

# LASA LIBERATOR

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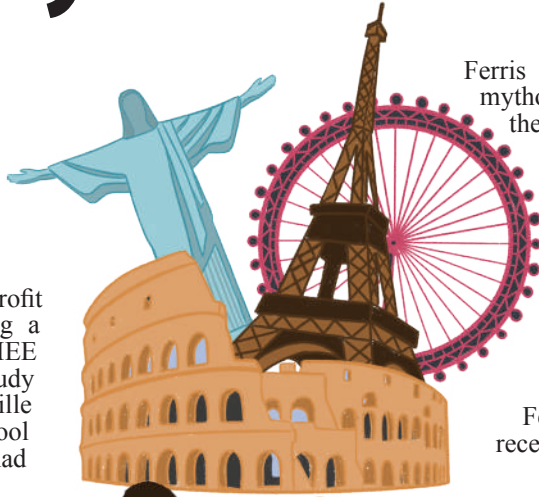
## Students' Study Abroad Dreams Falter

SAM WAELBROECK | staff writer

In light of the current political climate, as well as growing international tensions, many American students are rethinking their plans for international travel as U.S. institutions temporarily pause or reevaluate their international programs. Still, some students are opting for CIEE programs despite concerns about the state of U.S. foreign relations and the challenges presented by border control policies.

The Council on International Education Exchange (CIEE) is a nonprofit organization that offers study abroad programs to students, providing a unique opportunity to experience new cultures and education systems. CIEE representatives have been going to schools across the globe, introducing study abroad opportunities to students like Sophia Ferris, a senior at Waterville Senior High School in Maine. The representative who visited her school made the opportunity seem more affordable and accessible than Ferris had initially thought.

"I'd always thought that studying abroad was something that was out of my tax bracket, so to speak," Ferris said. "I'd only ever met one other person who'd done it, and I only learned that she had [travelled] after I had applied. But a CIEE representative came to my school in central Maine and held an assembly for our junior and sophomore-year language students, in which they presented their study abroad programs as affordable opportunities to travel and learn."



Ferris applied for a scholarship and was able to attend a creative writing and mythology program in Rome, Italy, in the summer of 2024. The financial viability of the program made it a unique and valuable experience for her.

"I wound up being the only person in my class to apply for any of the programs, and I received a several-thousand-dollar scholarship that made studying abroad possible," Ferris said.

However, Ferris explained that she has been affected by the current political climate in the U.S., especially given her identity as a person of color, put together with her political views. She expressed concern about the challenges that U.S. citizens may face when traveling abroad due to increased scrutiny at the borders.

"I probably will not make any plans that involve going through border customs at any point within the next four years unless absolutely necessary," Ferris said. "As a brown girl with extremely outspoken political views, the recent conduct of the United States with regard to its treatment of its own citizens coming through customs lately has scared me off a little."

Ferris worries that the unpredictable nature of U.S. border policies could make future international travel difficult.

According to her, how the U.S. is perceived abroad and its political tensions are affecting relationships with other nations.

"The ever-changing nature of our conduct regarding border customs stresses me out," Ferris said. "I'm not sure I'd feel comfortable trying to get back into the country after studying abroad."

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graphic by Megan Gerold



photo by Megan Gerold

see **SXSW** page 12-13



photo by Margot Moran

see **SXSW** page 12-13

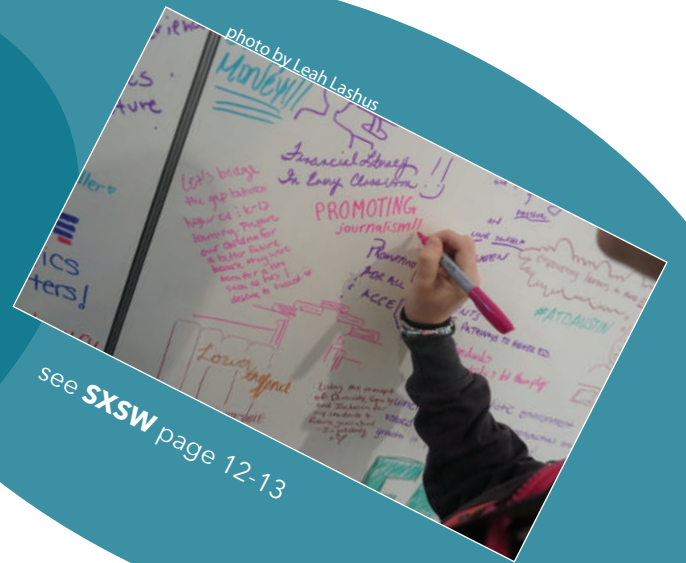


photo by Leah Lashus

see **SXSW** page 12-13

## SENIOR 30S



ALEXANDRA VALENCIA-SERRANO



ISABEL KRAMER



AMELIA COLEMAN

Graduating members of the LASA Liberator reflect on their time with the paper, the lessons they've learned, and what they will carry with them.

see **30S** pages 3-4

## LASA RUNNERS FACE FIERCE COMPETITION

### Track Tackles Texas Relays

TESSA WHITNEY | staff writer

Every spring since 1925, the Texas Relays have drawn the fastest runners, strongest throwers, and boldest jumpers from across the South of the U.S. to Austin. Originally established as a male-only meet, the event now stands as one of the premier showcases for both collegiate and high school athletes of all genders. It's a place where state champions and Olympic potentials line up side by side. This year, LASA juniors Anna Ugarte and Eva Cragolino stepped onto the track to test themselves against the best.

Competing in front of packed stands at Mike A. Myers Stadium, Ugarte and Cragolino joined a long legacy of athletes chasing fast times. However, this year's roster highlighted how much the sport has evolved. When the Relays began 100 years ago, there were no womens races, and winning times were modest by today's standards. The top 1600-meter time in the early decades hovered around five minutes for boys. Today, athletes like Cragolino are shattering those barriers, running sub-five-minute miles and doing so in a girls final.

Ugarte, who competes in the 100-meter hurdles, 300-meter hurdles, and 4x400 relay, trained intensely leading up to the meet. She spent five days a week working out with a club team, splitting her

sessions between hurdle-specific drills and sprint work. She explained that she knew it was worth it the moment she stepped into the starting blocks alongside some of the best hurdlers in the country.

"Seeing everyone there helped me be motivated to keep going," Ugarte said. "In the warmup area, you see everyone doing all their drills, and it's such an inspirational environment to be in. Honestly, I was really scared because I was racing with these professionals and amazing runners, but I was just trying to stay in my zone and focus on myself, not anyone else."

Despite the pressure, Ugarte finished strong with a time of one minute and two seconds in the 400-meter hurdles. While she walked away feeling proud of her effort, she was already looking for ways to improve.

"It's exactly what I was looking for, but I know I can do better," Ugarte said. "I have a certain rhythm that I'm supposed to do, so focusing on holding that rhythm and then at the end just kicking it as hard as I can and giving it everything I have. I try to tell myself, just don't be scared. Once you get over it, you got it."

see **LASA** page 15



graphic by Megan Gerold

*editorial* DEI Programs Need to Stand Against Tyranny

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

DEI, or Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is defined as a grouping of practices and policies that promote groups of people who have historically been dismissed or discriminated against through inclusive treatment.

The concept of DEI was first introduced in governmental policies during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. In response to mounting calls to integrate American society, the government passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which made it illegal to segregate public spaces based on race, gender, or national origin, and outlawed employment-based discrimination. After years of systematic oppression of people of color fueled by racist ideologies and legal precedent, the legislation put an end to the Jim Crow era of American life that had lasted for nearly a century.

Sixty years later, more and more policies like Executive Order 13985, which curtails racial inequity in federal agencies' implementation of laws, have been enacted to advance racial equity and policy to continue addressing the pervasion of racism in the U.S. Additionally, Juneteenth, a new federal holiday commemorating the day American slavery ended when the last slaves were freed in Texas, celebrates an additional win for African-Americans in the United States by showing recognition for their history and struggle.

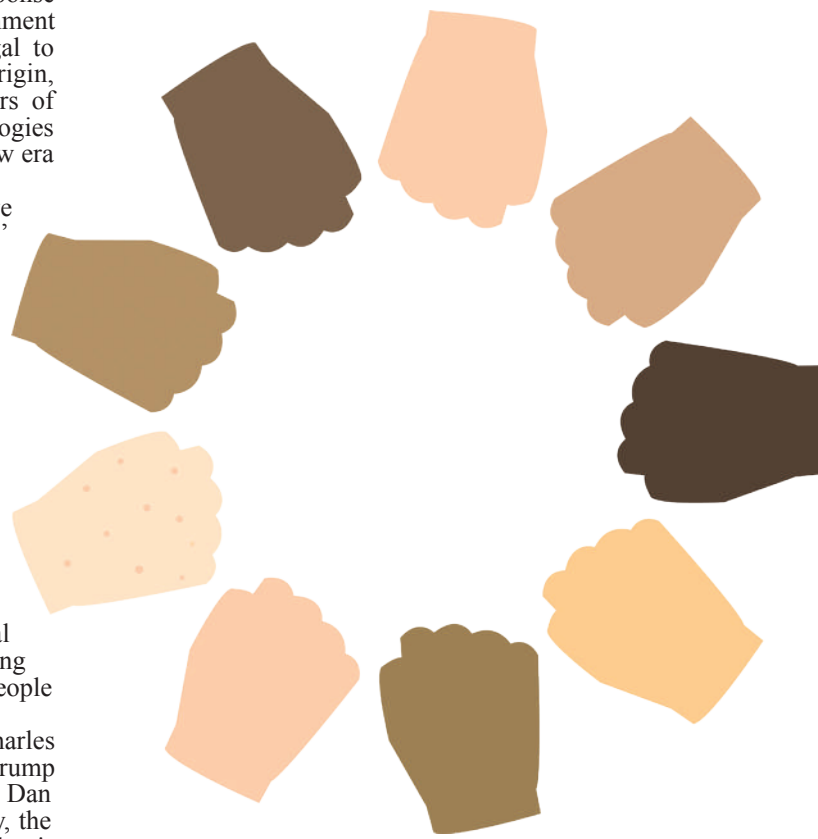
On the first day of his second term in office, President Donald Trump rescinded Executive Order 13985. To take its place, President Trump has signed Executive Order 14151, effectively ordering a purge of all DEI programs from the federal government. He justified these cuts by calling such initiatives "dangerous, demeaning, and immoral."

With the misguided goal of reforming the country as a color-blind meritocracy, his regressive viewpoints and personal agendas are seeping into governmental doctrine. By eliminating DEI programs, the government reinforces that only certain people are built for certain jobs.

For example, Trump recently fired Air Force General Charles Brown, a Black four-star general who was nominated by Trump himself during his first term, and replaced him with General Dan Caine, a white three-star general in retirement. The same day, the first female chief of naval operations, Admiral Lisa Franchetti, was fired via presidential decree and will most likely be replaced with a male officer. These actions, in direct contradiction to the DEI programs prioritizing diversity, highlight Trump's nominally "color-blind" attempts to reinforce a white male-led workforce. It is revealing of his undemocratic viewpoints and agendas as well as

his attempts to divide the country through discrimination.

Detractors of DEI programs such as Trump will point to alleged cases of DEI hires, people hired solely based on diversity and not merit, holding the economy back, but this worn out belief could not be more inaccurate. In a survey conducted by



graphic by Ellington Tough

the Pew Research Center, 56 out of 77 adults of multiple ethnic backgrounds interviewed expressed that they believe diversity benefits the country. This not only shows this removal goes against

the American people's voices, but getting rid of DEI programs and policies would result in a productivity and efficiency deficit for businesses that are both corporate and small. Additional research produced by McKinsey & Co, a management consulting firm, shows that companies with more ethnic diversity are 39% more likely to surpass companies with low ethnic diversity in terms of performance. Without these programs that provided opportunities for people from a minority group to advance in the corporate world, businesses and the economy both suffer. For a president and administration highly concerned about the current state of the economy and "mak[ing] America affordable again," slashing DEI programs actually hurts the economic growth of the nation. Trump's anti-DEI initiatives will make the U.S. less affordable if business productivity declines and people aren't getting paid what they used to.

Those arguing against DEI policies and programs believe that they are unfair to white people, specifically white men. They believe that if two people, one a white man and the other a woman of color, were competing for the same job position, both equally qualified to do the job, the employer would unfairly hire the woman in an effort to increase diversity. While this may seem like favoritism or "reverse racism," it is not unequal when viewed from a historical standpoint. For years, and even still to this day, people of color, women, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community have faced inhumane discrimination. The U.S. Department of Labor released data revealing that in 2023, Black women faced a deficit of \$42.7 billion in wages in comparison to white men, as well as Hispanic women losing \$53.3 billion. This racial and gender pay gap is real. Now, these DEI programs, from a standpoint on what is fair and just, are necessary because they are making up for that lost time when members of these communities could have succeeded and been provided more opportunities in the U.S. in decades past.

Furthermore, not only does keeping DEI align with democratic, logical, and economic standpoints, but DEI programs should be a moral and ethical obligation for the United States government. A history of racism and inequality dampens the success of minority groups in the U.S. as it systematically makes it significantly harder for them to succeed in employment and their financial advancement. DEI policies were implemented to help level an uneven playing field for minority groups, and they are necessary for the success of the United States and must remain in order to uplift minorities who have been put down for far too long.

## Raptor Chatter

Do you think DEI programs are unfair?



photo by Luca Sims

**Clare Harper**  
*Freshman*

"No, because it's equity ... It's not for [Trump], he shouldn't dictate it."



photo by Luca Sims

**Lila Clements**  
*Sophomore*

"No ... There are problems with non-inclusion, and inclusion is good. I don't think it undermines people who aren't marginalized at all."



photo by Luca Sims

**Simon Nield**  
*Junior*

"No, I do not believe that DEI programs are unfair. It depends on which programs you're talking about, but in general, I believe they're fair."



photo by Luca Sims

**Vinson Ratcliffgurdy**  
*Senior*

"DEI programs are blatantly unfair. The only way they can be qualified is as racist. Unless they're not in their implementation."

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## LASA LIBERATOR

### 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 LASA 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 LASA 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 LASA 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 LASA Liberator will attempt to publish a range of opinions within reason.

Have a good  
summer,  
Raptors!

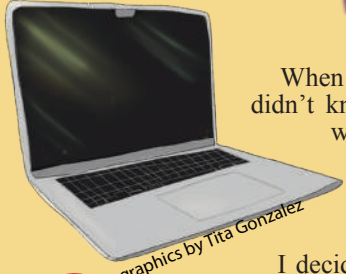


Have an opinion about a new school policy? Got an issue with this issue? Anything else on your mind? Email us at [lasaliberator@gmail.com](mailto:lasaliberator@gmail.com) or DM us @lasaliberator.

# Senior 30s: Memories and Reflections

**What are 30s?** Here at the LASA Liberator, 30s are a tradition. The name comes from the journalistic practice of putting -30- at the end of an article that is ready to be set for print. Our graduating seniors are ending their stories with the Liberator, so they get the chance to write one last article, about themselves and their journey with the paper.

## try NEW THINGS



graphics by Tita Gonzalez

When I decided to come to LASA, I didn't know what to expect. All I knew was that I was done playing it safe. To my surprise, the first thing I decided to try was Colorguard during my first semester of freshman year. More shockingly, I decided to join the school newspaper my second semester.

First semester, I had Ezine with Mr. Garcia. I enjoyed it because I discovered that I liked interviewing people and getting to know more about them through discussion of their passions. I found it inspiring to share other people's stories with the world and provide readers with information on countless topics of interest they could choose. However, after learning more about the school's newspaper, I

learned that I wouldn't be able to do exactly what I wanted, which was to write about different people and what they contribute to the world. Nevertheless, I did value the newspaper's mission to provide accurate information to LASA's community of students, teachers, and staff and bestow a space for students to voice their

opinions and concerns about current events. I admired its mission, so I decided to contribute to the LASA Liberator in any way I could.

At first, I was nervous because I didn't know in what ways I could contribute to the newspaper. I was not an avid writer or photographer, but I was eager to try something new and willing to learn. I decided to pursue an interest of mine, which was graphic design. There was an opening at the time, and I became one of the graphics editors. Before joining the newspaper, I had never used Adobe Illustrator to create graphics, nor was I particularly skilled in drawing. However, like many individuals around the world, I learned on the job. It was a process to learn how to maneuver the intricacies of Illustrator without breaking my wrist or having to manually color in an object for five minutes straight because I couldn't combine two shapes into one, but I found it worth it in the end. Despite my struggles, my community of editors were always there to encourage and support me. They acknowledged the amount of work and effort I was putting into becoming a better graphics editor and told me to be proud of myself for the progress I was accomplishing. Over time, my graphics improved, and even though I wasn't a master at it, I had learned a new skill. I was content at being able to effectively communicate an article's message through beautiful graphics.

Although my time as a graphics editor was short, I moved on to fulfill another role with the same intent of contributing to the newspaper in my own way and trying something new. I end my senior year as the finance editor who has learned how to confidently contact businesses through phone calls and innovated new methods to raise funds. I am grateful for everything I have learned and experienced being in the LASA Liberator, along with the friends I have gained.



My advice to the following generations of LASA students is to try new and unexpected things because you never know what experiences you might gain along the way.



photo by Megan Gerold



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

## SINK OR SWIM



ISABEL KRAMER

photo by Megan Gerold



graphic by Isabel Kramer

At the end of my sophomore year, I was diagnosed with major depressive disorder and lost all motivation for both school and my future. It got so bad that I was admitted to an outpatient program and taken out of school for the last two months of that school

year. There were days I couldn't move and days I couldn't find the energy to do the things I loved most. I didn't write, listen to music, or sing. I didn't complete assignments, email teachers, or try. That year felt like I was drowning, and I had to save myself despite wanting to give in.

The summer after outpatient treatment was a struggle to regain my sense of personhood, but through branching out and trying new experiences, I found myself again. I made new friends and began to remember who I was and what I valued. In my junior year, I joined the paper as a club member. I loved the idea of writing for others and having my words

printed, rather than hidden in journals. When I began interviewing people with vastly different outlooks from my own, my world got bigger. There was one particular interview with an alt-right preacher that warped my view of the world a bit. While he felt very different about particular groups and their choices, he was kind. That 50-minute interview was a moment for me to see the "other side" and realize that I had misconceptions. He wasn't some little red devil wanting to see my world burn; he was a nice man with some extremely opposite views. To this day, I disagree with this man, but I know he wants what he thinks is best, just as we all do.

Medicine and treatment don't make depression go away; it always nags at the back of your mind. The hard work and constant search for meaning keep you above water, but I could still so easily sink. As cheesy as it sounds, working at the paper gave me a sense of purpose. I felt like my words both mattered and were heard. When the previous editor-in-chief told me to apply for an editing position, I was taken by surprise but motivated to work harder once again. This was amplified

when I got that position. Working for the Liberator and my movement from club to editing helped me prove to myself my worth. Writing, interviewing, and collaborating on the LASA Liberator is what made my high school experience, and it is what made me feel confident in keeping my head above water.



graphic by Leah Lashus



UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

graphic by Tita Gonzalez

## I KNOW ME



MILES ANDREWS

photo by Lasya Sangana

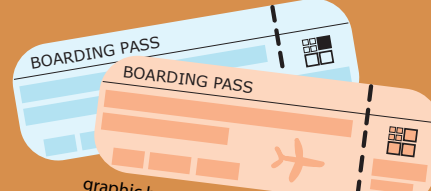
On the first day of Newspaper, Garcia asked everyone why they took the class. My response? "I don't know." The truth, one I was embarrassed to say at the time, was that I thought it might be cool, and it was. The funny part is, I don't like writing, and I still have no idea how to make a graphic. My brain's always worked better with numbers and systems, so the open-ended task of writing an article, especially this one, is still petrifying.

Still, Newspaper isn't the only class that surprised me. Between four signature courses, you will undoubtedly be baffled when hearing that each one was many people's favorite class at LASA. The one that puzzled me was Planet Earth (Plearth). I didn't enjoy relying on a small group, and I definitely didn't enjoy having a park 20 minutes away from me, but, I'm grateful for both Plearth and Newspaper in a similar way. They have both taught me how to work under the pressure I have put myself in and come out unscathed. The classes also gave me the

peace of mind that I am fully deserving of LASA's multidisciplinary endorsement.

I didn't get through LASA alone. My sister, Reiko, was a senior when I was a freshman. While our parents decided I was going to LASA for commute reasons, Reiko became my guide through much more than 183 traffic. Reiko has helped me navigate through instability, pressure, and college applications with the wisdom given to her by our school.

I'm not graduating with a pile of chords, a perfect GPA, or a shelf full of trophies. What I am taking with me is immeasurable: resilience, perspective, and a better understanding of myself.

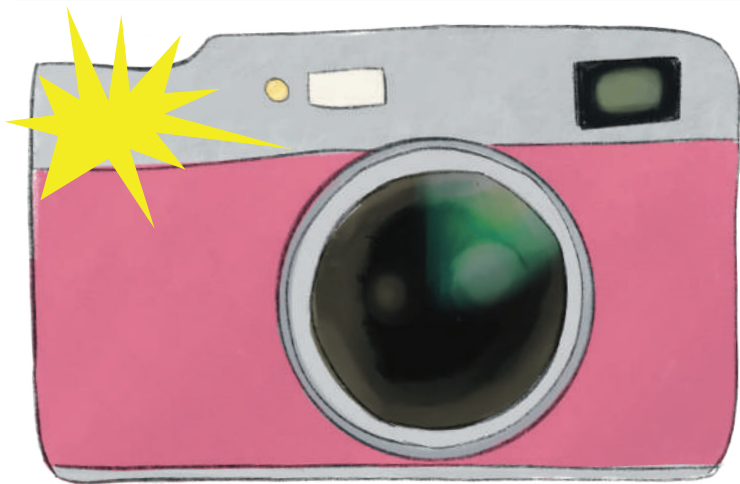


graphic by Sadie Sarrat



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

graphic by Tita Gonzalez



graphic by Tita Gonzalez



graphics by Amelia Coleman, Ellington Tough, and Tita Gonzalez

# THE LAST TIME

Despite never officially taking a newspaper class, many of my high school “firsts” are tied to a certain room in the 700s—a space that slowly, unexpectedly, became one of my favorite places in the entire LASA building.

It started with my very first article. I wandered into Mr. Garcia’s room as a nervous freshman, hoping to earn a little extra credit for English I through the Newspaper Club. I

graphics by Tita Gonzalez



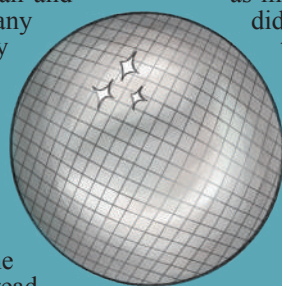
didn’t expect to have fun. I definitely didn’t expect to be interviewing people about a martial arts seminar. However, I ended up loving every minute of it: from nervously emailing sources to seeing my name in print for the first time.

That one article turned into a handful more, and soon, I found myself looking forward to the next chance I got to write another story, squeezing into that always-busy room between classes and during club meetings throughout freshman and sophomore year. I made many more firsts throughout my time in the *Liberator*. From my first time realizing that finishing my article the night before its due date is actually not something I should do, to my first time becoming irrationally proud when I heard someone say, “Hey, I actually read the paper this time,” newspaper became an integral part of my

LASA experience; one that I strived to immerse myself more in, especially starting in my third year of high school.

Junior year marked the beginning of my first time acting as an editor for the photo section, where my firsts began to have larger effects on me. For example, I wrote an entire photo essay and saw it take up an entire page of an issue. No other moment spent seeing my writing being published had as much of a positive effect on me as this one did. It solidified that my writing mattered and that all of my firsts had come together to bring me to that moment in which I felt invincible.

However, as I entered my senior year and my fourth year writing articles for the *Liberator*, I realized that so many of the firsts I had experienced suddenly became my lasts as well. I’d never get the chance to repeat them within the four walls of this safe space that I have come to appreciate so much.



AVANI GANNE

photo by Sadie Sarrat



graphic by Tita Gonzalez

# CRAVE THE CLIMB

Being on the staff of this paper has been like climbing a mountain. It’s been painful, exhausting, and sometimes I wonder if the view from the peak is worth the climb. From freshman to senior year, my strength and dedication have been tested. At times, I just wanted to give up. However, in the end, through some miracle, I reached the summit, and the view was breathtaking; the path just wasn’t what I expected.

I wasn’t really supposed to be here. In my freshman course list, I requested to be put in the yearbook class and was disappointed to be put on the staff of the *LASA Liberator*. I was disappointed but resigned myself to just lean into this less-than-optimal situation. I expected to hate the *LASA Liberator*, and although sometimes I still very much agree with that initial assessment, I was proven wrong! I learned to really love this newspaper and all the people in it.

This love wasn’t without struggle, I’m afraid. Throughout my four years here, I’ve failed more times

than I’d like to admit, and I’ve succeeded more than I expected I would. In my freshman year, every failure sat in my chest and bored a hole into me until it physically hurt. I now realize that my failure is important. Failure burns, but I need to lean into the burn. If it burns, it means I care; it means I’m trying; it means I want to grow. The passion I have grown throughout my time at the *LASA Liberator* has driven me to the burn, and the sting of disappointment keeps me reaching for new challenges. I now know that it’s okay to be a failure sometimes! It’s important to suck at the things you love! Being the absolute worst for a time is an asset because if you’re always winning and always succeeding and nothing ever comes with struggle and difficulty, then you never grow or change. Passion means sticking with your craft through loss and taking as much from failures as you do from successes. My passion has been constant throughout my four years at the *LASA Liberator*, although I didn’t initially want to admit it. Each failure,

each cutting word on my stories, each time that the work piled up and made me want to quit, each minor mistake that fell through the cracks has pushed me to work harder and strive for new heights. Passion is a constant cycle of summit and plunge, and you should crave the climb.



graphics by Amelia Coleman



AMELIA COLEMAN

photo by Lasya Sangana

# INVEST URSELF

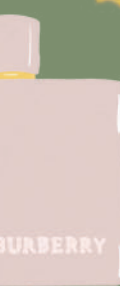
Newspaper wasn’t even on my choice sheet. I had applied for Audio Visual Production (AVP) and thought that newspaper and yearbook were the same—not that I cared. As a senior, I just needed a tech credit.

The first day of newspaper class, I was immediately greeted with the year’s first *LASA Liberator* issue, the one the editors had started

creating the summer issue in July. I heard a girl grumble about how the printers made the first background graphic too dark, and the staff list was incomplete, as she circled parts of the paper with a blue pen. I learned later that her name was Megan, one of two editor-in-chiefs, and that she was making notes for improvement. She wasn’t the only one; several editors wrote notes, meticulously checking every detail on that 15 by 22.75-inch sheet.

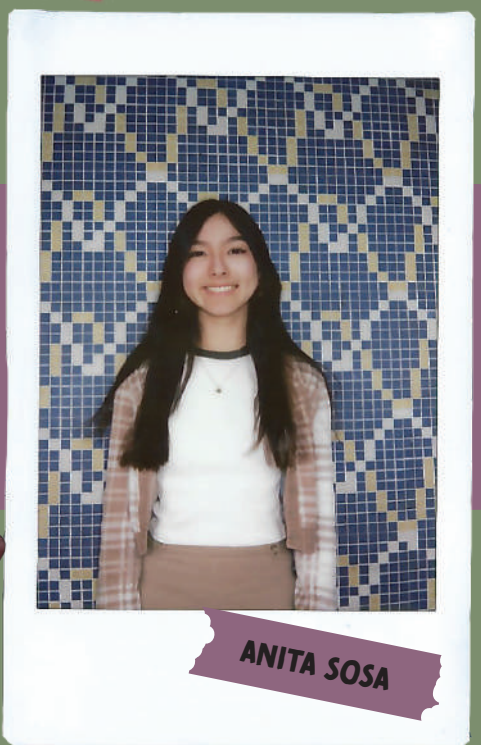
Now it’s April, and the year is almost over. My debate career has just ended. After my last debate, I started crying. I mean sobbing, red nose, the whole deal. I loved debate—it was something I was good at, but more than that, it was something I put my life into: it gave me passion and community. Whenever I lost, it felt really painful because I was that invested in it. However, when I reflect on my career, I’m glad I cared enough that I could feel that hurt. Even though it sucks sometimes, feeling that passion is a part of living a complete life, one where we accept the good and the bad as a part of caring. After 9 months as a first-year staff writer,

I’ve been able to witness how much care goes into every edition that’s made. Every editor has to put in so much effort, working sometimes even at night in the humid (and occasionally smelly and rat-infested) newspaper room. This work culminated not just in a well-done final product, but in community and fulfillment. It can be easy to be indifferent, apathetic saves time and potential pain, but you have to take that risk, investing yourself to reap the rewards.



graphic by Megan Gerold

For the next generation of newspaper staffers, policy debaters, or high school freshmen—I hope you care about something too. Care enough to write with intention, edit until every word is polished, circle every small detail, it doesn’t matter how many people read it—to care is its own reward.

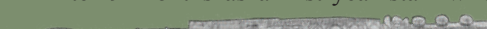


ANITA SOSA

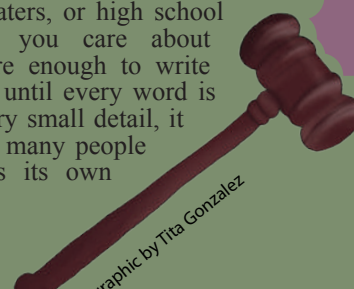
photo by Megan Gerold



graphic by Tita Gonzalez



graphic by Tita Gonzalez



graphic by Tita Gonzalez

## Magical Mueller Farmer's Market Thrives

ETHAN STERN | news editor

Hundreds of Austin residents make their way to Mueller to shop, explore, and gather at the farmer's market. Open year-round, through blistering heat and freezing cold, the market attracts vendors around Texas to set up shop every Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Since their opening in 2012, the market has greatly expanded both its size and influence, according to the Texas Farmers Market website. Having a permanent location since June 2021 at Mueller's Branch Park Pavilion, the market includes both a large inner area along with outside tents. Beside tents lie little water fountains where children dance in, as well as aromas from all different cuisines, produce, candles, and much more that drift around the venue.

According to the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, 80% of Americans attend farmers' markets. Vendors, like Yegua Creek Farms, benefit from the steady customers the Mueller market has gotten over the years. David Hinkle, a helper at the farms, explained how a constant flow of customers contributes to a better market.

"The customers come out typically in droves," Hinkle said. "There's always been very high foot traffic, there's a big diversity of vendors and types of products."

With over 120 vendors, the market has greatly expanded since opening, according to the Texas Farmers' Market website. Hinkle highlighted how he appreciates the sense of community amongst the vendors, attracting different types of business each time.

"My favorite thing about the market, I think, [is] the diversity of everything," Hinkle said. "The fact that there is so much variety, you can get something new every time."

Lynnsey Hooper, an assistant at the Sourdough Project, has been a part of the farmers market for multiple years. She mentioned how the project was able to grow since being a vendor.

"We have been at Muller since 2018," Hooper said. "The owner worked real hard to get in here, and no one was making sourdough crackers, so we had a good time. It has been a really great experience for both me and the project"

The market encourages local community impact as well as internal relationships amongst vendors. Julia White, an organizer at Texas Farmers Market helps out by making recipes using products from certain vendors.

"I love forming relationships and supporting the vendors," White said. "Knowing them by name, hearing more about their story, hearing random facts, and making recipes featuring their produce allow me to connect with the community here."



**MARKET MANIA** Attendees make their way along the outdoor vendors of the Mueller Farmer's Market. The market takes place every Sunday morning, photo by Ethan Stern



**INDOOR EXPANSION** The market takes up Philomena St. and pools into the Branch Park Pavilion building, photo by Ethan Stern



**SUPREME SELECTION** Over 120 vendors sprawl the streets of the Pavilion, creating ample choice for market goers, photo by Ethan Stern

## The Future of Youth Mentality

LEAH LASHUS | news editor

In recent years, mental health has been a topic at the forefront of the greater conversations surrounding general health, technology, and education. Schools like LASA have a reputation of pushing for academic excellence in their students, and with this expectation for excellence comes widespread experiences of chronic stress, fatigue, and anxiety among the student population. Both schoolwide and statewide initiatives have been forwarded to help students specifically recognize, cope with, and manage mental health issues.

Dylan George is a high school senior and Gold Award-winning Girl Scout who created a mental health curriculum at a local nonprofit and has experience in the mental health and neuroscience fields through teaching, observations, and field work. She discussed how interdisciplinary activities that mesh mental health and her love of theater helped her get into the field.

"I auditioned for this acting troupe with Planned Parenthood, called Teenage Communication Theater (TCT)," George said. "We're a group of teenagers in an acting group, and we go to different parts of the Dallas-Fort Worth area, and we teach theater peer education about relationships or mental health. We'll talk about suicide and what to do if you're ever in that situation, or resources to call."

An important aspect of mental health is building a community of people who care, according to George. In many ways, this includes friends noticing changes in behaviors symptomatic of mental health issues, which can appear in many forms.

"We talk a lot about how to recognize your friends," George said. "If your friend seems more distant, or if they change their eating and sleeping habits, or behavioral changes, and you just notice they're not talking as much in social situations."

Mental illness is an umbrella term for over 200 disorders, according to the Cleveland Clinic. This means they can present in completely different ways depending on the person and what they're struggling with, according to LASA Wellness Counselor Olga Alverado.

"Frequent complaints of stomach aches, feeling nauseated, headaches, not being able to focus," Alverado said. "Other students [present] very fidgety, or they could be very lethargic. It kind of goes [from] one extreme to the other."

To many people, confronting a friend is the hard part. In a joint study by CNN and the Kaiser Family Foundation, about one-third of respondents said they are "not too comfortable" or "not at all comfortable" discussing their mental health with friends. There's a thin line between being curious and being intrusive in a mental health discussion, according to George. While confrontation can be difficult, it's a necessary step in the process to a healthier mind, according to Healthline, and there are ways to do so while still being sensitive.

"Not in public, not in front of other people," George said. "Telling them that you're here to talk and that you're here for them will make them feel more comfortable to bring it up rather than if you ask really specific questions—it might seem intrusive."

Today, only 48% of kids discuss mental health with their parents regularly, according to a study by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). While it's become normalized to blame the child for this, the parent has the responsibility to initiate mental health conversations, according to NAMI. If this doesn't happen, there are other

options, according to George.

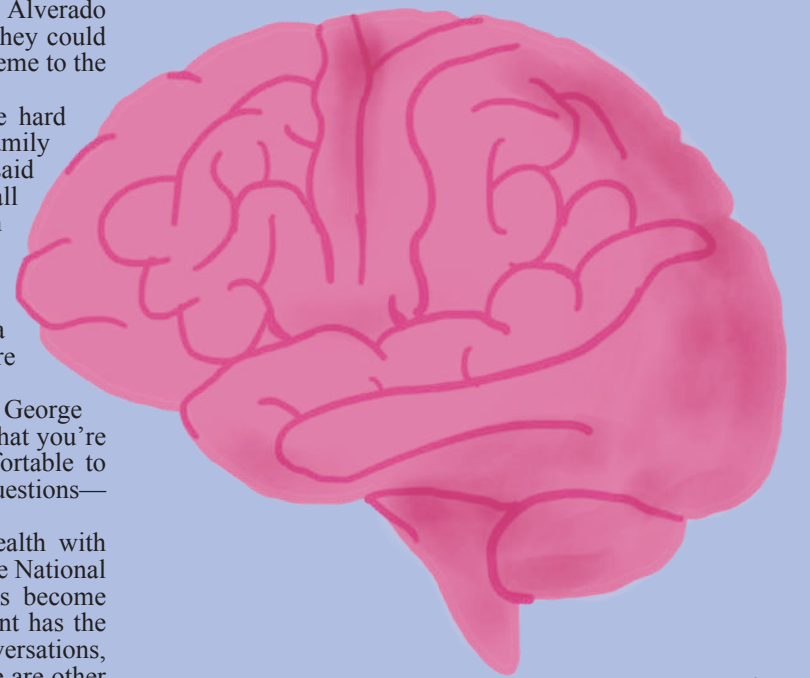
"If it's severe, there's a lot of hotlines, but if you can talk to a school counselor, those are really helpful because it's outside of the family," George said. "Maybe it's not a family member, but a trusted adult, if you have that type of person, or a teacher that you can talk to."

While things like LASA schoolwork and social pressures can be the causes of many mental health struggles, recent data by Girl Scouts of the USA showed that loneliness can start as early as 5 years old, with 64% of girls ages 5-7 reporting feelings of loneliness. Dr. Christine Crawford is a practicing psychiatrist and mental health expert who discussed the impact this early feeling can have.

"When kids, as young as five and six, are experiencing loneliness, it can unfortunately put them on a trajectory in which they might evolve into developing more serious mental health conditions," Crawford said. "We really have to be intentional about this ... There are so many kids that I see in my clinic who are living in these households with multiple siblings, multiple parents, multiple adults, and nobody in that house notices that kid. Nobody in that house notices what it looks like when that kid is struggling. And so these kids are suffering in silence, surrounded by so many people."

Many mental health crises, like loneliness, are complex, and sometimes the root cause may not be understandable or visible to others. That doesn't mean it doesn't exist to the person going through the problem, according to Crawford. Many times, friends and family will notice changes in behavior but create excuses that deny mental health crises, Crawford mentioned, but she added that there are ways for people to check themselves when they notice these changes.

"If you see somebody, say something, and I really, really mean that, because it can be really hard as a parent to see your kids struggling, to bear witness to their suffering," Crawford said. "As a defense mechanism, sometimes we turn a blind eye. But you denying what it is you're actually seeing with your eyes is going to have a negative impact on [the] kid. When we turn a blind eye to something that's right in front of us, we're doing that only in service of ourselves in our own discomfort."

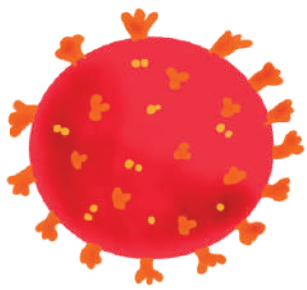


graphic by Leah Lashus

## DISEASE MAKES A COMEBACK

MRIDHULA KUMARAVEL | staff writer

Diseases once thought to be gone—like measles and polio—were previously under control thanks to widespread vaccination programs such as the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, the Measles & Rubella Initiative, the Expanded Programme on Immunization, and the Vaccines for Children Program. But in recent years, cases have been rising again, both in the U.S. and globally. Health experts warn that we are at risk of losing decades of progress in disease prevention because fewer people are choosing to vaccinate.



graphics by Leah Lashus

One major cause of declining vaccination rates is misinformation. Anti-vaccine conspiracy theories have gained traction, especially online. Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) Jr., an environmental lawyer and political figure, is a prominent source of this misinformation. According to US News and World Report, RFK Jr. has falsely linked vaccines to autism and promoted the idea that vaccine science is corrupt. No credible scientific evidence does not support these claims, but they have been widely shared, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. As public trust in vaccine wavers, more people are opting out, leading to lower immunization rates and increasing the risk of outbreaks.

To stop the return of deadly diseases, vaccine misinformation must be fought with facts and science. Vaccines go through years of testing before they are approved. They are safe, effective, and save millions of lives each year. Public health experts and doctors overwhelmingly support vaccination as one of the most important tools to prevent disease. Getting vaccinated protects not just an individual, but also the most vulnerable members of an individual's community. Trust credible sources like the CDC, World Health Organization, and healthcare providers, not viral social media posts.

Vaccination rates, especially among children, have been steadily declining. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), national childhood immunization coverage dropped from 95% to 93% between 2019 and 2022. While not a seemingly big difference, even small drops in immunization can weaken herd immunity: the protection we get when most of a population is vaccinated. When herd immunity weakens, diseases can spread quickly, especially among infants, elderly people, and those who can't be vaccinated for medical reasons.

Vaccines protect more than just the people who get them—they protect entire communities. This is known as herd immunity. When enough people are vaccinated, diseases have fewer chances to spread. But when vaccine coverage drops, herd immunity breaks down. This puts people at risk who cannot receive vaccines, like newborns, people undergoing chemotherapy, or those with immune disorders. Reversing the decline in vaccine uptake is crucial to keep these dangerous diseases in the past.



# PROJECT CONNECT

ABBEY WU | staff writer

Austin's light rail project, the first phase of Project Connect, is a major investment in the city's transportation system. Construction is set to begin in 2027 and is currently in its early design and environmental study phase.

## Current Status and Update

According to Jennifer Pyne, Executive Vice President of planning, community, and federal programs at Austin Transit Partnership (ATP), the light rail project is currently in the "preliminary design and early engineering phase," which includes ongoing traffic and environmental studies. "The next step will be as we move to final design and eventually construction. We are planning for construction activities to begin in 2027," Pyne said, signaling ATP's long-term commitment to expanding public transit infrastructure.

## Community Impact

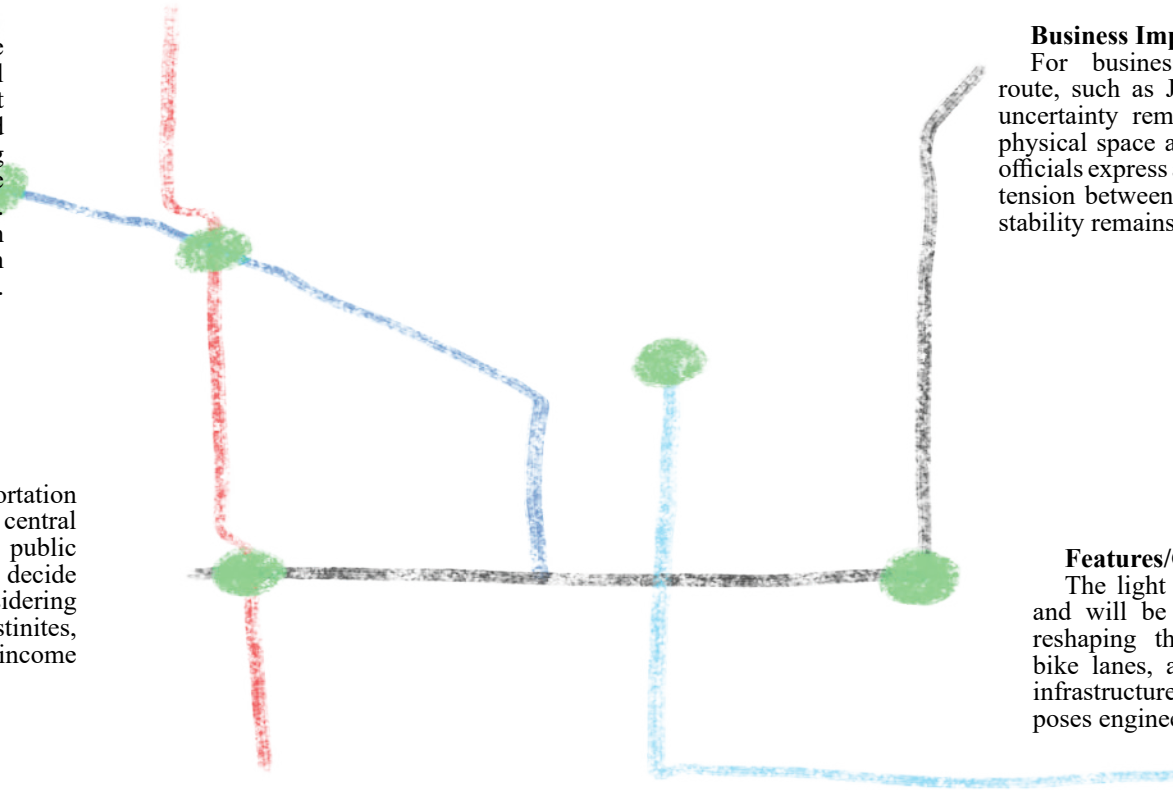
The project was designed to improve transportation access for Austin residents, with a focus on central Austin. ATP has involved locals through public meetings and outreach efforts, using them to decide station placements. Urban planners are considering equity with a goal of serving transit-reliant Austinites, including students and people in lower income households.

## Business Impact/Displacement

For business owners along the planned route, such as Jenn Hillhouse of Jenn's Copies, uncertainty remains. Hillhouse fears losing her physical space along with foot traffic. While city officials express a desire to minimize displacement, tension between infrastructure and local business stability remains unresolved.

## Features/Challenges

The light rail system will be fully electric and will be integrated into the city streets, reshaping the city to add new sidewalks, bike lanes, and public art. However, adding infrastructure into the densest areas of the city poses engineering challenges.



graphics by Leah Lashus

## HUB System at AISD

LUCA SIMS | staff writer

Beginning in the 2025-2026 school year, students from four Austin Independent School District (AISD) schools will have a different bus system for getting to and from school. This system establishes hubs for students to get bused to and from. Instead of getting dropped off within 1.25 miles from home, magnet students will be bussed to their school from the high or middle school closest to their houses.

According to Kris Hafezizadeh, the transportation director for AISD, this change was made to reduce AISD's budget deficit, which is currently estimated to be over \$110 million for the next school year. After AISD's board of trustees and superintendent examined a variety of costs cutting options for the district—a process which, according to Hafezizadeh, was full of tough conversations and decisions—the board decided that the least harmful expense to reduce would be changes in the transportation system of four magnet schools: Lively, LASA, Kealing, and Ann Richards School For Young Women Leaders.

"It's \$4 million per year to provide transportation just for these four schools," Hafezizadeh said. "[It] would be [the] parents' responsibility or caregivers to bring our students to and from those secondary schools for a.m., p.m., and late activities."

This move would save AISD an estimated \$1.2 million. However, it is only a fraction of the budget deficit, and data provided by AISD shows that total transportation spending exceeds \$38 million. This cost-saving program can also not be expanded much beyond the four schools slated to implement a hub system. According to Hafezizadeh, this is because magnet buses travel all over the city, while neighborhood buses do not travel far from the school's surrounding area.

"I'm going to use the example of where I live," Hafezizadeh said. "We go inside almost every single street to pick up kids ... Instead of putting [the stop] there, we

are gonna put it at Bowie or Small Middle School."

Despite proponents of the change suggesting that it might improve the lives of bus riders, significant concerns persist amongst students who rely on the bus to get to and from school. Declan Connor, a senior at LASA who no longer uses the bus, explained how the current bus system negatively impacted his experience.

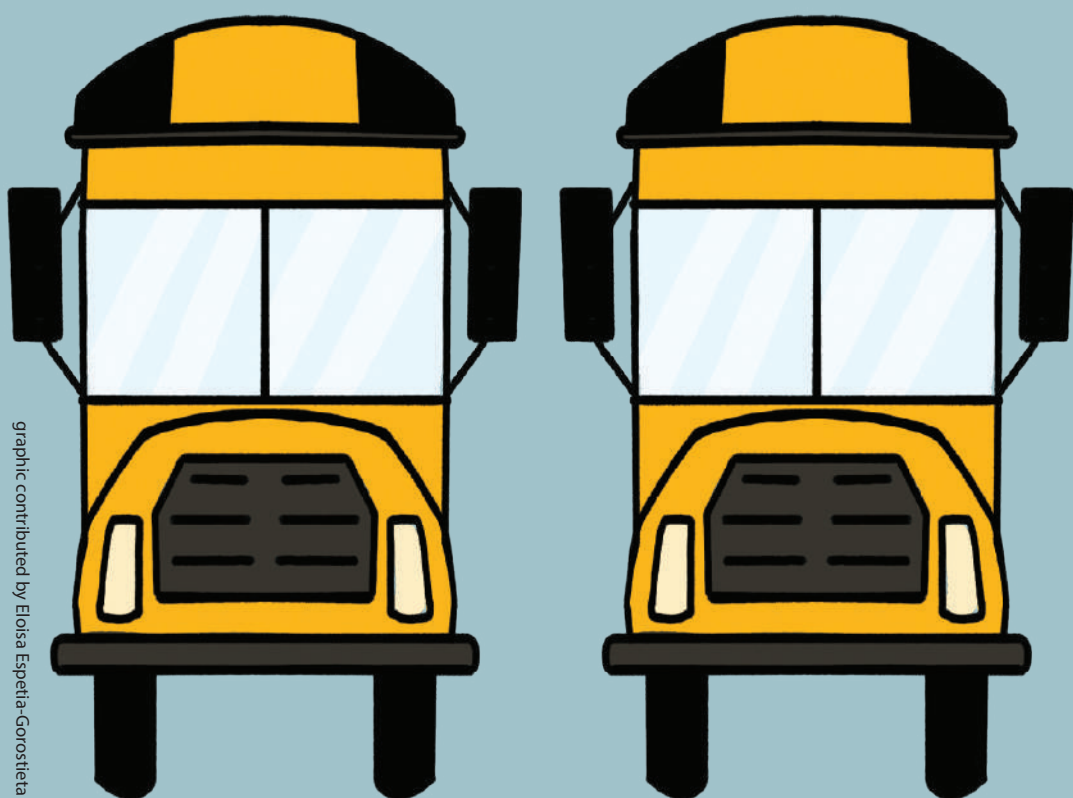
"It's about 20 minutes from [LASA] to my house," Connor said. "When I used to ride the bus, I would say I would leave at about 4:00 [p.m.], and I would get back at about 6:30-ish. People like me who live really far away rely on a bus, and maybe for people who can't wait [to get home] ... a hub system would make it a lot more difficult and take a lot more time for those people."

Junior Ezekiel Gregory explained that having transportation is one of the things that allows him to attend LASA. A hub system would have been a significant factor to consider when deciding whether to enroll in a magnet school, such as LASA, over his closer neighborhood school.

"I can barely walk to my bus stop now," Gregory said. "I'm disabled, so my parents have to come get me. I will literally wait at the stop as long as I have to. I can't walk that."

According to Hafezizadeh, AISD has reached out to the principals of affected schools and encouraged them to try to implement carpooling at a campus level. As for those who still have concerns over the system, Hafezizadeh strongly encourages them to use the AISD Let's Talk feature on their website to speak to district employees.

"It is a new thing for our schools, it is gonna be a new thing for my team," Hafezizadeh said. "But I guarantee you that we will do everything to provide the best way. We have already started to brainstorm about exact locations and things like that, but we will listen to our families."



graphic contributed by Eloisa Espelta-Gorostieta

## The Fight for Journalism

SADIE SARRAT | commentary editor

From articles calling for a revolution to detailed accounts of government subterfuge, journalism has played a drastic role in shaping the values and history of America. According to an article from the New York Times written by AG Sulzberger, journalism provides Americans with a necessary and vital piece of democracy through free press.

This reliability has unfortunately, according to a study by the Knight Foundation, decreased. 71% of responses stated that transparency in news was important to them, and a study from Reuters Institute and the University of Oxford states that trust in news organizations is partially defined by partisanship and the extent of the bias in the organization. While trust in journalism has decreased, according to the Knight Foundation, 69% of respondents say it can be gained back.

Dr. Anita Varma, an assistant professor in the School of Journalism and Media at the University of Texas at Austin, agreed that trusting journalists is important.

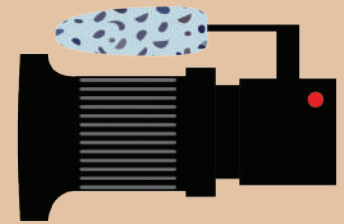
She believes that reestablishing a journalist's duty to engage in solidarity journalism, or translating social justice into action to serve the people, not a specific political stance, is key amidst political conflict.

"It's not about taking sides with the Republicans or with the Democrats," Varma said. "It's about taking sides with the public, starting with its most vulnerable members. The press is here to stand with the people."

In addition to being the voice of the people, journalism can be a form of advocacy and raise awareness according to Gaylon Finklea Hecker, former reporter for the San Antonio Light and San Antonio Express-News and author. She used her platform in journalism to draw attention to the issues surrounding women's rights and equality.

"Our department took whatever was happening across the country, and it made it important to women," Finklea Hecker said. "[We covered] the first District Attorney in Bexar County, the first woman pilot for Braniff Airlines, the first woman who ran on a national ticket for Vice President.

We localized those stories into what was happening in San Antonio and Bexar County. It was a really fine time to be writing about women, [as] we were also trying to pass the Equal Rights



Amendment."

Finklea Hecker stressed the importance of shedding light on untold stories. In her book, "Growing Up in the Lone Star State: Notable Texans Remember Their Childhoods", Finklea Hecker and her co-author allow Texas stars like former Major League Baseball pitcher Nolan Ryan and other legends to reflect on their childhood in Texas, an aspect of life often overlooked by the press.

"This psychology of growing up [occurs] regardless of if we were rich or poor, in a big city, small city," Finklea Hecker said. "You have a childhood, and you start out as a blank slate."

Journalism, in addition to storytelling, can take on many different forms. For Matthew Watkins, the editor-in-chief of the Texas Tribune, reporting and journalism are means of researching issues and working to improve them.

"Sunlight is the best disinfectant," Watkins said. "The more we shine a light on something, the

more things might improve. If people don't know about the problems, if they don't know about the challenges, they won't be able to take action on them."

In the school setting, especially amid the turmoil surrounding freedom of the press, journalism in schools has also become a more debated topic. According to the Austin Independent School District (AISD), the district has a budget deficit of \$110 million. To account for this shortage, officials are looking to cut funding from different proposed school programs, some of which might include student publications such as the newspaper. While AISD has not confirmed this, Varma shared her first-hand accounts of the impact of journalism and reporting on student journalists, specifically through the university's student-run newspaper, The Daily Texan. She expressed why students need journalism.

"For the students that I know who are involved in The Daily Texan, [journalism] really shapes what they're doing in their day-to-day," Varma said, "and how they are coming to understand the contexts in which they study, work, and live."



graphics by Ellington Tough



# Recent Archaeological Discoveries

LAUREN VANDERVEEN | staff writer

In the ever-advancing field of archeology, innovative technology and the use of archaeological theory are reshaping archaeology and the way we understand history.

Technologies such as ground-penetrating radar (GPR), radiocarbon dating, and 3D scanning and printing help make the discovery and inspection of artifacts less complicated and invasive to the land by using computer models instead of active digging and excavation. Finding the artifacts is just the beginning because the actual interpretation is key to understanding the ancient civilizations or animals they belonged to, according to National Geographic. Using archaeological theories such as processual archeology, the scientific method, objective analysis, and Marxist archaeology, which allows for an accounting for class struggles and social relations of ancient times, has allowed archaeologists and anthropologists to interpret different aspects of the lives of the beings to which the artifacts or fossils belonged.

In the past ten years, archaeologists and anthropologists have made discoveries that have allowed humanity to understand more about ancient civilizations, according to Archaeology Magazine. In January 2025, archaeologists confirmed the existence of a labyrinth of tunnels stretching for miles underneath the Peruvian city of Cusco, Smithsonian Magazine reported. Using technologies such as GPR, archaeologists were able to confirm the whereabouts of the labyrinth without breaking the earth. David Brockhoff, a Planet Earth teacher at LASA, explained how GPR works and its uses in the field of archaeology.

"It essentially allows archaeologists to explore the subsurface without disturbing it at all," Brockhoff said. "Its potential uses include locating artifacts or structures that may be impossible to access, or preventing any kind of damage from happening."

LASA World Geography and AP Human Geography teacher Cody Moody explained how another archeological technology, Geographical Information System (GIS), can be useful for archaeologists. According to Moody, the system downloads data from various sources such as satellite imagery and scanned maps, often made using Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) technology. The data is then converted into digital formats, which allow for analysis and visualization.

"LiDAR discoveries and other important archeological

findings can be plugged into a GIS and can allow researchers to find and analyze spatial patterns and relationships with the data expressed in various map layers," Moody said.

Professor of Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin, Ronald Alan Covey, explained his process when interpreting a recently uncovered artifact. While there are different ways to interpret artifacts when one is uncovered, many archaeologists rely on archaeological theory, Covey described that the framework helps these scientists interpret the culture and give explanations for past events of the ancient civilizations.

"I will consider any theory that has a sort of material patterning that could be used to test it," Covey said. "We really remember that we don't want to project our way of thinking onto data that really is kind of ambiguous. We can't always assume that science is going to answer all the questions with what the material record offers us centuries after the fact."

In October 2024, archaeologists discovered ancient Mayan city ruins in the Southeastern state of Campeche. The ruins were found by accident, according to a report by the BBC. A team of archaeologists attached LiDAR to the bottom of a plane that was flown over uncharted areas. The data was processed, and an ancient city, which may have housed over 30,000 people, was found.

Covey explained the use of LiDAR in archaeological sites and how it works. He mentioned how many artifacts have been found through this technology, as it allows archaeologists to see things they may not have been able to before.

"So you take a plane and you put the LiDAR, maybe on the belly of the plane, fly back and forth over the region, and it shoots all of this light down," Covey said. "99 percent of that bounces off the forest and backs the plane. 1 percent maybe bounces down to what's below that and goes back to the plane, and then you clean off all that vegetation and you get the roads, pyramids, and population centers that literally couldn't be seen."

According to Covey, through the use of technologies such as these, the field of archaeology is becoming more efficient and less invasive. Additionally, they assist archaeologists in reconstructing ancient civilizations and allow humanity to increase its understanding of the past.

"I think it is important to understand ancient societies, at the base level, to satisfy our curiosity as humans," Brockhoff said. "I'm sure there are many things we can learn from studying human history, from different technologies we have lost over time, like roman concrete, to different ways of thinking or pieces of art, but more importantly than that, we just have a desire to understand what the heck has been going on in human history."



graphic by Leah Lashus

# Students'

from page 1

Lily Wilcox, a sophomore at LASA, is also participating in a CIEE program for the summer of 2025. Despite her growing concerns about the effects of the political climate internationally, she plans to study engineering in Berlin, Germany, for three weeks.

"I just wanted to visit a fun place, learn something new, and go to a camp that seemed exciting," Wilcox said. "I thought it'd be a great way to experience another culture while doing something productive."

Wilcox chose to study abroad because she found a program that interested her. She hopes to use the experience to further her understanding of engineering and explore new opportunities.

"I'm interested in engineering, so I looked for programs focused on that," Wilcox said. "I knew I wanted to go to Europe because it just seemed more fun. When I found an engineering program in Berlin, Germany, I was like, 'Okay, that's the one.'"

Although Wilcox had already decided to study abroad before she felt the political climate become tense, she admitted that the current environment has made her more anxious about her plans. Despite her concerns, she remains determined to follow through.

"I had already decided to study abroad before all the recent political craziness happened," Wilcox said. "But hearing about everything going on has definitely made me more nervous."

Wilcox is less concerned about how she might be received abroad and more worried about people trying to enter the U.S. She believes that most countries are not turning away American students, regardless of the political tensions.

"Other countries might be annoyed at the U.S., but they're not really stopping us from going there," Wilcox said. "Honestly, I'm more worried for people trying to get into the U.S. than for myself."

When it comes to how Americans are viewed abroad, Ferris expressed a different view from Wilcox. Ferris believes that the U.S.'s actions in terms of its foreign policies have led to negative stereotypes and how she may be viewed. She fears that other countries might generalize the American population into one group of people with the same ideals.

"I feel like many countries' ideas of Americans have already been tainted by the image of your average disrespectful tourist," Ferris said. "Our executive branch's recent decision to completely torch our international relations with tariffs and rude accusations only stands to significantly worsen this stereotype."

Barak Shraga, a sophomore at LASA, is also planning to go to Berlin through the same CIEE program as Wilcox. As a native-born Israeli and Jewish student, Shraga explained how he is increasingly aware of how rising anti-Semitism in Europe, combined with shifting political tensions and travel policies, might impact his experience abroad. Despite this, he noted that participation in CIEE is too valuable an experience to let pass by because of the current security confusion.

"The program in Berlin would give me a good foundation and a unique experience that not many others could have," Shraga said. "The CIEE representative came to talk to everyone at school, and I was interested. So I asked around to see who might wanna do it with me."

According to Shraga, the current political climate in the U.S.

has made him concerned about how he, as an American tourist, will be received. However, it's also made him cautious, especially as new international policies and shifting attitudes towards Americans and Jews gain traction globally.

"The political climate in the U.S. definitely made me more open to the idea of stepping outside the bubble and experiencing another country's perspective," Shraga said.

Shraga is aware that heightened restrictions, surveillance, and anti-Semitic incidents abroad could make the experience less safe, which worries him. However, he doesn't believe U.S. travel policies will directly prevent him from studying in Germany or affect his time there.

"I don't think that there are currently any policies specific to Germany, but there are definitely more restrictions and security when leaving or entering the U.S.," Shraga said.

While he feels relatively safe as an American student, it's his identity as a Jew that raises concerns, especially in light of global tensions and the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict. For Shraga, the rise in hate has become personal, and the implications for his identity, along with international conflicts, worries him more than the current U.S. politics.

"As an American, I do feel safe, but as a native-born Israeli and Jew, I think it's scarier to travel to Europe, especially," Shraga said. "There have been rising cases of anti-Semitism every day, even before October 7, and tensions right now are just as high as they've been in the past year and a half."

Shraga's family has asked him to downplay his identity while abroad, which he finds upsetting, but understandable given recent events and how they may influence foreign perceptions and treatment of Jewish travelers. His concern isn't just about physical safety, it's also about being asked to hide who he is.

"My parents have told me specifically not to speak Hebrew or 'advertise' my Judaism while I'm there, which is very upsetting," Shraga said. "I'm not that religious of a person, but the principle that people are yet again blanketing their hate and rage over one group of people who have no say in what happens in foreign affairs."

Still, Shraga believes it's important to distinguish between being American and agreeing with American policies, especially in politically charged times. He wants his travel experience to reflect his values, not those of any government.

"Being from America or American does not equate to agreeing with American policy or American leadership," Shraga said. "We do not wish to represent our country, but rather to represent our own values as students who are unable to vote."



graphic by Asher Zvi-Nova

# THE LINE

## Global News

### Trade Deal Takes Time

On May 6, a deal between the United Kingdom (UK) and India was struck up to make it easier for UK firms to export whisky, cars, and additional products to India, as well as cut taxes on India's clothing and footwear exports, BBC reported. The agreement took roughly three years to reach, with both sides appreciating it, with Narendra Modi, prime minister of India, calling it "ambitious and mutually beneficial." The lower tariffs on Indian products and the levies falling on British exports allowed both sides to settle what some are calling a historic milestone.

### American Pope Elected

On May 7 and May 8, the Conclave to elect the next Pope of the Catholic Church was held after the death of Pope Francis on April 21. Cardinal Robert Prevost was elected, taking on the name of Pope Leo XIV. Pope Leo is the first American-born pope, and his beliefs are generally of that of a moderate within the church. The Conclave is a secretive election that must begin within 15 to 20 days after the death of the Pope. The secret election sequestered all 252 cardinals, despite only 133 cardinals being eligible to vote due to the voting cap at 80 years old. NBC News reported that of the 133, 108 were appointed by Pope Francis in his 12 years as Pope, making up more than 80 percent of those voting. Pope Francis was seen as a controversial pope due to his more progressive views, according to the New York Times. However, Pope Francis was still well-liked by most for his humble demeanor, Business Insider reported following his death.

## National News

### Six Flags Sinks

On May 1, Six Flags announced it's making cuts in its portfolio by closing a park and adjoining water rides, Chron reported. Six Flags America and Hurricane Harbor in Bowie, Maryland are the locations expecting to shut down at the end of the 2025 season. Currently, the future for the Texas parts is uncertain if they are part of the portfolio being looked at for being sold, but the company is still undergoing massive changes since their doors opened up 20 years ago, according to the Orlando Sentinel.

### Met Gala Makes History

On May 5, A-list celebrities, fashion figures, and other influential individuals gathered at the steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, adorned with outfits fitting to the title of the exhibition: "Superfine: Tailoring Black Style," with the dress code being "Tailored for You," according to CBS News. The co-chairs were ASAP Rocky, Pharrell Williams, Colman Domingo, Lewis Hamilton, and Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour. The exhibit aimed to acknowledge how clothing styles contributed to and influenced Black history. The Gala centered on the Black identity and Black designers for the first time in the Met's history, which has been around since 1948, TIME reported.

## State News

### Mosquito Mayhem

Beginning in May and running through October, mosquito season in Texas pesters residents every year. According to KVUE, following warmer weather patterns in recent years made it so mosquito season is larger and longer. The City of Austin Mosquito Prevention Team urges residents to drain standing water as it could become a breeding ground for mosquitoes in as little as one teaspoon. Additionally, they say using insect repellent can prevent mosquitoes and other insect bites. In addition to itchy bites, mosquitoes carry many diseases, namely West Nile Virus which, according to Austin Public Health, can develop into a severe illness in one of 150 people infected.

### Vouchers Vex Public Schools

On May 3, the Texas Legislation and Gov. Greg Abbott signed legislation into law allowing a school voucher program, granting money to Texas families who attend private schools. Expected to start on Sep. 1, 2026, the state of Texas will give participating families about \$10,000 to pay for their kids' private schooling, according to the Texas Tribune. Senate Bill Law 2 has been a goal of Abbott since his reelection campaign in 2022 where he promised school choice.

## Local News

### ACL Lineup Announced

On May 6, the Austin City Limits (ACL) lineup was published at 9 a.m., with the festival spanning two weekends on October 3-5 and 10-12 at Zilker Park. The setlist this year features a diverse range of headliners, namely Sabrina Carpenter, Hozier, Doja Cat, The Strokes, Doechii, Luke Combs, and John Summit. Approximately 450,000 people attended ACL in 2024 over the course of the two weekends, which is double the attendance of Coachella, at 180,000, according to Fifty Grande.

### Homeless Sites Close Down

On May 6, the City of Austin announced the closure of two homeless encampments after threats to safety and flooding concerns, KXAN reported. 51 unhoused people were relocated from the Colorado River Wildlife Sanctuary and the Govalle Neighborhood Park to the Northbridge and Southbridge shelters. According to the city's Homeless Strategy Office (HSO), the area posed concerns to wildlife in addition to growing concerns of flooding as the area sits upon a flood-prone riverbank, according to KVUE.

# COFFEEHOUSE

REBECA GONZALEZ | student life  
ISABEL KRAMER | editors

Every year, at the end of May, after months of planning, LASA's student concert will open its doors to the community. From Rolling Stone covers to original pieces, Coffeehouse has a diverse showcase of performances that lasts all night long. Between choosing a venue and creating a setlist, the live music event takes the coordination of many making this intricate event both daunting for performers and stressful for planners.

Each year, Coffeehouse is planned by LASA parents and students within the songwriting class taught by LASA teacher Corey Snyder. LASA senior Jasmine Tea has worked with the Coffeehouse since her junior year. This year, for her final year at Coffeehouse, Tea is returning as a host and performer despite no longer being a student of the songwriting class.

"It's 75 percent, 80 percent of people who already have interest in performing and songwriting," Tea said. "But I also think that there's a lot of people that are open to try and to just want to perform

"I think getting to play at Coffeehouse is a great opportunity to perform for others and put a positive spin on the tiresome end of the year."

- Calvin Fedyszyn, LASA Junior

and be part of Coffeehouse."

The criteria for participating in Coffeehouse are very minuscule. Although the majority of performers are experienced in music or are part of the songwriting class, there is no audition requirement besides talent.

"The first option is in personal auditions, which are scheduled, and I feel like these are less popular, since it takes a lot of time outside of school," Tea said. "And the second option is to submit a video, showcasing, while auditioning. And the majority of the people who apply do that."

LASA junior Charles Boyle is another student in the songwriting class. Boyle works in publicity and auditions for the event, specifically with online video submissions for auditions. Boyle discussed how he views preparation for this year's Coffeehouse as positive.

"It's been good," Boyle said. "The auditions have been a little bit slow this year, but for live, I think we've got a lot online and videos, so I think it's been good."

LASA senior Sarah Moser is also a part of the songwriting class and is in charge of social media as publicity chair. Moser focuses intensely on the technical aspects of Coffeehouse rather than performing.

"Sometimes

it's hard to make social media posts that get a lot of attention, and garner more followers and stuff, and spread the news, because, you know, we want to keep it interesting," Moser said. "You want to hop on those trends to get as many people to know about Coffeehouse and inform them about Coffeehouse."

However, once the day is set and doors are open, the stress for all involved is far from over. LASA senior Jack Davidson is preparing for his third Coffeehouse and has learned the feeling of performing on stage.

"I haven't been stressing out like I did my first year, and my second year on the plate was probably a bigger undertaking than this year," Davidson said. "I've got a more stripped-down performance this year, a simpler kind of thing. And so at this point, I'm really just having fun and am really excited to perform."

This year, Davidson will perform a Rolling Stones cover of "You Can't Always Get What You Want." He explained his process for selecting the songs he will perform and discussed why he chose this specific song.

"I chose this song because I could incorporate a loss acquired into it," Davidson said. "The message I'd like to give the whole school, you know, you can't always get what you want in life. It hits well for an end-of-year kind of thing because it's definitely a very conclusive song. I guess I'll do that little British accent for the intro of the song."

Over the years, Davidson has found preparation as a performer for Coffeehouse to be complicated with planning. Coordinating a band or practice can be difficult with Advanced Placement and final tests.

"You're mostly worried about getting the different parts of the act to fit well together and make sure that everybody else is well prepared and that your equipment is ready," Davidson said. "That's what goes wrong for me most of the time is forgetting stuff at home. Or, you know. Not having enough rehearsal time."

After months of planning, auditions, and scheduling, the final step is performing. For Davidson, no performance comes without its nerves.

"It's always adrenaline," Davidson said. "When you have that many people, it's almost easier because you don't see specific people. I always have sunglasses on, too. You never have to actually look at people, you know?"

However, not all performers wear sunglasses, and for Tea, hosting and performing for an audience she can see can be a heavy task. However, she believes that with experience, the nerves fade away.

"[It's] so terrifying," Tea said. "You can look down, there's just a sea of people, especially when we were hosting. We look down, there are just so, so many people. But I feel like, since I've done it so many times, it's gotten a lot easier because I've gotten more comfortable, but it's still very, very scary."

Moser and Boyle believe participating in songwriting has helped them grow, although they may have disliked it initially. LASA senior Jeffery Norman shares a similar sentiment.

"It's been pretty enjoyable," Norman said. "I hate it, but I love it. It's pushed me out of my comfort zone a lot."

After multiple years performing, Davidson has noticed a trend in his nerves regarding the size of the audience. Unexpectedly, for him, the more has been the merrier when it comes to managing his performance anxiety.

"You get a little adrenaline going through and cheeks flush up," Davidson said. "But you can't tell because it's dark lighting. I definitely feel that every time, unless it's a small crowd. When you have like 1300 people, it almost becomes easier than a 50-person group. It's strange because it's so many people that they kind of blur into being no people."

However, each performer's story is different. LASA junior Calvin Fedyszyn is

# Coffeehouse

performing in his first year and believes Coffeehouse is important because it allows artists to showcase their talent in a unique opportunity. "I've been playing the drums for a long chunk of my life and still, people who I've known for years and years will hear that I play and will have had no idea," Fedysyn said. "So, I think getting to play at Coffeehouse is a great opportunity to perform for others and put a positive spin on the tiresome end

"All my time is spent either holding a guitar or sitting at a piano. Or like whistling. Whistling when I'm walking through the hallways. I always have some sort of musical thing to do."

- Jack Davidson, LASA Senior

of the year."

Davidson's love for music began at a much younger age. His catalyst was listening to the piano at a church while attending a funeral.

"Ever since I heard that, I started playing piano in the cafeteria," Davidson said. "I heard that and wanted to recreate it myself. So I would just skip my computer science class in my freshman year to learn piano. Ever since then, I've become a piano player. Now it's just a thing I do all the time. All my time is spent either holding a guitar or sitting at a piano. Or like whistling. Whistling when I'm walking through the hallways. I always have some sort of musical thing to do."

In a full circle moment, Davidson's final Coffeehouse will be centered in the same place he first fell in love with music, a church. For him, this makes Coffeehouse one for the books.

"I'm excited to hear the LASA choir, and I'm excited for them to hear how I combine the choir and collaborate," Davidson said. "The crowd is gonna feel the energy. The venue this year is really good. I'm excited for the sound quality improvements I'm anticipating because that church, they've got like a full live production set up there."

After months of preparation, Moser agrees with Davidson on the unique energy this year's Coffeehouse will bring. Ultimately, similarly to many performers, Moser is anticipating the concert.

"I think it's gonna be a really fun atmosphere," Moser said. "I'm looking forward to watching people perform. There's gonna be a lot of great acts, and I'm really excited for it."

After years of attending and participating, Tea sees Coffeehouse as a crucial tradition in LASA culture. Although she and many performers are leaving the stage for a final time this year, she believes many new, talented acts are coming in and the future for Coffeehouse is bright.

"I hope it still continues, and I hope people always audition and come together and make bands," Tea said. "It's not a dying tradition."



# Pencils Down: LASA Cheating Reaches New Extremes

LAUREN VANDERVEEN | staff writer

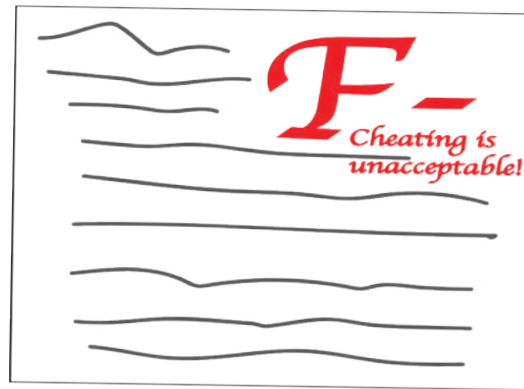
Throughout high schools around the country, academic dishonesty has become increasingly prevalent. Since the 2020 pandemic, 29% of students have reported having an increase in their cheating behavior, according to a study done by Wiley, a global publishing company that features educational resources and scholarly writing.

With the advancement of the internet and technologies such as artificial intelligence, many students have found new and innovative ways to cheat. Some LASA teachers found that after the pandemic, the number of students caught cheating was extremely high, leading educators to implement measures to limit students' access to technologies that are used to cheat. LASA Biology Teacher Emily Kossa explained the methods she uses in her classroom to combat this problem.

"Depending on the type of assignment, it can sometimes be difficult to effectively control how students engage with the assignment outside of the classroom," Kossa said. "While I do occasionally use other tools as well, the one I use most commonly is screen monitors like GoGuardian for in-class assessments or assignments."

LASA Algebra 2 Teacher Lane Cospers explained that cheating can have major consequences if caught, such as referrals, suspensions, and failing grades on the assignment. Even if the student is not caught, there are still repercussions. According to her, these consequences can greatly affect students in the long run.

"Cheating makes students intellectually weak," Cospers said. "They don't learn to solve problems; they learn to fake it ... They avoid effort and end up believing they're incapable without cheating. It guarantees failure later, especially in math ... When the pressure, grades, college admissions, and parental



expectations become intense enough, they make a calculated choice to cheat anyway, prioritizing immediate relief over future competence."

When the opportunity presents itself to cheat, especially on assignments without teacher supervision, students are more likely to seize the opportunity, according to Wiley. Additionally,

Kossa noticed that certain assignments or situations caused more cheating than others.

"I think certain types of assignments lend themselves to cheating more easily than others, especially with the whole AI situation," Kossa said. "In general, though, I tend to see the most academic dishonesty on smaller assignments like homework and daily work assignments."

High school environments can be very intense, and, as a result, many students may feel a strong need to do well in school and receive good grades. According to the National Institute of Health, college applications have become increasingly competitive, so many students may feel the need to engage in academic dishonesty to keep up. LASA freshman Lucinda Tedesco elaborated on why she thinks students feel the need to cheat for their grades.

"I see people cheating all the time, because it's such a high-pressure environment," Tedesco said. "People feel like if they get a bad grade, then it'll determine their sense of worth. ... I think a lot of it comes down to being really stressed and being scared to fail."

In a world where students can google anything they need and AI can write essays, preventing cheating is a challenge. Cheating can have severe academic consequences, but Kossa believes it can also damage how a person views you.

"A person can't just make themselves forget that you lied, cheated, or were dishonest in some way," Kossa said. "It becomes part of who you are to them."

graphic by Paxton Tidrick

graphic by Paxton Tidrick

graphic by Leah Lashus



MRIDHULA KUMARAVEL | staff writer

Summer Friend/Social Section:

Dear Lib,

My friend group is going through some strange stuff right now. My friend (who goes to a different school) sent out a message to a sub-group chat (we have multiple group chats) saying that she's going to cut ties with everyone because she believes that our friendships aren't what she needs at the moment. I also heard from another friend that she had been ghosting everyone in our friend group for a while. This confused me because I had been chatting with her for a long time, and she hadn't ghosted me! She had sent out the 'cutting ties' message on a Wednesday, and she had just responded to a message that I had sent her two days after that! Also, I have good reason to believe (because my other friend told me) that she may or may not have a crush on me. Coincidentally, I also have a crush on her, but I still have no idea what's going on. What do you think I should do here?

A Very Confused Friend/Crush

Dear A Very Confused Friend/Crush,

First of all, wow. That's a lot to process, and it makes sense that you're feeling stuck and unsure. Friendships tangled with feelings can be complicated on their own, and especially now that you've got this group dynamic with unclear signals in the mix! I think that you should reach out to her privately with a kind, honest message to let her know you care and are there if she wants to talk; don't pressure her, just offer support. Since she messaged you after saying she was cutting ties, it sounds like she sees you differently from the rest of the group. Be mindful of her boundaries and give her space if she needs it. If you have a crush on her, take things slow and focus on rebuilding trust and clarity first. Most importantly, take care of your feelings too; it's okay to feel confused! Good luck!

Lib

Summer Glow Up Section:

Dear Lib,

Should I get a low taper fade? I've been thinking about getting a low taper fade for a while now. I saw a few people at school with it, and it looks really good, but I'm not sure if it'll look right on me. Do you think it's a good haircut? I don't wanna do too much, but I kinda wanna switch it up too. But then I'll get memed. What should I do?

Coolboy in Cooltown

Dear Coolboy in Cooltown,

First off- love the name. Second, the low taper fade is actually a super clean cut, and it's great if you want to switch things up without doing something super dramatic. It frames most face shapes well, grows out nicely, and still gives you that fresh, sharp look. If you're nervous about getting memed (which let's be real, every friend group does no matter what you do), just own it. Confidence makes any haircut 10x better. Worst case? Hair grows back. Best case? You walk in on Monday looking like a whole upgrade. Rooting for you!

Lib

Summer Bucket List:

Dear Lib,

Where can a 15-year-old find a job this summer? What are some good first jobs with no experience?

Clueless Freshman

Dear Clueless Freshman,

15 year olds aren't typically hired because most jobs are 16+, but it could happen. The first thing you want to do is create a resume. Make it professional: list your achievements both in school and out. It's okay if it isn't super padded, just be authentic. Get feedback on it from your parents and tailor it so that it suits the type of jobs you want to apply for. You can look on Indeed, ZipRecruiter, LinkedIn, and autofill all of your information and apply to as many jobs as possible. If this doesn't work, whenever you're running errands with your family, you can ask to speak to a manager and politely ask if they're hiring. It can be a tedious process, but it's so worth it in the end!

Lib

## New Club Spins Into a Success

ASHER ZVI-NOVA | staff writer

When walking into AP Government and AP U.S. History Teacher John Goodell's room, one might expect test retakes or people discussing history, but recently the room has been taken over by the Fidget Spinner club. With snacks, celebrations, contests, and, of course, lots of spinners, they've transformed the classroom into a space for lovers of the toy.

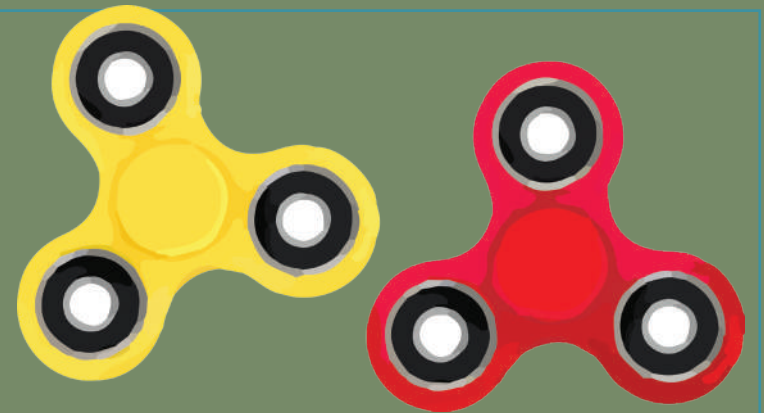
Club leaders, LASA juniors Sophie Borden and Jack Warden, are easy to recognize when wearing their hand-embroidered fidget spinner shirts. When Warden described the formation of the club, he explained that the club wasn't originally about having fun.

"I had a friend at McCallum that was selling fidget spinners, and it was really successful," Warden said. "So I thought, you know what? I could make some money on the side. I would say to people I was spreading the love of fidget spinners, but it didn't really work."

Sometime during October, Warden and Borden became friends, and she learned of his plan. That's when she had the idea of starting a club together, so they approached Goodell, their U.S. History teacher, who quickly said yes.

"Now we're just giving them away for free and doing activities and creating opportunities for people," Warden said. "For instance, during Valentine's, we made fidget spinner Valentine cards. We usually have snacks as well, and we give out free spinners to new people when they sign up."

Along with an Instagram account, the club advertises by putting up posters, creating announcements, and using word of mouth. Once people join the club, the leaders organize



activities as well.

"We sometimes have spin-offs, which is when everyone spins their fidget spinner at the same time and we see who lasts the longest," Borden said. "We also have a lot of fidget spinner-related crafts. For Christmas, we laser cut fidget spinners out of wood to make little ornaments."

To build on the club's success this year, different club members have pitched bigger projects to end the year on a high note. From choreographing a music video to hosting a potluck, Warden hinted that the club has even more activities planned for the future.

"We have a lot of ideas," Warden said. "We want to expand with more ambitious projects, we want to do some publicity stuff, and [build] our target audience. Because what it's really about is bringing the message of fidget spinners to as many people as possible."

## Raptor in the Wild: Delaney Rawson

ASHER ZVI-NOVA | staff writer

Each issue, the LASA Liberator interviews an alumni of the high school on their achievements now as a raptor "in the wild." This not only includes interviews focused on their careers and achievements but their time at LASA and the effect the school had on their future. This issue, UCLA LGBTQ+ Healthcare Fellow and LASA Alumni Delaney Rawson was interviewed for the story.

LASA Liberator: What was your experience like at LASA?

Rawson: I think LASA offered the opportunity to really explore whatever topics I was interested in in a way that was facilitated by both the community and the teachers. Also, it really challenged me academically in a way that very much prepared me for higher education. I think my hardest classes at LASA were harder than any of my college classes, which was good. A challenge, but good.

LASA Liberator: During medical school, you were a student director for a pride clinic in San Antonio. What was that like?

Rawson: It was a growth opportunity. Our medical school had a number of student-run clinics. There were clinics for the unhoused, for refugees, or for women with substance abuse [problems]. My first year of medical school, they opened a brand new clinic which served uninsured LGBTQ patients in the community. We were in charge of organizing volunteers, making sure they were able to provide competent care for our LGBTQ patients, and helping the faculty get their feet under them. We were trying to set up a system that did a good job, both for the students who were volunteering there and for our patients. That space was when I fell in love with LGBTQ care.

I have never seen patients so appreciative for such suboptimal care. We would have patients waiting hours, and when we asked for feedback, they would still say everything was perfect. I was like, 'Everything is not perfect,' but I am glad that we exist because so many of our patients have just been mistreated by the healthcare system that I decided to march. Facing that injustice made me committed to doing better as a member of the healthcare system.

LASA Liberator: What are your favorite parts of the job?

Rawson: I think my favorite part is how special the

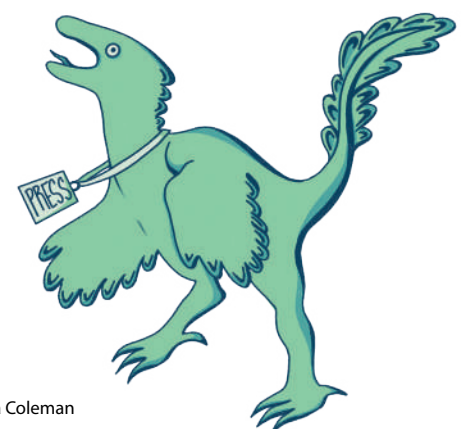
relationship with your patients is. I already liked primary care and that relationship, but being someone's HIV doctor, being the first person who tells them that it's okay, and that they're going to be okay, is a really special space ... Being someone's gender health provider is really getting to watch people blossom. And being like a lighthouse in the sea of chaos and political unrest is a really special place for me to occupy.

LASA Liberator: What would you tell LASA students interested in pursuing a medical career or interested in helping the LGBTQ+ community?

Rawson: I think there's a lot that can be done at every level, even just advocating for kindness and compassion. Medicine is a really challenging field, and I think anyone who's interested in it should make sure that they're in it for a good reason, because you're gonna have to fall back on that reason a lot throughout the seven-plus years of medical training.

LASA Liberator: Do you ever look back on your time at LASA, and if so, what do you remember strongest?

Rawson: For one, I met my husband there. We think about it a lot because we met in Algebra 2, sitting next to each other. I also think, especially when I was still in [medical] school, I would reflect back on the academic rigor that was provided from the confidence a lot of my teachers had [in me] that I could do right. They would really challenge me, but they also expected me to rise to that occasion. And I think that was a really productive space to be in, and it led me to believe that I could do so much more. I don't know, but hopefully I accomplished it. I think I did okay.



graphics by Amelia Coleman

The ABCs for The LASA Raptor School Community

JAY WILKERSON | club contributor

This is an infographic meant to display cultural, athletic, and academic aspects of LASA through the ABCs.

**A** LLEY CAT PLAYERS 

**T** ANNEX

**B** ATTL E OF THE BOOKS

**H** ELL PROJECT

**N** OCHE DE LAS ESTRELLAS

**U** LTIMATE FRISBEE

**C** OFFEEHOUSE

**I** N THE TIME OF THE BUTTERFLIES

**O** CKLEBERRY

**V** ELOCITY DANCE TEAM

**D** YNASTY DANCE TEAM

**J** UNIORITIS 

**P** ALS

**W** INTER SHOWCASE

**E** SCANDELL DUO

**K** EEP LASA WEIRD

**Q** UIZ BOWL

**X** C & TRACK 

**F** IESTA BOWLS

**L** IP DUB

**R** IP EM RAPS!

**Y** OUTH AND GOVERNMENT

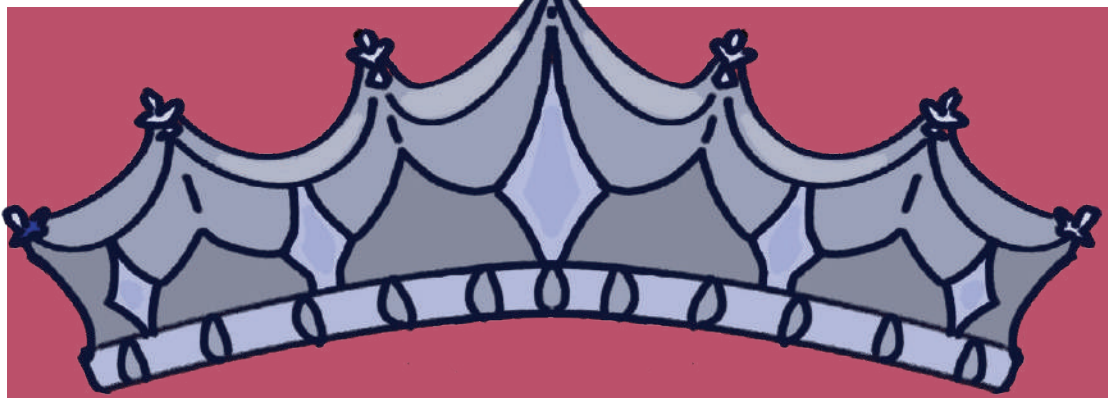
**G** ANNEX 

**M** ILK JUG CHALLENGE

**S** ENIOR SUNRISE 

**Z** IPPY SILKIE CHICKEN

graphic by Eloisa Espetia-Gorostieta



Let There Be a Queen!

ADEL WELLS | club contributor

Prom and homecoming dances have been a part of American culture since the early twentieth century, according to PBS's WHY. Though the first recorded prom, held in 1884 at Smith College, may have looked different than LASA's, which was held April 5 at the Bob Bullock museum, much of the traditions remain the same: Long dresses, spiffed-up suits, dancing, punch, shouted conversations, and, the prom court, to name a few. However, as we move further into the 21st century, even the typical prom court ritual of having a queen and a king is changing.

In recent years, LASA has gotten rid of gender requirements for prom and homecoming court, which has led to a court of only boys such as in the most recent prom. Emiliano Moreno is a junior, and he said that having a genderless prom court is not a bad change.

"I feel keeping it gender neutral is always a good thing," Moreno said.

Although he was ambivalent to the actual rule change, the new trends are less appreciated by female counterparts. Lyra Siano is a junior, and she believes that a court of only boys was not a good outcome.

"I think the fact that there [were] all guys ... was kind of lame," Siano said.

Carys DeCrane is a senior, and she agreed that she found the all-boys court to be lame; however, she was comparably less concerned about the change. According to her, although the change to a court of only boys is disappointing to some, it still remains

true to the spirit of LASA as it reflects what people find funny.

"It's annoying, but it's reflective of who people find funny, not really about popularity," DeCrane said.

For DeCrane and Moreno, the fact that the court did not contain any women was overpowered by the hilarity of LASA Senior Mills, a winner of the senior prom court. Moreno described Mills as his inspiration, while DeCrane appreciated his hilarity.

"Prom Court is about who is iconic and funny," DeCrane said. "Mills wore sparkly spandex and tearaway pants, so he deserved it".

While both Moreno, Siano, and DeCrane found the prom court to be entertaining, Moreno remarked that girls, more so than boys, seem to have a problem with not having women on the court. He stated that while he did not find it to be an issue, it was important for women to express their own opinion.

"The prom court being all guys, I feel like it doesn't really matter," Moreno said. "As a man, I have no problem, [but women] probably need to give their own opinion."


According to junior Rebecca Van Bavel, having a genderless court is not an issue, but rather, a positive, as the gendered expectations are not pushed onto the nominees. Despite this, the all-boys court is disheartening for some.

"I think the gender equality is good; that we're not forcing our homecoming court into, like, a guy and a girl," Van Bavel said. "I also think it's sad that it's been all guys this whole time."

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# Public Action Makes Waves At South

MARGOT MORGAN | entertainment editor

When thinking of South by Southwest (SXSW), many automatically think of the music or technology prominently advertised to the public, but there is more to SXSW than its entertainment value. Beneath its showcases is a platform for nonprofit organizations and social causes to inspire meaningful change.

SXSW, held annually every March, is a festival for showcasing new media, music, and tech. It highlights many nonprofit organizations whose goal is to raise awareness and educate the public about their important causes.

Primarily Primates is an animal sanctuary located outside of San Antonio that rescues abused and abandoned animals from the pet trade, the entertainment industry, and laboratories.

Nicole Benson, a volunteer and advocate at Primarily Primates, provides animals with a safe home for the rest of their lives in an effort to make up for some of the abuse they have experienced from humans.

"[The animals] are placed within our care so we can help them recover and have a good life for whatever years that they have left," Benson said. "And so we usually acquire at least a couple of animals every single year. Unfortunately, we have had to turn down animals. We just can't save them all. We just don't have enough space or enough resources, but we take as many as possible."

Primarily Primates' goal coming into SXSW was to educate people on pet ownership and to protect animals from bad habitats. According to Bendson, very few people know about their sanctuary because it is not open to the public to protect the animals from continued exploitation by humans.

"Our biggest impact we're hoping for is to educate people on the perils of primate pet ownership and encourage people to support organizations that do not use animal testing," Benson said. "We would like to eventually be able to go out of business because there are no other animals that need us, but we will be here for as long as we can, as long as there are animals out there that are in trouble."

With a shared goal of educating the public, the Human Rights Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights globally in authoritarian regimes, is raising awareness on the dangers of Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDC) with the CBDC Tracker. According to Zac Guignard, author of the Human Rights Foundation's Financial Freedom Report, CBDCs are problematic because the banks are controlled by governments, which he believes could prohibit your freedom.

"The problem is when you live under a dictatorship, you can't bank with your government without them being able to surveil all of your financial activity, freeze your funds, set expiration dates on your savings, impose bad interest rates ...," Guignard said. "People in that country wake up, and their savings could be worth half the amount than it was the night before because of a dictator devaluing a currency overnight."

The Human Rights Foundation is focused not only on digital currencies, such as CBDCs, but also with helping other organizations that support human rights. By educating and supporting these organizations and the people within them, their goal is to push back against governmental control of financial systems and create more economic freedom.

# Changes Come to SXSW

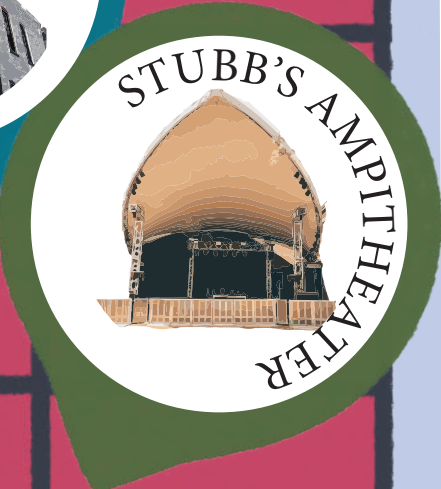
GEORGIA FINK | entertainment editor

With the Austin Convention Center beginning to be remodeled, South By Southwest (SXSW) has come up with a "reimagined South By Southwest experience", according to the website, leading to a festival that is one week long instead of two. Although the event is shortening, the music showcase will be one day longer. It is now seven days long and occurs at the same time as the rest of the festival. With this shortening of the festival, they are also planning to lower ticket prices to make the event more affordable. Other changes have come to SXSW partially due to, according to the Austin Chronicle, the president and chief of programming, Hugh Forrest, exiting from SXSW. Multiple staff members also left, including the senior leadership for the Music and Comedy portion of the festival, causing even more change for SXSW.

SXSW will be two days shorter, but the music festival will now last 7 days instead of the previous six. However, the decrease in days means the music festival is happening during the rest of SXSW, meaning there is no more dedicated music weekend

graphic by Megan Gerold

The Austin Convention Center will be undergoing a remodel until 2029, prompting changes in the festival for SXSW 2026



# Paper to Pixels

ABBEY WU  
TESSA WHITNEY | staff writers

As technology continues to reshape the art world, many of today's graphic artists are merging traditional processes like screen printing with modern tools such as Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator. Flatstock, South By Southwest's art exhibition featuring some of the world's most influential gig poster artists, puts this evolution on full display by presenting limited edition handmade posters that blend analog technique with digital precision.

Since its establishment in the early 2000s, Flatstock has become a hub for artists wanting to gain experience in visual design. It was founded by the American Poster Institute nonprofit organization, which was formed in 2002 to support the poster-making community and promote the art form as a legitimate, collectible medium.

For Christian Alarcón, an artist who designs gig posters under the name Chris.is.in.crisis, digital tools like Adobe Illustrator and drawing pads make the creation process much easier. He explained that working digitally is both practical and empowering, allowing him to more easily transpose his ideas into his artwork.

"I don't know how to use a tablet, so everything you see here is done with a mousepad," Alarcón said. "And usually in Illustrator, I use vectors, which makes it easier to create the images."

Using a blend of traditional and digital techniques, Alarcón begins his process with pencil and paper sketches before scanning them into Illustrator, where he then redraws the image using a mousepad. According to Alarcón, this technique allows for more precision and control, simplifying the poster-making process.

"I make a lot of mistakes," Alarcón said. "Digital tools make it easy to go back."

Though he typically sticks to using Illustrator and Photoshop, Alarcón elaborated on the impacts that additional online resources have on the art industry. He recognized that these tools make it easier for others to get into art and evolve their craft. This allows for more artists to fight artificial intelligence (AI), which has become more prominent across the internet.

"It's also a way to fight all the tools that are coming with AI," Alarcón said. "I'm not very good at drawing with a pencil, so it's great for me to be able to use digital resources."

Flynn Prejean, a poster artist at BadMoon Studios, has utilized digital software in a different way. He explained that he prefers to draw his work on a tablet instead of using a mouse.

"Most everything is hand-drawn," Prejean said. "It saves a step because I don't have to scan it and clean the art up."

By Southwest



**SPREADING THE WORD** Guignard describing The Human Rights Foundation in the South By Southwest expo, photo by Margot Morgan

“We have a development fund, so we give grants, in service of open source projects, to people building freedom tools for people living under dictatorships,” Guignard said. “We also have a nonprofit webinar, so we help nonprofits. We help onboard them onto decentralized and open-source money instead so that they can push back against the authoritarian regimes they’re living under.”

Another human rights nonprofit at SXSW is the Bail Project, whose goal is to help people in minority groups who can’t afford bail to get the bail money they need. Shannon Soper, the director of creative and marketing, explained that the Bail Project’s goal is to create a revolving bail: using the bail returned from previous bails to fund future bails.

“Once clients go back to court, we get 100% of that bail back,” Soper said. “Then we use that to help bail out the next person, so we call it a revolving bail. At the same time, we’re working to change policy and services. We’re working to pass bail reform across the country to ensure that justice isn’t based on clients making bail.”

Even though the Bail Project has already bailed out over 32,000 people across the country, their mission is not only to bail out people, but also to pass bail reform laws, which is another reason why they were at SXSW. Their presence in Texas highlights their efforts to fight proposed legislation that would make getting out of jail pretrial more difficult.

“Part of the reason why we’re in Texas is that they’re trying to pass two regressive bills that we’re trying to stop from going through,” Soper said. “Those bills would expand pretrial detention, make it harder for people to get out of jail pretrial. These are going against the people who are pursuing the legal system properly.”

The nonprofit organizations at SXSW were especially drawn to the festival’s large and engaged audience, which is passionate about innovation and making an impact. Many organizations saw it as a unique opportunity to connect with people who are interested in creating a better future. If you are interested in supporting or learning more about any of these nonprofit organizations, visit [primarilyprimates.org](http://primarilyprimates.org), [bailproject.org](http://bailproject.org), and [hrf.org](http://hrf.org) for more information.

“SXSW does have the impact of a million, and has a lot of really engaged people who are interested in causes and the arts,”

Soper said. “We work with a lot of influencers and people from tech, so we found that the people here are very engaged, very interested in the problem.”

For Prejean, the appeal of technology lies in the efficiency of the process. Despite this, he still insists on preserving the tangible elements of his work, so he often utilizes paper in his creations.

“I like that tactile sensation of pen to paper,” Prejean said. “It brings back the memories of doing it when you were a child.”

Prejean is open to exploring new technologies in his art, as long as they fit into his process of creation. However, he emphasized that he draws the line at AI-generated art.

“A lot of digital tools are essentially time savers, which is great if you’re working as a freelance artist,” Prejean said. “It has an impact. In my opinion, a good impact. If you’re talking about AI, I’m not a fan of that.”



**PAINTING THE POSTERS** Max Wesoloski, an artist at Flatstock, stands with his posters. Wesoloski uses digital tools to color his posters after drawing them on paper. photo by Abbey Wu

Local Artist Takes On Flatstock

Dan Rissom is an independent illustrator based in Austin, Texas. This year, he attended South by Southwest’s (SXSW) Flatstock event to showcase and sell his art. Flatstock is SXSW’s free art exhibition that showcases some of the most influential poster artists around the globe.

LASA Liberator: What’s your name? Where are you from?

Grissom: My name is Dan Grissom. I’m originally from Louisiana, kind of rural, middle of nowhere, Louisiana, but I’ve been in Austin since 2006.

LASA Liberator: Why did you come to Austin?

Grissom: I came here after I finished grad school. I didn’t have a plan in mind, but I was playing music, and I had some friends who lived here. They had a room open in their house.

LASA Liberator: How long have you been doing illustrations?

Grissom: I’ve been doing art in some form my whole life. I started as a painter. I did some letterpress printing and block printing. Then I got into screen printing and doing my illustration, and maybe like 15 years ago, started doing more of that. But before then, I worked more as a designer, a graphic designer, and a painter.

LASA Liberator: How do you think Austin has affected your art style?

Grissom: I think that Austin has a lot of people who value local [art]. That’s important. I don’t know if it’s affecting my style, except for the fact that just different print shops and artists that I’ve become friends with in Austin. I think Austin is a very nurturing place for artists, and we all know each other and comment on each other’s posts, even the people that we’re in competition with. We’re all supportive of each other, as well.

LASA Liberator: Would you say the art community in Austin is a great place to be?

Grissom: Yeah. It’s not as big as [others]. Some cities have much bigger art scenes, but maybe because it’s a little bit smaller. It’s a little bit tighter. You pretty quickly get to know a lot of the other artists and the developer community well.

LASA Liberator: You said you do screen printing. What kind?

Grissom: All the concert posters and all the colorful stuff you see are screen printed. Block printing is more like you’re making a big stamp. Essentially, you’re like carving a surface, putting ink on it, and stamping it. Screen printing is more like a stencil, so you have a screen that you sort of use in your design process. You create stencils for each color. Color has to be printed one color at a time, so you’re custom-mixing the ink. You’re printing the color, letting that dry, and then for the next color, let that dry, and so on. These prints vary from three or four colors up to seven or eight colors, and then you can also work with the transparency of the colors, so you can print like a light blue. I printed out of my garage on completely homemade equipment for years, and then, about a year and a half ago, I moved into a warehouse space that still mostly made equipment, but just more space for that equipment.

LASA Liberator: Do you have a preference for a block versus a screen?

Grissom: Yeah, it depends on what I’m trying to do. Screen printing works out better for doing large runs than block printing. Especially since I don’t have the right press necessary to do block printing. It’ll take me all day to print one, whereas by screen printing I can set everything up and then print like hundreds. So, especially for doing concert posters, where if I’m working with a bigger band, they might want hundreds, it works better.

LASA Liberator: How has your time been at SXSW?

Grissom: It’s been great. I haven’t been to any events other than Flatstock this year in years past. I’ve been able to get a badge by knowing someone and going to movies. Austin’s nice. When I first moved here, I used to go see tons of concerts. I would like to bike downtown. ‘I’m going to go see this man at this venue, and this band.’ It’s fun. I think South by Southwest can be a little bit overwhelming, but it can be fun if you embrace it and embrace the chaos a little bit.

opinion Suprising Sounds

GEORGIA FINK | entertainment editor

South by Southwest (SXSW) offers a multitude of opportunities for people to show off their innovations, make connections, and grow their companies. But the part of SXSW that draws most people into the event is music. With dozens of the most notorious local venues hosting musicians for SXSW back-to-back all week, a lot of them lasting late into the night. Many of these musicians aim to grow their following and build connections through attending SXSW.

This year, SXSW saw over 1500 music showcases throughout the week-long festival. Initially, I went to SXSW not expecting to see anything amazing, a mindset attributed to the fact that many of the musicians pay to play at the festival. However, my first showcase immediately proved just how wrong I was. I got to see three separate musicians on the Radio Day Stage at Rivian Park: Hien, Chinese American Bear, and Oreglo. All of them were amazing, mixing different styles to create something new, unexpected, but infinitely enjoyable.

The sheer quantity of music packed into this event was amazing. There are hundreds of showcases that take place in dozens of venues across the city, with sets being only 40 minutes, cramming as many performances per day as possible, and sometimes DJs would even play short, 15-minute sets in between the performances.

Knowing the insurmountable schedule was one thing, but physically seeing its hecticness around me during SXSW gave me a new appreciation for the musicians. From Hien mixing her sound live on stage without a live band to Oreglo mixing jazz and rock music to make this amazing sound, and Chinese American Bear bringing two cultures together to make an experience that was like no other, I was in awe at the talent and creativity displayed by the

artists. Despite this, I think what left a greater impression on me was the ability of the artists to put themselves out there, even when sometimes the audience didn’t enjoy their music.

My favorite out of all these musicians was Oreglo, an alternative jazz band from London, England. Their stage presence was hilarious, highlighted by them telling short stories in between songs that were easy to relate to. However, what struck me the most was the band’s instrument lineup. They had a drummer, guitarist, pianist, and trombone-turned-sousaphone player—a title shift resulting from him unfortunately losing his trombone on the plane. Using the sousaphone for the bassline instead of another string bass instrument allowed them to curate a unique sound. Although the pianist took most of the spotlight due to his role as the vocalist, the drummer was also a major part of the stage presence, telling stories and ensuring the audience was engaged with their performance.

Additionally, I enjoyed Hien’s performance. As an alternative pop artist from Brooklyn, New York, she takes inspiration from her childhood in Budapest, growing up in a Vietnamese family. She sings her songs in Hungarian, Vietnamese, and English. Even more interestingly, she is a solo performer. It doesn’t sound like that when she is on stage, but there is no one backing her up. Instead of having a band, she puts her songs together electronically live while keeping an amazing stage presence. It is not awkward to see her put together these songs; instead, watching her work her magic adds to her performance.

The third performance that we watched was Chinese American Bear. When they stepped up on stage, I was expecting a cozy indie performance, so when they started their set with a scream and the chaos of their instruments, I was surprised, to say the least. The rest of the performance did not disappoint. Most of the music was based on the lead singer’s upbringing in a Chinese-American family. One song was accompanied by a dance they taught to the audience, and although I felt silly, it highlighted the creativity that laced the artist’s sound.

The event’s status as a music showcase of new, emerging artists, rather than a concert dedicated to a single artist, set my expectations low, but instead of leaving wishing I had spent my time elsewhere, I was pleasantly surprised. I found the creativity and ingenuity displayed throughout the acts awe-inspiring and beautiful. While these artists might not end up on my playlist, the performances I witnessed increased an appreciation I have for musicians and performances in a way that will continue to push me to go out and explore Austin’s ever-evolving and lively music scene.

photos by Margot Morgan, Georgia Fink, and Tita Gonzalez  
graphic by Margot Morgan

## BIPOC PoP Amplifies Artist Voices

LILY ANTONY | staff writer

From comic books to TV shows, mediums of creativity reflect the diversity present in the creative community, and through dedicated events, this diversity is highlighted and reflected in the Austin area.

Many Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) creators are a part of this community, but, according to artists from BIPOC Pop, they often struggle with having their voices heard. Although events like BIPOC Pop, help them work together to uplift each other and make their voices heard, according to illustrator and cartoonist Eliamaria Madrid. Using their shared and personal experiences, they cultivate communities where their stories can be heard.

BIPOC PoP is an event that highlights BIPOC creators and provides an opportunity for them to share their art. The event is three days long, and it takes place at the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin). The event is run by Fredrick Luis Aldama and UT Austin students. They bring in many different creators to set up stands, host workshops, and speak at panels about their works and perspectives.

Madrid attended the event and has created many different pieces of art and books. According to Madrid, BIPOC PoP has allowed her to share her work and experiences with many creators.

"I've met so many amazing people from this event," Madrid said. "It's made me feel not alone in the BIPOC space and really fuels me to not just uplift my own work, but everyone's, so we can all show that BIPOC creatives are powerful."

A comic book writer and creator who also attended BIPOC PoP, Rafael Flores Jr., sees a lot of support at this event for his and other creators' work. He believes events like BIPOC PoP play a vital role in amplifying diverse voices and building a stronger community.

"It's a mix, and it's a lot of fun just to talk to other comic book creators and get their feedback on your work," Flores said. "And we always say, 'Hey, your stuff is really cool,' and we give each other compliments."

Darius Yancy is an artist and comic book author who has created multiple books whose characters represent his life experiences and struggles. He explained that he loved being able to be on panels and talk with other creators about their

artistic journey.

"My favorite part is between two," Yancy said. "I will say being on a panel with people that I've sat and listened to on the panel before when I was in the opposite seats, so to now be joining them, that's a huge thing that I'm forever grateful for. [Also,] walking around and asking everyone about their work, creating creators, the journey."

Flores learned at BIPOC PoP the importance of events that celebrate diversity. He saw just how much events that advocate for diverse storytelling are needed to empower BIPOC creators who have had a difficult time getting their name and art out there.

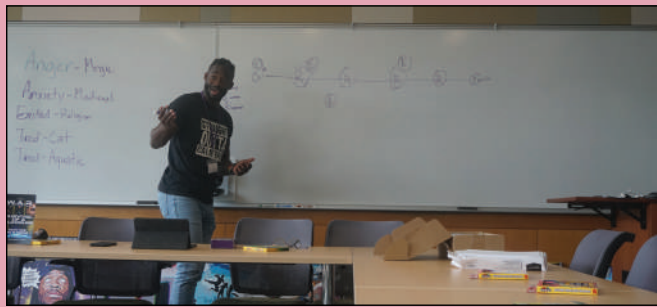
"I just learned that we need more of these kinds of events," Flores said. "It helps me build these connections. I just wish there was more of it."

Yancy described the idea that BIPOC creators need spaces to be their own people without being compared to other, white, mainstream comic book artists. According to Flores, these spaces allow them to create their own stories and be their own people.

"I made all these characters and stories, and someone was like, 'you're the black Stan Lee' and it was, even though it was funny, it was part of me was, 'no,'" Yancy said. "Stan Lee has made it happen. Sorry, but I am also a creator, and yes, I'm black, and yes, I have created all these endeavors, not to be the next person, but to be another pioneer for others to also do this."

According to Madrid, his event and many others provide a space to uplift BIPOC creators in times when it can be difficult to feel supported because of the controversies around diversity in the workplace. She expressed the need for these communities so BIPOC members get the attention they deserve in a world where they can be forced into the background of the art world.

"It feels like that part of our identity is just getting cast more and more into the background when we're all at our highest in terms of talent and loudness of voice that's being presented in our art," Madrid said. "Our stories all matter, and while we hope one day to be on the same field as everyone else, we keep amplifying our voices in the BIPOC space to show why and what we're making and how important it is."



**TEACHING THE CROWD** Darius Yancy leading a workshop on storytelling. Helping participants learn how to tell their stories. Through his work and legacy, Yancy hopes to inspire other creators of color to pioneer their own stories. photo by Lily Antony

## Lights, Camera, Lip Dub

JAY WILKERSON | club contributor

Every other year, the entirety of LASA gathers outside during advisory to shoot a massive film throughout the campus. Since 2013, the Lip Dub has been exciting LASA students enough that even during COVID-19, students came to school on Fridays to record their part of the Lip Dub.

The LASA film teacher, Vanessa Mokry, believes the Lip Dub brought the LASA identity back together during the pandemic that had separated the school. She explained that it gave students a sense of community and purpose during an otherwise isolating year.

"The only time people came to school that whole year was to shoot their bit for the Lip Dub," Mokry said. "It was almost like it was the only thing people cared about that made them feel like they were part of LASA again."

The Lip Dub brings the whole school together, especially the advanced Audio and Video Production (AVP) film students. While most people are standing out in the sun for a few hours, the film students work for months to organize a video that's a few minutes long. According to LASA junior and the director of the 2025 Lip Dub, Kate Bondar, the film students do much more than just organize the Lip Dub.

"We are the people to make it happen," Bondar said. "We are the people to clean it up."

Mokry explained that the Lip Dub has gotten increasingly more difficult to film with the growth of the school. It was much easier to film 12 years ago when the school had only 800 people. Now, with the school being closer to 1500 people, it is harder to get the entire school to cooperate.

"So the first one, we were half as big," Mokry said. "The school was less than 800 people, now we're huge. It's gotten harder, and we weren't even sure if it was gonna work. Then we kind of started thinking, got better, we kind of got very ambitious."

LASA film student, Adrian Martinez, stated that "Mr. Blue Sky", the Lip Dub from 2019, and the 2023 Lip Dub were key in shaping this year's filming process. According to him, lessons learned from those past videos directly influenced the planning for this year's production.

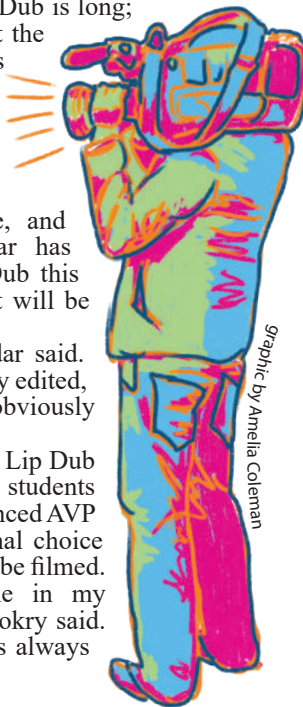
"For example, we didn't like that they ended in the front," Martinez said. "So, a lot of the planning and pitching was centered around how we could end in the field."

The process of making the Lip Dub is long; according to Martinez, it begins at the beginning of the year. The process starts with choosing a song, then the advanced AVP students pitch their ideas of what the video should look like. This year, three people pitched their idea for what the filming and song should be, and Mokry picked the pitch. Bondar has made some changes to the Lip Dub this year, most notably the way that it will be recorded.

"We split the video up," Bondar said. "The first part would be very clearly edited, while the second is not. It's very obviously different."

According to Mokry, the LASA Lip Dub has become a massive event that students are excited for. Especially the advanced AVP students who always make the final choice on whether or not the video should be filmed.

"There's nothing set in stone in my contract that we have to do it," Mokry said. "But for some reason, the students always say that they want to do it."



## Hyde Park Stories Come Alive

SADIE SARRAT | commentary editor

Storytelling is a valuable part of the human experience. Passed down from generations, stories allow us to share valuable life lessons and personal anecdotes with the people around us.

Hyde Park Storytelling, a local event centered around storytelling, draws Austinites from near and far for a backyard night of fun, kolaches, and the sharing of stories at Batch Kolaches in East Austin. The event allows eight storytellers to take the stage and share a story with the audience.

Matthew Stoner, the co-founder of Hyde Park Storytelling, originally got the idea to host an event like this from listening to podcasts during the pandemic. Specifically, he was inspired by "The Moth" podcast, a way for people to share their stories and life experiences during a time of isolation.

"I was just moved by people's stories [from "The Moth"]," Stoner said. "At that point in 2014, I was only in Austin for two years, and I just wanted to get to know people."

Motivated to form connections and a community of Austinites, Stoner and his roommates started Hyde Park Storytelling from the backyard of their studio apartment in Austin. What started as a small event in a backyard setting has evolved into an Austin spectacle at Batch Kolaches with ASL interpretation and ample space for audience members.

Theresa Donlin, a professional American Sign Language Interpreter and member of the Sign Language Access for Social Justice: ATX organization, volunteers to interpret stories at the event. She believes that having interpreters for spoken events like Hyde Park Storytelling is important for

representing the Deaf community in Austin.

"[Having interpreters] makes everybody more aware of the fact that Deaf people exist," Donlin said. "It exposes everybody to sign language and to the Deaf community and normalizes a different aspect of accommodations and accessibility. Often, small local events like this are overlooked, so having that access is really important."

Despite Hyde Park Storytelling becoming more of an official production, the initial laid-back backyard vibe and feeling of community remain. Sarah Tarrance, a first-time storyteller who shared a story at the May 3rd event, was drawn to this distinct Austin vibe and close community.

"I thought [Hyde Park Storytelling] was a very cool representation of Austin and just the kind of community that Austin brings," Tarrance said. "When I came, I just instantly fell in love with the overall vibe of the place and how many people and families were here."

Additionally, Hyde Park Storytelling does not look at the stories prior to the show. However, they do offer optional guidance to help storytellers practice beforehand. Stoner believes this surprise aspect of the event can form pure human connections and community.

"In the age of social media, everything is curated, everything's perfect all of the time," Stoner said. "[But] life isn't perfect. It's messy, and we like to have some of our storytellers show up in that way. It's not a perfect performance, and showing a person being vulnerable and unraveling parts of themselves in real-time matches the human element where it's kind of messy."

## Editor's Picks

### Best Way to Spend Summer

Topic

MARGOT MORGAN | entertainment editor

For many people, summer means a break from the school routine and the opportunity to go on an exotic trip with your family, but my favorite part about summer is something much simpler: spending time with the same friends I see at school, just in more fun and relaxing places.

Even though vacations to new places are exciting, nothing is better than making memories with close friends in local places. Whether we're going shopping at the Domain or hanging out by the pool, I always look forward to those carefree moments where we can enjoy being together. There is something especially comforting about talking and laughing with friends without the constant pressure of schoolwork weighing on your shoulders or the stress of upcoming exams.

During the school year, conversations are filled with talk about assignments and assessments or interrupted by deadlines, but during the summer, we have plenty of time to slow down and talk about what actually matters. Taking time to recharge with my friends by sharing inside jokes or pulling a harmless prank is, to me, the most important and meaningful way to spend my school break. These small summer memories with friends will end up becoming the stories we tell for a long time after summer is over.

The Pool

GEORGIA FINK | entertainment editor

The absolute best way to spend the summer is by the pool. As a swim coach who likes her job, I may be a little biased. But the cool water mixed with the heat of the sun makes the pool an optimal place to spend your summer. When you get too hot, just hop into the pool and cool down. When you get bored, just sit by the pool and do whatever you want, like read, listen to music, or watch TV. Spending the day by the pool is especially rewarding when you get home and are exhausted from being in the sun the whole day, and you can fall asleep easily. But one thing that you do have to be careful about is getting a sunburn. Surprisingly, I have not had that many sunburns in my life, even though I do spend most of my summer in the sun by the pool. But sunscreen is a must, especially if you don't want to have an ugly tan line—I am stuck most of my summer with a sunglasses tan.

Studying Abroad

LEAH LASHUS | news editor

My favorite summer of all time was one spent in Berlin, Germany. I went to Kealing Middle School, and I was (and still am!) in the German program. Kealing is notorious for its German abroad trip, formally known as the German American Partnership Program. It started as a way for the countries to implement their alliance through high school-aged kids, who stayed with each other's families as exchange partners. My exchange partner, Clara, and her host family were some of the best people I've ever met, and I am so grateful to have matched with her. The exchange program was with a lot of my friends, and each day we'd wake up with a long itinerary of something "German" to do: visiting museums, landmarks, neighboring cities, etc. While my German might not have become conversational, I did grow close to my exchange partner and my fellow American peers. It showed me I could be independent and free in a new space, while still learning and understanding a new culture.

There are a bunch of different study abroad programs at LASA, like the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE). If you're considering an exchange program, go for it! It will be the best summer yet, I promise.

Traveling

ELLINGTON TOUGH | sports editor

This summer, consider expanding your horizons by travelling outside of the United States.

International travel can be a great way to gain a new perspective on the world. Not only do you learn about a new culture, but you get to think outside of your own. Sometimes LASA may become its own world, and leaving the country is a great reminder that it's not.

In the past, I've visited family in Canada, connecting with the rest of the world in a profound way. During past Mexico's border with Texas last year, the at once empty, at once bustling northern deserts allowed me to contemplate my own role in the natural world as well as the political one.

International travel seems like a huge expense, but it doesn't have to be. Enjoy a two-day bike trip to Mexico. Spend a week on a road trip to Canada. Take a short flight to Cuba. There are a number of scholarships available to high school students that provide transportation to other nations; I'll be flying to Almaty, Kazakhstan, as part of the NSLI-Y Russian Language Program to teach American students languages of national security importance.

Amidst the stress of overwhelming US politics and economics, now is a better time than ever to explore life elsewhere.

LASA

from page 1

Ugarte's journey with hurdles began in seventh grade, and her success this season is the result of years of hard work and patience. She emphasized that her success has not been instantaneous and credited her improvement to consistent training and advice from her coaches.

"Keep trying, and don't get discouraged if you don't see immediate progress," Ugarte said. "I've been training pretty hard since freshman year, and I was struggling with my times then, but now I'm definitely improving. So, it's taken a while, but I'm seeing progress."

John Goodell, the head coach of LASA's track and field program, accompanied Ugarte and Cragnolino to the Relays. To qualify them for the Texas Relays, he submitted their times from MileSplit, a site that records U.S. track and field meets.

"Anna and Eva immediately said they wanted to compete," Goodell said. "They are so serious that if anything, I try to provide some levity."

Goodell emphasized his pride for the athletes and explained that he focused on calming them down instead of riling them up. He cheers them on when he can, but believes it's more important to ease their nerves before

but those gifts are just one part of the equation."

Cragnolino competed in the 1600 meters, facing a field filled with national-level distance runners. Leading up to the meet, Cragnolino maintained the same training base she had built during cross country season, running 40 to 45 miles each week. Her training's structure balances different types of workouts, including circuits, where she fluctuates the intensity every few miles; and tempo runs, where she runs at a comfortable, sustained pace for a long period of time.

"Every day I'll run around seven to eight miles," Cragnolino said. "I usually do an easier workout on Monday, something with circuits. Then on Tuesday, I'll do a longer tempo workout. Wednesday and Friday are for speed, and the rest are just long runs. You have to make

sure you have a good schedule. I always train in the evening or early morning and really just try to fit school work and studying around that. Because you can do work any time, but especially being in Texas with the weather, it's better to run at certain times."

During the race itself, Cragnolino found herself with the top pack of runners. The first few laps went smoothly and consistently, but midway through the race, the leaders sped up, and she found it difficult to stay attached.

"This race was pretty hard," Cragnolino said. "Around the third lap, they really put in a surge, and I couldn't quite stick with it, so I just tried to close out the last 200 strong."

Despite the difficulty, she finished sixth in the girls 1600-meter finals with a time of four minutes, 53 seconds. Cragnolino described the overall experience as both exciting and motivating.

Their fast performances show how modern track and field has changed. Success now demands more from athletes, both in training and mentality. With "track inflation" pushing times lower every year, simply staying competitive requires

relentless consistency, smart preparation, and a willingness to embrace challenges. Yet for Ugarte and Cragnolino, their Texas Relays debut showed that they are more than ready to meet the moment, and to keep chasing even faster times ahead.

"Track's not like any other sport," Goodell said. "What I saw on track this season—this is my first year as the head coach—was such a small sliver of what they do."

a race, focusing on easy subjects like what music they're listening to.

"Eva ran her fastest two-mile time

this Friday, so she's still got time to improve," Goodell said. "They've worked most of their lives. They've both been given tremendous physical gifts,



# AISD Launches Nascent Girls Flag Football League

LILY ANTONY | staff writer

The myriad of athletic programs available to Austin Independent School District (AISD) students seems to be ever growing, and a new sport is making its way onto the playing field. Girls flag football is an opportunity for girls to participate in football, breaking the barrier between girls sports and the male-dominated sport.

Girls flag football has been becoming increasingly popular with more and more programs being introduced in LASA and throughout Austin. Athletic opportunities for girls and women in Austin have been expanding in hopes of encouraging girls to get involved in sports. Programs are starting as a part of AISD at each high school this year and will continue to grow as the teams grow bigger and become a University Interscholastic League (UIL) team with a proper season.

wwAISD is launching girls flag football teams for a number of schools this year with a mini championship. AISD's area athletic coordinator, Crystal Victorino, has helped start and shape the program.

"It's gonna be a two week tournament, and each of our 13 schools is gonna be represented by a team," Victorino said. "So they can have up to 20 athletes on their team and it's gonna be girls only. The first week they will be playing four games per day."

The program will bring together girls from all over AISD to start playing flag football, and in future years the activity will develop into a full-fledged program. This year there will be a few games where the girls play against each other, and next year it will have a full season as a UIL sport. This starting program will also provide current seniors with the opportunity to play flag football before they graduate.

"Next year is when we're gonna have our full pilot program where we're gonna be with the NFL league," Victorino said. "But this year, because we started talking about it, I really

didn't want to leave out the girls who are graduating this year."

There are already many girls in AISD who have signed up to be on the teams and are ready to start playing. Some schools are holding tryouts because so many girls are interested.

"Within 24 hours, we had over 100 girls already signed up for the interest form," Victorino said. "The goal was to get at least 20 girls signed up. Every school has girls signed up, but there are a few schools that need to have tryouts at this point."

At LASA, official programs are starting up, with more than 30 girls who want to participate. Less formal activities have already been taking place, such as LASA's 7v7 Powderpuff tournament. Senior Abby Aardema is a student athletic trainer for the Sports Medicine class who helped run the tournament and has played a part of the powderpuff program.

"Powderpuff is girls flag football, where the football boys coach us," Aardema said. "And it's per grade, so the juniors have a team, the seniors have a team."

This program has been going on for two years. So far, the girls have had a lot of fun participating and helped support the idea for the coeducation 7v7 championship.

Christian Denison is a program director for Neighborhood Sports, and he runs the All Girls NFL Flag League in North Austin and in San Antonio. They have many programs for youth to help people develop community and skills. One of their programs is girls flag football.

"We run our NFL Flag Girls league year-round, with each season lasting seven weeks," Denison said. "Every team plays 6 regular season games, followed by a playoff tournament where all teams qualify, giving every girl the chance to compete for a championship."

This program brings in players new and old every year to play. It's designed to be a welcoming and open space for girls where they can learn new skills and grow their abilities.

"The commercial that was during the Super Bowl this

year," Victorino said. "I think it was about a two minute commercial of the introduction of girls flag football and how that's gaining traction."

These new programs have been gaining more and more popularity every year. There have been big strides in the sport's popularity in Austin, aided by a Super Bowl advertisement promoting bringing it to the varsity level around the country.

"They say girls flag football is the fastest-growing sport and we see it happening right before our eyes," Denison said. "Just a few years ago, our league had three to four teams across three age divisions. Now, in just three short years, we've expanded to double-digit team counts in each division and we're still growing."

More and more states are introducing official flag football programs into high schools. The environment supports girls to make them feel more empowered and active.

"Our goal here at athletics within Austin ISD is teaching more than the game," Victorino said. "We're building that confidence to go out and be out in the world, gaining friendships, being able to develop and build the confidence and the strength and those leadership skills to just go out into the world."

Girls flag football has grown and is on track to continue to grow. To Denison, the future of flag football is positive.

The AISD program begins in May for the starting championship games. They will play on May 16 and 17 and have their final game on May 23, 2025. Next year, the formal season will begin.

"The future of girls flag football is incredibly bright. It's already a sanctioned varsity sport in several states, and it's only a matter of time before all 50 states follow suit," Denison said. "We're committed to making sure every girl in our community knows that this opportunity exists, and that she belongs on the field."

# Editorial: Wrestling with the Truth of WWE Spectacle

ELLINGTON TOUGH | sports editor

According to the sports statistics site *Wrestlenomics*, an average episode of *World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE)* receives well over one million U.S. viewers. People line up in the thousands for live matches, and other events by companies like *All Elite Wrestling* attract similar crowds.

At first glance, these matches are stunning displays of talent and practice, chances to observe skilled wrestlers think on their feet and work with their hands. But this couldn't be further from the truth: wrestling is scripted, the moves rehearsed dozens of times before the show, every decision made months in advance by a shadowy director the audience will never see. So, why would anyone choose to watch a scripted sport instead of an actual competition?

These wrestlers represent the life we wish we were living, an experience of adventure and narrative. Human beings idolize the figures they see on TV as role models they wish to emulate. However, John Cena, Hulk Hogan, and The Rock are all acting, choosing lies as a lifestyle. So we choose, in imitation of them, to carry out lives of mistruth. We lie fluently as part of our day-to-day. As what is real becomes less important to us, however,

our most dangerous surrender will not be of truth to each other, but to ourselves.

Two thousand years ago, Plato discerned the existential question for human beings: whether our mastery of the physical world will result in its subversion or its embrace. He modeled the human condition through the Allegory of the Cave, where people chained in front of a fire in an underground cave imagine the world through the shadows presented in front of them, the artificial representation of reality. If one man was freed and brought to the surface, he would see the light of the sun and realize the falseness of his past life, to which he was so beholden just moments before.

Most critical, however, is

Plato's understanding of this emancipation: it is only possible when forced. If the man's chains were simply loosened, the light of the fire would blind him, and he would return to his version of reality; he would never leave the cave of his own volition.

Anyone who tries to do so would be attacked, dragged into a cesspool of imitation and indirect living.

That's what we see when our norms revolve around being glued to technology at all times of the day. Those who choose to live honest lives, without posting edited photographs on social media, are shunned and considered other. Society reshapes itself to accommodate communication through texts and videos, devoid of

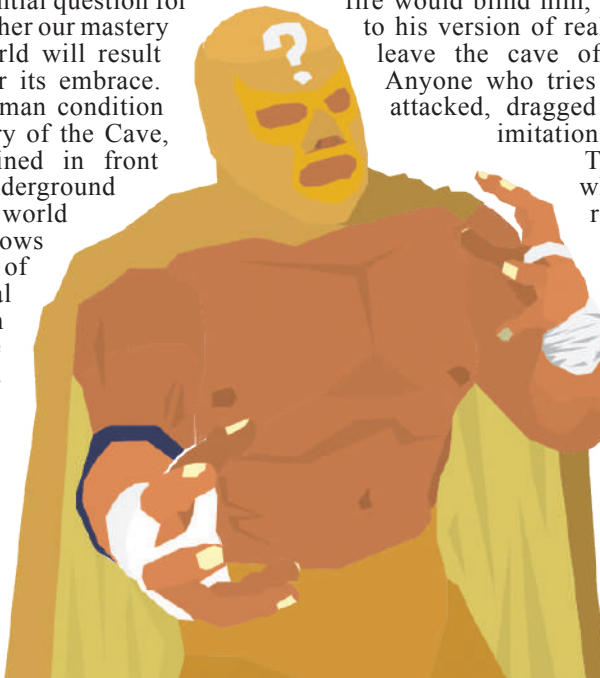
nuance or tone.

The French philosopher Guy Debord wrote that modern society has become based on spectacle, on representative shows of power instead of truly lived experiences. The popularity of scripted wrestling is just another symptom of a global sickness, where, as Debord writes in *"The Society of the Spectacle"*, "the true is a moment of the false."

What we're seeing now is the same shift that Debord diagnosed in 1967. People willingly choose to consume something they know is fake, giving up their own humanity and independence for a rush of dopamine.

In the era of ChatGPT essays and Instagram conversations, one's humanity becomes a luxury, an odd, inscrutable practice mastered by a few mystics, a modern version of divination. People turn to entertainment like wrestling to distract themselves from the pains of modern living, but they don't recognize the vicious circle of separation from humanity into which they've entered.

Instead, put down the newspaper—or, more likely, turn off the screen—and go outside. Pick up a basketball, go on a run, and play a game of catch with a friend or family member. You'll be happier for it.



graphic by Jonah Popinski

## A National Hero on the Away Team Baseball Declines in U.S., Spreads in East Asia and Caribbean

ELLINGTON TOUGH | sports editor

Since its modern incarnation in the mid-1800s, baseball has been an American hobby. Dubbed “America’s pastime,” it once occupied everyone from lower-class families in the backyard to American presidents throwing the ceremonial first pitch since 1910.

Now, however, America has shifted away from baseball. Other sports like soccer and football have replaced its number one spot, and the last two presidents have ceased to throw the first pitch. Meanwhile, its popularity has boomed in other countries. Adam Escandell is an AP world history teacher at LASA, and thinks that while baseball is American, it can also be Japanese, Cuban or Dominican.

“We can call baseball a quintessentially American sport,” Escandell said. “And in some ways, that’s true. But it’s not like the Cubans and Japanese don’t play it differently from us.”

Eric Martanovic teaches World Geography and coaches Baseball at LASA. His experience playing professional baseball for several teams shaped how he sees the sport, leading him to blame a decline in viewership on a separation from mainstream culture.

“Baseball is a game that takes a long time: you have time in between pitches and a lot of inactivity,” Martanovic said. “I think the other thing that needs to be considered with baseball is we don’t have enough household names anymore.”

Economics, Escandell argues, is a less obvious trigger of cultural change. Although professional baseball is increasingly profitable, professional football now promises more money, and at the family level, the cost of baseball equipment can be prohibitive.

“People just have more options, kids have other things they can do,” Escandell said. “If you buy this expensive baseball bat, then you kind of want to use it a lot.”

Another economic factor is gambling. New apps and websites allow fans to bet on players at the touch of a button, and fantasy football, for some, may provide a community around sports betting and gambling.

“Football found a way, before sports gambling was largely

legalized, to legalize sports gambling, and sports gambling is very popular,” Escandell said.

Escandell pointed out that while baseball’s viewer share may be decreasing, its revenue is only getting higher. Capitalism may drive the sport forward through its potential for enormous profits.

“There’s more money in baseball than there’s ever been before,” Escandell said. “There are literally more viewers, more attendees of games, more teams, more players than there’s ever been at any point in the past. And so if the claim is that baseball is somehow dying, then it’s hard to square that with Vladimir Guerrero getting a 500 million dollar contract.”

It can be hard to determine who, if anyone, a sport belongs to, even while they’re warped into people’s sense of personal and national identity. Although myths and rumors have floated around, like the story that baseball was invented in Cooperstown, New York, baseball has no single origin story. Although the name only came about in the 1800s, other versions of the game reach much deeper into history, such as rounders and cricket.

“In order for sports as a form of national competition to be meaningful, you on some level have to adapt sports that are from other places,” Escandell said. “Otherwise, how will you compete internationally?”

While it has declined in the U.S., baseball’s popularity has exploded in Japan, Taiwan, and Caribbean countries like the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Venezuela. LASA sophomore Masaki Chao has been on the varsity baseball team since his freshman year. He credits his love for baseball to both his Taiwanese father and Japanese mother, in whose home countries he has gone to games in the past.

graphic by Jonah Popinski



“In America, there’s not really a band,” Chao said. “But in Japan everyone is there [at baseball games]. If a school goes there, all the parents go, the cheerleaders go, the band goes. And it’s

very loud, and it’s actually very fun in general.”

Japan’s culture has absorbed no shortage of other foreign elements, many of which it then exports back out with its own modifications. In terms of baseball, this has given rise to the concept of a yakyu shonen, literally “baseball boy”, who fanatically dedicates themselves to baseball.

“Most Japanese players that go to the MLB usually are people that would risk their own physical condition,” Chao said. “I’ve seen people throw like 100 miles per hour. Roki Sasaki is a good example. He would throw his arm out to make it to the MLB.”

Baseball has also soared to the top sport in several countries on the Caribbean, including Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Venezuela. Many U.S. teams are full of players from this region, who, Martanovic thinks, are symbols of pride for their home nations.

“Those folks are revered in their home countries more so than someone from the United States who’s had similar outcomes,” Martanovic said. “It’s the story of making it: from going to a point in time where you would strap part of a milk carton to your hand to practice grounders, playing in dusty fields, throwing bottle tops and hitting them with broomsticks. This is where dreams are born.”

Although baseball’s face may be changing, Escandell emphasized that this could have meaning outside of nationality. For many, sports are entertainment with no cultural significance to them. Their political weight could be overstated by figures like the Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, who used baseball as part of his populist messaging.

“Castro would commonly claim that he had gotten scouted by the Yankees,” Escandell said. “Castro did play baseball growing up; there’s no evidence that he was very good. So this story is essentially a lie, but the element of the story that’s important is not just Castro saying that he could play this American sport, but he could play for the Yankees, the symbol of Americanism, like ‘that’s how good I was.’ That’s suggestive to me not of a conciliatory mode with the Americans but more something that’s defined—That baseball does not belong to you, it belongs to us, and that’s a way of claiming something.”

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## LASA’s Top 10 Sports Moments

ELLINGTON TOUGH | sports editors  
PRATIK GURIJALA

Every spring, the LASA Liberator compiles some of the school’s best athletic accomplishments in a top 10 list. One common theme this school year was the strides underclassmen made, supporting their teams and their school. LASA athletics fought through growing pains, making impressive showings and new records in several sports. Even formidable Anderson, which moved into the 5A category, couldn’t keep the Raptors down.

# 1



photo courtesy of LASA Track

Breakout star and junior Eva Cragolino brought LASA a number of medals this year. After the University Interscholastic League (UIL) rules prevented her from competing in her sophomore year, Cragolino went on to place first in the entire state for the girls 3200 meters, averaging just over five minutes a mile in the packed race. Several individuals shone in other events, from the discus to the long jump to the 100 meter dash.

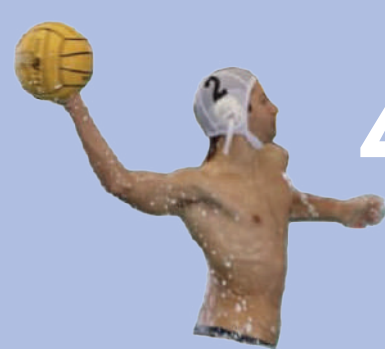


photo courtesy of LASA Water Polo

# 4

LASA water polo was the best in the district with major wins against Anderson, Austin, McCallum, and Bowie. After districts, they advanced to areas where they easily beat Lehman (17-5) and also Westwood (11-7). But then they faced Westlake, and even though they tied earlier in the season, LASA lost in a heartbreaker (13-14). LASA’s success this season can be attributed to junior players Cruz Crowley and Tomas Bellavia, who are both offensive weapons that score LASA many goals.

# 2



photo courtesy of LASA Girls Soccer

Experienced Head Coach Chloe Cardinale and Assistant Coach John Goodell put in the extra work this season. The girls soccer varsity team tied against Anderson this March, a momentous accomplishment against a formidable team that is undefeated in the district. They were the only team in the district not to lose to Anderson, which recently moved into the 5A classification. Goalie Adel Wells let only one shot past her as the team fought back in the second half of the game against an overconfident school. A young group of players also boosted the team to the playoffs, which they only lost in the last ten minutes.



photo courtesy of LASA Swim and Dive

# 5

At the state swim meet, LASA’s relay swim teams earned top-three placements, and three individual swimmers finished in the top three in their individual events. Justin Shi, ZJ Hays, and Auggie Sefcik each secured top-three finishes, contributing to a strong showing for the team. Their performances marked a successful end to the season. The team was led by head coach Christopher Parks, who guided the swimmers through training and competition. LASA’s swimmers competed against top athletes from across the state.



photo courtesy of LASA Softball

# 3

Donning gloves and helmets, LASA softball battled through Anderson, Manor New Tech and McCallum like they were wiffle balls. Senior leaders Abby Aardema and Gracie Philips supported a prospective crew of underclassmen. Team spirit brought them together under Coach Cruz’s leadership, and they had one of their best seasons yet.



photo by Ellington Tough

# 6

The energy from LASA’s Cheer team radiated at every game they attended. They endured long bus rides and supporting not only varsity football in the fall, but basketball and JV football in the spring. After winning a district competition over the summer, they were ready to take on the task of motivating a shook-up football team to win several games. Their presence became especially apparent at games the other school’s cheerleaders didn’t attend due to distance, epitomizing the team’s dedication to their sport and their school.

THE RAPTOR RUN DOWN

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

**SAM WELBROECK** | staff writer

When I first arrived, the small gym didn't seem to have much set up. There were no targets or equipment visible, but the floor was spotless and polished. Students were standing around chatting as I entered, and there was a somewhat chaotic vibe to the place. The preparations started as soon as head coach Kat Davis got there. As Davis set up a curtain behind the archers to stop the arrows from hitting the wall, the students sprang into action, pulling out foam targets and unpacking racks of bows. It was clear how many times everyone had done this before, compared to my confusion, and their efficiency was remarkable.

I stood awkwardly in the corner and watched, feeling a little out of place while the others worked on setting up. I had never done archery before this, so I wasn't sure what to anticipate or how I could assist with setup. Davis asked a student named Avery to assist me after noticing that I was unsure of myself. Avery, who was, in contrast, very composed and self-assured, got right to work teaching me the fundamentals.

Avery showed me how to set up a practice bow to get me started. They gave me a very straightforward explanation and demonstrated how to set it up physically. Avery began by showing me how to fasten the bowstring and check that the arrow was positioned properly. Although there was a lot to process, their advice made me feel more at ease using the tools.

Everyone warmed up before we started shooting. Even though I didn't have a band like the others, I still chose to join the group in stretching and strengthening their arms with resistance bands, using one arm to stretch the other. Our muscles were better prepared for the physical demands of shooting thanks to this warm-up. Seeing this, it was evident to me that archery calls for control and strength, and the warm-up seemed crucial to preventing injury during practice.

When I pulled the string back for the first time, I was

afraid it would slam against my arm. During the initial rough attempts, I got a reddish rash after the string touched my arm. However, I started to feel a little more confident as I practiced more. The sting lessened with each shot, and I was able to become more accustomed to the movement. I was reassured by Avery that things would become easier in due course, and they were correct. The pain lessened as I improved my bow control.

Avery also clarified the significance of the various whistle blasts. A single whistle blast announced the start of shooting, two blasts told archers to move to the shooting line, and it was time to retrieve the arrows at three blasts. Avery made sure I understood when each signal was used, and these guidelines were crucial for everyone's safety.

I waited in line with the others until it was finally my turn to shoot. Being surrounded by people who had been shooting for some time initially made me a little anxious. However, I took my place behind the line after Avery reassured me. I took care to adhere to their instructions, which included aiming for the target, drawing the string back, and keeping the bow steady. The arrow hardly reached halfway to the target in my first attempt, which was far from flawless. I had a hard time pulling the string back, and the bow felt heavy in my hands. Nevertheless, I was pleased to see it at least partially leave the bow. Every shot seemed like a small step forward, and each time I could feel myself getting more comfortable with the movements.

I became more conscious of my form as I kept shooting. I began to realize that strength alone was not enough for archery; instead, it seemed to me to be about patience, control, and focus. To ensure that every shot was as accurate as possible and that my arm wouldn't shake, I had to maintain my composure. Since I am right-dominant, meaning my right eye commands more of my brain's attention, Davis advised me to close my left eye. My arrows began to fly closer to the

target when I closed my left eye, which improved my shooting accuracy. I was at least moving in the right direction, which made me happy.

Avery demonstrated to me how to safely retrieve the arrows following the shooting. I discovered how to approach the target area cautiously, avoiding haste and keeping an eye on the other archers. After arriving, I took care not to harm the arrows or the apparatus by carefully removing them from the foam targets. I walked back with the arrows upside down and my hand over the spikes. The startling sharpness of the arrows' points against my hand made me understand why they take safety so seriously.

It was still enjoyable to try, even though my arrows didn't travel very far and weren't always accurate. I felt like I accomplished something from the experience, and it was thrilling to watch how each shot got better, even if only slightly. It was enlightening to try archery for the first time, but it was even more mentally and physically taxing than I had anticipated. I had to focus on each movement, ensuring that I was performing it correctly and staying focused the entire time. Despite not hitting the target, I was pleased to realize my real accomplishment was bravely facing something new.



**AIMING** Samrawit Waelbroeck takes aim. Archers try to align their eye with the arrow to narrow in on the target. photo by Ellington Tough

Athletes Stumble Over Injuries from Play

**ANYA GHIMIRE** | club contributor

Being an athlete means dealing with whatever comes at you, putting your physical and mental self on the line for your team and your school. But dedication can come with a price: the injuries that affect athletes across all levels of every sport.

After LASA sophomore Tanvi Thandri tore her ACL learning taekwondo last year, she didn't just lose the chance to continue playing her favorite sport. She had to face over a year of recovery and a shift in her identity as an athlete.

"Mentally, it took a really big toll," Thandri said. "I had to stop doing a sport that I had been in for a big part of my life."

Throughout the 2023-2024 school year, many high schools and club sports observed increased student participation, primarily due to a "rebound" back to physical activity after the COVID-19 pandemic. With this increase in involvement, the National Safety Council reported, the overall injury rate of high school athletes decreased, but the occurrence of serious injuries like concussions, sprains, and dislocations increased. These serious injuries typically require significant time without intense physical activity, ceasing participation in sports, and, in some cases, surgery.

"I tore my meniscus around two years ago and went to physical therapy for it," Thandri said. "I also had to get an MRI, and right after that, I tore my ACL. After I tore both of those, I also had to quit taekwondo."

BioMed Central studies show that individuals who have to stop playing their sport for just three months feel grief and sadness that typically affects their identity as an athlete. Sloane Townsend, a freshman on LASA's soccer team, has hurt her ankle multiple times and been concussed, leading

her to breaks from being on the field after every injury. As a result, Townsend expressed that the shift back into playing soccer was a struggle because she perceived her identity as an athlete differently.

"While I was adjusting, it took some time to get back to normal," Townsend said. "During that time, it felt like I was really bad at soccer."

As a sports trainer at LASA, Calvin Ta is responsible for helping athletes deal with injuries by monitoring, treating, and advising them. He believes that these problems are largely preventable, making sports less risky when one exercises caution.

"Injuries are typically from having bad form, from not having stretched or warmed up enough consistently before and after activity, and traumatic incidents," Ta said. "The more common injuries that I've seen thus far are ankle sprains and concussions."

Ta usually diagnoses concussions in high-contact sports like football, soccer, and wrestling, but has also found that they occur in cheer and basketball. These injuries, Ta says, come from fast movements that cause the brain to move inside the head.

"The earliest an athlete can come back from a concussion is one week," Ta said. "Our protocol is that if we suspect a student to have a concussion based off of their symptoms and ways that we check for concussion, we put them on a protocol that has them be seen by a physician ... and that physician will then determine the severity of a concussion and if they need any academic and athletic accommodations while healing."

Sprains and tears also affect athletes like Thandri. When he encounters sprains, however, Ta takes a different approach from the long breaks he suggests for concussions, instead encouraging athletes to return to activity as soon as possible.

"If you go to a doctor to have your ankle checked out after a sprain, they're probably going to have you rest for two weeks, whilst for me, I can get you back in two weeks," Ta said. "If you rest for two weeks, you're not doing anything, you're not optimally loading that ankle to bring healing factors to it, like blood flow and nutrients."

Although injuries can be overwhelming, athletes continue to work through them, reaching new heights even as they feel new lows. Ta emphasized the importance of moderation for student athletes who get injuries.

"I would have them talk to their teachers about what's going on, and let them know that they are having trouble balancing their current schoolwork and needing to rehabilitate their injury," Ta said. "There will be times where it's the middle or end of a season when you have tests and projects, and they're required to put more time and effort into that, and then because of that, they struggle with rehabilitation and getting better."

7



photo courtesy of LASA Girls Basketball

A cohort of talented juniors and seniors defeated forever rivals McCallum and Anderson this season. Despite heavy competition and a fairly young varsity team, LASA girls basketball never backed down. In one game against Elgin, they scored more than six times as many points as their opponents. As this team played, they weren't only fighting for their school. They were fighting for the sport itself, clear in their motto, "Treat women's basketball like a real sport".

9



photo by Asher Zvi-Nova

After a tumultuous transition to competing outside of UIL, LASA football has rebounded. While they were at first unfamiliar with their new opponents, the team is now used to their routine, and trained hard in the summer, fall, and spring for their two seasons. Although their opponents scored a lot of points in early games, those numbers were dwindling to the teens by late fall. They've succeeded across Texas, winning games in Austin, Houston, and Dallas.

8

All of LASA's graduating seniors will be missed next year, but that pain is going to be tenfold on the basketball team. Varsity players like Huck Light-Whipple and Joshua Korah made sure the team stayed steady, but younger players are rising up to fill the void they're going to leave. Both the freshman and JV A teams show great promise, and the question of the next few years won't be whether they're good, but how great they can be.



photo by Ellington Tough

10



photo courtesy of LASA Cross Country

Headed by sophomores Liam Brandyberry and Joaquin Gonzalez, LASA's cross country team pushed through a lot this season. Consisting of mostly underclassmen, their daily morning practices were not for nothing. LASA athletes raced past their rivals across Central Texas, scoring high at district and area championships. The future of LASA's cross country team looks bright, and as more freshmen join next year, there's no telling how far this squad will go.

# whisker watch

## Inside Austin's Animal Shelters

**APOLLO DAHMUS  
AVANI GANNE  
MILLER WILLIAMS** photo editors

workers at the shelters work hard to maintain this air of happiness for the shelter's inhabitants before joining them in their fun within the grassy area.

Working to ensure that many happy moments such as this one occur for animals in shelters during their time waiting to be taken to new homes through adoptions, employees and volunteers at animal shelters alike put in effort within their various duties. According to LASA freshman Chloe Billhardt, who volunteered at Austin Pets Alive for three months, this role included many specific responsibilities of its own, including spending time with the shelter's housed animals and spreading information about the shelter with its visitors.

"Last spring, I volunteered at Austin Pets Alive as part of a school community project," Billhardt said. "I spent most of my time with cats who have feline leukemia, helping raise awareness about the condition and showing people that these cats are just as lovable and deserving of homes as any others. Over the course of about 13 hours, I helped clean, refill food and water bowls, played with the cats, and talked to visitors who were thinking about adopting or fostering."

While many volunteers at animal shelters like Billhardt focus on directly taking care of the shelters' animals, other volunteers, such as Anya Bilakina, prioritize other facets of work at an animal shelter. In the case of Bilakina, her specific focus was marketing, and it came with extra aspects that she had to keep in mind throughout her work at Austin Pets Alive.

"I volunteered to do marketing things for the shelter, so I would post additional information online so people could be matched with pets," Bilakina said. "My favorite part of working at the shelter was being with animals, learning with them, about them, and promoting their well-being. [However], I had to think about infection because I have allergies, and I had to be cautious and mindful about that, especially washing my hands and stuff like that, so the other animals could be kept safe. Specifically with marketing in the cattery, they really needed people to help socialize the cats so they could go to

The animals bound after a ball thrown by the animal shelter's volunteers as the bright sun rises overhead, covering the play area in a warm and playful glow. As the critters make themselves comfortable in the safety of the enclosure, content to play and bond to their heart's content,

good homes. Spending time with them and things like that was important for them to be able to get adopted."

Similarly to the caretaking and marketing sides of maintaining an animal shelter, other facets, such as the communication side, still include emotional features. Regardless of the lessened physical contact with the animals compared to the first two sides as implied by the job description offered by the Austin Humane Society (AHS), everyone at the shelter plays a role in animals' wellbeing. According to AHS' director of Communications, Sarah Hammel, one of the hardest but most rewarding facets of work at the AHS includes the more emotional parts that come with caring for living creatures.

"You know, we see animals that are abandoned or we see animals that are in desperate medical care that they haven't gotten before," Hammel said. "And then there's kind of the bittersweet moments like, there have been times when we've had an animal here that I've really fallen in love with and when they get adopted, it's awesome, but it's also kind of sad for all of us to think like, 'oh, I'm never going to see Yogi again.' But, coming into working in this field, I thought that it would be a lot more sad than it is because, really at the end of the day, like most days here, we're seeing way more positive things than negative things. We're seeing animals get adopted."

We're seeing dogs that desperately need medical care transferred to our program and our vets are fixing them. We're handing out pet food, we're spaying and neutering cats. All sorts of amazing things are happening."

As Hammel describes, seeing animals being taken to their new homes is a bittersweet experience for many animal shelter workers.

However, as their ultimate goal is to ensure that the animals

they care for are taken into new homes where they can be happy, there are some things to think about for potential adopters and foster caretakers, according to Bilakina.

"Make sure you research what animal you are getting and how to care for it," Bilakina said. "Make sure that you have the time and commitment to take care of this animal because it's a huge commitment, and the animal depends on you. Just know it's a really big responsibility to take on. An animal might be super cute, but does it fit your lifestyle? Are you home, or always busy, or out? Are you someone that likes to go running and jogging, or are you more chill? Do you have access to a yard? All these things come into play. Make sure that the animal you're adopting and bringing in is going to vibe with you and vice versa."

Billhardt described her takeaways as she saw more and more animals being taken to their potential forever homes. She asserted that her experience spent helping at the animal shelter not only left a positive effect on the animals she spent time with, but it also made a deep and important mark on her life.

"It was honestly one of the most meaningful things I've done," Billhardt said. "My favorite part was seeing how the cats slowly opened up to people, especially potential adopters, as they got more comfortable. And getting to watch a cat go home with someone, knowing you helped make that happen, is just the best feeling."



Scrapy, at the Humane Society for rehabilitation from a broken jaw. photo by Apollo Dahmus



Corbyroy and Overalls, 2 month old puppies taken in by the Humane Society. photo by Apollo Dahmus



SHELTER SIGNS The inviting flag outside of the Austin Animal Shelter waves in the wind. The center has an over 95% save and live rate for all the animals it receives. photo by Avani Ganne



Arnold, a 2 year old foster-to-adopt cat. photo by Apollo Dahmus



WARM WELCOME The outside of the Austin Animal Center ushers in any potential adopters or volunteers. The Animal Center is located in East Austin. photo by Avani Ganne