

Mid-Peninsula High School

# CONNECTIONS

M A G A Z I N E :: W I N T E R 2 0 2 1



Life at Mid-Pen Online, Page 6

RESPECT :: KINDNESS :: ACCEPTANCE :: RESPONSIBILITY





# LETTER FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

In the fall, I was in a Zoom meeting with other heads of school I met three and a half years ago at the National Association of Independent Schools' Institute for New Heads (INH) in Atlanta, Georgia. A week-long program, INH sends new heads of school through an intense crash course on the many facets of running schools—building school culture, working with a board, handling legal issues, and so on.

As much as I learned about running a school, nothing at INH—or in my previous 25 years as a high school educator—prepared my colleagues and me for 2020. Shutting down schools during a global pandemic was one of the hardest decisions we all had to make and was something that none of us could have predicted.

As you will read in this issue of *Connections*, even while the Mid-Pen campus was closed for the fall semester, our online classrooms were full of activity. We also have used the time away from campus to prepare for a spring reopening. Our COVID-19 Task Force has kept safety as the top priority, and while we cannot promise a COVID-free community, I take great comfort in the task force's work and expertise. From testing protocols to numerous campus improvements and safeguards, the school has adopted every requirement from the county health department and the CDC. The strength of the school's financial reserves going into this year has also given me peace of mind.

In October, teachers and students spent some time on campus together, and those moments left many of us optimistic about our return. Life at Mid-Pen will certainly look and feel different; we will need some time to adjust



to outdoor learning spaces, social distancing, masks, and signs everywhere. The benefits of being together, however, far outweigh the necessary changes and challenges to life at school. Mid-Pen's core values will play a crucial role in our return to campus and to protect our community as a whole. Above all, we must uphold our individual and collective responsibility to one another.

As we look forward to the new year, I also reflect on our faculty during the fall semester and the countless hours dedicated to their students' educational growth. Our teachers continued to provide engaging, thoughtful instruction in their online classrooms while always leading with compassion for our students.

Our Parents Association also supported our community. Along with hosting regular Zoom meetings for parents and guardians, they surprised faculty and staff with special delivery gifts of gratitude and delivered Halloween treats to every student.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the students who have worked so hard throughout distance learning. I've heard from many of them that distance learning is "all work and no play." I know how much they have missed high school's social life—the camaraderie, the laughter, and the spontaneity. I cannot wait to see their faces, masked as they are, when we return to campus.

We will find joy together again. We are strong and resilient. We are Dragons. 🐉

  
Phil Gutierrez

## CONNECTIONS

*CONNECTIONS* is published twice yearly, in January and July, for the parents, alumni, faculty, and friends of Mid-Peninsula High School.

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## Reimagining the Admissions Season For a Virtual World

Last summer, when Head of School Phil Gutierrez announced Mid-Pen would continue its distance learning program through at least the first semester, Director of Admissions Randy Johnson started to lose sleep. Open houses, campus tours, student shadow visits: how could any of these events and activities be replicated on Zoom, particularly at a school that prides itself on individual attention?

"I was up nights all through the summer wondering how we could set up a really personalized, human admissions process over Zoom," Randy said. The solution, he realized, was not only to restructure events for the online world but to completely reimagine them.

Working with Director of Communications Charlene Prince Birkeland, he turned the school's traditional fall open houses into webinars, including taped interviews with teachers and a live student panel. To maintain the personal touch, interested families were invited for one-on-one virtual tours of the school that Randy led via a screen share on Zoom. With the aid of video clips, they walked the school's halls together, went outside, and stopped by the student center. They "visited" classrooms using videos and photographs taken while school was in session last year.

New this year were five information nights. They focused on math, science, humanities, the arts, and learning support. Families could attend any or all of the hour-long events to hear live presentations from teachers in each subject. The idea was to mirror the second half of the school's in-person open houses when parents visit informally with teachers in their classrooms.

Applicants were also invited to a "virtual shadow day," allowing them to attend online classes based on their interests, typically one elective and two academics. Teachers were given advance notice of the prospective student's interests, and Mid-Pen student ambassadors in each class introduced themselves in the chat and gave

prospective students their email addresses if they had any questions.

"When I talk to my peers in the admissions world, they think I am crazy for doing this," Randy said, explaining the complicated logistics of shadow days. "It's challenging juggling all the Zoom links, but really rewarding. Obviously, an online class is not the same as being on campus. Still, when I ask the kids after attending our Zoom classes if they can picture themselves in the class, they usually tell me they felt engaged and comfortable participating. Many say Mid-Pen's online classes are better than their schools' classes."

Of course, the results of this year's virtual admissions season won't be known until spring, when the school mails acceptance letters to students. For now, the numbers look good, with virtual open house attendance and tour numbers tracking closely with previous years'.

"What families are missing—what we are all missing—is seeing happy kids in our hallways," Randy reflected. "I feel good about admissions this year, but I know that folks are not going to sign up just because they talk to me. It's everyone else—students, teachers, administrators—who really make Mid-Pen Mid-Pen." 🐉



*Director of Admissions Randy Johnson and his cat, Flossy, ready themselves to lead a virtual tour.*

## Election 2020: An Inside Look

Whether sending postcards to increase voter turnout or volunteering to make phone calls and send texts for candidates, teens throughout the country participated in the 2020 election. Vote center volunteer positions for high school students were in especially high demand, and several Mid-Pen Dragons were accepted into vote center staff programs throughout the Bay Area.

### LESSONS IN VOTING

History teacher Alan Cameron's Government class joined Michelle Boire's Human Relations students for a presentation by the League of Women Voters (LWV). Susan Briggs P '21 and Ashley Eikenberry P '23, who volunteer for the organization, provided an overview of LWV and discussed the importance of voting.

For many in the class, the 2020 election would be their first voting experience. Susan and Ashley walked students step-by-step through the online voter registration process. As a result of the presentation, several students signed up to vote that day.

"Voting gives us the power to make the country a better place," said senior Aaron Posternack.

Senior Taylor Young volunteered at a poll center in San Jose to learn more about the election process in a hands-on way. "I was interested in seeing how the ballots are counted and how they are transported from counter to counter," he said. He worked one night shift at a vote center and wore a face mask and face shield, maintaining social distance when possible.

"I felt pretty comfortable and not too nervous working during the middle of a pandemic," said Taylor. "The voting center did a great job with coronavirus precautions."

Taylor was able to observe how ballots were counted and stored. "I signed up to work a second day because of my great experience, but they finished everything early, so they didn't need my help again."

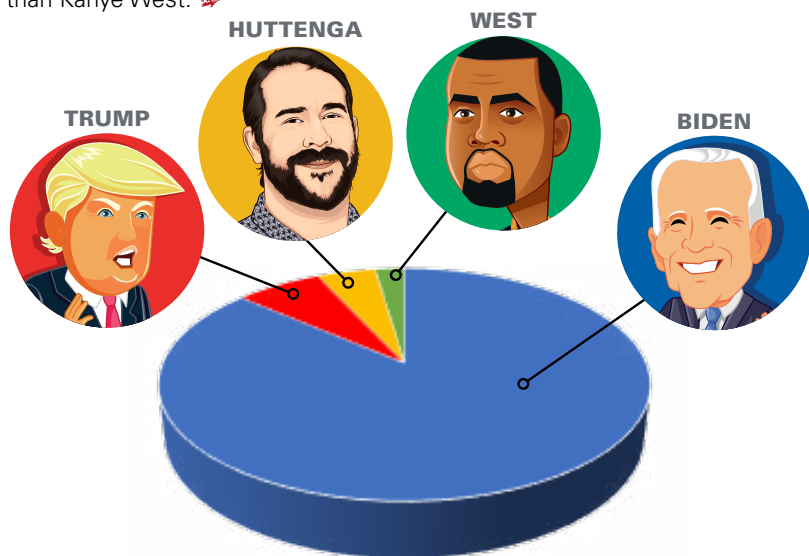
Volunteering at a poll center helped Taylor learn more about the voting process. He also contributed to the election in a more personal way—by casting his first vote.

"It felt very nice to cast a ballot in such a historic election," said Taylor. "I found myself more invested in this election ... I am so glad I got to witness the election first hand and be able to participate." 🗳️

## Mid-Pen's 2020 Presidential Mock Election

While some Mid-Pen students could cast a real ballot in the 2020 presidential election, Mid-Pen hosted its own mock election to see who the student body would elect to run the country. Nearly 87 percent of the students voted for the Joe Biden and Kamala Harris ticket. A surprise write-in presidential candidate was English Teacher Cory Huttenga, who received 4.6% of the vote, slightly more than Kanye West.

“  
IT WAS A TOUGH  
RACE, AND I JUST  
WANT TO THANK MY  
SUPPORTERS FOR  
THEIR VOTE. SEE  
YOU IN 2024!”  
– CORY HUTTENGA







*Julia Weaver '21, far left, provides ASL interpretation while Annika Benton '21 performs.*

## Mid-Pen Drama Program Explores Zoom Theater

By Ada Sussman '23

Mid-Pen's fall play is a source of excitement for the entire school community. This year, student actors and stage crew were challenged with tackling a live production over Zoom.

"So much of theater is about community, both the community that the actors and crew create together and the communion between the actors and the audience," said drama teacher Caitlin Berka. "I noticed right away in rehearsals that I felt farther away from my actors than I usually do. It's harder to read the room and feel the emotion of a scene or a person when everything is happening on a screen."

Caitlin participated in virtual drama programs over the summer to learn tips for staging online performances. She selected the play *Stranded: Views from Quarantine*, a monologue-driven ensemble show written to be performed online during shelter-in-place. Through Zoom, Mid-Pen student actors provided a virtual window into the lives of passengers quarantined on a cruise ship with no end in sight as they explore life, love, the funny, the dramatic, and everything in between.

For weeks, actors studied their roles and practiced individually. They had to figure out how to piece the whole show together, add sound effects, and refine the performance as a whole during tech week—a week-long period in which the cast and crew work to perfect the techni-

cal aspects of the show and do full-show run-throughs. Creating a virtual production was a challenging process. Their hard work paid off; by opening night, the show was ready for an audience.

"It was beyond anything that I imagined, and I owe all of that to the actors and the crew and the hard work that they put in and their willingness to try new things," said Caitlin. "I think that was my big takeaway: just how willing these students are to go with the flow and do something new and unexpected."

“  
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The show was not without technical issues, like untimely internet problems. Still, the cast and crew stuck it out and created an intimate production that garnered audience members from around the world.

"It's been really interesting to see how the world of theater has responded to shelter-in-place," said Caitlin. "One thing I was not expecting was a strangely heightened sense of intimacy in this performance. Usually, when actors are on a stage, they're so far away that there's an automatic removal from the audience. On Zoom, everyone's face is up close and personal."

Zoom theatre was new to most of the audience and the performers, but all of the participants—both audience and production members—adapted and stepped out of their comfort zone. It paid off. 🐉

## Parents Association Keeps Families Connected

*When Mid-Pen closed its campus last spring, the Parents Association stepped up to help families stay connected in the new virtual world. Traditional PA morning coffees moved online, and class reps started hosted evening Zoom meetings where parents could share and connect. With no traffic to fight on Willow Road and fewer social and work commitments, more parents than ever began participating in these virtual PA meetings and activities. This year's PA chair **Andrea Potischman P '23** reflects on some of the lessons learned from the challenging year that was 2020.*

At Mid-Pen's virtual Back to School event in August, I spoke about the remarkable community we have at Mid-Pen. I talked about community as a group with a sense of *belonging*. In the past several months, I have virtually watched as this remarkable community of parents, caregivers, teachers, and staff have come together to support one another through one of the most challenging times in all of our lives. I have been deeply moved.

Our eight incredible grade representatives have worked tirelessly, helping to bring parents and caregivers together not only to connect but also to vent, share, sympathize, and even grieve as our community grapples with an extremely trying situation. These parents have strategized, researched, organized, and advocated for all of us. In a COVID world, this is no small task. Their dedication has been admirable, and we are all better for their effort.

I have been on Zoom calls with parents and in PA committee meetings where the focus has been how to recognize our incredible teachers who are working tirelessly for our students, how to connect with parents and care-

givers who are feeling overwhelmed, and how best to reach out to anyone within our community who may be struggling, even if they are feeling too overwhelmed to raise their hands. Notwithstanding a number of other obligations, the amazing women on the PA Compassion Committee decided recently to virtually meet *more often* to help brainstorm about how to support others who may be in need.

Within the Mid-Pen community, a silver lining undoubtedly has been our ability to connect at the parent level. Although Zoom fatigue is real, technology has facilitated many amazing connections. The turnout for the month-

ly, and in some cases twice a month, grade-level calls has been remarkable. Parents and caregivers are seeking out and making connections. The same can be said for our quarterly PA Town Hall meetings, and the monthly Coffee/Wine calls with Phil.

Although we may feel isolated from friends and family due to COVID, I think many of us have found a sense of belonging within this community. Personally, I believe a sense of belonging to a greater community im-

proves my motivation and sense of well-being. But building that sense of belonging takes work. I am thrilled to see so many in our community participate in that work every day.

As our community enters the colder, darker winter months, I hope our distant bonds continue to strengthen, and we continue to support one another, upholding Mid-Pen's core values of respect, kindness, acceptance, and responsibility to the best of our ability. I hope everyone continues to be safe and healthy as we ring in a much needed new year. 🍷



*PA Chair Andrea Potischman P '23, in her usual Zoom seat in front of her fireplace, provided a constant presence and support during online community meetings this fall.*





*ASL Club and Environmental Club members jump for joy after working on the school's garden.*

## A Week in the Life of Mid-Pen Online

The start of the 2020-2021 school year felt like déjà-vu from the previous spring as Mid-Pen returned to a virtual campus of online classrooms. After spending the summer working on reopening plans, schools throughout the state were forced to stay in distance learning mode due to a surge in COVID-19 cases.

Given the unpredictable nature of the pandemic, Mid-Pen decided to continue its online-only program for the entire fall semester, which allowed students to have a consistent, predictable educational experience. At the same time, the school's COVID-19 Task Force looked to the future and started putting the pieces in place to reopen the campus for the second semester. In November, just as Mid-Pen began hosting small, socially-distanced gatherings on campus, the school pressed pause as the state experienced another COVID-19 surge.

Through it all, technology serves as the literal web that ties Mid-Pen together. Teachers incorporate video tools

like Loom and Flipgrid to create interactive lessons for their students. A messaging app called Remind helps the school reach out to Dragons. And Zoom video conferencing is still being used for classes, faculty office hours, clubs, school assemblies and activities, and staff meetings. Mid-Pen even hosted its first virtual winter dance party over Zoom.

While online, students often share their learning spaces on the screen. In the middle of this tech tsunami, we've spied a distinct, old-school memory-saving tool—a bulletin board filled with photos. With photos splashed across social media and pictures at our fingertips, we still have the desire to preserve memories more tangibly.

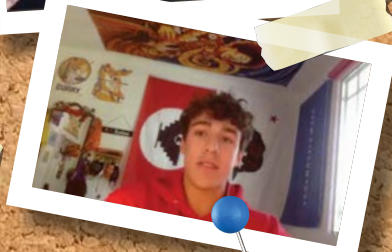
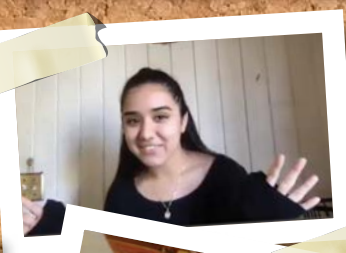
As we look to the spring and summer months, Mid-Pen hopes students are able to make those memories on campus. In the meantime, we offer you a *Connections* bulletin board with highlights from Mid-Pen's first semester of the year. ➤



# MONDAY



After two months of playing music apart, members of the Studio Ensemble gathered in Mid-Pen's Student Center for a socially-distanced rehearsal. Junior Mayan Dolev, like others in the five-piece band, wore headphones connected to a mixer, which allowed her to hear the other band members play while the vocalist sang outside.



# TUESDAY

In early November, Mid-Pen's LatinX Club hosted an all-school meeting to explore the meaning of Día de Los Muertos. Seniors Andries de Wit Castellano and Bridget Cruz led a lively discussion about family traditions. LatinX Club members also shared photos of their Día de Los Muertos altars.

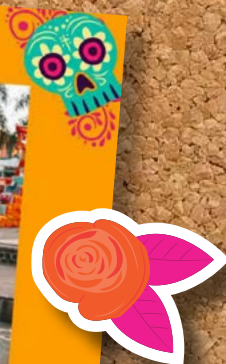


# WEDNESDAY



## What is the Día de los Muertos?

- Holiday that Originated in Mexico by Aztecs
- Happy holiday to celebrate loved ones who passed away
- Two days to celebrate
  - November 1: Día de los Angelitos (Day of the Angels)
  - November 2: Día de los Muertos (Day of the dead)







## THURSDAY



## ESDAY

When Mid-Pen transitioned to distance learning, English teacher Laurie Miller thought it would be almost impossible to host Socratic seminars, so Laurie shifted her curriculum. She had her class read plays because she believed they would encourage lively conversations online in a similar way as in-person classes. Watching her students discuss "True West" by Sam Shepard, it's as if the virtual format was made for Socratic seminars!



M&M's in a chemistry lab? Count us in! Students in David Oliver's chem class spent two days studying the distribution of Candium. This rare, naturally occurring "element" is only found in the candy. M&M's Its symbol happens to be Mm! Dedicated scientist Dwight Garraway '22 separates candy pieces by color before calculating their atomic weight.



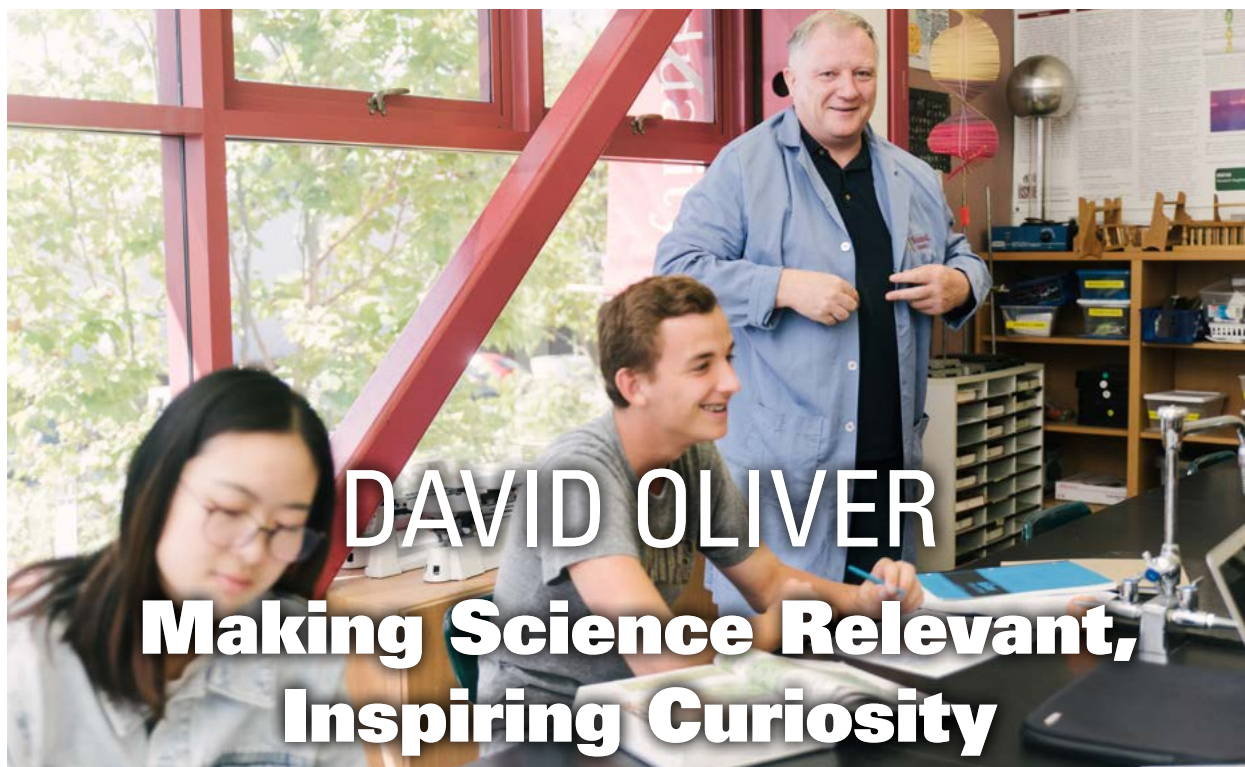
Under gorgeous blue skies, Dragons met with their Core classes over a weekend in October. It was the first time students and teachers had been on campus since it closed in March 2019. Before meeting with his classmates, Taylor Young '21 receives a health screening by nurse Stephanie Casal P '21.



## FRIDAY

Before Thanksgiving break, science teacher Meenu Baloda told her students that she had news to share when they returned. When her students became anxious, she challenged them: "Let me give you a hint, and if you guess it, great; if not, I'll tell you after Thanksgiving." Meenu switched her virtual background to show blue and pink booties. Her students quickly knew the answer, and their reactions were priceless: Meenu is pregnant with her first baby, due March 2021.





## DAVID OLIVER

### Making Science Relevant, Inspiring Curiosity

*Science teacher David Oliver works with Ryan Burton '18 and Phoebe Li '18, above, and with Alfredo Moran '20, opposite, in pre-pandemic days.*

Science teacher David Oliver lives life in curiosity and service. Adventures in his early teens were the foundation for his love of learning. At just 13, he traveled alone regularly from his hometown in Ireland to Saudi Arabia.

"It made me the person I am because I met people from all over the world. At that time, Ireland was very Catholic and very white, and here I was going to the Middle East," he recalled. David's dad worked in the aerospace industry, and it brought the family to the Middle East for six years. During his solo trips, David would travel on standby. "I knew how the system worked. I'd eventually get there, maybe not the way I wanted to, but I would get there."

David's work in the pharmaceutical and biotech industries brought him to the United States in 1995. With roles in sales and marketing, he spent time in Pennsylvania, New

Jersey, and New York before moving to California, where he founded a life science consultancy working with startup companies overseas who wanted to partner with those in the United States.

"We did some training work for the British government and the Irish government, and we worked with government agencies overseas who were looking to learn about the market here and then make connections," he said.

Disillusioned with the constant selling of consulting services during the Great Recession of 2008, David dissolved his business and began his quest for a new

career. While he was interested in law and science, he didn't want to return to school as a student. "I decided I would try teaching because of students' curiosity. I saw there was a great demand for science teachers."



**THE WAY I APPROACH TEACHING SCIENCE IS FIRST TO LET THE KIDS DISCOVER AS MUCH AS THEY CAN THEMSELVES BY GUIDING THEM, AND SECOND TO HELP THEM UNDERSTAND WHY IT'S RELEVANT TO THEIR LIVES."**





David taught middle school science at Yavneh Day School in Los Gatos and St. Lawrence Middle School in Santa Clara, years he calls “basic training.” He joined the Mid-Pen faculty in 2015. He now inspires high school students’ curiosity in environmental science, chemistry, and physics classes.

“The way I approach teaching science is first to let the kids discover as much as they can themselves by guiding them, and second to help them understand why it’s relevant to their lives,” he said, explaining his philosophy.

In his environmental science classes, a favorite project has students investigating tree coverage in different neighborhoods and correlating that data with residents’ socio-economic profiles. “Students are always very surprised by what they find. It’s really a kind of environmental/social justice project.”

In chemistry class, a student favorite is a flame test lab. Dragons observe the characteristic colors produced by metallic ions when vaporized in a flame. Students need to follow the experiment’s procedures step by step. “It’s a complicated lab,” he said. “The priority is always student safety, and in this case, I don’t want them to be intimidated by using a bunsen burner.”

The flame test lab will have to wait for current chemistry students while the school is in distance learning mode. Instead, David selected labs students can conduct at home using simple tools and ingredients like M&M’s.

While remote teaching and learning have posed a challenge, he believes his students have had a smooth transition into his online classes because he has tried to keep it as close to the real classroom experience as possible. “The most important thing is that their interest and enthusiasm hasn’t changed.”

One way David tries to keep students engaged is by incorporating his military experience into lessons. David is celebrating his eighteenth year in the National Guard and is on active duty one weekend a month with a unit in San Jose. His job? To design training plans if his unit needs to detect chemical, biological, and nuclear contaminants.

“When I talk about chemistry [in class], we talk about nuclear chemistry and the applications, and how knowing this information helps in terms of protecting people,” said David.

Last summer, during the protests that followed the death of George Floyd, every National Guard reserve unit in the state was called up to provide support to local police. David’s unit was sent to Santa Monica. “We worked night shifts, mainly manning checkpoints and keeping an eye on the locals, just generally providing support because there had been trouble in the city before the Guard arrived.”

In speaking with Los Angeles residents and peaceful protesters while on duty, he learned they appreciated the National Guard’s presence. “They were quite happy. We were around the corner, ready to be there if things went sideways.”

David says he’s a lifer in the National Guard and plans to be in service for as long as he can. As he reflects on his time in service, he’s most enjoyed that being on active duty brings him out of his silo. “I have met people from all over the socio-economic map. That, I think, is probably the biggest thing I take away from it—different countries, different socioeconomic profiles, and when you put your uniform on, you leave your silo behind,” he reflected.

“It’s nice to give back, in a way, to the U.S. for what it’s given me.” 🐉



## Dragons Are Flying in a Holding Pattern

Throughout the fall, Mid-Pen Athletic Director Kurt Lange had his eyes looking toward December. Based on the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) and California Coast Section (CCS) guidelines set back in July, Dragons were set to begin in-person practices in mid-December or early January if COVID-19 rates were lower.

It turned out that the high school athletics in the time of COVID-19 is like any sporting event: unpredictable.

In late fall, most of California was placed in the purple tier, meaning COVID-19 spread was widespread in the state. CIF and CCS announced they were pressing pause on sports until COVID rates were under control.

"At this point, things are still unknown," said Kurt. "Given the numbers in San Mateo County, we have to wait and see what happens. The best case scenario for sports practices to begin in late January to early February."

Co-ed soccer, girls volleyball, and co-ed cross country are slated to take place in the winter, with basketball, tennis,

boys volleyball, badminton, and track and field on tap for a spring season. Tennis and badminton will be nestled in between the two seasons. Kurt also said that CCS might have to cancel playoffs for the first season of sports in order to allow schools to push their respective league schedules back.

In the meantime, Mid-Pen joined forces with PLT4M, a company that provides virtual off-season training. The school has used PLT4M for physical education and independent studies throughout the fall semester online.

"We're encouraging our students to train independently in the off season so they are ready to practice once we get clearance from CIF and CCS," said Kurt. "Our first priority is keeping them safe, and we'll be following all health and safety guidelines once we're on the court and field. I know our kids are really eager for team sports to begin and their patience is admirable. I'm looking forward to seeing our Dragons back in action." 🐉



*Senior Sebi Strachan practices his footwork during a Core Advisory visit in the fall. Sebi hopes to play a final season on the Dragons soccer team when the school reopens its campus.*





## HANA DVORAK '17

### Spreading Happiness Through Art – and Dragons!

For artist Hana Dvorak '17, art shouldn't be complicated, difficult to understand, or require a detailed artist's statement to appreciate. "I'm the type of person for whom the art is just the art," she said. "I want to make people happy through my art, and you don't need a lot of explanation to make people happy. I also don't really like to write."

A ceramics and glass double major at California College of the Arts in Oakland, Hana likes to let her art speak for itself. In May, two months after COVID first shut down the country, she decided the most important message that her art could convey was that it was okay to smile again.

So was born @The\_Doodles\_and\_Dragons, an Instagram page where she and a friend post "happy drawings" almost every day for anyone needing a dose of good cheer. Hana does the dragon drawings, and her childhood friend Rebecca Spin, a graphic design major at UC Davis, creates the "doodles."

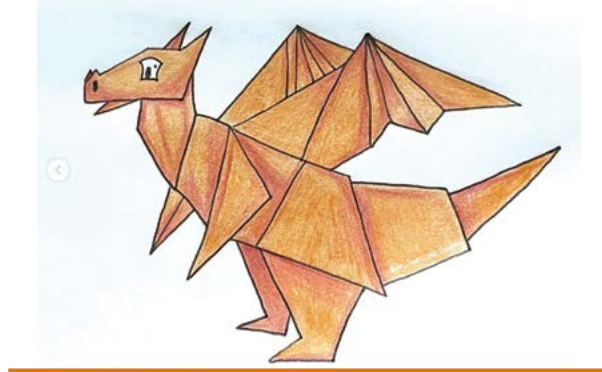
Each of the more than 100 Instagram illustrations the pair has created is inspired by a word of the day, such as *fold* or *buddy*. "Both of us had been working on finding a way to bring happiness to others," said Hana, "and we thought why not share our childhood humor? We decided that once the pandemic started, people were needing more happiness to focus on in their lives. Allowing people to

step away from their lives and enjoy some art that makes them smile: that's important to both our art practices."

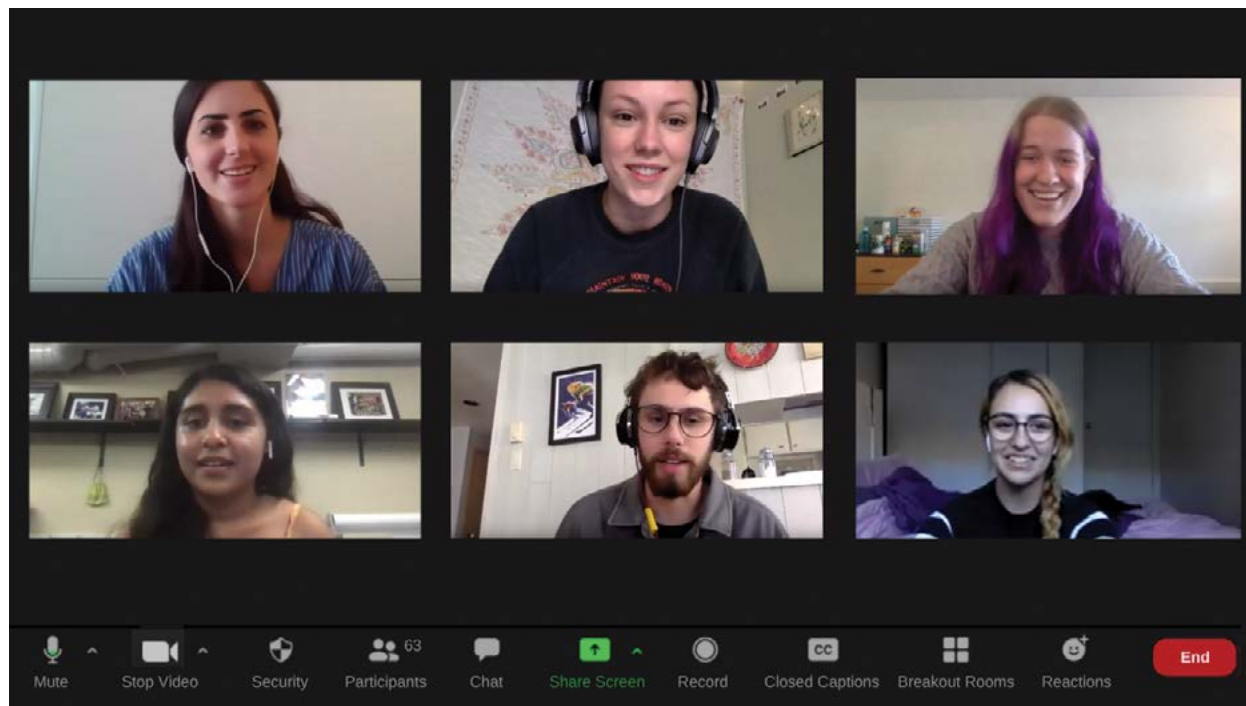
During the pandemic, it has been difficult for Hana to pursue her work in ceramics and glass. "I have a lot of unfired pieces that are filling up shelves in the studio that I am concerned about because unfired pieces are a lot more fragile than pieces that have been in the kiln. But getting access to the kiln during the pandemic has been difficult," she said. With CCA in distance learning mode, she has been getting her humanities and science requirements out of the way this year. "I am actually taking three history classes this year," she said, "I hate the essays, but I love history," a passion that she attributes to Mid-Pen history teacher Alan Cameron.

Like many, Hana has found a silver lining to the pandemic. Good friends since kindergarten, when they were in the same class at the Keys School in Palo Alto, she and Rebecca have become even closer since the pandemic. "We critique each other's work, although she is much more of the illustrator."

Eight months into her daily dragon drawings, Hana is pleased by the response to their Instagram page—after all, who doesn't love a dragon? She says she is also happy to take requests for illustrations from Mid-Pen alumni and students; she can be reached at [hanagd@gmail.com](mailto:hanagd@gmail.com) or leave a comment @The\_Doodles\_and\_Dragons on Instagram. 🐉



## Young Alumni Share Their Wisdom With Students



*The Young Alumni Zoom Panel, clockwise from top left, Sarah Cobbett '13, Megan Biglow '13, Casey Schaefer '16, Julia Gold '17, Malcolm Willig '17, and Yasmeeen Magaña '16.*

In October, six young alumni came together on Zoom for a panel discussion with current Mid-Pen students on life after high school. Moderated by History teacher Alan Cameron, the discussion ranged from college social life to choosing a major. Below is some of the advice they shared with our college-bound seniors.

**Julia Gold '17** is a senior at Sonoma State majoring in Psychology with a minor in Jewish studies. She always

knew that she wanted to work in psychology; however, it wasn't until her junior year, when Julia attended a career fair and discovered Burnett Therapeutic Services, that she decided she wanted to work with children. Julia is currently working at Burnett Therapeutic Services as an ABA Therapist.

"If you had asked me at Mid-Pen what I wanted to do, I couldn't have told you," she said. "Talk to your profes-

**Sara Ginsburg '90** is living in Vermont and finishing her MA at Middlebury College. She has very fond memories of her time as a Dragon and would love to reconnect with any staff and old friends. Sara's email address is ginsburgvt@gmail.com.

**Brady Robertson '06** graduated from UC Davis with a BS in materials engineering in June. Over the years, he tutored hundreds of students at all levels of math for Cabrillo College's math learning center and has offered to work with Mid-Pen students as well.

Condolences to the family of **Christopher Cousins '08**, better known as Kit, who was killed in a motorcycle crash outside San Diego on August 12 when he failed to navigate a curve, veered off the roadway, and crashed into a fire hydrant. He was 30 years old.

After graduating from Mid-Pen, Kit studied automotive technology before enlisting in the U.S. Navy in 2016. He trained as a fire controlman to operate sophisticated shipboard weapons systems, a highly technical and challenging rating (as the Navy refers to its jobs) requiring advanced electronics and computer skills. Attached to the USS Mobile Bay, he quickly advanced to Second Class Petty Officer and earned his Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist pin after just seven months on board. In February 2020, he was awarded a Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal. In addition to operating and maintaining the computers at the heart of the Navy's modern weaponry, Kit also trained others in the safe and effective employment of these highly sophisticated systems.

**Rachel Thurber '14** is living in Philadelphia and has a career as a professional makeup artist. "I've been working hard





sors. They've all figured out their careers, so it's really awesome to be able to talk to them and learn what their career paths have been."

Many of the alums spoke of the need to develop a strong support network in college. A sociology major, **Yasmeen Magaña '16**, is in her final year at UC Berkeley. Asked about the transition to a much larger school, she said, "Any school with two buildings is bigger than Mid-Pen. There were times when I did feel very overwhelmed, but what helped with my transition was creating a social network, a support circle of people who can help guide you."

**Megan Biglow '13** started at the College of Charleston before transferring to the University of Puget Sound, where she focused on animal behavior and behavioral psychology.

She echoed Yasmeen's advice: When things get challenging, she said, make use of your network and "remember there are many people in your same position. You're certainly not alone in your experience. While it's definitely intimidating to talk about challenges, it is comforting to remember there are people who are going through the same thing as you."

**Casey Schaefer '16** encouraged students to try new things in college. Prior to the College of William and Mary in Virginia, where she is a senior, she attended Foothill College for three years. She became interested in anthropology at Foothill when she worked at archaeological field schools in Ireland and Ecuador.

"I had no idea what I wanted to do when I left Mid-Pen," she recalled. "I was going into community college with

really no plans. I saw a sign for this archaeological field school in Ireland. I didn't really know anything about archaeology, but I'd been to Ireland with Alan's class, and I was, like, I want to go back! Even if you don't know what you want to do, don't be afraid to try things that you may not really know anything about, as you could find something that you love."

**Sarah Cobbett '13** suggested that students "think of college as an opportunity to reinvent yourself, to get into new interests, to join clubs or sports that you wouldn't have otherwise tried."

Sarah also attended Puget Sound, where she studied communications and French literature. She studied abroad in Dijon, France, and taught English in Cambrai, France, for a year after college. She currently works at a public relations agency in Seattle.

**Malcolm Willig '17** was the third panelist to attend Puget Sound. He is majoring in Chinese, with an education minor, having transferred after his freshman year at Allegheny College in Pennsylvania. "I found out that East Coast culture is very different from the West Coast," he recalled. "Just keep an open mind and be willing to meet people, even if they have different perspectives, is my advice."

All six alums said they look back on their Mid-Pen education as strong preparation for college.

"I feel that going into college I already had the confidence of raising my hand and saying, 'I don't know what's going on, can you please help me?'" said Julia, articulating a lesson others said they had learned at Mid-Pen. "Mid-Pen created a lot of confidence for me, letting me build who I am and find myself."

at a business I never thought would take off, but now have successfully made it in my industry, traveling everywhere for work. I am working on films and bridal, as well as fashion work in New York and Philadelphia."

**Dudley Ryder '16** recently became the proud father of twins, Remy and Mekhi.

After graduating from Mid-Pen, **Michael Bennett de Avila '17** took a gap year and traveled to Costa Rica to work at an animal rescue center. Returning to the U.S., he tried his hand at being a chef and attended community college in Portland. Most recently, he has been training to become a voice actor. "I have been working with a professional doing private lessons during the pandemic, which has been great," he writes. "My skills have grown, and I have been getting better and better.

My instructor and I are hoping in 2021 I will be able to make a demo tape and get my voice out there. My goal is to turn this into a career that I can make a successful living at."

Currently vacationing in Korea, **Hannah Lee '19** is attending cooking school in San Francisco to study baking arts.

At the beginning of the summer, we received an email from **Ernesto Valencia Arevalo '19**, who wrote, "I transferred to BYU on a scholarship and have been able to maintain a 4.0 throughout college so far. In the Fall, I'm going to be living on campus so [I] won't be living with Tyler (Peery '19) anymore, but right now I'm stuck in my country, El Salvador, where the only international airport we have is closed until further notice. However, I'm so grateful to be able to spend so much time with my family after three years of seeing them on and off."



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