

the liberator

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Senate Bill 17 Stunts Diversity Programs

LEAH LASHUS
ESME KESSLER | staff writers

Passed in April of 2023, Senate Bill 17 (SB17) went into effect earlier this year and bans Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) offices and services from public universities. DEI is a set of university institutions and programs set up to help marginalized students transition to college and to adult life since the mid-1960s, according to The Conversation.

According to LASA College Counselor Vyasur Ganesan, DEI exists to help make students from diverse or underrepresented backgrounds feel more like they belong in educational spaces, by prioritizing inclusion. For LASA students going to university, and educators everywhere, this bill has a tremendous impact.

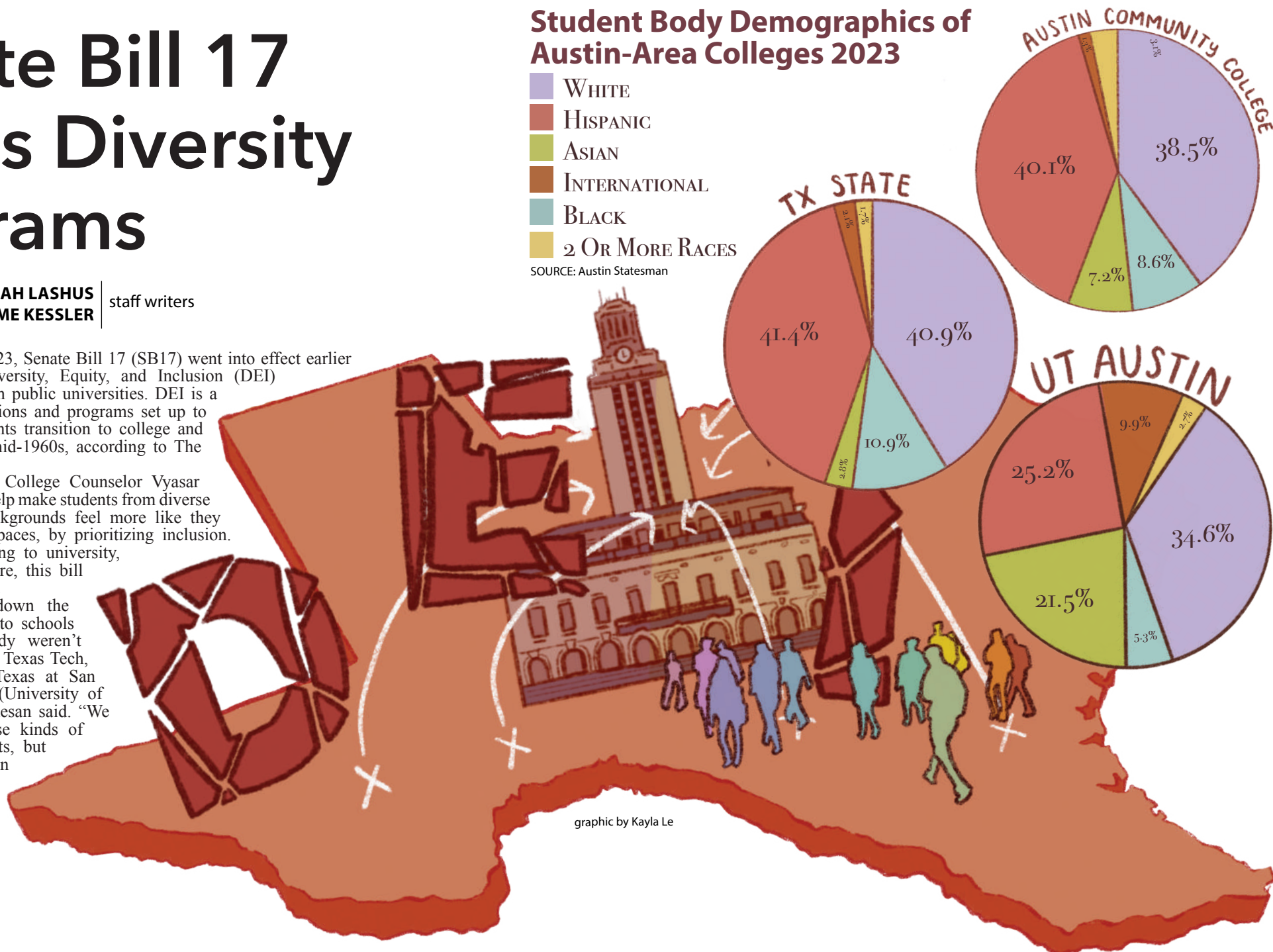
“I think it slows down the number of applications to schools that we [LASA] already weren’t sending a lot of apps to, Texas Tech, UTSA (University of Texas at San Antonio), UT El Paso (University of Texas at El Paso),” Ganesan said. “We don’t already send those kinds of schools a lot of students, but now we have less reason to. Now students feel like they have less incentive to want to be in those places.”

see **SENATE** page 7

Student Body Demographics of Austin-Area Colleges 2023

WHITE
HISPANIC
ASIAN
INTERNATIONAL
BLACK
2 OR MORE RACES

SOURCE: Austin Statesman



what's news



photo by Annabel Andre

Frank Erwin Center to be replaced
with M.D. Anderson Cancer Center
see **NEW** page 7



photo by Annabel Andre

ATX Open welcomes world-class
tennis players to the court
see **ATX** page 16



photo by Annabel Andre

Protests spring up in Austin and
youth advocacy rises
see **ACTIVISM** page 8-9

Plan for AISD Apartments

Anita Ferrales Coy Facility to Turn Into Affordable Housing Units

ETHAN STERN | staff writer

The rising cost of living expenses in Austin and the lack of support for district employees have forced the Austin Independent School District (AISD) to address the situation. Thus, the 18-acre Anita Ferrales Coy Facility, which is currently home to the district's Alternative Learning Center (ALC), will be torn down and replaced with two new apartment buildings with a combined total of 500 units. The housing options will be marketed to AISD staff starting in 2025, according to the district.

The Coy facility, located on Gonzales Street and Shady Lane in East Austin, was brought to the attention of the AISD School Board few years ago as an underutilized space, in November 2023, the district approved the renovation of the property to build affordable housing for AISD employees. The lot will include two buildings with 250 units each and a newly

renovated ALC. The buildings' construction will be spread out with the first one's construction starting in the fall of 2025. To manage this project, AISD chose a national consulting group to work with called the NRP Group, who appointed Nick Walsh, the Vice President of Development at the company, to take charge.

“Austin ISD issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) ... [that] they marketed to other companies like my company that specialize in building multifamily housing and specialize in this fix,” Walsh said. “There was an opportunity for a best and final offer where they asked some additional questions. And from that, they selected my company, NRP, as the finalist company. And then it was up to the school board and the trustees, [who] officially confirmed our selection at the November board meeting.”

The decision to renovate the area occurred after continuous discussions with community members in the area and AISD staff members who felt they needed extra support. As cost-of-living is one of the most pressing issues for Austinites, the district felt that having a reduced-rent housing option was important in supporting their employees and something they heard many requests for from AISD staff. Jeremy Striffler, the Director of Real Estate at AISD, described the process AISD went through to ensure that housing was what the community wanted.

see **AISD** page 5

photo by Lily Wilkerson



The Land of Free Music

Red River District Puts On Free Concerts

ELLINGTON TOUGH | staff writers
GEORGIA FINK

Live music has increasingly gotten more expensive, making it progressively harder for venues and artists to stay in business. Free Week is an annual event that takes place in downtown Austin at the beginning of January in the Red River Cultural District. This Austin staple allows people to see live music for free every year while supporting local venues and artists.

During Free Week, local bands play at venues while Austinites and tourists come out to see them. This event has been around since 2003 when the concert venue and bar, Emo's, formed it to keep the business together and people employed throughout the winter season. This year, Free Week took place on Jan. 5th and 6th. Callie Thoresen is the production manager for Stubb's Bar-B-Q, one of the many venues for

Free Week. According to her, Free Week allows musicians to find and create a following and helps venues to establish themselves as a place where people can see live music.

“It definitely does help business because the winter months are probably our slowest time of year,” Thoresen said.

According to Thoresen, a few thousand people showed up for Free Week across all venues this year, which was very high in comparison to the previous few years, making this a very successful Free Week.

“Everybody was so excited and happy and having a good and safe time too,” Thoresen said. “If you don't have a lot of money, like a lot of people don't right now in this economy, it helps people get out and see this live music.”



see **LAND** page 12

editorial

The Legacy of Elitism in College Admissions

Staff Stance: Every grading period the Liberator staff present their opinion on an important current issue in the form of an editorial written by the Commentary editors. The opinions in the piece below represent those of the staff as a collective, not of each individual member.

Every year, highly selective universities receive thousands of applications from ambitious teenagers hoping to become one of the lucky few accepted into their prestigious halls. High schoolers do everything they can to increase their chances of getting into the likes of Harvard, Yale, Stanford, and more. From packing their schedules full of advanced placement classes to participating in more clubs than there are days of the week, many students spend hundreds of hours throughout their academic careers trying to change their chances of admission by only a few percentage points. Meanwhile, according to researcher Michael Hurwitz, some students' chances of getting into selective universities are boosted by an average of more than 23% by the sheer luck of belonging to a family of alumni. By favoring these applicants, universities perpetuate an old-fashioned tradition that fails to consider the privilege or capabilities of the students it supports.

Legacy students — those whose parents or close relatives graduated from the same university the student is applying to — often have an immense advantage over non-legacies at selective universities. While most Harvard applicants face a minuscule 3.2% acceptance rate, for legacy admissions it was a whopping 34% in 2022, according to Forbes. Nearly 70% of students admitted through this practice are white, more

than double the school-wide average of 37.7%. Despite obviously giving preferential treatment to white students, legacy admissions do not fall under the Supreme Court's June 2023 decision that prohibited race-conscious admissions. This was the same decision that effectively banned affirmative action in higher education. However, unlike affirmative action, legacy admissions primarily benefit the already privileged white upper class. Take, for example, the fact that on average, Harvard alumni make \$136,700 annually about 10 years after graduation, according to CollegeSimply. Meanwhile, the median national income is far lower, sitting at \$54,000 a year in 2022. Many students hope that going to prestigious universities will offer them more social and economic mobility in the future, but instead of rewarding hard work, these highly sought-after places are given away to those who already reside in the upper echelons of society for no reason other than the circumstances of their

of legacy and non-legacy students at Princeton University. Like Harvard, in 2022, Princeton had an estimated legacy admission rate of 31.7%, yet only admitted 6% of applicants total. There is no reasonable excuse for a student to have a five times higher chance of getting into a university than someone with a nearly identical resume. The only thing that such a practice accomplishes is preserving pre-existing inequalities.

Due to a centuries-long history of systemic racism in the U.S., primarily Black and Latine neighborhoods often have lower property values than majority-white neighborhoods.

that. They give even more opportunities to those who were already born having more of them and neglect those who have been at a disadvantage their entire lives. Many universities are proud



to tout their various diversity initiatives but fail to truly make an effort to help students from marginalized groups. The continued practice of legacy admissions is only proof of that.

Those in favor of legacy admissions commonly argue that, by favoring the children of alumni, schools are more likely to receive donations that allow them to provide the programs they're famous for. This argument falls apart when one considers the case of Amherst College in Massachusetts. The school has a 7% acceptance rate and an endowment of \$3.8 billion, amounting to nearly \$2 million per student. The school abolished legacy admissions in 2021, and its bottom line has yet to see a negative impact.

Created in the early 20th century, legacy admissions are an unnecessary, outdated practice that fails to accomplish anything meaningful. By giving preference to those who have done nothing to deserve it, legacy admissions preserve the status quo at the expense of marginalized groups. They sabotage their own efforts at diversity and receive little benefit in return other than continuing a cycle of privilege that only benefits the white upper class.



Throughout the 20th century, strict laws were in place restricting where people of color could live, and wealthy neighborhoods were typically whites-only. The legacy of these policies, as well as continued wage discrimination, means that many people cannot move out of these neighborhoods. This may not seem relevant to college admissions, but because most state schools are funded by property or income taxes, students in low-income areas do not have the same opportunities as those in richer ones, leading to them scoring lower on tests regardless of their actual intelligence. Policies like affirmative action were created to help remedy this by giving opportunities to high-achieving low-income students or students of color. Legacy admissions do the exact opposite of



birth, taking these opportunities away from those who could actually benefit from them.

That is not to say that no white, upper-class individuals should be accepted into selective universities, only that admissions processes should be based on merit rather than luck. According to the Daily Princetonian, there are minimal differences between the SAT scores and GPAs



file graphic by Juan-Carlos Ramirez

Raptor Chatter

Should colleges consider legacy when admitting students?



photo by Apollo Dahmus

Lu Amaya
Freshman

“No, because the legacy you have doesn’t show your actual personal goals or accomplishments.”



photo by Apollo Dahmus

Grace Ford
Sophomore

“The intelligence of a parent doesn’t necessarily determine the intelligence of the child, so we shouldn’t think that the success of parents will in any way determine the success of the child.”



photo courtesy of Jupiter Mefford

Jupiter Mefford
Junior

“I think it should heighten chances because students have a better chance of finding a college they’re comfortable at since a direct relative has experience at the campus.”



photo by Norah Hussaini

Emily Word
Senior

“Colleges should be admitting students that are qualified academically and extracurricularly. Everyone should have a fair chance whether they have parents that went to a certain college.”

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Editorial Policy

Responsibilities of a free student press: Serving as the primary communication link within the Liberal Arts and Science Academy and between the school and the local community, this newspaper accepts the responsibilities inherent in being a free press. The Liberator staff strive to produce a professional-quality publication that follows the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists. The objective is to print the news in a fair and objective manner with the utmost regard for integrity.

Editorial Content:

1. The students on The Liberator staff will print articles which have been researched to the best of their ability to obtain the most complete available information.
2. The information will be presented in a truthful and fair manner.
3. When personal commentary is given it will be in good taste on issues that have been researched, analyzed and where expert opinion has been sought.
4. All commentary will be clearly labeled as such.
5. No material which is obscene, libelous or that will cause an immaterial and substantial disruption of the school day, according to accepted legal definitions, will be printed.

The Editorial Boards and its Functions:

The Liberator staff will be governed by an editorial board composed of the following individuals: lead editors and commentary editors.

The Editorial board will:

1. Determine the content of the publication (with input from other staff members)
2. Stress the editorial policy
3. Ensure the accuracy of the publication
4. Address inappropriate behavior on the part of the staff
5. Dispense disciplinary action to staff members
6. Change or add policy as necessary

Viewpoints:

Printed material which contains the opinion of a staff member or a contributing writer will be labeled as such. These views are not intended to reflect the view of the administration of Liberal Arts and Science Academy nor the School Board of the Austin Independent School District. Viewpoints will be given in two areas in the newspaper.

Editorials: These will be determined by the staff consensus. The editorial will be unsigned and will represent the majority viewpoint of the staff. Commentary: Commentary articles represent the viewpoint of one member of the staff, and are signed as such. These articles do not represent the opinions of the entire staff.

Letters to the Editor: Letters to the Editor are accepted for topics of general interest to the readership of the newspaper. Letters must be submitted typed or neatly printed in ink and must have the signature of the writer and the writer's grade level. Editors reserve the right to determine which issue the letter will be published in, with every effort made to print the letter as soon as possible. The editors also reserve the right to edit the letter for grammar, length and repetition. No letters which are obscene or libelous will be published.

Non-Staff Contributors: Bylined contributions are welcome.

Correction of Errors: The staff makes every effort to print accurate information. In the case of substantial errors, a written correction will be made in the following issue of the newspaper.

Sources: In general, no anonymous sources will be used in reporting. Sources from within the school, as well as those not connected with the school, will be used. Under no circumstances will gifts, including coupons, etc., be accepted by the staff members from sources or advertisers. Note: The Liberator will attempt to publish a range of opinions within reason.

Corrections from Issue 1 and Issue 2:

The newspaper graphic on page 2 in issue 1 should be credited to Wintyr Rice.

“String Fest: LASA Seniors Mentor Young Musicians” should be credited to both Georgia Fink and Fugo Tomii.

“The Liberator Through the Years” should have Annabel Andre, Sanwi Sarode, LiLi Xiong, and Sadie Cravotta as contributors.



Have an opinion about a new school policy? Got an issue with this issue? Anything else on your mind? Email us at lasaliberator@gmail.com or DM us @lasaliberator.

graphic by Asha Rountree

HOME Initiative Aims to Help Housing Horrors

Ordinance Introduces Affordable Housing Options for Austin Community

FUGO TOMII | staff writer



The new housing initiative, named Home Options for Middle-Income Empowerment Ordinance (HOME), passed on Dec. 7 of last year and introduced additional affordable housing options to the Austin community. The ordinance will permit three mostly single-family housing units. While three new buildings will not have a dramatic effect on the availability of housing in Austin, they hold great promise in bolstering Austin’s housing supply and affordability, which have struggled to keep pace with surging demand in recent years. Over the past decade, Austin has experienced exponential

growth, experiencing a 5.3% population growth according to Bramlett Residential, and has been the fastest-growing area in the nation for 12 years in a row according to city demographer Lila Valencia, driving up housing prices and making homeownership increasingly out of reach for many middle-income families and essential workers such as teachers, first responders, and government employees. According to KUT, the median price of homes in Austin has risen more than 50% since 2018, reaching an astonishing \$570,000, despite the damper that rising mortgage interest rates have put on the housing market. The HOME initiative aims to tackle these issues head-on by increasing housing density and flexibility, particularly in single-family neighborhoods. By allowing for three housing units on most single-family lots and permitting the use of tiny homes, this initiative will diversify housing options and create more opportunities for affordable homeownership. Though these changes may not fully solve Austin’s housing deficit, they represent a crucial step toward addressing the mismatch of supply and demand in the housing market. According to City of Austin Council Member Alison Alter, this initiative is designed to target the “missing middle” of the housing market, catering to middle-income families who often find themselves priced out of homeownership and providing a much-needed stepping stone onto the property ladder for those previously locked out of Austin’s competitive housing market. The initiative aims to offer more attainable housing options for a broader range

of Austin’s residents by producing smaller homes on smaller lots. While it is still extremely early for the HOME initiative, the potential impact is generating optimism among people such as with the City of Austin District 3 Rep. José Miguel Anwar Velásquez, one of the council members who voted for the passing of the HOME initiative. Similar land use changes in cities like Houston, San Antonio, and San Diego have yielded positive results, demonstrating the potential of density-focused policies to lessen housing affordability pressures and promote growth. However, challenges remain, as the success of the HOME initiative will ultimately depend on the implementation and ongoing evaluation. City officials must monitor the initiative’s progress closely to ensure and fulfill its promise of creating a more equitable and accessible housing market for all residents in Austin. While the HOME initiative will not drastically transform Austin’s housing landscape overnight, it represents a promise from Austin politicians to address one of the most pressing issues for many Austinites in the future. By embracing innovative approaches to housing policy and prioritizing the needs of middle-income families, Austin can pave the way for a brighter future where everyone has the opportunity to call it home.

The Ethical Ramifications of Felon Disenfranchisement

ISABEL KRAMER | club contributor



The universal right to vote is a significant step that distinguishes a dictatorship from a thriving democracy, and it is what gives the people a form of control over their government. However, this fundamental right excludes one primary group of people: convicted felons. Our prison and justice systems are designed to strip those convicted of their humanity. From the moment of their sentencing, the lives of those convicted of crimes can be ruined. Inside prison they live in horrible conditions where the food quality is poor, they face violence from guards, and the absence of air conditioning results in extreme heat. Even after they serve their time, the odds are stacked against them when trying to get work, applying for loans, or renting an apartment. In short, rather than rehabilitating those convicted, our prison system ruins their lives. Prisoners have no way of voting while incarcerated. Sometimes, even after serving their time, they never get this right back. The U.S. government makes it almost impossible for jailed or detained people to exercise their right to vote by placing many barriers in

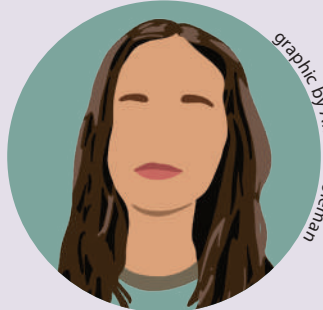
the process of attempting to vote, such as preventing those jailed from having access to voting booths, even though jailed people still have the right to vote while detained. On the other hand, people in prison have absolutely no way of voting while incarcerated and have no legal protection to allow them to vote except in Vermont and Maine. The difference between being jailed and in prison is jail is where you are kept while awaiting trial and prison is where you are sent after you have been convicted. Even after prison, voting is difficult. Prisoners’ right to vote is dependent on the state they live in, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. For example, in Michigan, the right to vote returns the moment you leave prison, but in Virginia, an ex-felon would have to submit a petition to the government to earn their voting right back, and these petitions could be pending indefinitely. Prisons’ main purpose according to the DOJ is “to protect society by confining offenders in the controlled environments of prisons and provide work and other self-improvement opportunities to assist offenders in becoming law-abiding citizens.” If prisons’ purpose is to reintroduce people into society, why are ex-felons not allowed the rights of their citizenship immediately in all states and territories? Voting is citizens’ main power in our government and it is the only way we have a say in what happens to our homes, schools, cities, states, countries, and bodies. How can we expect someone to live in our society if they feel completely excluded and isolated from the way it works? It is ludicrous to say that the label of “ex-felon” should determine whether or not you should count or have a vote in our society. This issue surpasses the basic fact of striping citizens of their rights, it also plays into long-term race issues in our country. To fully understand these complexities it is imperative to understand our nation’s past with systematic disenfranchisement. After black men got the right to vote with the 15th amendment, voting in the South changed to exclude black men from voting in a way still considered

legal. Literacy tests were used to determine who could enter the voting polls. These tests had no right answers and were purposely confusing. These tests were only given to black men approaching the polls where they would “fail” and be turned away. When these tests were no longer allowed the South shifted to another form of suppressing these votes. Black men started being sent to prison for very minor infractions, whether that be loitering or petty crimes. In the 1860s, about 18 states had felony disenfranchisement policies, but the number jumped to 28 after the Civil War. The increase in felon disenfranchisement policies along with the establishment of Black Codes, which further restricted the civil liberties of Black people, were clearly racially motivated policies. While these disenfranchisement laws were put in place over 150 years ago, they continue to disproportionately affect Black Americans. According to the official United States Federal Bureau of Prisons website, 38.7% of those incarcerated are Black. The United States census states that the U.S. Black population is 13.6%. This indicates that over a quarter of those in prison are Black while the Black population in the U.S. doesn’t even make up a sixth of the population. This is systematic disenfranchisement. The system is taking away marginalized groups’ rights to vote and there is nothing more to it than that. If the population in prisons overrepresents marginalized groups due to both over-policing and disproportionate incarceration rates, then those populations will subsequently lose their right to vote at high rates and their voices will be silenced. Voting is essential to the democratic processes of our country and it should be a universal right for all U.S. citizens. To call our country the “Land of the Free” without immediately granting the freedom to vote to someone who had spent years of their life in prison to finally be reintroduced into society is a lie and is not justice. Justice is the years they spent in prison, not the years after.

Teaching Aides Fired Over Mental Health Resources

Questions Raised About Censorship in Education and the Effects on Youth

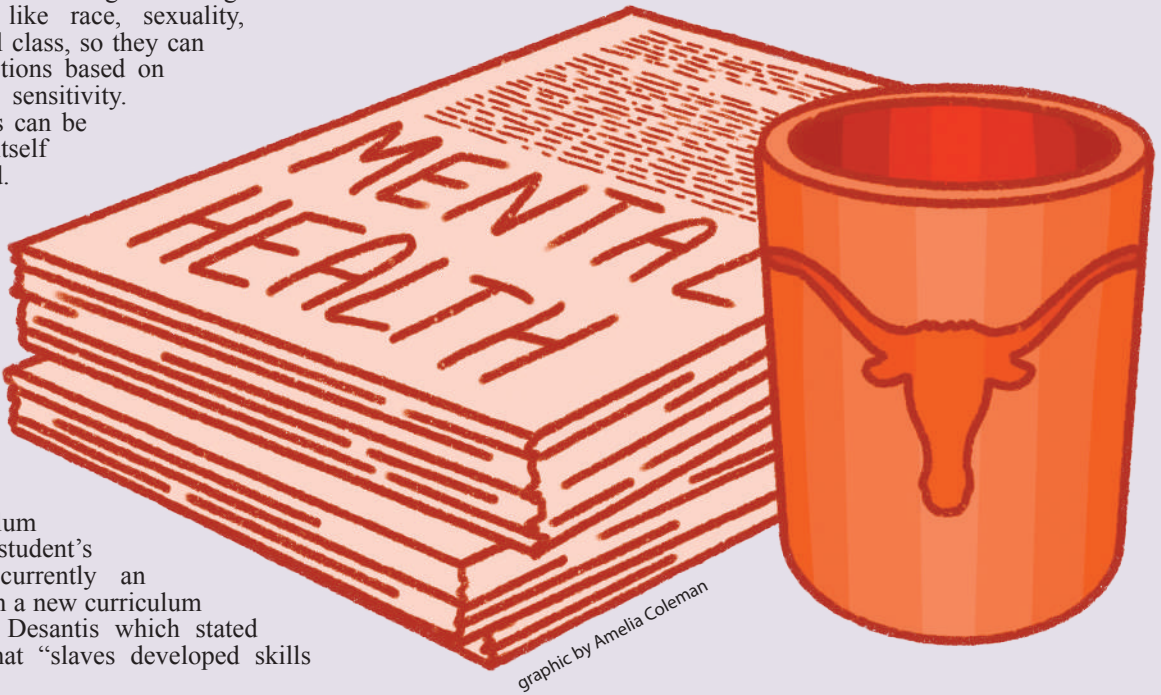
LILAH O’DAIR | staff writer



In November 2023, according to NPR, two teaching assistants at the University of Texas at Austin (UT) sent out an email to the students in their class providing mental health resources for students struggling due to the current Israel-Hamas conflict. In the email, they shared their support for the people of Gaza and criticized the school for being silent on the harassment of students at a Palestinian solidarity meeting. The teaching assistants shared this information after being asked by one of their students if the class would discuss mental health topics, and they believed this email to be the appropriate response. They were then reprimanded by the Dean of Social Work at UT and fired from their positions at the university. The email contained no language attacking any groups of people or attempts to convince students to feel a certain way about the conflict, yet they were harshly punished. This is one of many examples of educational instructors receiving excessive backlash for their comments in classrooms. When teachers are drastically censored in the information they can provide, students are unable to receive a well-rounded learning experience with ideas from multiple perspectives. According to an article by NBC News, a teacher in Georgia was fired in August 2023 for reading a book to her students about the LGBTQ+ community and gender fluidity. The school district said in an official press release that they wanted to keep schools focused on “teaching, learning, and opportunities for success.” By making this statement, the school district made it clear that they do not support the freedom of people to express their identities in educational environments as well as the decisions made by teachers to expose students to other perspectives, which is harmful for students and their broader educational experience.

If children are not raised with exposure to opposing viewpoints, they will not be able to develop fully into dynamic individuals. As stated in a research paper on the importance of diversity in early childhood, not incorporating various forms of diversity in education can cause young adults and children to grow up with a mindset saturated with stereotypes and societal prejudice that can lead to struggles in adulthood according to Ellen Wolpert in their book “Start Seeing Diversity: The Basic Guide to an Anti-Bias Classroom”. According to a research paper on discrimination in the United States, in environments with less diversity, children are less comfortable engaging in discussions on identity and perspective, which can often perpetuate views of prejudice in children towards people who are different from them. One way to tackle this subject is to implement an anti-bias curriculum and teaching methods both in the classroom and at home. Some methods used by early childhood teachers and researchers include creating diverse and inclusive activities, giving voice to the less recognized, and instilling a deep belief in justice and equity for all. Children are taught to recognize and understand topics like race, sexuality, gender, ability, and social class, so they can then make better connections based on empathy and emotional sensitivity. Before anti-bias ideals can be implemented, the bias itself must also be recognized. It can present itself in many different ways in the classroom, like a teacher sharing their political views with the intent to convince the students to feel a certain way, or a school board purposefully omitting or twisting a fact or historical event from the curriculum to manipulate a student’s education. Florida is currently an example of the latter, with a new curriculum approved by Gov. Ron Desantis which stated in a history textbook that “slaves developed skills

which, in some instances, could be applied for their personal benefit”. This angered people ranging from education experts to Floridian parents due to its misleading perspective and is only a small portion of the new history standards being implemented into our schools today. This censorship is permitting political conversations from taking place in the classroom, and as a result, preventing students from developing into individual critical thinkers who can analyze complex ideas such as race and slavery. This is not just a political issue, and no matter what someone’s opinion may be on the controversial topics discussed in the classroom, we cannot keep going down this path of censorship and the deterioration of the First Amendment. If teachers are prohibited from sharing opposing viewpoints and presenting examples of bias and opinion seen in everyday life, students will not be able to learn and grow into free thinkers with complex thoughts and ideas.



LASA's Signatures: Pros and Cons of the Required Classes



KAMRYN REYES | staff writer

PRO: LASA's four signature courses allow underclassmen to sample the variety of the elective courses provided at this school. The classes each present valuable learning opportunities, including eventual familiarity with construction, design, research, debate, and more. These courses make up a significant part of the LASA experience and are extremely beneficial to freshman and sophomore students. Though the double-blocked schedule sacrifices two elective slots, it's worth the cost in exchange for what students will learn from the classes.

The signature courses freshmen are required to take are Science and Technology (SciTech) and Electronic Magazine (Ezine). In SciTech, students learn how to take a problem and build a solution for it through trial and error. SciTech projects in the past have included building a marble run, a Goldberg machine, and designing assemblies on OnShape. According to Stem Education Journal, engineering design thinking skills take a longer time to develop than other technical skills, so it's crucial for high school students to have early exposure to classes that help them progress these skills. Design and construction classes are especially important because students develop communication and collaboration skills and are forced to think outside of the box. Additionally, they learn the crucial lesson that most difficult problems cannot be solved on the first try, and by learning to be persistent to find a solution, they gain a sense of confidence in their abilities as well as an understanding that failure is necessary for success. Similarly,

Ezine also incorporates design into its class, although in a digital format. In their process of creating a magazine using Adobe tools such as Illustrator, Photoshop, and Indesign, students get the chance to work with professional software and once again learn valuable skills such as time management, creativity, and being a dependable team member, which are necessary life skills according to Yearbook Life.

Sophomore year, LASA students are allotted two more signature courses that are perhaps even more important to partake in. The curriculum of the two courses allows for more autonomy, causing students to further develop their work ethic. Great Ideas and Planet Earth (Plearth) are more work-intensive classes, but as a result of this, they help students learn to manage their time. Great Ideas is a philosophy-driven course that teaches students how to think and how to question what seems unquestionable. The Socratic seminars and topics covered, such as ethics and justice, in Great Ideas make it a class that heavily focuses on discussion, thinking, and developing a deep understanding of humanity, which are abilities that will allow students to gain a superior sense of understanding of the world that they will eventually graduate into. It's also absolutely necessary for students to engage in philosophy, as it helps them extract what is essential from large quantities of information and learn more about themselves, their identity, and what they want to value in their own lives, according to James Madison University.

Finally, Plearth is a class that offers invaluable information about environmental science. Specifically, students spend time studying parks and organisms such as bugs, plants, and birds, while engaging in debates over the major mass extinctions. Not only do students gain a deeper appreciation of natural life from this subject, they also have the chance to explore nature during field trips to Boggy Creek, Shoal Creek, and McKinney Falls State Park. Additionally, as Plearth is a very

hands-on course, it allows for a much-needed break within the intense LASA student schedule. According to Project Learning Tree, taking environmental classes are especially significant for our generation of students who are most prominently being affected by issues such as climate change, pollution, and the degradation of biodiversity. By learning more about the environment, students will have knowledge going into the future about how they wish to address these issues.

The signature courses provided at LASA are rare opportunities to learn skills that students will need later on in high school, college, and work. Furthermore, they provide students more chances and options to explore varying subjects and careers that they might not have otherwise encountered. No student should be "spared" these courses that come together to form an extremely well-rounded education crucial to personal development.



SANWI SARODE | copy editor

CON: LASA's four signature courses leave students with only one elective choice for their first two years of high school. This lack of student choice is detrimental to a student's ability to develop their unique interests and be invested in their education.

Primarily, having only one elective choice for the first two years of high school is incredibly damaging to a student's ability to develop autonomy. According to The Willows Community School, giving students a voice in their education gives them

a "sense of ownership" that makes them better decision-makers in their future. When students learn early in their lives how to take control of their learning, they are more likely to take responsibility for their actions in their careers and in their lives, boosting their chances of success. It's disappointing to see LASA students' individuality diminished through limited choice, preventing them from being creative and achieving their full potential.

Additionally, a report by the Education Trust stated that limiting students' elective choices allows teachers to "control [the] bodies and minds" of students, leading to a dangerous tendency for students to have passive mindsets about their education. Students will be so used to doing whatever they're told — like a robot — that when it's time for them to branch out they won't know how to. Students won't feel motivated to learn. Removing LASA signature courses, and thereby giving students more opportunities to explore their passions, will increase LASA students' interest in learning in all of their classes and make them more active participants in their education. Students will be more engaged, empowered, and aware of the depth of their learning, according to The Willows Community School. It's similar to reading books: according to Scholastic, when students shift from assigned to choice reading, their willingness to engage in reading increases. When students are given elective choice, they naturally take more interest in learning.

It's excessive to ask high school students to take seven mandatory classes for the first two years of high school. With many colleges expecting students to select majors by the time they're seniors, students need all the time they can get throughout high school to explore their true interests and be prepared to make early career choices,

and, according to Edutopia, it is essential for students to connect their learning to their passions. I experienced the conundrum of a lack of elective choice myself. As a current senior, selecting majors for colleges was made unnecessarily difficult and stressful because I was unable to take career-oriented classes until junior year. Essentially, I was given one year to make up my mind on the subjects I took for a decision that could very well impact my entire future. It's crucial to recognize the impact a lack of scheduling space in early high school years can have on a student.

Finally, removing LASA signature courses and granting students more elective choices would help students build up a community that shares their interests and would improve their social and mental health. As stated by Education World, students feel more rooted when they have opportunities to build their identity, which is hard to accomplish without elective choice. Students look forward to other aspects of academic life than core subjects, such as spending time with classmates and delving deeper into their unique passions. Students who have limited elective choices also have an increased chance of encountering significant mental health challenges, according to Education World. If students have four years of elective choice as opposed to two, they will have more chances to build communities within their interest and grow together as peers, improving their learning, social health, and abilities to work together towards an aligned goal.

LASA signature courses result in more harm than benefit by taking away elective spots from students who might have other passions than the ones forced upon them by the school. To counter these detrimental effects, LASA's signature courses should become optional classes.

When Activism Becomes the Performance of a Lifetime

HAGEN HOBBS | staff writer



Humanitarian crises are almost invariably accompanied by a storm of social media hashtags and statements of outrage shared via Instagram stories. Performative activism is the practice of trying to appear to the public as supporting a movement or cause while doing very little substantive activism. For example, retweeting a tweet, reposting a story, or liking a charity post all count as examples of performative activism because, while they spread awareness, they exemplify a lack of effort by the end user. Performative activism does little to help progress a movement and taints a cause's reputation and credibility and it must end.

Performative action can lead to major human rights cases simply becoming a trend that people will forget about in a short amount of time. In this way, it is very similar to virtue signaling, the practice of showing others that you are on the right side of

history just to be more likable.

The Kony 2012 movement is perhaps one of the biggest cases of performative action in recent times. "Kony 2012" was a video made in 2012 that brought awareness to America of Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony who made use of child soldiers. This video quickly became the most viral video of its time, being the first video on YouTube to reach 1 million likes. This sparked massive social media activity such as people posting on their Facebook profiles and making tweets on the subject of Joseph Kony according to the Huffington Post. People painted their faces, got tattoos, and posted all over social media platforms, protesting the actions of Joseph Kony. According to Invisible Children, \$12.6 million was raised as a result of the campaign which was directly invested in its on-the-ground programs in Central and East Africa. But, despite the virality of the issue and the money raised, Joseph Kony is still alive as of 2024 and remains at large. The whole movement was largely forgotten about a few years later, showing the ineffectiveness of performative activism to create real change.

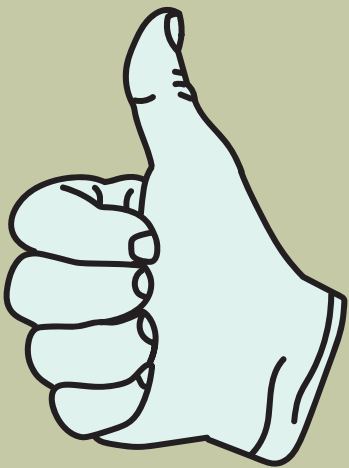
Unfortunately, almost a decade later, performative activism is still often used as a mode of protest despite its inability to generate actual impact. Instead of being useful, performative action turns into a trend that people hop on to feel included, becoming a fashion statement instead of a gateway to action. On June 2, 2020, in protest of George Floyd's death via police brutality and the mishandling of the situation by the Minneapolis police department and the United States government, around 28 million accounts on Instagram posted plain black squares onto their profiles as part of the #BlackoutTuesday protest according to NBC News. With the lack of clarity and context to those outside of the loop combined with the lack of publicity, organization, and effort put in by those participating, this event was proof that many people wanted

change in society for the better but were not willing to contribute in ways beyond social media. Many social media influencers and celebrities showed their support for the movement online but others called into question the effectiveness of simply changing a profile picture. In the end, #BlackoutTuesday drowned out other posts surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement and did very little to advance the Black Lives Matter movement and everything went back to normal after the initial rush.

It's a common saying that "there is no such thing as bad publicity," and many believe awareness on anything is better than if they weren't speaking out at all. However, if society focuses exclusively on making social media posts and other low-effort methods to push awareness, then any real change gets lost in the noise. Even worse, government officials and other figures of authority will notice the lack of impact performative action has and its general treatment as a fad and ignore it without any attempt at making a change, as they know the subject will be soon forgotten. These two cases show why performative activism is not as useful when it comes to supporting movements in comparison to in-person protesting.

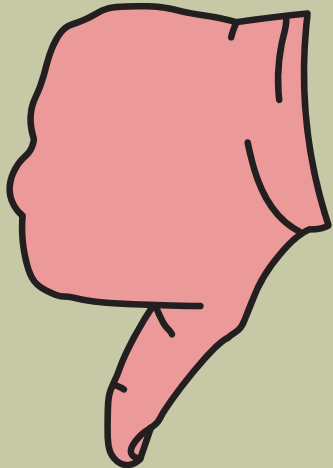
With new movements such as the protests against the Israel-Hamas war coming further into the public eye, and with more people posting about them, performative action is once again on the rise on social media. We cannot let movements that are trying to save lives be soiled by people on the internet who would rather make social media posts than something more meaningful. Instead, bring attention to the movement you are supporting by posting information about specific resources that can be used to support the movement and information about local protests. It is also important to get involved off of social media as well by donating if you can, attending protests, and educating others.

Thumbs Up



Ambient lighting
Typing tests
Blueberry scones
Tightly-tied shoes
BLEND confetti

Thumbs Down



Spotify DJ
Impending adulthood
Fist bumps
No autocaps
Gelatinous substances

Thumbs Up Thumbs Down: Every grading period, the commentary editors of the Liberator select a few objects, things, places, or current events that they are either liking or disliking at the moment. Likes are placed under Thumbs Up and the dislikes under Thumbs Down. These items are chosen randomly, meant to be taken in a lighthearted manner, and are not meant to offend anyone.

AISD Apartments

from page 1

“We engage [with] the community via various meetings, public surveys, as well as talking with our teachers and staff, and what consistently came up over and over again was the lack of attainable housing in the city of Austin,” Striffler said. “And what has been very challenging for, not only the district but for lots of public entities, services, ... is that it’s been very challenging to keep up with the cost of living, to keep wages increasing at the same rate as the cost of living. And so this is an attempt to use land that we already own to address that need.”

As one of the main aspects of the project is to reduce staff

members’ expenses, about half of the apartments for rent will have income restrictions put in place. The restrictions will align with the median family income limits set by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

“So [HUD] says that for anyone who spends more than 30% of their annual household income on housing-related expenses is cost burden,” Striffler said. “And so the rents will be capped so that they do not exceed 30% of anyone who’s renting, who is in one of the income-restricted apartments, does not exceed 30% of their income.”



EXPENSES SOAR The Anita Ferrales Coy Facility, currently hosting AISD’s Alternative Learning Center, will be torn down to create housing opportunities for AISD teachers and staff. The renovated facility will be home to two new apartment complexes with a total of 500 housing units and a renovated ALC. photo by Lily Wilkerson

As for the ALC, AISD intends to keep it on the property but make the size of the building smaller and design it to fit specifically to the facility’s needs. The center will be across the property from the two apartment buildings and will be separated by its fencing and parking lot. Additionally, AISD intends to add more roadways to accommodate increased traffic and circulation for people and neighbors around the facility.

“[The ALC] building was never designed for an alternative center and ALC has moved around over the last decade or so from some different facilities,” Striffler said. “And so this really gives us the opportunity to design a space that is tailored towards them. There’s a lot for personalized learning at the alternative learning center. So, I think this will be a real step forward for that program and it really puts the emphasis on those students and making sure they get what they need.”

People who work in schools should make a wage that would allow them to live in this city without getting special housing discounts.

- KEN ZARIFIS, PRESIDENT OF EDUCATION AUSTIN LABOR UNION

Although this project is a way of combating staff members’ steadily increasing expenses, some see this as a distraction from the real pressing issue. Education Austin, the teacher’s union in AISD, hopes the buildings don’t act as a substitute for paying their teachers more. Ken Zarifis, the Co-President of the union, talked through his concerns surrounding this project from the union’s perspective.

“What we have is fundamentally a deeper problem,” Zarifis said. “People who work in schools should make a wage that would allow them to live in this city without getting special housing discounts.”

The teacher’s union, which has been around since 1999, sees that this improvement should make things better in the future. To the union, the project shows the district’s promise to support its employees and hopes everyone recognizes that.

“But at the end of the day, we want this to happen,” Zarifis said. “We want to have those types of investments. And that the district is trying to make it for all employees. If we can make sure that we’re doing that, then that’s certainly a step in the right direction.”

CLUB CRAZY

Smash Bros

GIOVANNI ALEJO-AGUILAR
staff writer

In Smash Bros Club, gaming passion ignites a supportive community. From shared enthusiasm to academic growth, it’s more than just a club — it’s a gateway to connection and fulfillment.

Sophomore Giovanni Benitez, a member of the club, echoes the sentiment, expressing how Smash Bros extends beyond mere entertainment for him. According to Benitez, the club is a space where his passion intersects with an eager community.

“We often organize mini-tournaments, have game nights, and even host friendly competitions,” Benitez said. “It’s not just about playing — it’s about building a community.”

Junior Luis Galvan, the club’s leader, helps manage the club along with other members. Through his stewardship, gaming becomes a mode for fostering connections and personal growth.

“It’s more than just managing a club; it’s about fostering a community,” Galvan said. “Seeing members enjoy themselves, build connections, and even improve academically, that’s personally fulfilling.”

Smash Bros club meets every Thursday during lunch in room 103.

Baking

GORDON STREBER
staff writer

The loud chatter that fills Monica Cong’s classroom every Thursday during lunch, the colorful baked goods, and the friendly atmosphere would make anyone feel at home. In the Baking Club, the members enjoy various baked goods and try out new recipes with each other while socializing.

Lucy Loehr is a senior and passionate about the club. She’s one of the founder’s closest friends, Mailys Schuppe, but she did not just join for that.

“I like that everyone pitches in to bake,” Loehr said. “The desserts are usually recipes that people make with their families. There’s a lot of cultural dishes and variations on desserts that make each one special.”

Connor Grim is a senior and one of the club’s first members. He bakes to relax and finds comfort in talking to the other members.

“I like the social aspect of it, being able to be around people with a similar interest and talking about it,” Grim said. “Eating the food and whatnot is great, but honestly the social element is my favorite part.”

Producing

BISHOP BRITT
staff writer

Creating beats with friends is what Producing Club is all about. Located in the choir room, the club meets most Mondays and is a get-together for LASA’s aspiring music producers.

Sophomore Gabe Reynolds is passionate about music production and has been a member of the club since September. Reynolds loves the club and has nothing but positive things to say about it.

“Music Producing Club is just really the number one place to foster imagination within the music-making space at LASA,” Reynolds said.

Charles Boyle III, a sophomore member, says that the club has helped him further his journey in the music industry.

“I love making the beats and seeing what everyone else is making and helping them,” Boyle said. “Hip hop, rap, drill, rock, just whatever I feel. I can make my music into a big actual future and career.”

Reynolds encourages students interested in music production to join the Producing Club. According to him, the club motivates its members to keep making music.

“I would recommend this club to anyone at LASA who is looking into getting into producing and wants some help from experienced people,” Reynolds said. “Music Production Club is just really the number one place to foster imagination within the music making space at LASA.”

Libraries Locking Down

Book Stores Stand Against House Bill 900

WINTYR RICE | commentary editor

Floor-to-ceiling bookshelves filled with books are a common sight in school libraries and classrooms. But what would happen if the bookshelves were empty?

House Bill 900 (HB900), passed by the Texas Legislature in June 2023, aims to restrict the number of books in schools. Books deemed “sexually explicit”, meaning they contain “patently offensive” material that is not directly related to required curriculum, would be banned. Elizabeth Switek, LASA’s librarian, has been keeping an eye on the bill and how it would affect schools and bookstores.

“All books that are for sale to a school district, elementary, middle, or high school in the state of Texas have to be classified as sexually explicit, sexually relevant, or not applicable,” Switek said. “The group that has to identify every book that’s for sale in the state of Texas is the booksellers – not the authors, not the publishers.”

If a bookstore does not comply with the law, it is barred from selling books to any school in Texas. However, according to Charley Rejsek, the C.E.O. of BookPeople, following the law is impossible for many bookstores.

“BookPeople is a 53-year-old business,” Rejsek said. “I don’t have 53 years worth of records of books that I’ve sold to schools. So number one, I don’t even know what books to read and rate, but what I do know is that I sell books to schools all the time and so I do know it’s going to be thousands and thousands of books that I do not have money to pay people to read and rate.”

Rejsek joined a lawsuit filed by the American Bookselling Association and the Media Coalition over the law in July 2023. The official complaint argues that the law “establishes an unconstitutional regime of compelled speech, retaliation, and licensing that violates clear First Amendment precedent” because the Texas Education Association could override

booksellers’ ratings. Reid Pillifant is a lawyer who helped to argue the case.

“Compelled speech can take a number of forms,” Pillifant said. “But essentially, it is when a government forces citizens to speak a message with which they may disagree.”

HB900 was ultimately deemed unconstitutional by Judge Alan D. Albright and had an injunction placed on it, preventing it from going into effect. So far, the case has been appealed to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, who upheld the original ruling.

“Texas has already stated that they’re going to appeal it to the Supreme Court,” Switek said. “Whether they do that or not, we have no idea. So at this point, the portion of the law that makes booksellers identify every single book that is sexually relevant or sexually explicit, that part of the law is just set aside and not going to happen.”

If the case is appealed to the Supreme Court, the justices’ ruling will be final. Recent Supreme Court cases have made predicting how the court might rule on the case difficult.

“It’s very difficult to predict how the justices might react to this case,” Pillifant said. “While the Court has tilted to the right in recent years, they have also recently struck down laws that compelled speech.”

If the injunction against HB900 stands, similar laws could still be passed. There are several ways to advocate against such laws, including contacting representatives in the legislature.

“Organizations like Freedom to Read are a great opportunity to help fight book bans across the state,” Pillifant said. “To help prevent a state law like HB900, students should keep an eye on the news during next year’s legislative session and come to the Capitol to testify against any proposed book bans.”



graphic by Asha Rountree

Austin Solarbrates

LASA to Experience a Total Solar Eclipse after 150 Years



SADIE SARRAT | staff writer

For the first time in 150 years, Austin will be in the path of complete darkness for the solar eclipse on April 8, 2024. While many people in northern and western states will have to travel to view the eclipse, Austinites can enjoy darkness from the comfort of their homes.

Unlike the October partial eclipse, Austin will experience almost two minutes of complete darkness at 1:35 p.m.. Due to Austin’s location in the path of totality, Austin Independent School District (AISD) officials will provide students with protective eyewear to view the eclipse, and in addition, LASA students will be temporarily released during their third periods to view the eclipse as it passes over Austin. According to LASA astronomy teacher Ellen Owens, solar eclipse glasses and pinhole cameras, devices that allow students to view the unique shadows caused by the eclipse, are essential on eclipse day.

“For a pinhole camera, you get a note card and you punch a hole in it so that you can see the effects of the eclipse on the ground even ahead of time when it’s partial,” Owens said. “Then, you can see the shadows, and you can also see [the shape] of the eclipse as the light goes through the leaves and trees. You’ll see a bunch of rings on the ground.”

Owens stressed the importance of students putting their phones down to enjoy the solar eclipse. She stated that the complete darkness from the eclipse only lasts a few minutes, and to enjoy the moment.

“They should put their cell phones down,” Owens said. “Don’t try to take a picture of it. It’s so short, it’s gonna be like a minute, just enjoy it. It’s one of the few times that you can truly see the motion of the earth and moon or really of the motion of any celestial body in a given moment. There are solar eclipses somewhere on the earth probably one to three times a year, but it’s a very narrow path in which you can see it, and as you know, most of the surface of the earth is ocean. So most of them happen and nobody is there to see them.”

According to Owens, sunlight isn’t the only aspect of nature that will be affected during the eclipse. Students can expect animals to have surprised reactions, not only to the lack of light, but also the drop in temperature of a few degrees.

“The temperature will drop, and the animals

will react, so we will likely hear a lot of birds going crazy,” Owens said, “and really that’s because it’s such a dramatic drop in radiation and in temperature. Of course, it only lasts a minute or so, and then the sun comes right back.”

Amy Jackson, the founder and current director of Starry Sky Austin, an organization that exposes students to astronomy, shares how this upcoming event is extraordinary and how scientists and researchers across the U.S. use this solar eclipse to delve deeper into their projects, learning more about the universe and astronomical discoveries. Jackson was recently involved in the creation of new devices at The University of Texas at Austin under their LightSound Program that will record and convert the light intensity of the solar eclipse into sound to allow people who are visually impaired or blind to be a part of the experience.

“We are creating these devices that sonify the change in light intensity during an eclipse, and I got to go and solder the circuit boards and make the device work,” Jackson said. “Then people sign up and they’re able to have a device, and we can be a data collector. It’s an opportunity for people like me who do outreach to go and provide an experience for people who normally would not have one because they can’t see. It’s just so cool.”

James Ervin, a senior at LASA, leads the Astronomical Club and the K5LBJ Radio Club. Ervin plans to use this opportunity to further his research on whether time scales broadcasted over radio waves will be affected by the solar eclipse.

“As the eclipse is occurring over this path,” Ervin said. “We want to be listening to all three of those frequencies to see, okay, how does that delay change? It’s really cool, and so I’m also reaching out to the local radio community here in Austin to get them involved in the research. We already got a guy who is willing to dedicate a few receivers to this, which will help us make [our experiments] happen.”

Educational opportunities aside, Owens is excited for the opportunity to experience a once-in-a-lifetime astronomical event. Eclipses have historically sparked interest in astronomy, according to Owens.

“It is such a rare opportunity unless you’ve traveled to see one,” Owens said. “This is my first total eclipse. The next one is not going to come through the U.S. until probably near the end of your lifetime.”

PREPARING TO CAST YOUR BALLOT IN TEXAS

Check Your Eligibility
Only U.S. citizens who are over 18 years old and are not convicted felons can vote

Registering
Voters must register by the 30th day before Election Day to be eligible to vote

Stay Informed
Learn which candidates are on the ballot and review their beliefs/campaign goals

Pick a Location and Date
Make sure to bring a government-issued photo ID

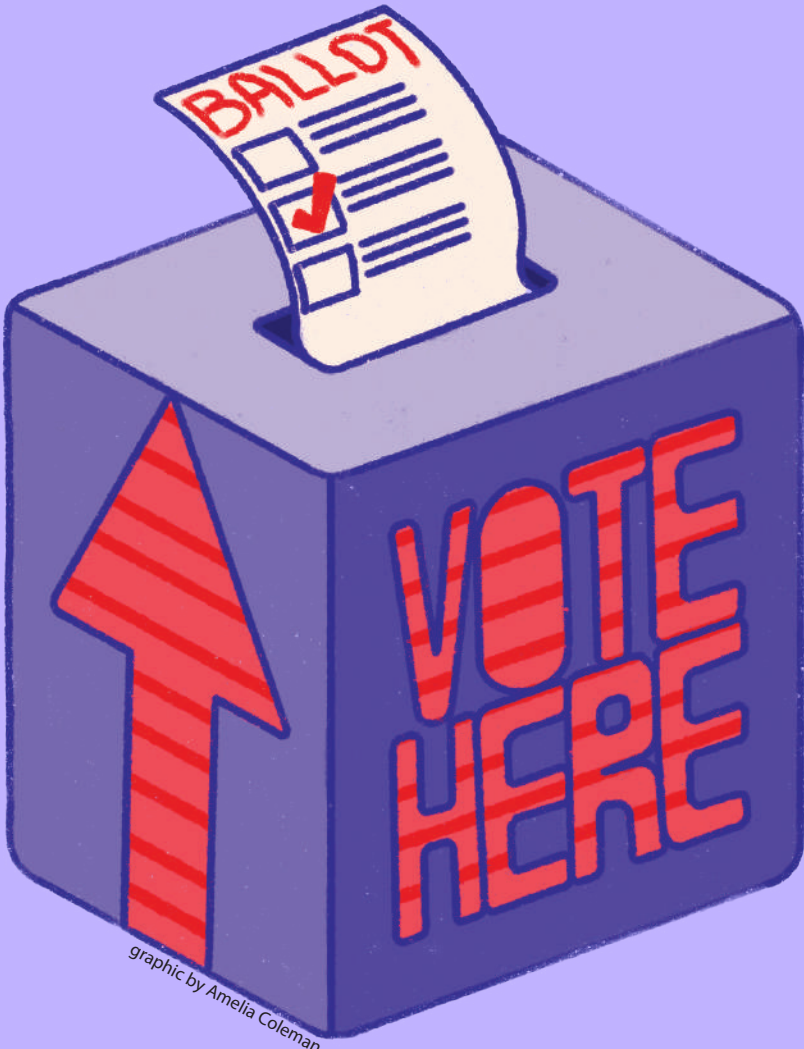
Upcoming Dates

Tuesday, April 4: Last day to register to vote in May Local Election

Monday, April 22: Early Voting for May Local Election begins

Tuesday, April 30: Last day of Early Voting for May Local Election

Saturday, May 4: Election Day for May



graphic by Amelia Coleman

Tips and Tricks

Vote early! Election day can be hectic, and voting early allows you to avoid crowds.

Know your rights! Educate yourself on what you are entitled to as a voter at <https://www.votetexas.gov/your-rights/>.

Research by Tita Gonzalez, staff writer.

Senate Bill 17 Stunts Diversity

from page 1

DEI provides students, as well as faculty, with resources like free counseling support, diverse events that reflect the university, and places to go to with concerns over classroom material. Many students value these resources, and without them, applicants may have different opinions of the schools, though it’s still too early to tell, according to Ganesan.

“My instinct is to always get scared, right?” Ganesan said. “[My instinct] is to always look at this and be terrified. But I have to remind myself that there’s an element of wait-and-see here that’s not bad, but actually essential. Because if we have data, if we understand more about what’s going wrong, it gives us more evidence, and it makes us fight this better.”

Waiting and watching how the next few months unfold can help students understand what they can do to replace the DEI-shaped hole. Brian Peña is a student at the University of Texas at Austin (UT) and president of University Democrats, an organization helping to combat SB17.

“I do think that student organizations have a big responsibility to kind of fill in those gaps,” Peña said. “You know, there’s a lot of different programs that have broken away from the UT official side and just become student-run organizations entirely because otherwise, they wouldn’t be able to exist if they stayed as UT-centric institutions.”

DEI serves students in ways beyond just events or classroom support, according to Peña. It’s a way to help remember history, and not repeat it in the future—as well as being fundamental to the resolution of many public policy issues.

“To try to solve these issues without actually addressing the history behind them is insane,” Peña said. “I mean, we can’t possibly expect to be solving these things without knowing the full context, knowing the history. You know, otherwise, we’re kind of just going at it blind. And it’s almost ignorant to assume that race is not a driving factor in a lot of our issues today.”

Khayree Williams is the director at Austin Community College’s Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Campus Center, which seeks to eliminate racial disparities in preschool through college institutions. According to Williams, without DEI institutions, many families could be left feeling confused and invisible while applying and attending college.

“When a student comes in here without a degree, without a certificate, without a high-paying job, if we support their family, we help to kind of transform that situation,” Williams said. “We help to change the trajectory of their family, but also, you know, the stakes to show you once one person in the family gets a college degree, it becomes a ripple effect. So, the generations will benefit from that.”

Since SB17 was enacted on January 1, ACC has rebranded its DEI council to be a Purpose and Belonging council. Both councils aim for students to feel included and to give everyone an equal opportunity for success, according to Williams.

“[Purpose and Belonging officers] are faculty and staff,” Williams said. “These are executive vice presidents, but these are

also financial aid officers, librarians, advisors, people that are on the ground working with students and don’t necessarily have diversity or purpose and belonging in their title, but are still interfacing with students still impacting students. These concepts help to empower them from the perspective of ‘No, this is also my job. I work at ACC. I am ACC. I have a responsibility to continue to make sure

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But really sort of working hard to be intentionally DEI-minded. And that takes a lot of work, and it’s not something that happens overnight.

- LASA COUNSELOR VYASAR GANESAN

that we are doing everything we can do to support every student.”

Just because Texas banned these institutions doesn’t mean they will disappear. According to Ganesan, many cities are currently fighting to reinstate DEI.

“There is a teacher out in Houston who’s running for a seat in the Texas Senate, Karthik Soora, and one of his first agenda items is to let reference citizen referendums go back on the Texas Constitution,” Ganesan said. “Citizen referendums basically allow groups of citizens to petition their cities and local governments to help put issues on a ballot that can be voted on. And he’s desperate to try to bring them back, because that’s how everyday people can sort of fight back against the legislature.”

It’s not only organizations and politicians who can bring up DEI banning. According to Ganesan, the people with the most power to enact change are ordinary citizens.

“I think having more conversations with your community, with your friends, your parents, people in the community about what DEI means and why it’s important and not just sort of taking it as an acknowledgment like, ‘Oh, yeah, diversity matters,’ [is important],” Ganesan said. “But really sort of working hard to be intentionally DEI-minded. And that takes a lot of work, and it’s not something that happens overnight.”

Healthcare Needs a Home

Frank Erwin Center to be Replaced by M.D. Anderson Cancer Center

BRIDGET DUNLEAVY | staff writer

In August 2023, the University of Texas at Austin (UT) published a press release informing the public of a plan to construct an MD Anderson Hospital directly beside a University of Texas at Austin (UT) Specialty Hospital, replacing the multi-use UT entertainment center: the Frank Erwin Center.

The construction of these two hospitals allows for more opportunities for patients and UT faculty alike. Due to M.D. Anderson’s leading status in cancer research and treatment, the hospital will provide more widespread care.

“The new UT MD Anderson hospital in Austin will be fully staffed by MD Anderson physicians, making it easier for patients in Central Texas to access the world’s leading multidisciplinary, subspecialty-focused cancer care,” said MD Anderson in a press release. “UT Austin’s new university hospital will be constructed adjacent to the MD Anderson site.”

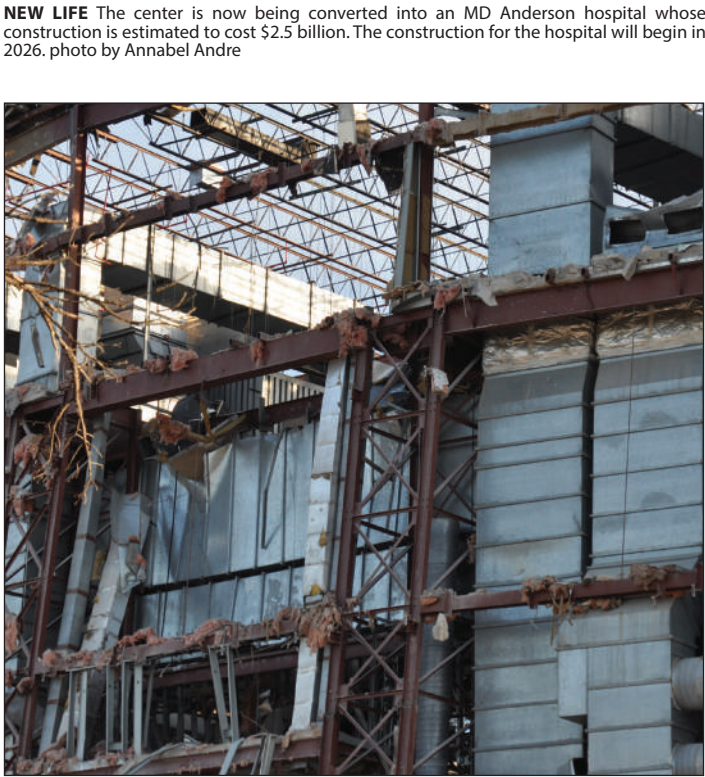
MD Anderson Cancer Center has multiple locations in and surrounding Houston, with the nearest location being around an hour away from Austin. LASA school nurse, Alicia Murphey, is glad that cancer patients in Austin will be able to receive new treatments without the strain of travel.

“We already have the MD Anderson Center in Houston which is world-renowned, people from all over go to the center,” Murphey said. “This will be another second location that will increase the amount of patients that they’re able to take on. People that are west of Austin won’t have to travel all the way to Houston, they can just go to Austin. It’ll be wonderful.”

In addition to providing countless benefits to cancer patients, both hospitals provide advantages for healthcare students at UT through the form of hospital clinicals, according to Murphey. These clinicals allow for further education in the healthcare field with real-world experiences.



BREAK IT DOWN The Frank Erwin center is in the midst of demolition. The center used to be a multi purpose entertainment center, where both the UT men and women’s basketball teams would compete. photo by Annabel Andre



NEW LIFE The center is now being converted into an MD Anderson hospital whose construction is estimated to cost \$2.5 billion. The construction for the hospital will begin in 2026. photo by Annabel Andre

THE SKINNY

Global News

Feb. 23

In a 407-226 vote on Feb. 23, the German lower house legalized recreational cannabis use. This makes Germany the third European country to do so after Luxembourg and Malta. The drug will become legal for adults beginning on April 1, however, it is still banned for those under 18. New rules allow adults to possess up to 50 grams of the drug in their homes and 25 grams in public. According to the country’s health minister, Karl Lauterbach, the aim of the new law is to decrease the black market selling of the drug and related dangerous crimes.

Feb. 25

On Feb. 25, 25-year-old Aaron Bushnell, a senior airman in the U.S. Air Force, lit himself on fire outside of the Israeli Embassy in Washington D.C. as an act of protest against the U.S.’s role in the Israel-Hamas war. As he burned, he shouted that he did not want to be “complicit in a genocide,” and “free Palestine,” according to the Washington Post. His self-immolation has prompted discourse online, with some celebrating his actions, and with others believing his protest to be an unnecessary suicide, according to the New York Times.

March 4

On March 4, France became the first country to make abortion a constitutional right. In a 780-72 vote, Article 34 of the French Constitution makes access to abortion a guaranteed freedom, with the article being inscribed into the constitution on March 8. Parisian feminists gathered to watch the March 4 vote on a large screen in Trocadero Square, a plaza overlooking the Eiffel Tower, and celebrated upon the amendment’s passing. According to the New York Times, the push for the amendment came after Roe v. Wade was overturned in the United States Supreme Court.

National News

Feb. 21

In a Feb. 21 ruling, the Alabama Supreme Court ruled that frozen embryos are considered children. This ruling follows the suit of three families who lost embryos in a fertility clinic and claimed wrongful death. The ruling sided with the families and equated the embryos used in a fertility clinic to unborn children, meaning the destruction of such embryos would be a crime. Some in vitro fertilization (IVF) clinics in Alabama have already stopped operations in response to the decision.

March 4

According to a March 4 ruling, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of keeping former President Donald Trump on the ballot in the state of Colorado. Colorado had removed Trump from the state’s ballot last year, citing Section 3 of the 14th Amendment, which prohibits insurrectionists from holding office. In their unanimous decision, the court reinforced that only the federal government can make such a determination, and it is not within a state’s right to do so.

March 6

After losing every state but Vermont in Super Tuesday’s primary elections, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley dropped out of the 2024 presidential race on Wednesday, March 6. Haley ceded her nomination to former President Donald Trump, and while she didn’t announce an endorsement on Wednesday, she encouraged Trump to earn the support of the Republicans and independent voters who had supported her.

State News

Feb. 21

On Feb. 21, Texas carried out its first execution of this year. Ivan Cantù was executed by lethal injection in Huntsville for the murder of his cousin and cousin’s fiancée 24 years ago. Leading up to the execution, there were several protests and calls for Gov. Greg Abbott to pardon Cantù, but to no avail. The Collin County district attorney maintained that Cantù was guilty and pointed to strong DNA evidence and a confession from Cantù.

Feb. 28

A rapidly growing fire evolved into Texas’s second-largest wildfire in history on Feb. 28. The fire, which is spreading throughout the Texas Panhandle, is now five times the size it was two days prior, on Monday, Feb. 26. As of Feb. 28, the fire is now half the size of Rhode Island, and Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has issued a disaster declaration in 60 Texas counties, urging residents to evacuate. The fire has crossed into some counties in Oklahoma as well.

Local News

Feb. 24

On Feb. 24, the City of Austin celebrated the grand opening of the McKalla Station. Created through Project Connect, the city’s program is hoping to increase mobility, according to KXAN. McKalla Station is located outside of Q2 Stadium with the hopes of improving transportation on game days. The station is the newest addition to CapMetro’s Red Line.

Activism Arises Across Austin

Youth Become More Involved in Calls for Change

LASYA SANGANA | student life editor
LEAH LASHUS | staff writer

In recent years, youth activism has been on the rise in many forms, whether it’s through the creation of awareness campaigns through social media or the increased attendance at local protests. Activism has spilled over to schools like LASA, with new clubs being formed to educate students about important issues. Outside of LASA, local chapters of organizations, such as Planned Parenthood in Austin also have helped facilitate increased advocacy.

A student activist at the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) who wished to remain anonymous believes that the initial step to activism is understanding activism has many facets and there is a clear distinction between true activism and philosophical activism. According to them, there is a clear line between writing about the idea of activism and the physical act of doing it, which entails activities like protests and creating conversations about issues.

“There’s this distinction that should be drawn between activism and philosophy and theory,” the student said. “Activism can be protests, it can also be organizing protests, or advocating for causes on social media, or talking to your friends and family about it, but it’s not this kind of more theorizing philosophy realm.”

The student also mentioned that historically, a significant portion of activism is derived from youth advocacy. For example, the majority of those involved in initially organizing protests in the Civil Rights Movement were college students. The same trend reoccurred in other situations such as when young people advocated against the apartheid government in South Africa and similar protests against the Vietnam war.

“So you do see a historical continuum, where youth activists are pretty regularly involved in these kinds of things,” the student said. “And it’s also important because young people, I think as a whole, tend to be a bit more radical than their older counterparts. I’m honestly not sure why this happens, but it is a pretty solid historical trend where it seems to be that young people are pushing for what older people are not pushing for.”

Sarah Garrett, the co-president and founder of the LASA Against Gun Violence club and a Liberator news editor, stated that youth advocacy is especially important because it allows young people to pave a future for themselves. She mentioned that activism doesn’t have to be fancy, and it can be as simple as researching issues and starting conversations in your community.

“Youth activism is especially important since we are the ones who will be voting and creating policies soon,” Garrett said. “Learning about what issues bother you can prepare you for being an adult, and you can impact adults as well. I actually helped my parents vote this year by researching for them about what they’d be voting on in the Texas amendment election earlier this year.”

However, Garrett also mentions that while being a youth activist is important, there are also additional boundaries that come into play such as age. Youth activists can’t dedicate the amount of time they want to on the issues they are passionate about which makes it harder to create large-scale change.

“I think that making change on a large-scale is hard to achieve,” Garrett said. “I’m not naive enough to believe that my club is going to change the number of shootings in Texas, even though I wish I could. Organizing large protests takes a lot of time and energy, and I haven’t organized any yet.”

Although being involved in activism at a young age can be difficult, Mason Marriott-Voss from the Austin Democratic Socialist Organization (DSA) suggested that a great way to get involved despite your age is through activism-oriented clubs that are in schools. According to Marriott-Voss, even though most high school students aren’t able to vote, they still are very important to the democratic process because they can reach people in ways that adults and traditional protests might not have the capacity to do.

“Whenever a kid says something, it’s a lot easier to get excited by it,” Marriott-Voss said. “And you hear it from a different place, especially in the context of things like climate change, which is an issue that affects younger generations more than older generations, because it’s cool, longitudinally, only getting worse. And so often, you find just demographically that younger folks are more keyed into that. And so that’s an issue where, in your home, in your family, that you young people have a lot more leverage than some other folks would otherwise.”

Additionally, Marriott-Voss added that although youth activism can sometimes be challenging to get involved in, it is still very important. Currently, only the voices, needs, and opinions of adults get expressed when it comes to current issues, but he believes that having the opinion of younger people is equally important because they are also a major part of the community.

“The youth are a part of our communities, our civilization, our culture, and their voice is just as valuable,” Marriott-Voss said. “And then on some issues, like the climate issue, possibly more valuable because they are larger stakeholders in that. And being able to have use involves being able to not just be led by people who’ve been doing it for the last 50 years, but also to be led by people with new ideas, who have new perspectives, who might not have done something like this before, but are motivated and spurred to action by something they see locally. They have an optimism that some older organizers don’t have.”

The UTD student recommends the first step to getting involved in youth activism is to find an issue that spurs a lot of interest. According to them, there can be a multitude of compelling issues, but it might be easier to focus on local activism to feel more connected to the issue and see the causes and effects of the issue more clearly.

“It starts with figuring out what really pulls you towards a cause,” the student said. “It can be anything that you’re really interested in, but you really have to have a passion for it, because it is difficult. It’s not easy. A lot of times you’ll find yourself wondering what is the point of all of this.”

According to the student, the next step is finding organizations that support the issue of interest. The student added that when first starting to be involved in advocacy-related activities, focusing on local organizations can be helpful because it can be easy to get swept away and feel lost in the big organizations. For example, when advocating for reproductive rights, getting involved in a local Planned Parenthood could be much better than getting involved in an organization that focuses on these problems at a bigger scale.

“A lot of times when we talk about advocacy, we think of really big national organizations like the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), which is a great organization, and if you have the effort to get involved with the NAACP, I would definitely encourage you to do that,” the student said. “But it’s much harder to get involved with those big national organizations because they’re usually pretty closed off to most people, or you have to know people, or they’re just looking at priorities that are on a national level.”

In addition to local activism, according to Marriott-Voss, using social media to spread awareness can be a key part of youth activism. He added that social media, especially in current times, has become a significant gateway in what type of ideas and issues people and youth are more exposed to and willing to discuss.

“I think that the internet and social and online spaces are spaces of community and the discourses we have there matter,” Marriott-Voss said. “And they can influence and affect people. The internet is a great place to be exposed to ideas that you’ve never been exposed to before and to be able to have conversations with people you wouldn’t have otherwise been able to have conversations with. And so using the internet as one tool of many to help affect change I think is super important.”

On the other hand, Marriott-Voss elaborated that sometimes it is easy for activists to get caught up in social media without understanding that there is a boundary to which social media can influence change. He highlighted that while social media can be a good stepping point for activists, striving past online activism to make a stronger impact on issues is an important thing to keep in mind.

“I think if we contain our movements and make them only exist online, then we’ve lost an entire sphere of what organizing and activism looks like, and how it can be effective,” Marriott-Voss said. “I think that the important part about that is to remember what it is that we are fighting for and pushing for our material changes, changes to legislation, changes to working conditions, changes to employment status, changes to legal structures, or changes to policing. These are all physical things that exist in the physical world. And yelling about it on the internet is great to generate energy, maybe educate people who don’t understand how those things work.”

Marriott-Voss added that while youth activism has been on the rise, there seems to be a trend of a self-imposed boundary placed by the youth on their voice. While making a change can feel impossible at a younger age, Marriot-Voss advises that it’s key to not be influenced by others’ opinions about the amount of change youth activists make and believe in the positive impact and power advocacy has on issues.

“I think that there’s this self-imposed barrier that kids are told by people that their voices don’t matter, that their voice isn’t relevant, that it’s not your turn, that you don’t know what you’re talking about,” Marriott-Voss said. “And I think that gets internalized. And I think that the youth would be really surprised at how much power they wield if they were to organize and move collectively. One person on their own does not make a movement. But an organized group of people demanding something as a collective action is incredibly powerful.”

““

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- MASON MARRIOTT-VOSS, MEMBER OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA (DSA)

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Get Involved in Activism

1. Educate yourself
2. Educate others
3. Advocate for legislation
4. Attend protests
5. Raise money
6. Donate



PROTEST On Saturday, March 2, Austinites took to the streets to protest the U.S. support of Israel in their activity in Gaza and their treatment of the Palestinian people. The protesters gathered at Austin City Hall before marching through downtown Austin to the Capital. photos by Annabel Andre

7. Contact your local politicians, representatives and senators. Find your representative here: <https://wrm.capitol.texas.gov/home>
8. Engage in community service
9. Share information on social media
10. Create a public awareness campaign



SPREADING AWARENESS Co-President of LASA Against Gun Violence club and Liberator news editor Sarah Garrett gives a presentation to club members about submitting articles to Themis Magazine, a youth-led social justice magazine. The club meets every Tuesday during lunch in room 105. photo by Annabel Andre

Learn how to get involved in your local community's activism from Amnesty International!

graphics by Asha Rountree



Q&A

with Elizabeth Switek

Journey from Architectural Geology to Librarianship

SADIE CRAVOTTA | student life editor

The Liberator: Did you do anything else interesting after your graduation?

Originally obtaining a master’s in architectural geology, Elizabeth Switek, LASA’s librarian, talked about how her life wasn’t always about managing a library, but protecting native areas around Texas and working for an engineering company. More specifically, she worked for PBS&J, an engineering design firm, and also with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) which protects native land from being dug up. While working with NAGPRA, Switek also ensured that if fossils or artifacts were found on native land they would be treated with care and returned to the native people.

The Liberator: What did you study before you were a librarian?

Switek: I have a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in archeological geology. It’s the application of geologic techniques to archaeological questions. My specialty was ceramic analysis, so ancient ceramics, and my bachelor’s thesis was on Troy and Trojan ceramics. So, [I was] doing petrographics, microscopic analysis of ceramics, and neutron activation analysis.

The Liberator: What did you originally pursue with your bachelor’s and master’s degrees?

Switek: I was enforcing the NAGPRA act; they navigate the intricacies of repatriation of cultural artifacts and human remains back to Native American tribes absolutely differently. NAGPRA involves regulations and culture, whereas being a librarian is about organizing information and connecting people with it. It’s a shift, but one I thoroughly enjoy. During my time as an architectural geologist, I was working with a company called PBS&J which involved engineering in piping systems in buildings and such. I worked alongside them because when digging in a site we have to know first if we are allowed to actually work there and that is why NAGPRA is a part of this.

The Liberator: What made you move from the complexities of NAGPRA to the librarian hustle?

Switek: Well, truth be told, money was tight. Librarianship promised stability, and it seemed like a natural transition. That was one of the reasons to give up my job, but being a librarian is interesting to me. I just love being surrounded by books and getting kids hooked up with books as well.

Switek: I moved to Austin after graduation and I worked for an environmental consulting company. I also liked the archival research that I was having to do as part of the work that I was doing. We would go into archives to research these dog trots or these old structures to see, did anyone famous ever actually own these homes? I really enjoyed that and so I had a friend who was the director of the Texas Memorial Museum at UT (University of Texas at Austin). And she was like you know what, there’s a whole field of research called archives. So, I went to UT library school, and I specialized in archives and records management, and I became a certified archivist and a records manager and I worked at UT as the Lloyd Bentsen archivist. Bentsen was a senator and he was the Secretary of Treasury during Clinton’s administration. Later, I left there and I went to Semitech which was a semiconductor technology consortium, and again I was the archivist and I was a records manager.

The Liberator: Did your job ever include traveling?

Switek: My husband got transferred to Hawaii. So, we moved to Hawaii and had our first kid. When I came back I ended up getting a job. [My husband] started at a school called Austin Discovery School which is a K-8 charter school, and they weren’t going to have a library, so I decided to create the library from scratch and I ran it for 2 years unpaid then the third year they hired me full time. I worked there for 15 years as the librarian. So it went from archeology to geology to archives to school librarian, and I like school librarian because I get summers off, and two weeks of winter break, and a spring break, so it’s a nice gig.

The Liberator: Do you think that there’s any overlap between these fields?

Switek: The thread that runs through it is history. It might be a little more tenuous but I have nonfiction books, and I’ve got historical fiction books, etc. The whole idea behind research skills is that I had to use all those research skills to be able to research these structures and the ceramics, and now I’m helping kids with understanding how to use the same research skills to get the information that they need for projects and papers. So, I would say that’s the common thread: history and learning and appreciation of past cultures.

Complaints on Chemistry

Questions Raised About the Difficulty of the Course

BRIDGET DUNLEAVY | staff writer

LASA is nationally ranked as one of the best high schools in the United States, and with that ranking comes many challenging college-preparatory classes. One of these is the sophomore Pre-AP Chemistry class which has recently received many complaints about increased difficulty, the grading system, lack of extra credit, and the difficult material. But, according to the chemistry teachers, no changes have been made to the curriculum and the assignments have undergone only minor changes.

Chemistry classes at LASA are taught through a mix of assigned videos, live lectures, and reading and solving practice problems from the textbook written by the chemistry instructors. Students also take frequent Check for Understandings (CFUs) to increase their understanding of the content and tests every unit. Sophomore Sarah Smith described the subject as something she’s ambivalent to as a class. The fast-paced nature of the class and the grading system make it hard for her.

“I think it’s a little bit tough, especially considering we don’t have extra credit, but it’s supposed to be a hard class,” Smith said. “The only assignments we really have is homework and I think it’s reasonable.”

Accounts of the class’s increased difficulty have spread to other grades. Junior Renee Breaux, who remembers the class’s workload from their experience last year, assumes the already tough class is made harder by changing testing and grading policies.

“I’ve heard that this year is much harder, especially now that practice problems are being checked and CFUs have changed,” Breaux said. “[For my class], about 90% of people passed CFUs since we had multiple attempts.”

Despite complaints from students, according to Shontel Willie, one of LASA’s chemistry teachers and forensics teacher, the only changes made to the class are that CFUs are no longer online and that students only have one attempt instead of three on CFUs unlike in previous years. These changes, according to her, were put in place to slowly phase out the class’s policies while online during the COVID-19 pandemic. No changes have been made to the curriculum or the class’s difficulty.

Though the class is meant to be demanding, Smith feels that she has to compensate for the difficulty of the coursework by going to office hours and studying with friends when she’s struggling with

a topic. Similarly, sophomore Mia Lopez relies on both the material in class and supplemental content in order to fully understand the content.

“I study by going through the textbook and marking the questions and topics that I don’t feel comfortable on,” Lopez said, “and then I go through the workbook and re-work some of the problems and write down explanations for how to do them. If I still don’t understand then I watch a video on how to do the topic.”

In order to ensure the class runs smoothly and works best for their students, the chemistry teachers meet weekly to work through issues and make adjustments to the course, according to chemistry teacher Joel Barton.

“We standardize our BLEND courses and assignment dates,” Barton said. “We also meet weekly to discuss our classes, as well as intermittently during our conference periods and between classes.”

While some students feel pressure from some teachers grading practice problems more seriously rather than treating them as a completion grade, according to Willie, it is invaluable in helping the students gain a greater understanding of the content. Barton also assists his students when they struggle by working with them in class and suggesting outside sources to help them thrive in the class.

“First, I assist them in class,” Barton said. “Next, I recommend office hours (either with myself or another chemistry teacher) and/or the UT (University of Texas at Austin) tutors. After that, I recommend individualized help from me when necessary; contact with a student’s family is also helpful.”

While the teachers do not confidently know if the class will see any more changes next year, they hope more labs and projects will be incorporated into the class. Some students also wish to see changes in the class. Smith suggests extra credit as an option to keep the difficulty of the class the same while decreasing student’s stress about grades, while Lopez suggests more interactive learning.

“If I had to improve that class, I think I would make it more self-paced with the incorporation of labs so we can apply what we are learning,” Lopez said. “I feel that it helps me to learn the topic better.”

If students struggle with the chemistry class’s content, LASA offers tutoring from UT students after school. Chemistry tutoring is held in the library after school on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 4:15 to 6:15.

graphic by Asha Rountree

Sleep is for the Weak

LASA Students’ Sleep Habits and Caffeine Intake



Somebody to Lean On

LASA Tutors Lend a Helping Hand

BISHOP BRITT | staff writer

LASA offers many tutoring opportunities for their students in areas such as math, sciences, and writing. Tutoring sessions at LASA, funded by PFLASA, are free of charge and occur weekly. While many LASA students themselves teach at these sessions, University of Texas at Austin (UT) students also conduct after-school sessions for students. Chemistry tutoring via UT students happens after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the Japanese room, physics tutoring led by students and teachers happens during lunch, and math tutoring varies per class during lunch and after school hours.

Sophomore Amritha Ramkumar stated that her peers often believe that tutoring is long, hard, annoying, or a waste of time, but she believes that tutoring at LASA is actually very quick and stress-free. At LASA, you don’t need an appointment, and according to Ramkumar, the way tutoring is structured allows students to better ease into tutoring.

“You can come and leave as you want to,” Ramkumar said. “It can be general or specific questions. Some people just come in if they have a CFU [Check for Understanding] or something and they have a question about a particular concept, and then other people ask for help with practice problems.”

However, Ramkumar mentioned that while tutoring is incredibly helpful, it also has downsides. Tutoring can often get overcrowded with people, and the time students have to wait to get to a tutor is very long.

“Sometimes the tutoring gets really busy,” Ramkumar said. “There are lots of students so I wish that there was more space to tutor.”

Sophomore Eamon Griffin feels that tutoring is superior to office hours, even with its specific drawbacks such as overcrowding. Griffin said that it feels more personal than regular office hours and, for him, that makes it easier to understand the topics.

“Tutoring is very different from office hours in a couple of ways,” Griffin said. “While office hours are a good way to get back on track or better understand the material, often there is not enough time, the teacher is busy doing something else, and sometimes you have to schedule an appointment. Tutoring gives you an alternate way to understand and learn your

material with a second voice that might help more than your teacher.”

Sophomore Bouna Sakho believes that when students can understand and admit they don’t understand a subject, it shows their strength, not their weakness. According to him, understanding subjects in a healthy and fun learning environment through these tutoring sessions can be a really good thing for all students’ grades, mental health, and future success.

Sakho added that the after school tutoring sessions hosted by UT students, while perfect for some, don’t work for all LASA students. It can conflict with several after-school extracurriculars, sports, and other activities. Additionally, with the popularity of these sessions, space can get filled up quickly, as office hours might be closed and people want help with their problems.

“I play soccer and sometimes it’s hard to go to soccer and chemistry, because of my scheduling conflicts,” Sakho said. “School is the most important thing on my list so I sometimes have to do school over sports.”

Sakho explained that although tutoring is very helpful, many students feel scared to go tutoring, especially at LASA, because they feel embarrassed to admit they need help or don’t understand something. He once shied away from tutoring too, but realized that it was good for him.

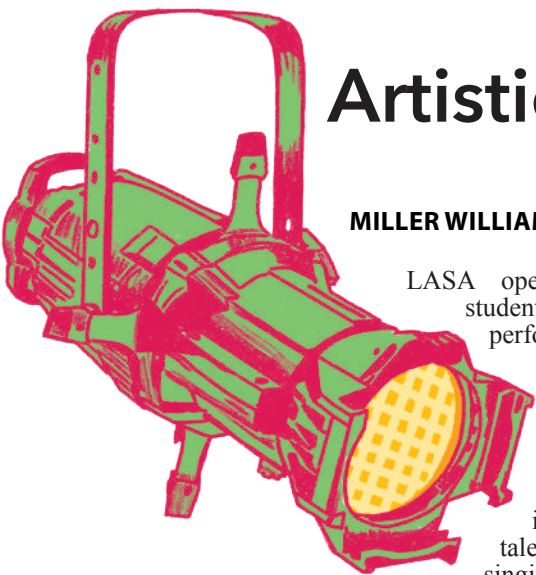
“I definitely recommend that if you are struggling, don’t hide it and fail, and don’t care what people think, because tutoring helps,” Sakho said. “Just go to tutoring, try your best, and maybe it will help you and maybe you’ll start to like the subject more and want to succeed.”



HELPING OUT LASA students in AP Calculus and higher-level math classes volunteer to tutor their peers in math subjects. Math peer tutoring is available in the T-Annex everyday during lunch and before school. photo by Annabel Andre

Artistic Students Spotlighted in Open Mics

MILLER WILLIAMS | staff writer



LASA open mics gives students a chance to perform their talents for their peers and teachers in an open environment. Entertainment at open mics includes student talents such as singing, poetry, rap, and more. Recently

formed in September 2023, open mics are held in the guitar room once a month during lunch. Performers can sign up as soon as 10 minutes before the performance. Any student can go during lunchtime on the specified dates and perform their acts for a crowd of students to enjoy.

David Lester, the guitar teacher at LASA, began teaching guitar at LASA in the fall of 2021 and was inspired by Austin’s energetic open mic scene, which made him want to give LASA students a similar opportunity in school. He believes that it’s an open and stress-free way to allow students to showcase their talents and gain experience.

“Open mics are community spaces to share art,” Lester said. “Usually these are music, poetry, comedy, and dance. The LASA open mic is a space for students to share their performing art in an informal setting. We always love to hear honed and experienced performers, but the LASA open mic is also a place where beginners can figure things out.”

Junior Arhant Choudhary, who has participated in every open mic session, mentioned how the opportunity to perform for his peers has had a beneficial effect on him. According to him, many performers who attend open mic similarly feel that the environment is very positive and judgment is not a concern, and for him personally, the activity allows him to grow past his performance-based anxieties.

“The audience is very nice and very appreciative,” Choudhary said. “They don’t mind if you mess up. It’s perfectly fine. It’s a great

first test audience for anything... I didn’t have to find or organize my own teams of people to perform to and to help me get over any performance anxieties.”

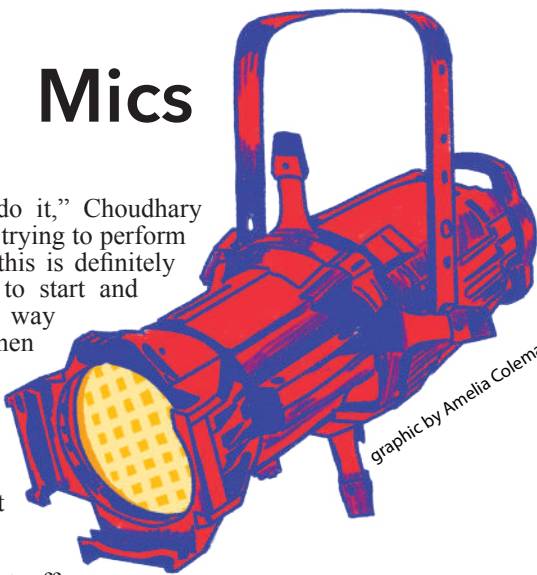


Performance and art are tied together in a special way. It’s almost like the art isn’t complete until it’s shared. It’s unfortunate that performing is a skill separate from writing or learning. You can have a song or poem perfectly memorized at home, and find holes in your memory when you perform. That’s why it’s really important to practice performing. Start small in an informal setting like our open mic, then test your chops at larger gatherings.

- DAVID LESTER, LASA GUITAR TEACHER



Choudhary added that having open mics at school is a great chance to gain experience, especially for aspiring musicians. He stated that he particularly remembered the open mic on Jan. 26, when the meeting gained an audience of nearly 30 teachers and students.



graphic by Amelia Coleman

“Definitely do it,” Choudhary said. “If you’re trying to perform anywhere big, this is definitely the first place to start and try it out. The way you play when you perform changes when you’re in front of people, so it’s definitely helpful to start out and it’s a very great audience to start off with.”

According to junior Reed Winkelmann, not only do open mics give students an opportunity to look inward and find their hidden talents, but they also give them a chance to discover the hidden talents of their classmates. Winkelmann has also attended the majority of the open mic opportunities and mentions that even though he has prior experience, having that space at LASA has still been rewarding.

“I’ve been playing guitar for about 10 years,” Winkelmann said. “Every once in a while, I’ll go perform at a café... I think [at LASA] it allows people who are scared to show themselves in this small space.”

Lester believes that for students looking to share their art, or who just want to start by performing to a smaller audience, LASA’s open mics are great opportunities. Rather than starting with a large crowd, performing for a smaller, less intimidating crowd can be a good starter for budding performers and artists.

“Performance and art are tied together in a special way,” Lester said. “It’s almost like the art isn’t complete until it’s shared. It’s unfortunate that performing is a skill separate from writing or learning. You can have a song or poem perfectly memorized at home, and find holes in your memory when you perform. That’s why it’s really important to practice performing. Start small in an informal setting like our open mic, then test your chops at larger gatherings.”

AISD Excessive Banning of Websites Affects Classes

GEORGIA FINK | staff writer

Throughout the 2023-2024 academic school year there has been an increase in websites and images banned by the Austin Independent School District (AISD), not only for students but also for teachers and administrators. This has caused disruptions in classrooms by preventing students from accessing websites or videos teachers included in their curriculum, leading teachers to spend a large amount of time creating alternative lesson plans.

Jessica Cherry, the sophomore LASA Assistant Principal, stated that these interferences have caused teachers across the school and the district to lose many of their teaching tools, primarily educational videos and websites like Tinkercad. This has forced them to recreate lesson plans to accommodate for the changes, taking up much more time and setting their classes back. Chloe Cardinale, one of the Great Ideas teachers at LASA, previously used a different website to manage her coursework. Since the website was blocked, she had to move all of the resources to Blend.

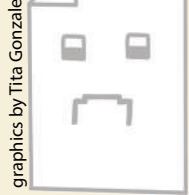
“The frustration for some of those teachers is that ‘I put hours of work into this and now it’s gone’,” Cherry said. “You just feel like you’ve been robbed of your time and your effort and it just again makes you feel frustrated.”

Cardinale finds it irritating when students are given homework assignments such as reading an article online, only to discover that the article has been banned, stopping students from completing their homework and learning. In order to combat these changes, Cardinale spends extra time making sure students can access these assignments by double checking if it is blocked, and if it is, creating Google Docs of the content instead.

“We’ve never gotten direct communication about what it is that they ban or what the standard is based off of,” Cardinale

said. “It’s different stuff all the time and they don’t ever give us any notice.”

According to Cherry, there is a warning that administrators get before things get tighter on district computers and Wi-Fi. This is just a warning, though, and there is no information given about what information or sites will be restricted.



graphics by Tita Gonzales

“I’m hearing more from teachers,” Cherry said. “It kind of feels like you’re being micromanaged when all of a sudden you’re not allowed to choose what sites you’re using as a teacher.”

Cardinale mentioned that in the past, there have been other points when AISD has banned websites that teachers would

This site can’t be reached

use, like YouTube. This disrupted a lot of learning as teachers had no alternative methods to find similar educational videos.

“I don’t know that there’s practical reasoning or rationale as to what they specifically censor,” Cardinale said. “There doesn’t seem to be any consistency that I can glean, so it’s confusing.”

Sophomore Lina Morris believes that the recent banning disrupts learning and classwork by not allowing her to view websites that would help her to complete assignments. Although understanding the fundamental reason why AISD blocks websites, to prevent students from accessing inappropriate sites and information, Morris also mentioned that many of the blocked

websites seem to follow protocol and are blocked randomly.

“I understand why they’re blocked,” Morris said. “But also at the same time, it can be kind of annoying and pointless.”

When students have to work around these blocks, Morris explained that it takes time away from working on assignments. Morris believes that this causes distraction in classrooms and wastes time.

“There was just a website about search commands and it was blocked,” Morris said. “I had to look something else up and I don’t know, spend like a minute doing something else that I could have been doing my work.”

Although there are many downsides, Morris believes that there are some positives to AISD banning the websites. Some of these include ad blocking and preventing harmful or distracting websites from reaching students.

“Restricting some things does keep things safe,” Morris said. “I also like that they ban ads on some browsers.”

Cardinale and Morris are surprised that many online games aren’t blocked, but instead, the articles and videos teachers use are. Even though AISD has banned many websites and images, Cardinale stated that she is in support of censoring some information due to the fact that it could be damaging to kids. However, she also believes that AISD should be able to trust teachers.

“Teachers are professionals and we should be able to make those decisions,” Cardinale said. “They should trust us to know what to show y’all.”

Students Feel the Need, the Need for Speed

Complaints Rise as Traffic and Poor Driving Increase Around LASA

ETHAN STERN | staff writer

As enrollment at LASA steadily increases each year, more students can be seen driving around the LASA campus every day. In order to manage the congestion resulting from LASA’s growth, new rules have been implemented, such as moving junior parking to the surrounding streets and supplying warnings whenever students disrupt neighbors by blocking mailboxes or driveways.

As experienced parents, the volunteers of Parents and Friends of LASA (PFLASA) help establish clear guidelines for new LASA parents and students. These guidelines include license plate checks and reminders for drivers to stay updated on community issues in order to control traffic chaos. In addition to these guidelines, PFLASA arranges community engagement meetings to address neighborhood concerns. Delia Mitchell, a parent at LASA who attends drop-off and pick-up, feels that these discussions could help resolve this issue.

“I do think there is a strong need for a community traffic discussion that includes parents, students, and the neighbors around LASA,” Mitchell said. “I also think that it would be helpful for the city of Austin to have surveying teams monitor traffic patterns around the school to make improvements.”

With many student drivers in the LASA area, obeying traffic rules is a common complaint amongst residents in LASA’s neighborhood. Missing simple road signs or going above the speed limit in a school zone can cause alarm for many students and community members alike. James Ockleberry, a security officer at LASA, described some of the common issues he has noticed around the school.

“I’ve noticed young people drive fast,” Ockleberry said. “Even in the community, we have people who are speeding, and so we are

trying to keep them aware of how fast they are leaving the parking lot and not having an accident.”

Accompanying that, with everyday life stressors, it is very easy for parents and students to be in a rush when driving, according to senior Emily Lucas. Seniors trying to make it back from lunch or parents scrambling to get to work on time might be speeding and paying less attention to the road.

“It causes a lot of stress for the people who are parking in the parking lot just because there’s so many people coming in and out of it,” Lucas said. “Especially because the entrances are pretty slim, so it’s kinda hard to fit two cars. And I think a lot of people like to take their time when they’re dropping off their kids. Like, when you get to the front of the line, that’s the time to have a talk with your kid for some reason.”

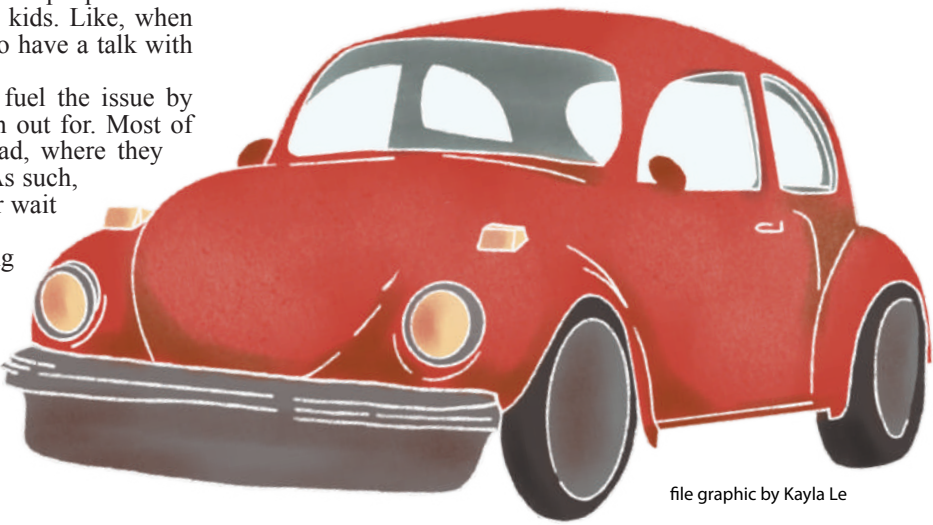
According to Lucas, school buses can also fuel the issue by adding an extra component for drivers to watch out for. Most of the buses circle around LASA on Gardner Road, where they can conflict with the senior parking lot’s exits. As such, seniors at LASA either have to beat the buses, or wait for them to pass.

“I feel like if you don’t get out of the parking lot before the buses leave, then you’re kinda screwed,” Lucas said. “Because you have to wait behind all the buses. And especially if you’re going the same direction as the buses, you’re stuck behind a bus.”

Despite these prevailing issues, Ockleberry believes that LASA has been handling this recent surge of cars well compared to some other schools. A poll by the Harvard-Westlake

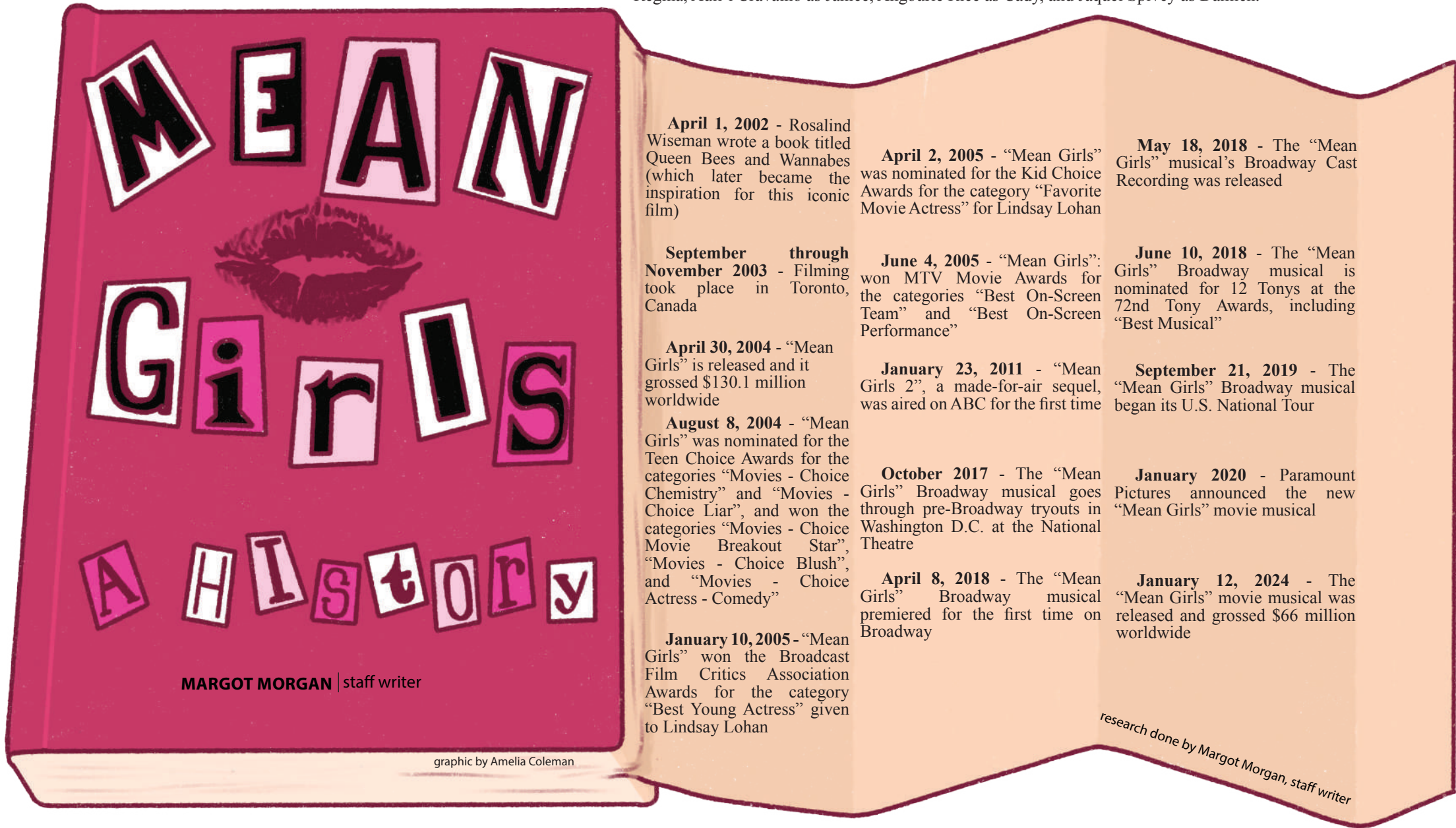
Chronicle showed that out of the 429 students polled, around 15% of them had claimed to be hit by a car in a school parking lot. Compared to this, Ockleberry said that LASA has started seeing improvement in following protocol in the parking lots.

“Considering other schools that I’ve heard about, even smaller schools, they have challenges because there are kids that don’t come back from lunch on time so they’re speeding, trying to get back,” Ockleberry said. “So it causes an accident, but not with our kiddos though. They follow protocol.”



file graphic by Kayla Le

Everyone knows who Regina George is—the Queen Bee of North Shore High School in “Mean Girls”. The original “Mean Girls” movie, starring Lindsey Lohan as Cady and Rachel McAdams as Regina, became an instant classic, scoring \$130.1 million at the box office on premiere day. This movie was so popular that in 2018, the “Mean Girls” musical premiered on Broadway, and it was nominated for 12 Tonys that same year. As the 20th anniversary of the original movie’s release approached, the new “Mean Girls” movie musical was announced in 2020. And what better way to celebrate Mean Girls’ 20th birthday than by having Renée Rapp (one of the actresses who played Regina on Broadway) play Regina George? The casting even contains some of the iconic actors from the original movie, including Tina Fey and Tim Meadows revitalizing their roles as Ms. Norbury and Principal Duvall, respectively, and Lindsey Lohan as the Mathletes Moderator. These actors are accompanied by new ones, such as Reneé Rapp as Regina, Auli’i Cravalho as Janice, Angourie Rice as Cady, and Jaquel Spivey as Damien.



opinion Scales of Hollywood
Gendered Standards of the Entertainment Industry

ISABEL KRAMER | club contributor

Have you ever noticed how in video games the male characters have full armor on while the female characters have...less? What about the roles of Adam Sandler’s wives in his movies and how they are always significantly younger models? When was the last time you saw a man on the red carpet asked about his diet? In all of the media we consume, women are treated significantly different than their male counterparts to a degree that has become so normalized many don’t even notice.

In 2011, actress Jennifer Lawrence was cast as the main character in the Hunger Games movies, Katniss Everdeen, and received significant criticism for her body. “A few years ago, Ms. Lawrence might have looked hungry enough to play Katniss, but now, at 21, her seductive, womanly figure makes a bad fit for a dystopian fantasy about a people starved into submission,” remarked Manohla Dargis, a writer for the New York Times. This same writer did not comment on the fact that Lawrence’s costars, Liam Hemsworth and Josh Hutcherson, did not look malnourished, or “hungry enough”. Jeffrey Wells, the writer of Hollywood Elsewhere magazine, also commented on Lawrence’s appearance, stating that she was a “fairly tall, big-boned lady” who was “too big” for Josh Hutcherson. The media never once picked this same grievance with the male actors. The Hunger Games fandom.com website states that Peeta (Hutcherson’s character) was supposed to be 5’10, three inches taller than Lawrence’s character. There is a reason Wells didn’t point out anything about Hutcherson’s height or criticize him for his build — because criticizing women’s bodies is so normalized in media and society, this writer could feel comfortable saying such things about Lawrence but not Hutcherson. Women’s value is largely associated with their looks rather than their skills, so despite the fact that Lawrence might have been the perfect fit for the role, she simply didn’t have the “look” according to critics.

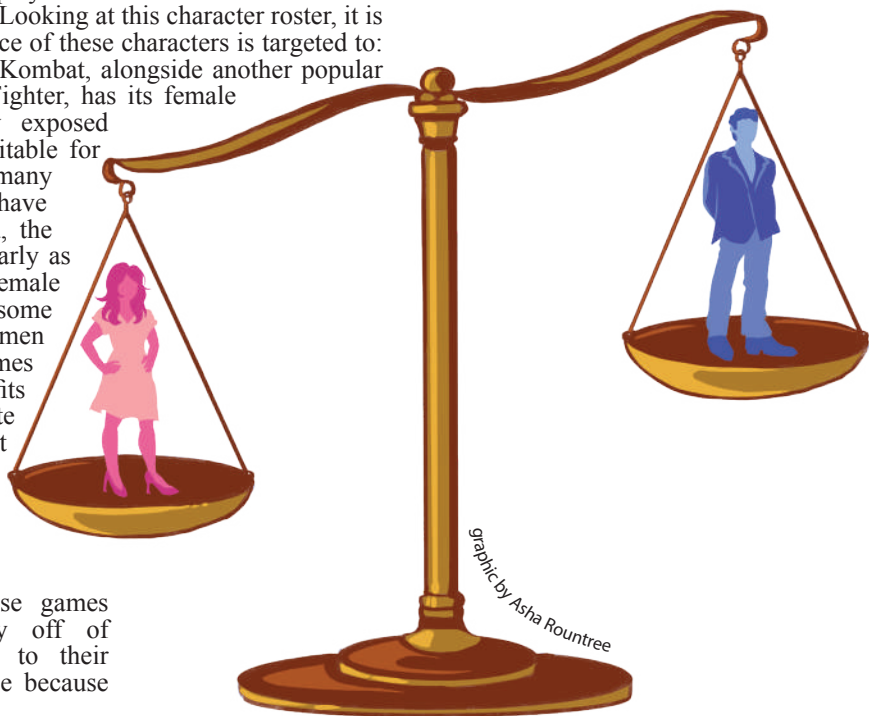
The media has had such a fixation on women’s bodies for so long that it goes unmentioned, but its influence leaks into societal expectations of women. This is seen in the obsession with women’s bodies to look a certain way to fit a role or to sexualize women to make a profit off of a male audience. The hypersexualization of women in men’s media, especially in video games, has gone rampant. Mortal Kombat, a popular video game, has 20 female characters in the entire series, and according to CBR.com, only one playable female character out of the 77 playable fighters. Looking at this character roster, it is clear who the audience of these characters is targeted to: young boys. Mortal Kombat, alongside another popular video game Street Fighter, has its female characters in fairly exposed outfits that are unsuitable for combat. While many male characters have their chests exposed, the male chest is not nearly as sexualized as the female chest. I’m sure some of the many women who play these games appreciate the outfits of their favorite characters, but that does not negate the fact that there is a clear reason why these characters are dressed the way they are. These games are making money off of sexualizing women to their young male audience because

it has become the norm for women to be used as commodities for sales.

Unfortunately, this discrimination in women’s media can also be seen in the gendered language commonly used by the press to portray public figures. For example, in 2016, retired NFL quarterback Tom Brady was characterized by CBS Sports as a talented surfer and a good father for showing the basics of surfing to his son while vacationing on the beaches of Costa Rica. Three years later, in 2019, Gisele Bündchen, a Brazilian fashion model and Brady’s former wife, was spotted on the same beaches of Costa Rica. However, instead of highlighting Bündchen’s vacation, Fox News claimed Bündchen was “flaunt[ing]” her “bikini bod”. Despite being in similar situations, the media chose to depict Brady’s athletic ability during his vacation and reduced Bündchen to her outfit, describing her “white bikini top” and “high-waisted green shorts” instead of her own surfing skills, which she had also been practicing on the beach, like Brady. It’s ridiculous for the media to portray women in such a manner as if a woman’s only reason for going outside or on vacation is because of her wardrobe. This difference in language is hardly subtle, and it is disappointing to witness in the 21st century.

Women and men have very different expectations when consuming media, and neither set of expectations is always achievable. While pointing out the double standards placed on women, it is important to note men have their own set of unfair standards that have the possibility of damaging the consumer of said media. I am only saying this to acknowledge that there are double standards that affect the population as a whole, but I am specifically talking about how women are treated.

The people who produce the media we consume understand that they can make a profit off of sexualizing women. The hyper-fixation on women’s bodies has been leaking into our everyday society to the degree that women not in the media might feel the same expectations pressured onto them that the media has placed on models and actresses. A survey conducted by AARP in 2023 found that most adult women largely believe beauty ideals are based on media. The media has always been incredibly harsh on women, whether it be Jennifer Lawrence or female characters from Mortal Kombat, and there is no let-up.



The Land of Free Music

from page 1

Easy Compadre! is an Austin Band that performed at Flamingo Cantina on the 6th as part of one Free Week concert. Its members are guitarist Hector Tednoir, keyboardist Oscar Botello, and percussionist Juan Alfredo Rios Rodriguez.

“This is all free, but we’re still getting paid,” Tednoir said. “We’re not the best-paid workers, let’s put it that way.”

Easy Compadre! also played at Hot Summer Nights, Free Week’s partner event occurring every July. The percussionist of Easy Compadre!, Rodriguez, has attended both festivals in addition to playing at Free Week.

“It’s a round of events [Hot Summer Nights and Free Week] where the district supports the community,” Rodriguez said. “So it’s the same procedure. If you get selected by the district, it’s awesome because you’ll be playing for a very nice audience.”



Nicole Klepadlo is the Interim Executive Director of the Red River Cultural District. She believes that Free Week has a very positive impact on everyone involved.

“I think one of the benefits of this festival is that it allows access to free shows,” Klepadlo said. “So people can come down, they can visit over 12 different venues, over 80 to 100 plus local acts, and they can really explore a new band that they’ve never heard of and find their new favorite while just coming to the festival.”

The Red River Cultural District prides itself on mixing up each Free Week. It offers different genres of music, hiring new artists to play every year, and peppers the lineup with songs of many different tempos, lyrics, and nationalities.

“Venues do their best to identify new talent, and new local talent, and so it is a mix of genres and types of music,” Klepadlo said.

According to Thoresen, Free Week is very important to the culture of Austin. This event allows Austinites and tourists to experience the music in the self-proclaimed “music capital of the world” for free.

“We wanna know that local music can still survive,” Thoresen said. “If we do these events, it does really matter. It does impact things.”

Free Week attendees don’t have to be exclusively adults. There are many venues where people under 18 can attend, one of which is Stubb’s Bar-B-Q.

“I think sometimes being in high school, you think that you’re not welcome to go because there’s older people around,” Thoresen said. “But music’s for everybody and everybody should get out there and experience it.”

Paying for artists, venues, and advertising has gotten more expensive, making it tougher for the Red River Cultural District to keep Free Week running. This has caused the event to change substantially since it first started.

“[Free Week] used to be longer, and then it dropped down to three days, and now it’s two days,” Thoresen said. “The reason why is because of funding. If we don’t have the support from the city and the people, then these kinds of events like free week and supporting local artists is not gonna happen.”

Free Week and Hot Summer Nights are run by the Red River Cultural District, a non-profit organization providing live music for both the local community and tourists. To learn more about the Red River Cultural District and their mission of preserving authentic Texas live music heritage, visit their website at redriverculturaldistrict.org.

Hitting the Right Tone

The Pit Orchestra’s Impact on Alley Cat Players’ Musical

BEN GOODMAN | staff writer

In preparation for LASA’s winter musical, “Les Miserables”, the pit orchestra began rehearsal in early January before the official start of the spring semester. This journey included two weeks with rehearsal nearly every single day, leading up to the opening weekend’s performances on Jan. 26 and 27.

Jesus Torres is the Associate Band Director at LASA, as well as the director of the pit orchestra. This year’s performance was the 11th time he has conducted a pit orchestra and the second one he has conducted at LASA.

“Every single one is different,” Torres said. “The kids are always different, even when they’re the same, it’s always a different experience. This performance was one of the most challenging, for sure. We played a lot, pretty much nonstop throughout the entire musical. I’ve never had a musical where we’ve played from the beginning of Act 1 until Intermission and the beginning of Act 2 until the end.”

“Les Miserables” is a hugely popular musical, with performances in 43 different countries reported by Musical Theatre International as of 2012. Torres additionally identified “Les Miserables” as one of the most difficult musicals he has conducted.

“The major challenge in this year’s musical was losing so many kids the second week,” Torres said. “Losing all those kids and then having to cancel two rehearsals that week was probably the biggest challenge. I think it ended up being the best thing though, because we had the chance to rest and get healthy.”

Senior Isabela Christian played violin in the pit for the performances of the show. She said she had never done anything like it before but when Torres suggested she join she agreed.

“Well, I just kind of wanted to do a musical and I decided even if it was trash music, it would be fun and it would be interesting,” Christian said. “Also I was specifically requested to do it by people so that’s a compliment.”

Junior Tavi Tragus played viola for the pit orchestra this year, as well as playing in last year’s “Into The Woods”. Tragus enjoyed both years, but each had different specific perks. Last year, she met and played with many seniors in the orchestra, and this year, the musical took place at LASA instead of the AISD Performing Arts Center, meaning that there was less transportation needed.

“It was a lot of fun both years,” Tragus said. “Last year I was with a bunch of seniors, and that was cool, because they were all better than me, so I learned some things. This year was fun because we were in the LASA theater so we didn’t have to drive anywhere, and I think the music was more fun this year. It was a little bit less repetitive.”



graphic by Amelia Coleman

The pit orchestra faced some challenges on the road to performances. According to Tragus, a freeze removed some rehearsal hours earlier in the preparations process. In addition to this, there was illness going around in the cast, crew, and pit, leading to the cancellation of two rehearsals between the first and second weekend of performances. Torres said this could have been a positive in some ways.

“After the first week there was a snow storm,” Tragus said. “That removed like four rehearsal hours, which was a lot, and so we never really rehearsed the ending of Act 2 together until show week, and that was scary. I think it ended up being the best thing though, because everybody had the chance to rest and get healthy.”

Freshman John Golby is a band member who played multiple roles in the musical this year. He has been in multiple other productions before, but this was his first at LASA.

“It was really cool because I’ve worked with Mr. Torres before, so I already had that understanding of how he directs things,” Golby said. “In addition to that... I got to work with more of my friends, because I know some people in the pit.”

Christian said that the pit largely followed Torres’s direction since they had trouble hearing the actors at times and his conducting helped keep them on time even when they couldn’t hear the stage. They had massive amounts of music to memorize so they had many rehearsals.

“The first rehearsals were purely pit only because we did not know the music at all,” Christian said. “We had never played it together. A lot of us had not looked at it. Those of us with the easier parts had the privilege of not looking at the music before they showed up to rehearsal. And then we would do ones (rehearsals) with the actual group.”

Golby is somebody who has had previous acting experience outside of LASA. When asked about the musical, he especially praised the tech and the orchestra in addition to the cast.

“It wasn’t really like any other musical I’ve been in,” Golby said. “The tech was great, and it wasn’t really like any other musical I’ve been in. The orchestra, as well, was probably the best one I’ve played with.”

Others agreed that the performances and rehearsals were something special. Despite a challenging preparation schedule for everybody involved in the musical, there was a general sentiment that those involved in it shared.

“It was stressful, but still fun as it always is,” Tragus said.

The winter musical was one of LASA’s most successful yet. All four performances were sold out.

Brazil Parades into Texas

Carnival Celebrates 50 Years in Austin

ELLINGTON TOUGH | staff writer

Carnaval Brasileiro, or what is described as a “night of craziness”, is a huge, Brazilian-style Mardi Gras party in Austin that has happened annually for 50 years. With the amount of dancing and music that comes with it, according to their website, it has been described as being “a giant washing machine” with everyone moving and bumping around. It is the largest Brazilian celebration in the world outside of Brazil. The first time the festival was held in Austin was in 1975 when Brazilian students at The University of Texas at Austin (UT) held a party of about 200 attendees. Everyone enjoyed that celebration so much that it was repeated the next year with an even higher attendance and was held earlier this year on Feb. 3.

Freshman Antonio Passos is a Brazilian student at LASA whose family celebrates the holiday every year. He watches the big parades and calls his cousins in Brazil to connect with them. Carnaval Brasileiro incorporates the cultural diversity of Brazil through samba dancing, which originated among Afro-Brazilian populations during the height of the slave trade. The holiday also incorporates elements of Christianity.

“It’s like the Christian holiday, but in Brazil, it’s not really as much about the religion and it’s more about celebrating the heritage of Brazilians and the mixed race country,” Passos said. “It’s a symbol of our culture.”

Carnaval marks the period before Lent with celebrations full of eating and drinking. During Lent, Catholics give up something that is enjoyable but can have negative effects, like sugar, social media, or gossip.

“[Lent is] spent commemorating the days that Jesus Christ spent fasting in the desert and enduring the temptation of Satan,” Passos said. “Carnaval is over a span of four days of Lent.”

Susanna Sharpe is the Communications Coordinator at UT’s Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies (LLILAS). She led the musical band Susanna Sharpe and the Samba Police for several years, which has performed at Carnaval Brasileiro many times.

“Especially in its early days, the Carnaval Brasileiro had a group of local musicians who would put together a show,” Sharpe said. “I did that for many years myself.”

Brazil’s culture is formed by a combination of indigenous peoples, Portuguese people who colonized and ruled for centuries, and West African people who were enslaved from as early as 1540 until the 1860s. Catholic Christianity, along with Carnaval, was introduced by the Portuguese. Mike Quinn has been the producer of Austin’s Carnaval since 1978.

“The difference between Carnaval and Halloween, for example, is that there’s music involved,” Quinn said. “Carnaval in Brazil

has a very specific music tradition. And the bands that we have follow along those lines and play traditional Carnaval music.”

Carnaval Brasileiro has also experienced a change in venues. The very first Carnavals were held at Austin’s Unitarian Church.

“[This year] we’re at Speakeasy, which is a nightclub downtown,” Quinn said. “We used to do it at Palmer Event Center, which holds 6,000 people. It’s changed over the years because I think the city has changed, and our attendance has dropped because there are so many new people who just don’t get what we do. They haven’t been around, they don’t know the tradition.”

As Austin has changed and modernized in the past 50 years, Austin’s Carnaval has changed to match it. It has grown significantly in size, from 200 to as many as 6,000 people in the 2010s. This year, tickets for it sold out at Speakeasy, as they often do at much larger venues.

“We’re limited by the capacity of the venue, which is 1,200,” Quinn said. “Not much compared to 6,000.”

A more recent addition to the festival was themes. Each year, since the 2000s, a new theme has been chosen for the attendees’ costumes. Although people do enjoy having similar looks with other partygoers, the need to comply with the theme stifles the creativity that used to be present in the 1980s, according to Quinn.

“The costumes in the 1980s were much more interesting than the costumes that have been around the last 10 or 15 years,” Quinn said. “Penny, my partner, has chosen party animals or animalism as a theme for this year. So we expect a lot of people to come in various permutations of animal costumes, furies if you want.”

Many people who go to Carnaval Brasileiro are longtime Austin residents. They hold a yearly tradition of attending, even if they don’t celebrate Carnaval or Lent themselves.

“We’ll have people there who have been coming almost from the beginning,” Quinn said. “Certainly there are people coming in February who have been to 20 or 30 of these parties.”

Although the origins of this Austin tradition go back to native Brazilians nostalgic for the festivities, these days more people go because of their loyalty to old Austin and “keeping it weird”. Although some of the guests do go to connect with their heritage, most do not.

“I would say at most our attendees are maybe 15% to 20% Brazilian, at most,” Quinn said.

Carnaval Brasileiro took place this year, and will continue to as consistently as it has the last 50 years. Its tickets continue to attract both newcomers and frequenters. For more information go to their website, <https://sambaparty.com>.

opinion

The Rise and Fall of Disney On Screen

MARGOT MORGAN | staff writer

Disney expected to earn \$35 million on opening weekend from their newest animated movie “Wish”, but in reality, they only earned \$19.5 million. This might seem unexpected for The Walt Disney Co., a company that has, according to Business Insider, produced 29 films grossing over \$1 billion. However, it shouldn’t be the shock that it is, when considering how Disney’s most recent movies have been doing at the box office.

For as long as I can remember, Disney has had the Midas touch in the theaters, as almost every movie that was released between Disney’s founding and 2019 grossed on average \$100 million, according to the movie data tracking website The Numbers. However, Disney’s inspiration and artistic touch have since faded as they have released movies in a post-pandemic world. The most recent Disney movies have been struggling to perform well at the box office. This list of recent disappointments includes films like “Wish”, “Haunted Mansion”, “The Marvels”, “Indiana Jones 5”, and “Elemental”. The challenges at the box office worry people about the future success of the Disney empire. According to The Baron, many people think that the recent Disney movies lack creativity, artistry, and act as cash grabs for the company. Several sources, including articles from Variety, Fox Business, and The MV Current, have confirmed the accusations and are concerned about the future of the Disney company because of the lost quality of their films.

The struggles to make successful movies often revolve around poor writing and how the SAG-AFTRA strikes have affected the production speed of the movies. These strikes affected the animation of Disney movies because Disney was on a tight schedule because of the pandemic, and the subsequent delays prevented the animation studios from continuing to create their movies at the same speed. The unsuccessfulness of the films also led to many workers at Disney being let off, which then in turn led to the loss of animators for the movies, affecting the creativity and animation of the films, and potentially leading to the unoriginality of the films.

The rise in popularity of modern-day streaming services has impacted the box office success of Disney’s theatrical releases. According to the New York Times, Disney has experienced \$11

billion in streaming losses since the release of Disney+. With audiences shifting their preferences towards streaming services, Disney is still trying to figure out how to keep the public invested in seeing the movies in person at the theaters. Although Disney has tried using Disney+ to boost the popularity of their movies, it has resulted in people preferring to wait and watch the movies on the streaming platform instead. Therefore, it is not just the movies themselves that are being affected, but also how people choose to watch them.

However, streaming service popularity isn’t the only reason these movies are doing poorly, as the recent movies from Disney’s film catalog have been critiqued as “watchable but far from fabulous” by the Red Leger and “stuck in a subside of mediocrity” by MV Stampede. These critiques represent how the viewers feel about the failures of Disney’s newer films. Many Disney critiques are about the downfall of Disney’s live-action remakes of classic movies. This includes adaptations of “The Lion King”, “Aladdin”, “Beauty and the Beast”, and “The Little Mermaid”. The quality of these adaptational films has been negatively impacted by the creative choices made, the loyalty to the original movies, and the challenges of adapting animated magic into the live-action world. The criticism of these live-action movies mentions the problems in the execution, storytelling, and character portrayal of these adaptations. Despite their large budgets and star-studded casts, I agree that the live-action remakes of movies didn’t meet my expectations of what I expected the movies to be like. The live-action remakes shouldn’t be only about milking the franchise to make more money, they should be about sharing the classic story in a new way.

In animated films, several sources provide a critical perspective on the latest movies from Disney Animation Studios and Pixar. These animation studios have started to be judged by the public as “lacking creativity” and as “over-relying on familiar tropes”, like having an animal as a side-kick and having deceased parents. Even though these studios have made masterpieces, like “Inside Out” (2015) and “Frozen” (2013), it’s clear that the public isn’t accepting these new films and believes that the quality has gone down. I believe that the reason for this is that, with the release of some of the new films, you can almost tell that they were just making the movies to be able to

make money. The atmosphere of the film seems like it was only created to be able to sell merchandise.

Most of the substantial criticisms of recent Disney movies are about Disney’s most recent animated flop, “Wish”, which makes me question the studio’s ability to regain creative momentum and create new films that could become hits. The poor performance of “Wish” in theaters has become a big topic of discussion, with people wondering about the factors that might have contributed to it. These speculations range from bad storytelling choices made by the filmmakers to the odd character choices when making the villain. People believed that the actions of the villain in the movie were too ambiguous and not written as well as other villainous characters from Disney, which led to horrible box office scores.

Music is a crucial part of Disney’s animated movies, but recently, the studio has been struggling to create the right balance and creativity in this way, which could have contributed to the studio’s most recent troubles. The quality of “Wish” also decreased because of the songs in the movie. The songs in “Wish” are not as good as previous songs from Disney films. The lyrics in their songs are bland and unoriginal and sometimes don’t feel like they match up with the melody. The songwriting in Disney movies is essential because hits like “We Don’t Talk About Bruno” from Encanto (2021) and “Let It Go” from Frozen (2013) made their movies all the better.

Some could argue that Disney is just trying to get back into the swing of things since the pandemic has ended. The viewers are well aware that Disney is capable of making good films in the post-pandemic world because “Encanto” was very successful, with “We Don’t Talk About Bruno” being almost as popular as “Let It Go” was. The success of Encanto proves that Disney can make unique and creative films and that maybe the creativity just wasn’t perfect in “Wish”.

The decrease in popularity of Disney movies proves that Disney may be losing its popularity and imaginativeness. Luckily, we don’t have to worry about losing all the good films because while Disney may be lacking, other animation studios, like Illumination Studios and Dreamworks Animation, haven’t lost their spark yet.

Austin Museums Make A Mark

REBECA GONZALEZ | staff writer

Austin is a city with a vibrant collection of museums, from the Bob Bullock to the Harry Ransom Center. With art museums, history museums, and more, Austin’s diverse collection has always been a part of many students’ lives, from field trips to personal visits.

Kaitlyn Zaldana is the Special Events and Marketing and PR Coordinator at the Mexic-Arte Museum, a downtown art museum that highlights Latin American art and artists. Zaldana talked about the museum and its extensive collection of art and important collections.

“Mexic-Arte has been building a permanent collection for the past 40 years,” Zaldana said. “Our collection features over 4,000 works of historic and contemporary Mexican/Latin American art. We have rotating exhibitions throughout the year that showcase and highlight different aspects of our collection. Some of our artists are from Austin, Mexico, and other places around the world.”

The Mexic-Arte Museum has a collection of historic and contemporary artworks that highlight culture in Austin through its events. For instance, its Día De Los Muertos parade is a vibrant celebration paired with the museum’s annual exhibition on the subject.

“We feature lots of print artists and canvas paintings, and depending on the exhibition, we will feature large mixed media installations,” Zaldana said. “For example, for our Day of the Dead exhibit this past year, we had paintings, prints, and ofrendas (altars).”

Another well-known museum in Austin is the University of Texas’s Harry Ransom Center, which has a widespread collection of artifacts representing thousands of years of history. Alyssa Morris, the Communications and Marketing Manager at the Harry Ransom Center, discussed some of the most important and interesting pieces on display.

“The Harry Ransom Center is kind of unique in that we have a huge collection,” Morris said. “We have about 49 million items in our collection. But the things that are always on display are the Gutenberg Bible. We have a complete copy. It’s one of 20 copies in the whole world that survive intact.”

The Harry Ransom Center has a wide variety of objects besides artifacts, however, according to Morris. The collection includes some highly famous pieces of art that are constantly on display.

“We also have a Frida Kahlo painting that’s always on display,” Morris said. “It’s called Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird, and it’s considered one of her best works, incredibly detailed and beautiful.”

With its UT campus location and academic catalog, the museum may seem directed to older students and adults. However, the Harry Ransom Center has taken strides to include younger students as well, according to Morris.

“We’ve been creating family guides to all of our recent exhibitions that provide activities for kids so that they can engage with the content, even if sometimes it’s more scholarly or academic,” Morris said.

The Bullock Texas State History Museum highlights Texas’s history, attracting many visitors throughout the year. During the last fiscal year, the museum had 28,172 students visit on a field trip, with 10,860 more participating in a distance learning program, according to Lindsay Muncy, the Public Relations Specialist at the Bullock Museum. Muncy talked about the vital role the museum has played for the public and the engaging environment it has created for visitors over the years.

“Since its opening in 2001, the Bullock Museum has been the official history museum of the state of Texas and was established for the purpose of educating and engaging visitors and students in the history of the Lone Star State,” Muncy said. “Thousands of school children visit every year on field trips that expand on their learning in the classroom. Being a few blocks from the Capitol, the museum is also a staple for tourists, and we see visitors from all over the world every day.”

Despite its long history, the Bullock Museum still works to improve its exhibitions and visitor experience as Austin becomes more diverse. Muncy detailed some of the museum’s new measures to become more inclusive for all visitors and learners.

“We recently completed a years-long initiative to make all of our three floors of Texas History Galleries bilingual in Spanish and English, and we will continue to make other areas and Museum materials bilingual in the coming years,” Muncy said. “In 2018, the Museum’s first floor Texas History Gallery was completely renovated and reopened as Becoming Texas, which explores the history of the land we now call Texas and expanded the timeline of history the Museum covers to as far back as 16,000 years ago.”

The Bullock’s new innovations have also updated the ways the museum highlights Texas history, taking account of historical injustices and prejudices. Muncy explained how this was changed through the addition of a new section to the Bullock Museum.

“We’ve also added an equal rights section that highlights the ways Texans have and continue to fight for equal rights,” Muncy said. “[We] completely renovated the gallery exploring the history of oil and gas in Texas, and we continue to develop new programs for families and distance learning opportunities for students.”

All museums were monumentally affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, making it vitally important to attend and visit Austin’s museums. According to Muncy, many museums have begun to bounce back from their pandemic-era struggles with renewed support and attendance.

“Museums continue to play an important part in communities, including our own,” Muncy said. “Even during the pandemic, when we were closed for several months, our members continued supporting us and we were able to engage visitors and the community in different ways by providing virtual programming and online resources. Based on post-pandemic research and analysis in the museum field, we’ve seen that trust in museums has grown in recent years, and visitation numbers continue to rebound.”

Music All Across the Globe

The Importance of Cultural Music in Austin

PRATIK GURIJALA | staff writer

Through the power of notes, the sound of music creates a symphony of culture and community. This is seen across the world, where music is used in a variety of different ways, although how it’s used depends entirely on the community crafting it. For example, music in Indian culture can serve as a form of spiritual expression during religious ceremonies like bhajans. Conversely, in West African traditions, rhythmic beats and drums are integral to storytelling and community bonding.

For DeeDee Austin, an indigenous singer from Nova Scotia, music has played a constant and important role in her life. Time and time again the embrace of music has uplifted and strengthened her, connecting her back to the history of the Mi’kmaq, the native people of Nova Scotia.

“From hearing the stories about my great-grandmother and other elders for which they had endured as a child,” Austin said, “to growing up with the bare necessities of life and being happy with what we have, I take the stories and lessons I’ve learned, along with the knowledge I hold, and incorporate them into writing songs.”

For Austin, music is a way to express a tapestry of the Mi’kmaq nation. The Mi’kmaq people are one of the original people of the Atlantic provinces in Canada, and their native language has recently been established as the first language of Nova Scotia. Through the use of traditional instruments, Austin weaves music that is true to her and her people’s experiences.

“I create music and then I incorporate the grandfather drum ... along with the traditional Mi’kmaq Language,” Austin said. “When it comes to my live musical performances, I try to embrace my culture as much as I can using traditional dancers and drummers.”

Austin tries to create her music in a way she could influence the local community. She also uses her platform to spread awareness about her culture, with one of her top songs “Buried Truth” being based on her grandmother’s experience at residential school. The song describes a part of Mi’kmaq history where natives were forced into boarding schools meant to isolate them from their own culture and force them into the culture of their colonizers.

“I utilize my various platforms to share our traditional style of music,” Austin said. “Always embracing our language, following our traditional traditions, such as beading, quillwork, smudging, food from our heritage, and the importance of supporting the community that I come from along with other communities also.”

Felix Pacheco is a local Austin musician. He is a member of the Cilantro Boombox which is a diverse group of singers and songwriters, and according to their website has a sound that “merges elements of Latin, Pan-African, brass bands, and electronic musics in a unique flavor as bold as its namesake.”

“My band ... has a couple of Latinos and a couple of black dudes and one of them is Jamaican, the other one grew up in Mississippi,” Pacheco said. “So, it’s always been very

easy with my band, and we all listen to each other’s music. There’s also a white dude that grew up in Detroit, he grew up in a mostly Arab community. So even though he’s a white dude from Detroit, he knows Middle Eastern music almost at an academic level. And then the dude up in Mississippi, his parents played in a studio. It’s soul music that’s all him, but he also listens to salsa. I grew up in Latin America, but I was listening to a lot of punk rock metal going into it. I like to say that my band is American as it makes up the flavors that represent this country, and we should continue to strive to be mixing cultures.”

Pacheco blends various musical elements from a variety of different genres, creating a composition that showcases cultures from around the world. For Pacheco, one of the most important aspects of cultural music is its ability to connect and share across lines.

“Music has always had crossovers,” Pacheco said. “But when it gets filtered down, and people don’t know where that comes from, that’s when you lose that representation side of things. So, it’s a tough one. Because I’m a personal believer that you always have sort of where you surrender, and this music gets better because of them. But the representation side of things is what I don’t see happening all the time, necessarily.”

Corey Snyder is a teacher and musician at LASA, and he plays the guitar in a gospel band at a local Austin church. Gospel music has been steeped in rich history, as its roots come from African Americans coming together to sing songs throughout slavery. Now, it takes its role of connection in churches, providing people with a spiritual outlet. As a gospel musician, Snyder says that all of the music isn’t scripted.

“In gospel music, there is not really a divide between audience and performer - everyone in the room at church helps make the music, which means we must be able to go in whatever direction the congregation goes,” said Snyder. “If someone starts singing an old hymn the rest of the congregation will join in and it’s the band’s job to play along. Making gospel music is a cooperative effort. That means learning as many songs as possible, joining in with the group, and going where the spirit leads us. The collaborative, improvisational nature of the music means every time we sing the song it is different. It is intense and real and very in-the-moment.”

The diverse musical perspectives of Austin, Pacheco, and Snyder all showcase how music is used for cultural expression and to highlight the intricacies of their community and culture. Austin’s incorporation of traditional elements, Pacheco’s fusion of diverse influences in Cilantro Boombox, and Snyder’s collaborative gospel approach showcase how music serves as a medium for cultural connection and personal expression. Through her music, Austin hopes to provide and share a part of her that is essential to who she is.

“I see my music as a way to embrace who you are,” Austin said, “and share our culture with the hopes that others will join in, to share it and support each other as well.”

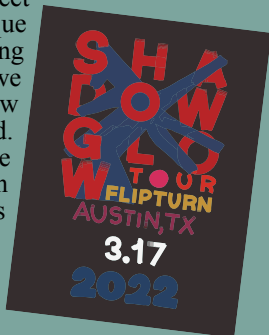
Editor’s Picks

Favorite Concert

Flipturn

KATIE BUSBY | entertainment editor

South by Southwest (SXSW) has been such an important part of my newspaper experience; getting the chance to go out and see downtown Austin come alive is something I look forward to every year. My first year attending SXSW was the second time I saw the band Flipturn live in concert, having first seen the five-piece indie rock band from Florida the previous fall, becoming even more captivated with their music after the show. As I had been obsessing over this band, I convinced my friends to listen to their music, making two of my close friends fans of theirs as well. This meant that when we saw their name on the SXSW lineup we were so excited to get a chance to see them. The day came and we made our way through the crowds enveloping 6th Street to reach Esther’s Follies, one of the most unique venues that I have had the pleasure of frequenting during the festival. The crowd was smaller and we packed in by the small stage and marveled at how close they were going to be when they performed. As the band neared the beginning of the show the lights dimmed and colorful spotlights in neon greens, pinks, and blues played across the faces of the musicians in front of me. The opening song started and I realized just how much I love this band, the opening melody coming from the guitars perfectly matching the lyrics and vocals, putting the audience in a trance. The fever-dream energy of their shows is so magical I just keep going back.



The Lumineers

MEGAN GEROLD | entertainment editor

When my family, friends, and I walked into the Moody Center to see The Lumineers, we weren’t expecting anything extraordinary. Our seats were pushed against the wall, at the highest point in the venue, as far from the stage as you could be, and we were honestly just scoping it out to see where we would be for our upcoming Harry Styles concert. Despite this, when James Bay came on I was rocked with the sound and energy emanating around the room. Austin has always been a place built for live music, but I felt as if this was a shrine solely dedicated to the god that is sound. Then, when The Lumineers started playing with a shining mirrorball raised above their heads, I was left dumbfounded by their ability to craft a feeling so beyond the room. As they worked through their setlist of iconic song after iconic song, I was suddenly eight years old again, driving home from dinner with my family screaming the lyrics to a song I had only recently learned to read. They were never in one place, moving endlessly around the stage and constantly playing off of each other and the crowd. I have always considered myself a Lumineers fan, but this concert launched me into an endless love for their discography that I now know by heart. When people ask me what my music taste is, I gush over this night and the palpable feelings of joy that The Lumineers can weave no matter where they are.



The Cure

ANNABEL ANDRE | editor-in-chief

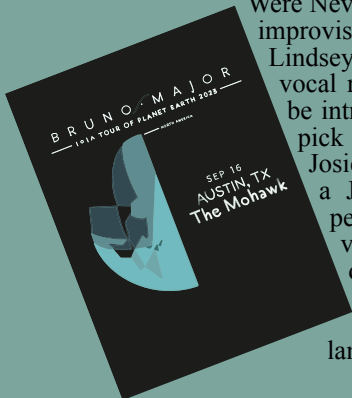
The crowd pushed at me from all sides and, despite standing on my tiptoes, I could barely peak above the sea of heads spread out in front of me. But nothing could waver the big smile plastered on my face. The music reverberating in my ears transported me to car rides with my mom, windows rolled down, screaming the lyrics of “Boys Don’t Cry” and “Just Like Heaven”. So, when I realized that the Austin City Limits tickets my friend Violet had gifted me meant I could see The Cure, I just about squealed. Every day leading up to what seemed like the most important day of my life to eleven-year-old me felt like years, and the hours just before the show under the harsh and sweltering sun in Zilker Park somehow seemed even longer. But all the waiting was worth it once lead singer Robert Smith stepped out on stage and the comforting harmonies of “Pictures of You” spilled across the crowd. The sunburn on my neck, my aching feet, and the hot sticky night air that wrapped around me were soon forgotten as I chanted every lyric from memory. My first concert had been even better than I could have imagined.



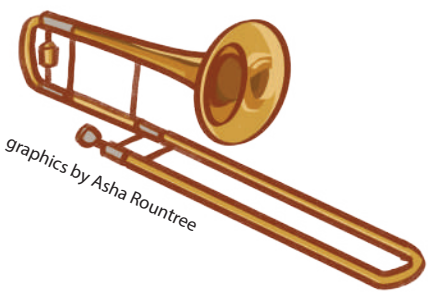
Bruno Major

ASHA ROUNTREE | graphics editor

At my first concert, Greer at Empire Garage, two summers ago, I found myself pleasantly lost in the bright music, dim lights, and collective enthusiasm of the crowd and the band. Ever since, I’ve become obsessed with the experience of live music, despite the considerable dent that tickets and merch leave in my wallet. One of the most memorable recent concerts I attended was Bruno Major at Mohawk last September. As much as I love a loud and energizing concert, I’m partial to softer, intimate shows, especially when I’m not being elbowed in the ribs every few minutes. Bruno Major’s music is a beautiful blend of R&B-Pop, Jazz, and Soul, accompanied by poetic songwriting. Seeing him at Mohawk was amazing because the venue is layered so that everyone in the audience has a clear, close-up view, and my friend Ava Hernandez and I were able to thoroughly enjoy the smooth waves of instrumental washing over us and the friendly energy of the band. My favorite song performed was “We Were Never Really Friends,” and I loved the random improvisation moments. The opener at that show, Lindsey Lomis, also had some super impressive vocal runs, and I’m so glad I got the chance to be introduced to her music. Because I can’t just pick one, another great concert that my friend Josie Long and I attended was Ichiko Aoba, a Japanese Folk singer and guitarist, who performed at the Paramount. Her ethereal vocals and intricate finger-picking were dreamy, warm, and emotionally touching to the point where we heard quiet sniffles around us: proof that music transcends the language barrier.



graphics by Megan Gerold, inspired by Shadowglow 2022 tour, The Lumineers official Moody Center Print, The Cure 2022 tour, and Bruno Major’s North America tour



graphics by Asha Rountree



LASA Basketball Shoots High

Girls and Boys Teams Reach New Hights in 2023-2024 Seasons

SADIE SARRAT | staff writer

LASA Raptor basketball was first established in 2020, and since then, both the girls and boys teams have made progress in developing a strong program and team dynamics, with the girls’ team’s district record improving from 9-7 last season to 13-3 this season. To recognize this success, both teams have been featured in numerous Austin American-Statesman articles.

With head coaches Jametria Green and Joseph Pendell leading the girls and boys varsity teams respectively, both advanced to the first round of the playoffs, with girls ranked third in the district and boys in second.

Throughout the 2023-2024 season, Green and her team have been working on solidifying team values, plays, and chemistry. The Raptors are prioritizing culture through confidence and competitiveness on the court. Green has noticed how close the players have become this year, and she wants them to remember that they will always have each others’ backs.

“It takes a village to do anything powerful in this world,” Green said. “If you want to do anything incredible, anything powerful, you have to work together.”

In addition to rigorous practices and games, the girls’ team spent several mornings reading to students at Oak Springs Elementary. According



REBOUND Junior Vince Williams rebounds in an game against Navarro High School. The boys basketball ended their season by advancing to the first round of the playoffs ranked second in the district. photo courtesy of BeauxCephus Media

to junior guard Taylar Edgerton, being a part of a team sport surrounded by driven teammates has allowed her to improve in aspects of her life outside of sports.

“My favorite part about being on the team is being able to see how well other people work together because I think that’s a very valuable skill to have,” Edgerton said. “I think that’s something LASA does well because we’re all able to take each other’s talents and work them together on the court.”

Since the team has grown closer together and learned how to utilize the strengths of their teammates, the Raptors were able to make LASA history when they defeated McCallum, the number one team in the district, 40-37. The team used the momentum from their win over McCallum to propel them into their playoff game.

“Defense,” Edgerton said. “That’s one of the main things our coach preaches. Defense wins the game, and I think that’s why we beat McCallum because we had multiple sets where we were running sets for a solid minute. They couldn’t do anything, and I think we gotta get cracking down on our defense and move the ball as well as we can.”

LASA senior Andrew Teodorovich also noticed changes within team dynamics and the overall growth of his teammates. According to Teodorovich, LASA boys basketball has been



DEFENCE On Jan. 23, LASA Girls Basketball defeated their rivals, McCallum High, 40 to 37 at home. The victory extended the Raptors’ four-game winning streak and marked the Knights’ only district loss of the season. photo by Izzy Cravotta

implementing their team values of total dedication to the sport and commitment to regimented practices above all else.

“[Players] will have overall growth in commitment because now everyone’s in the class [elective] period and at all the practices,” Teodorovich said. “It’s more mandatory that you’re at practice because other players in the past sometimes missed when it was accepted, but now it’s not.”

With the program developing a more prominent presence in LASA culture, Teodorovich and other players feel more confident and supported by fans, coaches, and teammates. The increased school engagement has additionally translated to the school being able to have the interest necessary to create more periods for the basketball class, for example.

“With the number of kids in the classes, now they also have a second period for freshmen,” Teodorovich said. “We’ve been seeing more people going to the games, more people talking about them... definitely growth and community around the team and within the team as well.”

Under the direction of Pendell and Green, both boys and girls basketball have set historic records in Raptor history. They each had their best records yet for the 2023-2024 season in LASA basketball. But the value of the team goes beyond just winning and helps the team members grow, according to Edgerton.

“LASA has helped me mentally, more than anything with both basketball and the school aspect of LASA,” Edgerton said. “I think that the school work has made me more confident ... and [helped me] face challenges to my fullest potential ... and that also applies to the basketball court. Freshman year is rough for everyone, but being able to look back at that I’m glad that I was able to go through all of that because it made me the person that I am today.”



GUARD LASA senior Lyssa Lashus prevents McCallum freshman Ruby Airhart from passing the ball. Both the girls and boys basketball teams finished their 2023-2024 seasons with their best records yet. photo by Izzy Cravotta

Athletes’ Heart Health

APOLLO DAHMUS | staff writer

In July 2023, USC basketball player Bronny James, son of LeBron James, collapsed unexpectedly during a practice session. After three days in the hospital, James’ cardiac arrest was attributed to an underlying congenital heart defect that left him vulnerable to potential coronary complications. The shocking heart attack of a high-profile, seemingly healthy basketball player sent ripples through the public imagination, raising alarm about Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) in young athletes.

What is SCA / Symptoms:

SCA is when the heart’s electrical system experiences complications that cause it to beat irregularly, also known as arrhythmias. According to the National Library of Medicine(NIH), SCA is usually caused by coronary artery disease and anomalies, which account for up to 80% of the cases. The other causes are usually obesity, fibrosis, and alcoholism. Athletes experiencing SCA can undergo sudden collapses, inability to breathe, absent pulse, and a loss of consciousness. While the onset and event of SCA are very similar to a heart attack, the latter is caused by blood flow to parts of the heart being blocked, not changes in electrical activity.

How It Affects High School Students:

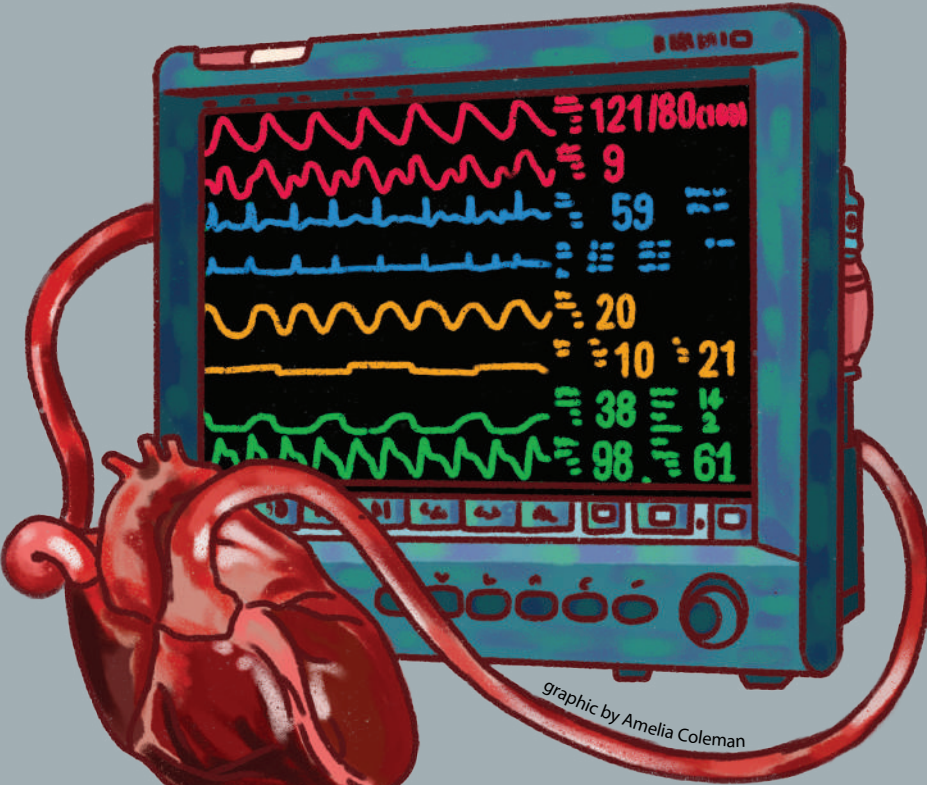
In the context of high school and collegiate athletics, victims of SCA are more often than not nearing or at the peak health and fitness of their lives. According to the NIH, accounting for differences in aspects such as routines, injury proneness, and gender, the average person’s athletic peak is between 20 and 30 years old. This means that the usual causes of SCA cannot be feasible explanations for SCA in athletes whose hearts have an increased capacity for oxygen. It is usually attributed to underlying heart defects and myocarditis cases that the athletes themselves may not even be aware of, such as in the case of Bronny James. While many claim that increasingly exposed cases in high school athletes are linked to COVID-19 vaccinations, evidence for direct causation is scarce.

Prevention:

While underlying congenital and general heart defects cannot be cured and can only be mitigated with time, there are ways to prevent and lower the likelihood of SCA if you are a young athlete. The most important points are to maintain a healthy weight, stay away from smoking and alcoholism, eat a healthy and balanced diet including ample protein, manage stress levels, and get at least 150 minutes of exercise a week, according to Tenet Healthcare.

Closing / How to Improve Overall Health for Athletes:

While only one in 50,000 to 80,000 young athletes die of SCA each year per Mayo Clinic, which is far below the national yearly average of one in 1,000 in the general population, athletes today are more concerned about it than ever before. However, with the necessary health precautions, student-athletes should not be a major fear or concern for young and fit athletes.



LASA Senior Athletes Score Big for College

PRATIK GURIJALA | staff writer

While seniors across the country begin to hear back from colleges and think about where they will spend the next four years of their lives, many student-athletes started the process much earlier and have already committed. Student-athletes are in communication with college coaches well before other students submit their applications with scholarship offers at schools of varying competitive levels ranging from Division 1 (D1) to Division 3 (D3). LASA students are no different, attracting offers from prestigious colleges all across the country.

Marin Maycotte, a senior athlete at LASA, has made a commitment to her passion for rowing by securing a spot on the D1 team at the University of Washington. As she starts on her collegiate journey, Maycotte hopes that her skill as a rower will continue to flourish and leave a lasting mark on the collegiate rowing scene.

“I love rowing and I have been doing it for 5 years,” Maycotte said. “I feel like rowing makes me better in many ways including being physically fit, improving [my] mental health, giving me a routine to help manage my time well, and helping me be a better student. These are all aspects I want to continue to have in college to be a successful student-athlete. Also rowing in college has so many benefits. I couldn’t pass that up.”

Maycotte carefully considered colleges that would nurture her passion for rowing. In her decision-making process, she sought institutions that could provide the right environment and support for her continued success in the sport.

“I knew I wanted to row at a serious and competitive school, so I looked at the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletics Association) rankings to see what schools were at the top,” Maycotte said. “I also did summer camps and visits at the colleges and talked to students there.”

Maycotte faced a challenging junior year as she navigated the dual demands of maintaining strong academic performance and honing her rowing skills. Recognizing the crucial need for effective time management, she concluded that mastering the art of knowing when to stop is a valuable skill. Balancing these responsibilities defined the importance of finding an equilibrium between academic pursuits and athletic dedication.

“It was very difficult, especially during junior year,” Maycotte said. “I had to keep up my grades while doing well at rowing. I had lots of spreadsheets to organize everything which helped a lot. I also had to remember to update coaches every few weeks and reach out to new coaches. I kept a spreadsheet to keep track of everything.”

Max Vale, another LASA senior, has also committed to participating in high-level collegiate sports at the California Institute of Technology (CalTech), joining their D3 water polo team. For him, collegiate water polo is something that he was set on playing, but he also wanted to make sure that the college he ended up at fit with his academic interests.

“I knew that water polo was something that I really enjoyed,” Vale said. “I wanted to keep playing in college because it would still be something I would enjoy. It would keep me in shape, and the exercise can help you focus on your studies. The teams that sounded like a good fit to me I looked into more, and then I narrowed it down even further based on what I wanted to study, computer science.”

Vale prioritized his studies over water polo and sought out a college that aligned with his career aspirations. Recognizing the importance of a well-rounded education, he aims to

improve his skills both in and out of the pool to pave the way for a successful and fulfilling career.

“Academics was the most important factor for me,” Vale said. “I was never going to become an Olympic player, nor did I want to. So, I needed college to be able to set me up for work. Water polo was probably the second factor. I really enjoy it and have been playing competitively for almost eight years now. I knew I didn’t want to abandon it. When looking at teams in particular, I wanted to see how close they were to each other—would they hang out outside of practice? Would they give each other advice?”

Megha Siddapureddy, a 2022 LASA alumna, currently swims competitively at Case Western Reserve University. Having been a part of LASA’s varsity swim team, she pursued her passion and accomplished swimming for the collegiate level, demonstrating her commitment to both her education and athletic pursuits.

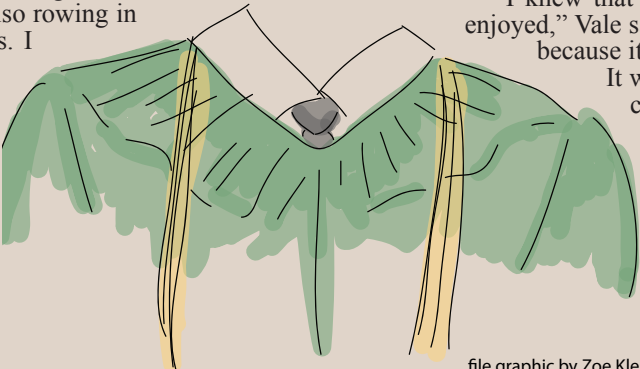
“I just really liked swimming and the atmosphere it creates,” Siddapureddy said. “I loved being part of a team with highly motivated and physically tough people and I wanted to continue that in my college career.”

Siddapureddy attributes her journey to the unwavering support and guidance of her coaches. She acknowledged that she wouldn’t have reached this point without their invaluable contributions to her development.

“My coach helped guide me through the whole recruiting process because it can be overwhelming at first,” Siddapureddy said. “He helped me formulate my emails and gave me tips and counters on what questions to ask each college coach and how to grab their attention. Not only that, my coach helped me with my swimming too and improved my times.”

The consensus among these LASA athletes is the recognition of communication as a fundamental skill that not only fosters team cohesion but also plays a pivotal role in individual growth and success. As Vale learned first-hand, something as simple as an email can be a door to opportunity and a brighter academic and athletic future.

“I would say to email anyone you can,” Vale said. “A lot of coaches don’t respond to just cold emails, but a lot do, and you never know if sending an email could change your life.”



file graphic by Zoe Klein



LASA'S WINS AND LOSSES



LASA Football Will be Competing as Non-Honors

SANWI SARODE | copy editor

As of Feb. 16, 2024, LASA High School's football team will be competing on a "non-honors status", which means LASA will still have a varsity team but will be playing against not only University Scholastic League (UIL) teams but charter and private schools as well. This means they will also be creating their own match schedule as opposed to UIL making it for them. Following the news, which came as a surprise for LASA students and district 5A competitors like Liberty Hill and McCallum High School, LASA Principal Stacia Crescenzi cited safety concerns as one of the reasons for the sudden change.

Crescenzi said in her Feb. 18 Principal's Message that because many senior players are graduating from LASA in 2024, the football team will be left primarily composed of sophomores and freshman

students who would have to play both offensive and defensive positions. Due to the amount of force and contact often required in football, Crescenzi believed this would put the younger players in danger, adding that the passing of Coach Trey Soto, LASA's strength and conditioning coach, Special Education teacher, and assistant coach for various sports, meant that football would also lack proper off-season strength and conditioning practice. The decision to change the football program to non-honors would allow these students to build up experience in the meantime, with the hope to come back in the future. The band and dance performances as well as the annual homecoming game will continue as usual.

ATX OPEN

FEB. 26 - MARCH 3, 2024



ATX Open Makes Quite a Racquet

Austin's Annual Women's Tournament Comes Back for a Second Year

REBECA GONZALEZ | staff writer

The ATX Open is Austin's only professional, tour-level tennis tournament and its largest professional women's sporting event. Despite only being the second year of the tournament, the ATX Open has already become America's third-biggest women's tennis tournament. This exposure to professional tennis has allowed for a spike in interest in tennis within Austin.

Claire Zhou, a LASA sophomore varsity tennis player, has played tennis since she was little. Tennis is an important part of her life and the ATX Open gives her the unique opportunity to interact with the professional tennis community in her own city.

"It was nice to see different faces or new faces," Zhou said. "At the bigger tournaments, you just see a lot of the very famous people and not so much the people that are up and coming."

When discussing the tennis community, Zhou also mentioned how she's seen a decrease in interest following the COVID-19 pandemic. She hopes that events like the ATX Open will rekindle an interest in tennis in the younger generation.

"It's been declining as of lately because a lot of kids have gone to university," Zhou said. "And especially after COVID there's not a bunch of resources or people aren't able to put in the resources to play tennis consistently and put their kids in tennis."

Christo Van Rensburg is the ATP Open tournament director and a former professional tennis player who began the sport when he was four. He played on tour for 15 years and was ranked in the top 20 best players worldwide and fifth in doubles. He believes tournaments are essential in the sport and in inspiring youth to play.

play.”

“Looking back lately at how Austin is growing and how the people are very crazy about sports, we looked at everything and said Austin is missing something very big,” Van Rensburg said. “They don’t have a women’s professional event in Austin, or even Texas at this magnitude. So, why don’t we bring it home and give people in Austin that opportunity of seeing these female professional athletes playing in their backyard.”



Following the tournament, Van Rensburg spoke about his excitement after hearing the positive

MATCH POINT Finalist Yuan Yue returns a serve from opponent Wang Xiyu. The two hour and thirteen minute final ended with Yuan winning in an exciting second-set tiebreaker (7-4). photo by Annabel Andre

feedback after only one year.

He explained how the ATX Open is exposing the sport to Austin and inspiring many old and new players to begin tennis once more.

"We're only going out on our second year and you walk around in the city and you see people wearing [our] merchandise," Van Rensburg said. "Someone said to me, 'Woah, I've never been this close to see professional [players] and they move their feet so fast. I've been trying and I'm getting better now.'"

Not only has the tournament sparked interest in watching professional tennis, but it has also begun inspiring people to pursue the sport. Van Rensburg found it encouraging to see how people are compelled to improve after watching professional players' skills.

"When you have a tournament like this, it's a boost in that sport," Van Rensburg said. "Now people wanna try and play better in that sport and more people are taking up tennis now because they know they wanna be as good as they can be. And every year people come and watch and see some of these athletes and pick up new little things that they want to copy from them."

LASA sophomore and tennis player Anna Ugarte volunteered as a ball girl for the ATX open last year. The experience was inspiring and engaging for her.

"Not only was it great to see a tennis tournament in Austin after being interested in the sport for a long time," Ugarte said, "but it was also very inspiring to see so much female representation."

The ATX Open has become an important part of the tennis community in Austin. Van Rensburg recognizes the importance of having professional sport tournaments in Austin and believes that the ATX Open will become a significant part of Austin culture in coming years.

"When I go to the academy to promote the tournament, they already say, 'Which days would be the best to bring our kids there? Should we come for lunch? Should we come in the daytime? And can we all sit together?'" Van Rensburg said. "And that's what's great to hear because this sport will never flourish in the future without our kids."



APPROACH SHOT Finalist Wang Xiyu approaches the net in an intense point with semi-finalist Anhelina Kalinina. The two played in the ATX Open semi-final on Saturday, March 2. photo by Annabel Andre

Austin Skating Community is on a Roll

Locals Create Welcoming Spaces and Outlets in Sports on the Rink

VICTOR MARTINEZ | sports editor

In the years following its revival in Austin’s 2001 punk scene, modern roller derby’s—and subsequently, skating’s—popularity and media exposure has grown significantly at the city and national scale, particularly in female and queer communities. For some Austinites, skating has helped them find empowerment in being a part of a sport with a welcoming community. While roller derby’s inception can be traced back to the 1930s, according to Texas Roller Derby (TXRD) league member Harli Grim, it was revolutionized when the Bad Girl Good Woman Productions (BGGW) league formed in 2001 to host exhibition matches alongside punk and hard rock musical acts. After a split over finances, TXRD was formed, which became nationally recognized after appearing most notably in “Whip It”, a movie starring Elliot Page. “[In 2009] ‘Whip It’ was released, which featured both the TXRD name and had two of our skaters as stunt doubles, Sacralicious for Drew Barrymore’s Smashley Simpson and Rocky Casbah for Ari Graynor’s Eva Destruction,” Grim said. “2,800 people attended the Calvello Cup (TXRD’s championship cup) that year!” In a web-exclusive interview on Oprah Winfrey’s website, director Drew Barrymore made it clear how personal the film was for her, stating she drew inspiration

from experiences with the female camaraderie and intensity of roller derby camps. LASA’s Skate Club president junior Adele Tversky, while initially intimidated by the lack of women at local skate parks, found that these safe spaces are necessary for up-and-coming skaters. “I think skating parks can be a little scary because there’s a lot of skateboarders who are pretty much all men, so it’s daunting when you’re just starting,” Tversky said. “But for the most part either they don’t really care what you’re doing if you’re being respectful or are going to cheer for you if you do something cool.” Tversky initially struggled to find her place in the sport, as well as with getting a handle on the physicality that skating and roller derby are known for. However, instead of being discouraged, Tversky used her struggles to learn and develop her skills, building a lasting love for the sport in the process. “I got my first pair of skates in fourth grade... since I first got them, I’ve really only had positive experiences skating,” Tversky said. “Sure, it sucks when you fall or get hurt, but I think I choose to look

at those as a learning experience, like ‘Okay, maybe I need to start actually wearing my knee pads or do this trick differently next time.’” With time, Tversky also became more confident of herself in public. She credits other female skaters for making her feel a part of a safe space in the skating community. “At House Park, whenever there’s female quad skaters out there, I’ve always found them to be particularly kind and encouraging,” Tversky said. “I think it’s like a femme or girl solidarity thing, but it is comforting to see other women on skates.” Junior Shahar Yaacob is a competitive figure skater with 12 years of experience. By being a coach and mentor for young skaters, she hopes to be a role model for her fellow skaters and inspire confidence and a love for the sport. “I want to be able to share my sport with others and allow them to enjoy it for themselves,” Yaacob said. “From my personal skating journey, I’ve learned to prioritize fun over rigor and I take great care to try to pass on a positive skating experience to my students.” In Yaacob’s words, enjoying the sport is much more than being good at skating; for her, it means being able to give herself up to a completely different, elevated state of mind once she puts on her skates. “Figure skating for me is not only a

form of exercise that keeps me healthy, but it clears my mind and helps me relax,” Yaacob said. “My favorite feeling is being able to feel the cool air on my face. Being on the ice is magical and really unlike anything else.” According to both Yaacob and Grim, the greater emphasis on trusting your body and the skill of your movements is one of the most rewarding aspects of skating. In a community that lives out the philosophy of being confident in who you are in both sport and bonding, for Grim, skating has become an area of life where she can feel secure and empowered in her own body. “Skating is important to me because it provides a safe and fun community space where I can freely be myself,” Grim said. “Everything else that has come along with it has been icing on the cake.”



graphics by Asha Rountree



Chandana Dubakula contributed to this article

THE RAPTOR RUN DOWN

Every issue, The Liberator sends a reporter into the field to try a new sport and write about their experiences.

ESME KESSLER | staff writer

I come from a long line of devoted Yankees fans, but I never took any interest in baseball or softball until recently. In all honesty, I haven’t consistently played a sport since second grade, so softball, and what it’s like to be on a team, was completely beyond me. When I first stepped onto the field, I was warmly greeted by the friendliness and generosity of the other girls on the team. I was welcomed by girls of all different grade levels and affectionately given the nickname “Newspaper.” The culture of the team is unique to any other community I’ve been a part of. Each girl seemed to genuinely care about helping one another succeed. Each warmup ritual focused on consistency, which was low-intensity and beginner-friendly. Despite the brief warmup routine, I felt adequately prepared for the rest of the training. Practice was split up into stations to encourage collaboration and everyone had the opportunity to work on each skill. I noticed players could choose to work on specific skills based on their individual needs. As a complete beginner, I was afraid that I would be judged or that I’d embarrass myself, but before every swing, hit, or catch, I was greeted with cheers and encouragement. Girls of all skill levels worked to give me pointers and feedback, both positive and negative. I never once felt judged or embarrassed by any of my plays, regardless of how poorly I performed. Practice began by catching and throwing with a partner, starting from a short distance and gradually stepping backward. Then, we ran two laps around the field. Afterward, we worked on various skills, like long-distance catching and batting from tees.



STRIKING OUT A POSE Kessler poses for a photo with an umpire’s mask and glove. Through the Raptor Rundown, Kessler was the chance to try softball for the first time since second grade. photo courtesy of Esme Kessler

I had a small audience of players who gathered around and offered their advice. From that, I learned to keep my eyes on the ball, move my hips with my swing, and to take time before I swing to adjust my form. Each girl I talked to, regardless of experience, offered constructive criticism and encouragement. The team is incredibly loving and supportive, and everyone I talked to had a lot of enthusiasm and a welcoming attitude. LASA softball is a great option for students of all skill levels who are looking for a workout, a friendly community, or just another after-school activity. Whether you have been playing for 10 years or you’ve never touched a bat in your life, the LASA softball team could be for you!



BATTER UP Esme Kessler prepares to swing at a softball. This was part of a drill to get accustomed to swinging. photo courtesy of Esme Kessler



BAT! Kessler swings at a softball. Through this drill, she trains her batting form and keeping her eyes on the ball. photo courtesy of Esme Kessler

Active Lifestyles of Austinites

Running Culture Spreads Across Austin

DEVEN SHARMA | staff writer

Austin has become the eighth healthiest city in the country, according to the Chamber of Commerce. With running being a focal point of Austin’s culture of active living, numerous annual running events take place in Central Texas throughout the year. These events range from small fundraisers to international competitions that bring athletes from all over the world to Central Texas to compete in a single event. The beginnings of this athletic culture started in 1978 with the first-ever Austin Statesman 10K race. Since then, the Cap 10K has grown to be the largest 10K race in Texas and the sixth largest in the country. In 1991, the Austin Marathon was created, and since then it has expanded to include not only a marathon but also a half-marathon and a 5K. The Austin Marathon started with a total of 605 registrants and has grown to include over 17,000 runners from 25 countries around the world and all 50 states. Senior Dylan Ramirez was a competitor and runner in the 2024 Austin Marathon in mid-February. Ramirez’s experience was marked by intense pain throughout the race, but then a final sense of accomplishment right after finishing the 10K. “I started training for it right before school started,” Ramirez said. “It feels like the past six months of my life culminated up to a point, and my legs were cramping and I could barely walk, but that feeling is unlike anything else out there. You get to push yourself to your limit. The best thing about running a marathon is the sense of accomplishment you get out of it.” Running events aren’t the only athletic attraction that Central Texas has; there are over seven different triathlons that take place in Central Texas throughout the year. Junior Summer McCurdy participates in a triathlon every year during the summer. She is also a member of the LASA Track and Field team. She notes that competing in a triathlon has its own unique challenges.

“Athletes should have one outfit that they wear for the triathlon: one that you can swim, bike, and run in,” McCurdy said. “In my first year doing a triathlon, I changed in between events and I lost a lot of time. The first step for doing a triathlon is choosing a race type to compete in. Then, you can create a training plan moving backward from the race date.” In addition to the races and events that take place in Central Texas, Austin has several running clubs and groups that are active throughout the week. Shayna Dunitz is a representative of one of the biggest clubs in Austin is the Austin Runners Club (ARC), which will be celebrating its 50th anniversary this year with special initiatives for its members. According to them, ARC is not a single club, but rather a collective group of clubs scattered throughout Austin that meet at different times throughout the day. “We have clubs in South Austin, North Austin, and East Austin... even out in Buda,” Dunitz said. “Our mission is to transform lives through running and build active communities for people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.” To Ramirez, as daunting as running may seem, the hard work it entails is outweighed by the runner’s high that comes immediately after a good, challenging run. As long as they have the will, discipline, and good pacing, even running a marathon is possible for anyone. “Some advice I would give to someone training for a marathon is to build up slowly and focus on your recovery days,” Ramirez said, “because if you undertrain a little bit, it’s fine, the adrenaline will carry you to the finish line, but if you overtrain, your legs are gonna be fatigued from your training and you’ll burn out too early in your race. Play the long game during the race.”



graphic by Amelia Coleman



A TOUGH INTERROGATION Ruby Venkatesh (Left) and Maka Perry (Middle) play Cosette and Jean Valjean who are interrogated by Javert. photo by Griffin Beam



MAKEOVER! Crew member Astrid Gothard styles the wig for one of the characters in the play. photo by Griffin Beam

Les Misérables

AVANI GANNE | photo editor

As the curtains finally rose on LASA's production of Les Misérables and the pit orchestra played the first notes of the musical, all of the work put in by the performers, crew, and facilitators of the musical's production finally came to fruition during the musical's opening night on Jan. 26, 2023. Surrounded by the sets created and polished over weeks at a time by the crew of the Alley Cat Players and singing the pieces they've learned and memorized, the actors were finally able to show the audience what they've been working on.

Junior Brennan Lein played Marius Pontmercy, who is one of the musical's main characters and a student revolutionary who falls in love with the main protagonist's daughter. As the pit orchestra played below and he performed above them on stage, Lein said that teamwork across all groups in the company, everyone involved in the play's production, was imperative to the overall success of the musical.

"[Teamwork across all of these groups] was more than important; it's absolutely essential," Lein said. "Nothing happens in isolation during a show, and every song, movement, and lyric has to be a combination of the pit, technical aspects, and direction."

Junior Gabby Lee, who worked as a costume designer in the Alley Cat Players crew, also believes this to be true. She believes all of these company groups working together enhanced the overall quality of the musical.

"Teamwork was so essential in this production," Lee said. "Everyone was putting together their parts for this show. The pit orchestra was learning their music, actors their lines, costume crew was costuming, and each tech crew was working on their pieces for the production. But coming together and learning how to work with one another's elements was a hard but super important part of creating a successful show."

The work put in by these groups individually is noteworthy as well, according to junior Davis Burns. Burns played in the pit orchestra as a cellist, and explained how the pit orchestra practiced in the weeks leading up to the musical's opening night.

"We put in just over 30 hours of rehearsal, about 12 without actors, not including time spent practicing at home," Burns said. "All of the musicians were super dedicated and fun to work with, which just makes the show better. Even though it was challenging to play, we had a ton of fun!" Similarly to how the pit

orchestra prepared for the musical's official performances, the cast also had to learn how to perform their songs in tandem with each other, according to Lein. He also mentioned how, beyond the effort of simply learning the music, his process of learning how to best portray his character was mostly centered around discovering the mannerisms and emotions of Marius.

"I spent a decent amount of time learning the music, but I spent more time figuring out my character," Lein said. "I had a lot of freedom to decide how my Marius would think, act, and make decisions, which took up most of my time."

Despite the initial anxiety surrounding the company as opening night finally arrived, Lee described how the nerves transformed into joy as the company saw all of their aforementioned hard-work pay off. As she waited with the other cast and crew members behind the closing curtains, she experienced the effects of the first performance first-hand among the rest of the company.

"Despite the nerves, opening night was full of so much energy that our rehearsals didn't have," Lee said. "We had the presence of our audience and the excitement of the entire company to feed into the energy of our first performance. After the curtains closed, there was so much joy backstage. It was such an amazing feeling to not only pull this show together, but to see the positive impact it had on the audience."

According to Burns, this influx of emotions was felt by the pit orchestra members surrounding him as well. His own emotions mirrored the ones described by Lee.

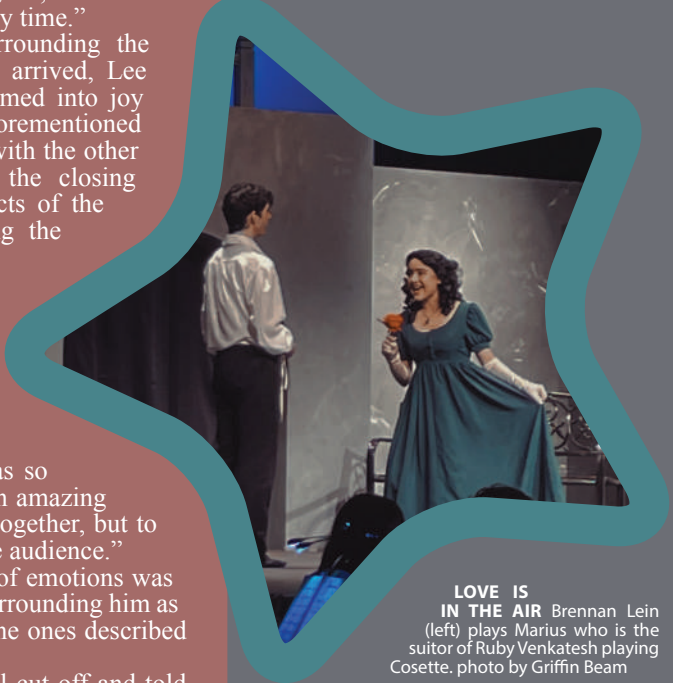
"When Mr. Torres gave the final cut-off and told us to stand, there was nothing to do but smile, and looking around at the rest of the orchestra, I wasn't the only one," Burns said. "Musicians are always critical of our own performances, so right after the show, all I could think about were my own little mistakes. But, after talking to my fellow performers, we knew there was room to improve, but overall it was a fantastic first performance. I think we were all pretty proud of our work."

Following the memorable experience encompassing the production and performance of Les Misérables at LASA, Lein expressed how his time in the company still affects him to this day. Joined together with the perspectives of Lee and Burns as well, it is clear that the production of Les Misérables is still important to many of its cast members.

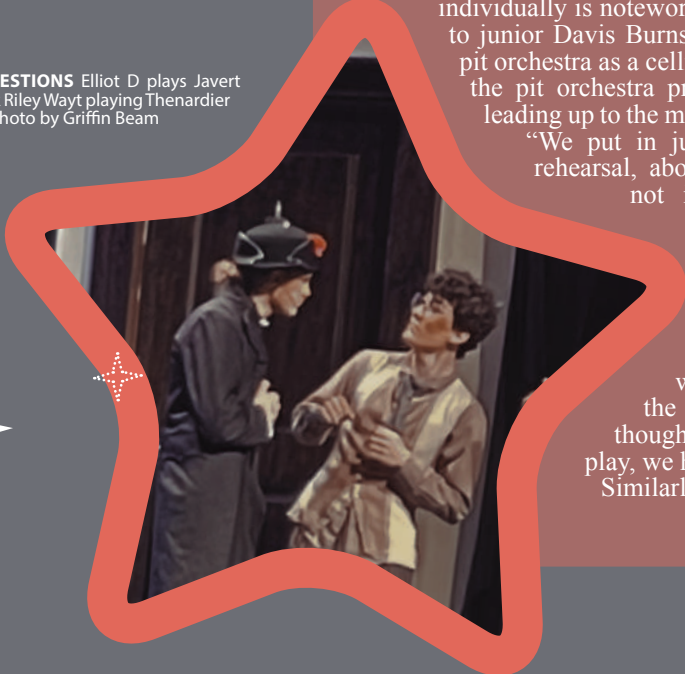
"The Alley Cat Players make up such a welcoming community and I never feel isolated or rejected when I work with them," Lein said. "Just thinking about [the musical] makes me tear up a little bit because I miss it so much."



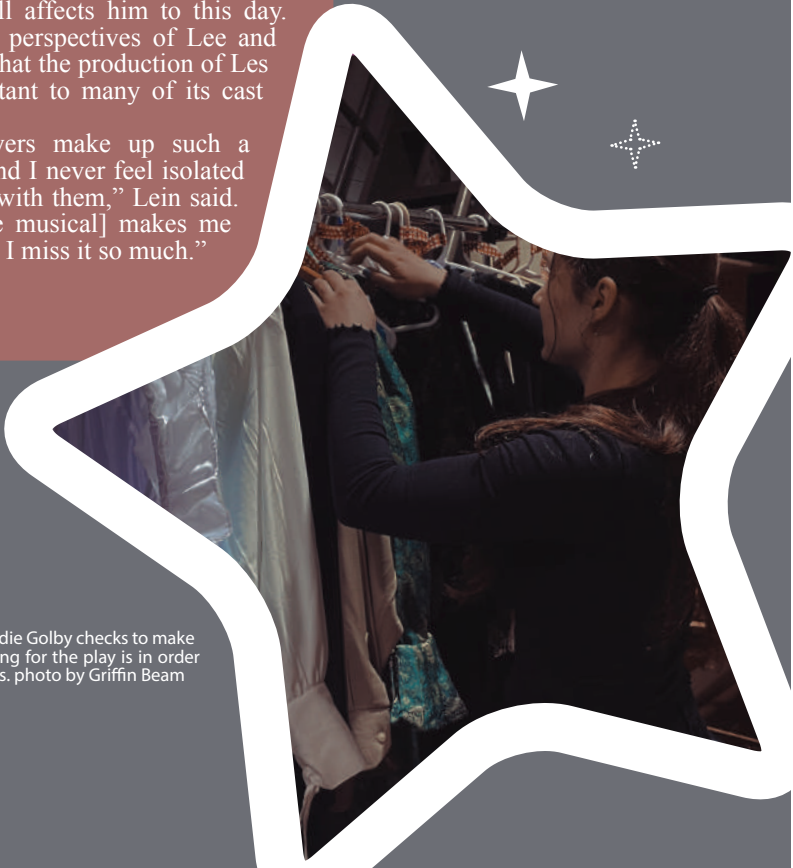
ABC CAFE (Left to right up to down) John Coury, Amelia Coleman, Brennan Lein, Lucy Martin, Sophie Murphy, Kir Kraus, Django Somero, Jonas Klumpp. Play ABC students meeting up at the ABC Cafe. photo by Griffin Beam



LOVE IS IN THE AIR Brennan Lein (left) plays Marius who is the suitor of Ruby Venkatesh playing Cosette. photo by Griffin Beam



JUST A FEW QUESTIONS Elliot D plays Javert who is there to ask Riley Wayt playing Thenardier a few questions. photo by Griffin Beam



DRESS CHECK Maddie Golby checks to make sure all of the clothing for the play is in order before the play starts. photo by Griffin Beam