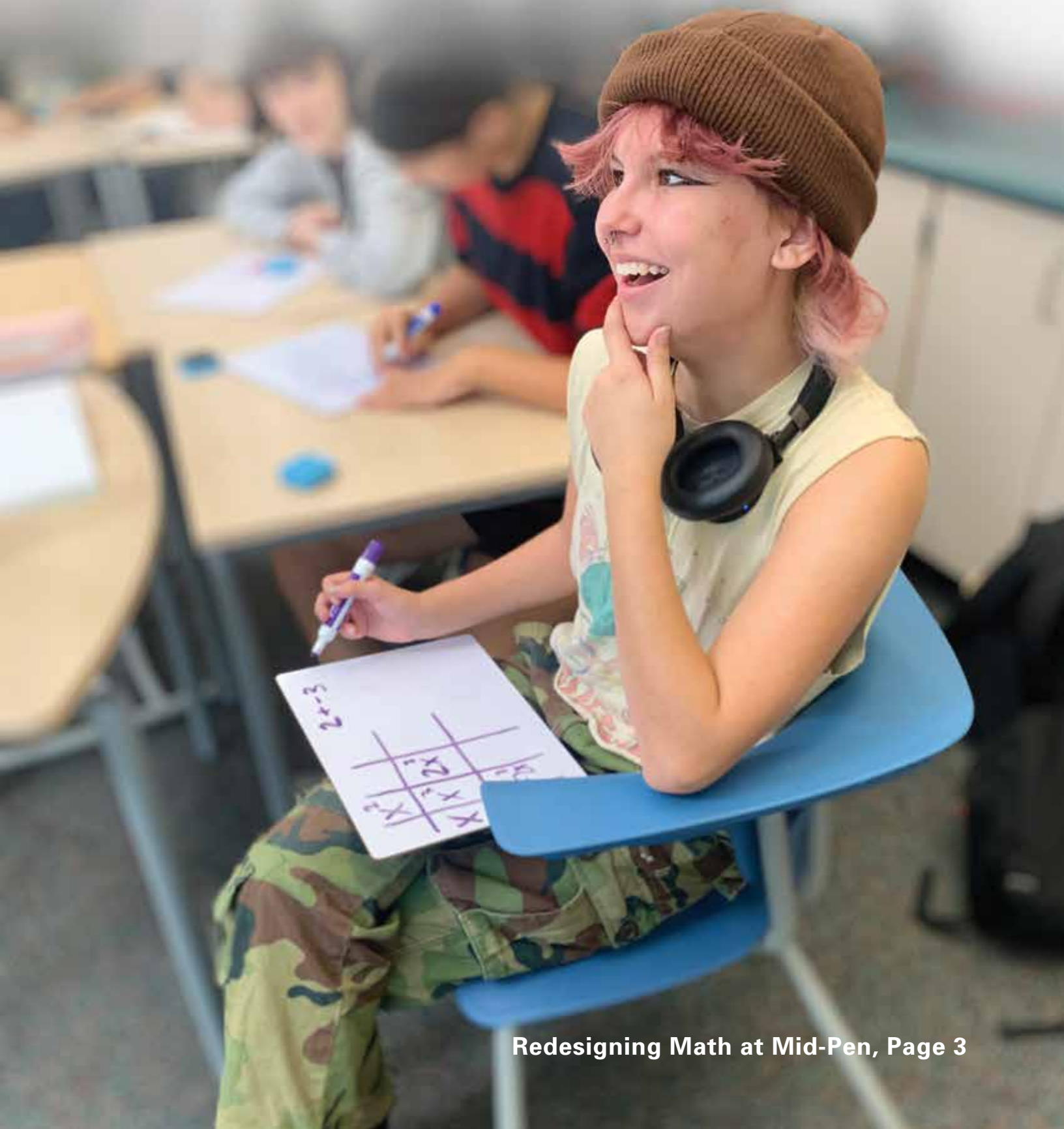


Mid-Peninsula High School

CONNECTIONS

MAGAZINE :: WINTER 2023





I recently had the privilege of sharing the State of the School presentation with our current families. As I talked with the people in the room, I was reminded of how proud I am to lead a school whose priority centers on the health and wellness of our students. We know that all of our Dragons' successes—in academics, athletics, arts, and life beyond high school—are made possible by the trusting and meaningful relationships with the adults in their lives. And I am incredibly fortunate to partner every day with colleagues, trustees, and families who work tirelessly to support and manifest our institutional values daily.



We strive to be good stewards of our resources and manage our costs carefully, and we prioritize investing in our people and ensuring that they have the support and resources they need to deliver an exceptional educational experience to our students. We are proud to invest in our dedicated and passionate staff, who will continue to shape the future of our school.

Because of our collaborative efforts, Mid-Pen is now a "first choice" school for families seeking a supportive community with a commitment to student growth and development. We have built a stable average enrollment of 135 students and know it will continue to grow.

I am excited to announce that Mid-Pen is in the early phase of a capital campaign to raise funds for a new building that will transform our campus and enhance our programs. This new

space will provide students with state-of-the-art facilities that support their academic, artistic, and wellness pursuits. It will include new classrooms, a performing space, a rehearsal studio, and a student wellness center, so our Dragons

will have even more opportunities to pursue their passions and develop their talents while supporting their health and well-being.

We are grateful for our community's generous support, which has already helped us get closer to making this exciting project possible. This new building will be a game-changer for our school, and we

look forward to sharing more updates as our plans progress.

As we look towards the future, the unwavering support of our community gives me incredible confidence in the strength and resilience of our school. I have heard repeatedly about how Mid-Pen has transformed so many lives—of students themselves and their families—over the course of our history. I look forward to working with my colleagues, our Board of Trustees, and our current and alum families to envision the most relevant, supportive, and transformative experiences for our students now, and to laying the groundwork for those kinds of experiences for our future students. Go Dragons! 🐉

Karen Eshoo

CONNECTIONS

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

Charlene Prince Birkeland,
Contributing Editor

Henry Trevor,
Director of Development

Design by Gino Squadrito
Printed by LaserCom Design

Cover: Fin Collart '24 works with quadratic equations in Algebra II.

Sports photos by Daniel Bellomy '23.

Mid-Peninsula High School
1340 Willow Road
Menlo Park, CA 94025
www.mid-pen.org

To submit alumni news and address changes, please contact alums@mid-pen.org.

The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the authors.



A SPOOKTACULAR HALLOWEEN!

Students and staffuly showed up ready to impress on Halloween with their creative, spooky, and often hilarious costumes. These photos show the school's tradition of costume competitions and challenges between Core classes. 🦋



Beyond the Numbers: Redesigning Math at Mid-Pen

The pandemic and subsequent lockdown generated a host of new concerns for academic institutions. When they returned to in-person learning, teachers had to contend with gaps in students' learning, necessitating a significant review of past concepts and slower pacing throughout the year. Math instruction, in particular, was severely impacted. Research showed gaps of four to seven months of learning among students nationwide between March 2020 and the return to full-time in-person learning 18 months later.

According to Director of Teaching, Learning, and Equity Jorge Rodriguez, Mid-Pen's math department faced its own particular issues due to the challenges of distance learning. "We had to adjust the structure and pacing of classes to meet the needs of our student population," he said. "Students with learning differences had some added concerns that needed to be addressed compassionately."

Mid-Pen students come from a wide array of middle schools, which send new Dragons with disparate math backgrounds to campus each year. All of these factors, combined with a tradition of teacher autonomy, meant that some classroom practices and policies needed to be more consistent across the department.

Last spring, the math department worked with Henri Picciotto, a nationally known math educator and consultant, to help close some of the gaps lingering after the pandemic. Henri spent several months visiting math classes, speaking with teachers, and meeting with students to glean information about our program.

The real work began when the academic year ended. During the summer of 2022, the math department met with Henri to review his findings, discuss their practices and curriculum, and develop concrete steps to improve student learning in math.

The cornerstone of the new program is meeting all students where they are mathematically when they arrive at Mid-Pen and supporting them through a curriculum that will prepare them for application to four-year colleges. The school's earlier Intro



to Algebra course has been eliminated, and all students now begin their high school math journey with either Algebra I or Geometry.

The department put new structures in place for students to receive help when they need it. An early morning class meets for 30 minutes twice a week to help students entering Algebra I with foundational skills. A Math Café during lunch provides homework help, test corrections, and test preparation three times a week for all students. All Algebra I students are welcome to attend the early morning class. And, of course, teachers continue to offer office hours for individualized support for all students.

The Algebra 1 and Geometry courses now have a coordinated curriculum with two teachers leading each class, sharing lesson plans, assignments, assessments, and goals. "This collaboration promotes cohesion and structure, allowing teachers to exchange ideas and better support students," explained longtime math teacher Ethan Weker.

The department also agreed on a standardized grading system for homework, quizzes, tests, and projects to ensure fairness and accuracy in providing feedback. Math teachers have revised their grading techniques to align with this system.



Math specialist Cara Colker-Eybel, left, works with Layla Lehman '24. Above, teacher Richard Willits watches as Yuri Cass '23 graphs an equation.

Perhaps the most significant change has been the implementation of a “No-Zero” grading policy, which addresses the imbalances of traditional grading systems where failing grades have a wider range than passing grades. Traditionally, any grade below a 60 percent is an F, meaning it can be extremely difficult for a student to recover after one very bad grade. The new policy gives a failing grade the same 10 percent range (50 percent to 60 percent) as a passing grade and makes it easier for students to improve their grades following a low score on one assignment.

Students and families believe these changes to the math department are a positive first step.

“The changes have led to improved student understanding of the material and better assessment by teachers,” said Jorge, adding that the math team will continue to evaluate the changes and make further improvements, including analyzing the grading policies and curriculum and considering potential changes based on the anticipated revision of the California K-12 math framework later this year. “This process has been exciting with a dedicated team, and the department looks forward to continued refinement of the program.” 🐛

Doing Math is for the Bees



While many students would fret at the prospect of working on one math problem for hours on end, four members of Mid-Pen’s Math Club thoroughly enjoyed it, as participants in the international High School Mathematical Contest in Modeling (HiMCM) held last November.

The annual contest gives high school students the opportunity to engage their mathematical modeling, problem solving, and writing skills. Teams of up to four students choose between two real-world problems and then work together over two weeks to apply mathematics to model and develop solutions. This year one problem involved the modeling of bee populations while the other addressed CO₂ emissions and climate change.

$$a+n = \frac{1}{12} + 1 \quad \frac{1}{12} \leq a \leq \frac{12}{12}$$

The team of Matthew Evans '23, Nick Miley '23, Maisy Palmer '24, and Ileana Woods '24 was coached by math teacher Ethan Weker. They used a little bit of calculus and a lot of advanced algebra to create equations that modeled the population of honeybee colonies over the course of a year. Their contest entry included a sensitivity analysis to determine which factors have the greatest impact on colony size, models and predictions of how many hives are needed to support pollination of a 20-acre parcel of land containing crops that benefit from pollination, a technical paper communicating their solution, and an infographic summarizing their findings.

The work tested not only their mathematical knowledge, but also their research skills. “We had to do hours of research before even starting on the math,” said Matthew. “When you are given a problem, you often get some information, but you have to figure out a lot yourself. We took a problem that was completely open-ended and developed a creative mathematical solution.”

A total of 854 teams representing 362 schools and 18 countries/regions competed in the 2022 HiMCM, made possible by the Consortium for Mathematics and its Applications (COMAP). 🐛

SHELLY WILLIG

Helping Students Learn from Their College Apps

When Shelley Willig started at Mid-Pen in the summer of 2022 as the school’s first full-time college advisor, it felt like coming home. Not only is she the parent of an alum, Malcolm Willig ’17, but she also served on the school’s Board of Trustees for three years, including as co-chair.

An independent college advisor since 2012, Shelley started her career in high tech marketing and communications. She got involved in college counseling when Malcolm’s older brother was applying to college. Like many parents, she remembers being more excited about the application process than he was.

“I realized that applying to college was dramatically different from when I went through it in the early eighties,” she said. “I helped him, and then his friends, develop their personal statements for their applications. That’s when I realized that I really wanted to be working with high school students.”

Connections caught up with Shelley between meetings with students.

Why did you decide to return to Mid-Pen?

I wanted to provide the level of individualized support that is right for each student and family and be able to leverage the efficiency of working with an entire class of students. Most importantly, I wanted to work with self-aware students in an environment where people feel a sense of belonging. I was pretty sure that Mid-Pen could be that place. After meeting with Head of School Karen Eshoo and Assistant Head Heidi Schiessler, I was certain of it.

What have you learned about Mid-Pen students in the past seven months that you didn’t know before?

As a parent and trustee, I wasn’t aware of the depth of involvement of Mid-Pen students in campus activities. Since starting at Mid-Pen in August, I see the majority of students engaged in ways that help define culture and form community. It’s exciting!

What do you think makes Mid-Pen students attractive to colleges?



College Advisor Shelley Willig counsels juniors Charlie Woods and Abby Wee.

Mid-Pen students are distinctly self-aware, and they know how to advocate for themselves. Mid-Pen students are also very resilient.

Could you describe how you work with students?

My intention is to work with groups of students on the parts of the process that are universal—the mechanics of the process—and to work individually with students to identify good fit schools and on crafting an application that represents their strongest selves. Not everyone at Mid-Pen goes straight on to a four-year college, of course, so I also work with students to help them plan more generally for life after Mid-Pen.

Is there anything that kids actually learn from the college application process?

Students can learn a lot from the process, including what makes them special, how to present themselves, and that their choices about how to spend their time matter.

Long term, what are your goals for college counseling at Mid-Pen?

In a well-rounded high school experience, students already do the work that is required for applying and gaining admission to college. I would like the college admission process to be integrated into our program so that it doesn’t live as a big separate process that takes on a life of its own. On our way to that goal, I will be talking with students about making the most of their classes, participating in the community, pursuing outside interests, and thinking about the post high school environment in which they want to continue doing these things. 🐉

MILO BUCKNER '23

Changing the World Through Kindness

Core Teacher: Alan Cameron

Previous School: Moonridge Academy and Charles Armstrong

Favorite Movie: *Rushmore*, directed by Wes Anderson

Favorite Book: *My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult

Favorite Class: English. Either English III with Tara Theobald Anderson or Gender Studies, or Socratic Seminar/Advanced Composition with Laurie Miller. Really every English class at Mid-Pen has been my favorite.

Why Mid-Pen?

It's home. I get to be who I want. Mid-Pen has this incredible flexibility in its academics and also in the community. It has always been the perfect place to grow; when I have trouble with my friends, I know my core teacher, Alan, will support me, and when I have a problem with homework, I receive lots of help from my classmates and teachers. Even when I had to do something challenging and say goodbye to some friends because what they talked about made me uncomfortable, I still didn't feel alone because many more students welcomed me to sit with them and chat.

We grow and struggle as a community, too. For example, Mid-Pen felt the effects of the pandemic on the student-teacher dynamic and just the socialness of the school in general. But we overcame that because the administration, teachers, and students worked together. At Mid-Pen, I feel like my voice is heard, I feel safe inside the community, and I feel academically and emotionally supported.

A favorite Mid-Pen moment

Talent shows/concerts. We have a lot of live music, sometimes at lunch, after school at concerts, or talent shows. It's so beautiful that we can come together and support each other's



passions. I also have friends in music, and my boyfriend plays bass/guitar, so it is especially sweet to watch them have fun.

If I could change the world...

I would have a world where everyone slows down and focuses on understanding, respecting, and being kind to each other, no matter how different you are. The world would be better if we left each other alone. I am not saying we shouldn't strive for a more morally upstanding society. However, I do believe that in most cases, if I am not hurting myself, others, or the earth, it's probably okay.

What's next?

I plan to go to a four-year university to become a secondary school art teacher. In my experience, there aren't enough kind adults so I want to be that for the next generations. I applied to 14 schools, which I admit was overkill; however, I want to find the right one. I am really looking for a school that will continue the support and encouragement I receive here at Mid-Pen. 🐍

Mid-Pen ASL Students Lead and Learn in Zambia



By Ada Sussman '23

In the summer of 2022, 11 American Sign Language Honors students and alums embarked on a trip to Zambia to visit Mid-Pen's sister school, Jennifer Memorial Special Community School (JMSCS). As a part of the ASL Honors course, students prepared all year and developed a service project to contribute to JMSCS. During the three-week excursion across the country, students got to visit a national park in Mfuwe, volunteer at the school in Kitwe, and explore Zambia's capital city, Lusaka.

The trip was led by ASL teacher Francis Phiri, who was born and raised in Zambia's capital. After emigrating to the United States to attend university, Francis co-established JMSCS in Kitwe to provide strong educational resources for Deaf children in Zambia. Before the pandemic, two students in the Class of 2021 helped build the sister relationship between Mid-Pen and JMSCS and arranged for ASL students to visit the school. However, COVID-19 interrupted these plans. They were resumed last summer, with several now-graduated students who were a part of the initial project returning to contribute to our sister school.

Before heading off to the airport, students attended a week-long preparation course where they learned the

basics of Zambian Sign Language and two commonly spoken languages in Zambia. After finishing the final touches on their Honors projects, the group embarked on the almost 24-hour trip, including a one-night layover in Dubai. After landing in Zambia's capital city, the group hopped on a smaller prop plane and landed in the Mfuwe National Park at sunset.

The students, along with their three Mid-Pen chaperones and two parents, spent three days in the park relaxing and adjusting to the time difference. Each morning, they woke at the crack of dawn and hopped in open-air vans for game drives, during which they spotted lions, elephants, hyenas, zebras, water buffalo, hippos, and giraffes. They stayed in small platform tents alongside a river bank and were treated to vibrant sunsets every evening. They also spent time exploring the village of Mfuwe and learning about the risks of animal poaching at a local wildlife conservation center.

Following a flight to Kitwe, home to JMSCS, the next week was dedicated to the American students working with Zambian students and staff to make lasting contributions to Mid-Pen's sister school. Each Mid-Pen student had prepared an honors project designed to benefit JMSCS.






Two Mid-Pen students donated sports equipment they collected back at home and led daily soccer practices for the students of JMSCS. One student who was passionate about dancing gave dance lessons and choreographed a number that was performed on the final day in Kitwe. Two students taught a biology class for the older kids at JMSCS and provided the school with a year-long science curriculum.

JMSCS students got involved with creating a hand-painted mural in an art class to help commemorate the trip. A Mid-Pen student filmed the whole trip to make a documentary about the experience. Another student collected thousands of dollars to establish JMSCS's first library, working with local carpenters to construct shelves and tables and taking a group of students to pick out various books to fill the shelves. Two other students cooked every student and staff member a hot lunch daily and bought the school a new stove.

After a week of hard work and spending time in JMSCS's tight-knit community, the group celebrated the last day with a closing ceremony and a final day of fun with the kids. Knowing that each of their projects would make a lasting impact, Mid-Pen students spent the last day in Kitwe exploring the downtown city area and getting a tour of one of the country's leading copper mines.

The trip's final leg was spent in Lusaka, Zambia's capital city and Francis's hometown. The group spent the first few days in the center of the downtown area, visiting museums and markets and experiencing life in the country's largest city. The group also got to see the President's residence and tour the compound where Francis grew up.

The last few days of the trip were spent in another hotel on the outskirts of the city, owned by a good friend of Francis. Students got to relax by the pool, play a round of golf, and dine at nice restaurants as they celebrated the birthdays of two students. After a few final days of relaxing after a long few weeks of travel, the students hopped back on a long overseas flight. They returned home to California, excited for Mid-Pen's next adventure in Zambia. 



CORY HUTTENGA**Stories From a Life of Wandering**

Talk to Cory Huttenga for more than a few minutes, and you'll discover he's full of stories, like the time he was hiking in the Czech Republic and, as a shortcut, jumped a fence, only to be surrounded by police for landing in the backyard of the presidential mansion. Or the time he was fired from a warehouse job for wearing flip flops, or when he got sacked as a gas station attendant for not smiling enough.

"Before becoming a teacher, I must have had 100 different jobs over the years—literally," Cory says. "Cook, waiter, security guard, warehouse packer, salesperson in a garden store—I've done it all, and there's a story behind every one of them."

As an English teacher, it's hardly surprising that Cory loves stories—and has accumulated more

than a few over his varied career. Cory says teaching English is all about helping students develop a love of stories, their own as well as those written by others. Journaling is a big part of his classes. By sharing his own stories with the class, his students discover and write the stories of their own lives.

Growing up in Grand Rapids, Mich., Cory was one of the first members of his working-class family to attend college. He attended the University of Michigan on a gymnastics scholarship and competed for four years at the Division I level in floor exercise, vault, and rings. "I didn't go to the Olympics and we didn't win a national championship, but I competed at a pretty high level nonetheless," he recalls.



When students prepare to write journal prompts, Cory encourages them to have fun by wearing one of the many hats or wigs available in his classroom.

Leading by example, he often sports a Viking helmet or rainbow-colored wig himself.



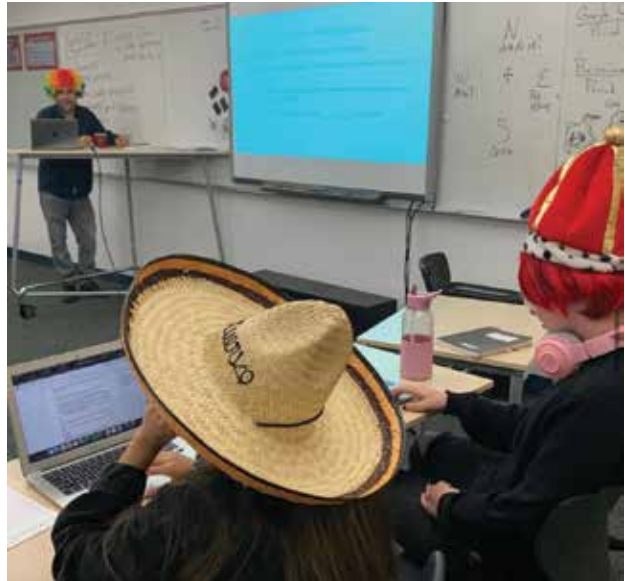
When he graduated with a degree in English in 1990s, his goal was to become a writer, and “to be a writer I needed to go out and accumulate experiences that I would write about.”

Cory’s first stop was an art co-op in Boulder, Colo., where he discovered what became a lifelong passion for music, learning to play the guitar and realizing he had a talent for songwriting. “I called my Dad and told him I’d just discovered music,” he recalled. “He told me that most people my age were giving up music, not just getting started in it. But I told him I had found something I loved and wanted to make it an important part of my life.”

“Before becoming a teacher, I must have had 100 different jobs over the years, and there’s a story to every one of them.”

From Colorado, it was on to Seattle, San Francisco, and Europe, working odd jobs and chalking up experiences that he hoped would provide material for the Great American Novel he was planning to write. The first time he made money from music was in Spain. “I was down to a few euros and needed some cash,” he said, “so for the first time, I took out my guitar and started playing on the street—and people actually started putting money in my case. I realized that just by busking for a few hours each day, I could make enough money to stay in Europe for months.”

After hitchhiking through a dozen different countries, he returned to the US, where he continued his wandering ways. The teaching seed was planted in him when he worked as a writing tutor at a community college for a year. All his students were from other countries and were learning English as a second language. He enjoyed helping non-native English speakers learn to write, finding surprising poetry in their work, and discovered he had a talent for teaching. Cory quickly became the most popular writing tutor on campus.



One of his longest stints was as a parking lot attendant in Portland, Maine, during which time he worked on his Great American Novel. “I just sat in a booth all day and watched cars go in and out of the lot,” he laughs. “Most people had a monthly ticket, so they just waved to me as they came and went. Most days, I didn’t have to interact with a single customer, so I was pretty much able to write undisturbed. I had a goal of writing 10 pages a day, and between 2008 and 2012 I was able to complete three novels.”

Cory found the writer’s life to be a lonely one and he also knew the work of finding a publisher required an entrepreneurial spirit that he lacked. He returned to California with the goal of going back to school to become a teacher.

Though he started at Mid-Pen in fall of 2016 as a part-time ESL teacher, Cory was quickly asked to take on a couple of sections of ninth-grade English. As the number of international students declined, he taught English full time and today teaches nearly all sections of English for grades 9 and 10.

Now in his seventh year at Mid-Pen, Cory says he has found his place. As he is quick to point out, it’s the longest he has held any job. “For my whole life of wandering, I always aspired to be an artist, whether as a musician or a writer,” he reflects, “only to discover that teaching is as close as you can get to being an artist and get a paycheck.” 🐉

Volleyball Wraps Up Stellar Winning Season

By Kurt Lange, Athletic Director

The Dragons had a full fall season that brought excitement and action for our volleyball, cross-country, and soccer teams.



GIRLS VOLLEYBALL

Coaches: Franc and Alec Salazar

Mid-Pen Girls volleyball enjoyed one of its finest seasons in the history of the school.

With a total turnout of 27 Dragons, we were able to once again field both a varsity and junior varsity team. Our JV team played a total of nine matches and ended the season 4-5. Perhaps their biggest win came against Stratford Academy by a close score of 25-14, 15-25, and 15-11.

Our varsity girls team finished the league season with a record of 11 wins against only 3 losses, tying us for second place in our division. We were eliminated in our final match of the season by a mere two points.

Amber Rodriguez '23 received a First Team All League award and Mayrin Ceja '23 made the Second Team All League. Julia Oram '23 and Jocelyn Godinez '23 received Honorable Mention awards. Franc Salazar received a special Honor Coach Award. In all fairness, the award is split between Franc and his brother Alec, as they shared coaching duties throughout the season for both teams.



Lizzie Ross '25, left, passes to a teammate while Jocelyn Godinez '23, above, goes up to tip the ball over her opponent for the point.





CO-ED SOCCER

Coaches: Raul Salazar, Kurt Heise, and Francis Phiri

It was a competitive season for Mid-Pen soccer. With 19 players, including nine seniors, the team finished fourth in the league with a 4-4-2 record. The Dragons had home and away victories against both Pescadero and San Francisco Christian High Schools, and tied against second-place finisher Kehillah Jewish High School and third place finisher North Valle. Among the 19 players on our team this season, nine were seniors.



Seniors Will Cook and Uly Cruz garnered First Team All League awards. Henry Chant '24 and Rishi Kapoor '23 received Second Team All League awards, and Honorable Mentions went to Alex Magaña '23 and Bryce Lawson '24.

Long-time coach Raul Salazar received the Honor Coach Award for his dedication to our soccer program. A big shout should also go out to Francis Phiri and Kurt Heise as amazing assistant coaches.

CO-ED CROSS COUNTRY

Coach: Alan Cameron

The 2022 Dragons Cross Country team was small but mighty. Though we didn't have enough healthy runners to field a complete team, Mid-Pen competed in the PSAL this year. New runners such as Connor St. Pierre '25 and Walter Bachmann '25 joined veterans like Bella Maxcy '24 and Devon Crouse '25. Seniors Ronan Furlong and Jonathan Wu led the team both on and off the trails. We look forward to next season and hope to have a large team! 🐉



Alex Magaña '23, right, tries to evade his opponent. William Cook '23, above, completes a steal.

YASMEEN MAGAÑA '16

Completing a Full-Circle Moment

When Yasmeen Magaña '16 attended Mid-Pen, she loved the small environment that allowed her to try new courses and sports. Still, she never imagined she'd end up on the school's cross country team.

"I had never joined any sort of organized sport before in school or outside of school. It was the very first time and it has really stuck with me," said Yasmeen. "I even joined a 5k recently." Her exploration of new activities shaped her experiences at Mid-Pen and helped her while a student at UC Berkeley, where she graduated in the spring of 2022. "I ended up majoring in sociology and public policy. I didn't really know what I wanted to do, I just wanted to explore."

While at Cal, Yasmeen discovered her passion for working with local communities. She wanted to bring that passion back to where she grew up in San Mateo County.

We caught up with Yasmeen one afternoon to learn about her life after Mid-Pen. Now working at Meta with the community engagement team, she is experiencing what she calls a "full circle moment."

How did you land at Meta?

I was working as a case worker helping refugees resettle in San Jose. I come from an immigrant household, so that was very special for me to give back to the refugee community. I was on a path to social and case work and then an opportunity came up at Meta.

When I was attending Mid-Pen, my Core teacher, Jameson [Swanagon], told me about the Facebook Summer Academy. Local high school students could participate in an internship at Facebook and learn about careers in tech. I applied and interned the summer before my senior year.

When I graduated from college, they were looking for alumni of the program to come and support it. So that's what I do now. I work at Meta with the



community engagement team and the state and local policy team.

Working in tech wasn't really on my priority or to-do list, but I found a very nice intersection where I'm working at Meta and I'm also working with local communities, local nonprofits, and helping participants of what's now called the Meta Summer Academy. So it's a very full circle moment where I get to work with students who were just like me when I was in high school.

The majority of them are first-gen students, the first in their families planning to attend college; they're students from the community and are usually very interested in learning about careers in tech but don't really know what it's all about.

What are you working on right now?

We're starting programming for the 2023 Meta Academy, the summer internship program. We recently started making presentations at schools this month, and I'll be going to Mid-Pen in a few weeks. Having my younger brother at Mid-Pen helps. I ask him to tell all his friends to apply.

I joined Meta right when last summer's program was starting. A lot of the students [in the program] were first gen—they really felt like college was almost impossible. They would come out to talk to me about it. They felt like, "Oh, well, my parents didn't go to college. I don't know anyone who's been to college, and it feels like a very distant goal." So it's very exciting when I get to share my story with them and provide any resources or support because I remember that feeling too.

You went from a small high school to a large college and are now working at really large company. What's that transition been like for you?

I really loved the intimate small school setting in elementary and middle school. I was extremely shy. I would never speak in class, I would just do my homework. But at Mid-Pen, I felt comfortable asking



questions, sharing my ideas and joining a new sport I'd never tried. During my senior year, I applied to local colleges. I knew I wanted to stay close to home. I was deciding between University of San Francisco and UC Berkeley, which I knew had a lot of opportunities. I was very nervous and scared about the size of UC Berkeley.

I sat down with Randy [Johnson] one day just after school. We made a pros-and-cons list. I decided that the skills that I had learned at Mid-Pen would help me thrive at a larger university. I decided, okay, I'll get past my fear and attend UC Berkeley, which was an amazing experience.

What are some of those skills that served you well at UC Berkeley?

I think one of the bigger ones for me was feeling comfortable with myself, feeling comfortable asking for help. I knew while I was at Mid Pen that when I shared ideas, teachers and students were all very welcoming. So I became more comfortable sharing my voice and opinions in class. I was more comfortable reaching out for support or even just trying new clubs and things like that. It made the college experience enjoyable.

Going to professors' office hours, I noticed that for my peers sometimes it was a very daunting experience. But for me, it was like in high school. My teachers [at Mid-Pen] all knew who I was, they knew my name, and I felt like I wanted that same experience in college. So I went out of my way to make that happen, and created really close relationships with professors at the college level.

You talked about getting past your fears during the college decision process. How does that experience help you now?

Being a first-gen college graduate and being at a large company, it can be a little daunting. You have a little bit of impostor syndrome. I remember thinking to myself, like, "Okay, what were the pros and cons for deciding to transition from case work to this type of opportunity? What are the larger outcomes and goals?" I'm very passionate about helping members in my local community also gain access or resources similar to the ones I did. So I just remind myself that, yes, I belong here.

Yasmeen's sister Lizbeth '17 is also a Mid-Pen alum and her younger brother, Alex '23, will graduate this spring. 🐉

Marc Jacobs '87 is living in Los Angeles, where he is creative director at the Candy Warehouse, an online candy shop. He writes that he has been married ("to the same person") since 2005, and "has one human child, David, who recently graduated from Columbia University in New York, and two canine children Oscar and Dior, who recently destroyed a sofa."

Sam Cahn '01 stopped by the school in October while in San Francisco with the touring company of *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*. Since graduating from Mid-Pen with a passion for dance, Sam has performed on Broadway in *Wicked*, *Rocky*, *Memphis*, and Disney's *Aladdin*, among other shows. When he's not on stage, Sam is a massage therapist and lives in New York City.



A graduate of California College of the Arts, where she double majored in ceramics and glass, **Hana Dvorak '17** spent last summer in a residency at the Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts in Maine. "I met artists from around the world and made many new friends who also love ceramics," she writes. "Most exciting was trying techniques for firing ceramics that I have been wanting to learn since I started working in clay."

Hana is now teaching at Public Glass, San Francisco's only public-access glass studio and school. "It is an amazing studio that focuses on being a public community space where anyone can learn a wide range of glass techniques. The times I'm not found at Public Glass, I'm teaching Martial Arts at a local studio or team sports at Decathlon Sports Camp. I appreciate that I went to schools like Mid-Pen that encouraged and taught me how to follow my passions and be able to do all the things I love as my jobs now."

Lizbeth Magaña '17 recently graduated from the University of the Pacific with a bachelor's degree in marketing and a master's in business analytics. She is currently living with her sister, Yasmeen, in Menlo Park and working as a client services associate for a wealth management firm on Sand Hill Road.

Gregory Prieto '20 joined the Marine Corps and completed his training in Mississippi last summer.

Max Fletcher NG'22 is a student at Sonoma State, where he is studying psychology and education. When he's not in class, he races Mazda Miatas at several California racetracks, including Sonoma Raceway, in the National Auto Sport Association's Spec Miata category. "I was originally planning to do a full gap year," he writes, "but got in a massive car crash while racing and decided to apply to four schools and happened to get into all four of them! I hope to see good results in my upcoming races, meaning finishing in the top 10. Next season I aim to win at least one race. I have a good team behind me and I'm hoping to push myself to my limits to achieve what I've dreamed about since I was a kid and win a race."

Colette "Coco" Zubizarreta '22 completed her first semester at Curry College in Milton, Mass., where she is planning on majoring in communications.



Mid-Peninsula High School

1340 Willow Road
Menlo Park, CA 94025

NON PROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE PAID
MENLO PARK, CA
PERMIT NO. 736

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Parents of Alumni: If your Dragon no longer maintains a permanent residence at your home, please notify the Development Office at 650-321-1991 or alums@mid-pen.org. Thank you for helping us keep our alumni records current.



LIKE US!



FOLLOW US! @midpendragons



WATCH US! vimeo.com/midpendragons



1992



2022