u-high midway

100TH YEAR

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University of Chicago Laboratory High School

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From cracking jokes with friends to peforming on stage, laughter isn't just fun. It reduces stress, strengthens bonds and even boosts your immune system. Experts say humor goes a long way.



PAGE 8 • ARTS
Bringing new life to stories beyond English, junior Adam Tapper is dedicated to literary translation, uncovering voices from minority languages and reviving connections to his own heritage.



PAGE 11 • FEATURES
In a high-pressure academic environment, some U-High students turn to baking and cooking not just as hobbies, but as creative outlets and even small businesses, redefining success.



Phone, clubs policies analyzed

Committee finds most faculty support phone restrictions; academic club absence policy proposed at meeting

by LILA COYNE & ARI NOVAK

Committees formed to develop policies surrounding cellphone use and club management are beginning to enter the final stage of their processes. Members of the cellphone committee and the clubs committee presented updates on their work at a faculty meeting on March 5 to check in with the faculty and provide them with an opportunity to give feedback.

These committees, comprising both students and faculty, began meeting in January to assess current policies and determine the best path given new information about phone use in schools and an increase in the number of clubs at U-High.

The clubs committee has proposed to administration a policy that will allow students participating in academic competitive clubs at least some excused absences that would not count toward the semester absence threshold. The proposal applies to groups such as Model United Nations, debate and robotics, as well as club sports like sailing and water polo.

Committee member Isaac Berrueta, a Model UN adviser and history teacher, believes this policy benefits students in competitive as well as other clubs.

"[We are] also creating a system where other clubs that are not necessarily competitive clubs can also have an opportunity to experience something outside of school," Mr. Berrueta said. "So we're having these discussions with the dean, your classmates and other teachers to see what would be an equitable system here."

Meanwhile, a member of the cellphone committee emphasized that the group is still early in the process. Librarian Susan Augustine said neither the faculty nor the committee have a fully formed idea of what the final proposal will look like. However, based on feedback, most of the faculty seem to be in favor of limiting phone use.

"I'd say that more faculty than not are in favor of having cell phones put away all day for attention and focus in the classroom and for social development," she said.

She thinks that faculty members are mostly concerned with the negative impact of phones on students' socialization and relationships.

"I think more faculty see it as problematic outside the classroom," Ms. Augustine said. "They see people just hide on their phones and don't talk to others, or, you know, are on their phone so much that they're not either doing their work, or they're not socializing, or they're just not learning how to interact with others. There's a lot of concerns about isolating oneself on the phone."

Catherine Collet-Jarard, a world language teacher who attended the faculty meeting, is in favor of restricting phone use to improve students' social habits. She's concerned about their widespread use during lunch and other social opportunities and thinks a ban will facilitate connection.

"It will probably allow students just to really connect with one another without having a device," Ms. Collet-Jarard said. "So that would be an entirely different culture, which I want to see."

She also recognizes an inherent contradiction in our relationship to technology. As technology has improved, Ms. Collet-Jarard said, we have cultivated it and adapted to it in the classroom, but now we're trying to backtrack.

"At the same time, we're moving forward with technology and then we're pushing against it when it's not convenient for us," she said.

In addition to faculty input, the cellphone committee is working to involve students in the decision-making process. Ms. Augustine said students on the committee have as much of a voice in the meetings as faculty members. There have also been discussions about including Student Council later on.

She said committee members are anxious about student reaction if a ban were formalized.

"I don't think the students of the school want this to happen," Ms. Augustine said. "I think that's really a big part of it. We want to bring in student voice. We want students to be heard, and they are being heard, but we're concerned that people would be really up in arms."

Two sophomore members of the clubs committee, Hannah Gao and Gio Nicolai, both said the faculty feedback for the clubs proposal was positive. The proposal included a revised homework policy similar to the policy for absences due to illness: students absent for club competitions will have the same number of days to complete missed assignments as the days they were absent.

Gio said that the committee plans to start discussing maintenance policies, which will establish guidelines for room allocation based on club attendance.



Midway photo by Delaney Connell

SCREENS AND SCHEDULES. Juniors Vivianna Nieto and Audrey Tian use their phones before their Neuroscience & Behavior class. Committees for cell phone and club policies presented their proposals at a March 5 faculty meeting, sparking discussions on classroom engagement, academic balance and the student experience at U-High.

2025 U-Highlights yearbook to be released this spring

by NAOMI BENTON
Audience Engagement Editor

For the first time in over 60 years, students will receive their U-Highlights yearbook at the end of the school year. The U-Highlights team has decided to deliver the 2025 yearbook in the spring, instead of at the end of the summer as it has for decades.

Because of the timing, the yearbook will have two parts. The bound yearbook will include events from September to before spring break. An attachable spring supplement covering spring sports and activities, including graduation, will be distributed at the beginning of the 2025-26 school year.

The decision to change the delivery of yearbooks was made by the U-Highlights editors-in-chief, junior Daniel Chang and senior Amelia Tan and managing editors juniors Ruby Koyner and Clara Blucher. The editors hope an early release will give students a sense of closure on the year.



Midway photo by Eli Raikhel

SPRINGING INTO PRINT. U-Highlights staff members celebrate sending the 2025 yearbook to print in a March 31 tribute.

"It will be exciting because it's a nice way to wrap up the end of the year," Clara said. "It's a nice thing for the seniors to reflect on their time this year and for everyone to reflect on how the year went right when it ends."

> **"It's a nice thing for the seniors to reflect on their time this year and for everyone to reflect on how the year went right when it ends."**
> — Clara Blucher, U-Highlights managing editor

A factor in making this decision was the opportunity for students to sign yearbooks at the end of the year. The U-Highlights team hopes to plan a signing party for seniors in the first week of June and will distribute yearbooks to all other students in the last week of advisory.

"I think one huge thing that maybe seems a little silly but isn't when you think about it is the fact that high schoolers can't sign each other's yearbooks," U-Highlights adviser Jayna Rumble said. "I think that's an underrated tradition that people miss when you're here at Lab."

Although the new delivery method brought an intense new deadline schedule, the U-Highlights team was determined to make this change.

"Our team this year was a lot bigger than last year, and we have a lot of competent people who knew what we were doing," Daniel said, "and so we thought it would be a perfect opportunity to switch over."

Clubs unite in prioritizing free speech

U-High Progressives, Lab Liberty meet together, create new space for dialogue

by SOHANA SCHNEIDER
Assistant Editor

It's a Wednesday lunch when students sit in a circular arrangement in Room N318, as seniors Lucie Bhatoey-Bertrand and Oliver Wilson present different political issues on the board: abortion rights, climate change, government cuts and efficiency, the Russia-Ukraine War, and gun policy.

The attendees put their heads down and take a vote on which topics they want to discuss first. Students contribute through a combination of speaking freely and raising their hands to be called on, and the discussion goes from there. Occasionally there is disagreement on a topic, but everyone listens and everyone has the opportunity to speak.

Sharing the value of free speech, Lucie, the president of U-High Progressives, and Oliver, president of Lab Liberty, formed the Coalition for Free Speech at Lab, a space at the end of every month meant to facilitate conversations about politically relevant topics.

In late March 2024, the first post was published on Lab Liberty, which lists itself as "a site dedicated to economics, and libertarian-based analysis." Lucie began to read the posts. While she disagreed with many of the opinions on the blog, one about the freedom of speech and the alienation of less-mainstream ideas stuck with her.

Lab Liberty became a club in September. In January, Lucie reached out to Oliver to see if they could organize a space like the coalition.

> **"We can rationalize people's views instead of demonizing them and keeping those ideals in the dark, so it gives people an opportunity to understand each other.**
> — Oliver Wilson, president of Lab Liberty

For me, that marked a pretty significant turning point in the way that I was looking at the political space at Lab," Lucie said. "It was a moment where I began to see it more as a bubble and realized there was something I could do about it."

Lucie wants the coalition to be a supportive space where everyone is heard.

"I feel like Lab lacks spaces where you can really share your political opinions without feeling the judgment of others," Lucie said.

She also believes that different outlooks have a positive impact on the community.

"The value of diversity of thought and free inquiry creates better thinkers and better learners," Lucie said. "If we narrow ourselves down to one way of thinking about the world, it's just not creating a community of people that want to challenge what their teachers say, what their peers say, and creating an argument about what you want to believe."

Oliver agrees that political conversations among students at U-High makes them better learners but also provides them with different perspectives.

"We can rationalize people's views instead of demonizing them and keeping those ideals in the dark, so it gives people an opportunity to understand each other," Oliver said.

As a result of the coalition, Lucie's perspective on others' thought processes was shifted.

"I think it challenged the way I think about the way other people think," Lucie said.

Reflecting on the first meeting Jan. 29, ninth grader Syria Vegna-Spofford, a U-High Progressives member, said that she felt it was civil, achieving its goal.

"I thought it was gonna be heated, but it was relatively relaxed," Syria said. "It felt like we were having a respectful conversation."

By inviting speakers and hosting a Social Justice Week workshop next month, Lucie and Oliver hope to expand on the coalition, keeping their combined passion for free speech in mind.

Oliver said, "I think we both agree that there is not enough of it, and I'm grateful that we were willing to do that together."



Midway photo by Nathan Li

COALITION CONVERSATIONS. The president of U-High Progressives, Lucie Bhatoey-Bertrand adresses a meeting of the Coalition for Free Speech, which meets the last Wednesday of every month in Room N318.

Spring Fling enchants, charms with themed decor



Midway photo by Delaney Connell

MAGICAL MOMENTS. Junior Sara Park dances with fellow students during the Spring Fling on April 5 in Sherry Lansing Theater.

Spirit Week ends with dance based on Harry Potter

by CAROLINE SKELLY
Audience Engagement Editor

Mimicking the Yule Ball, the school dance in the "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire" movie, students danced to popular songs under twinkling candles and golden snitches during this year's Spring Fling dance on April 5 from 7:15-10:15 in Sherry Lansing Theater. Aside from the dancing, students enjoyed a photo booth and food, such as Hogwarts house cupcakes and fruit punch, references to the wizarding world.

Cultural Union Vice President Sinéad Nagubadi said Student Council members were pleased with the turnout of the dance considering they were unsure of how many people would attend.

"Going into the dance, we weren't entirely sure how many people would come, given that we sold most of our tickets at the door," Sinéad said, "but it was great to see that a lot of people were able to come in the end."

Tickets were $15 at the door or $10 in advance.

During the week leading up to the dance, Student Council hosted Spirit Week and sold tickets. Some of the spirit week themes included Meme/Internet Day, where students could dress as their favorite internet meme, and Dress Like a Teacher Day.

Sophomore Mercury Romero said she enjoyed the community aspect of Spring Fling and being able to spend time with her friends.

"Spring fling was so fun," Mercury said. "I always love going to school dances because it's a great way to spend time with friends, especially those who I don't always get to see outside of class."

Mercury also enjoyed the decorations and the music selection. Students danced to songs ranging from Taylor Swift and Chappell Roan to Flo Rida.

"The decorations were super cool and I loved the photo booth," she said. "Dancing with my friends is easily one of my favorite parts of the night and the music was great."

Sinéad said she was proud of the attendance and how the dance turned out.

"It was stressful as always but it was still a great last dance," she said.

New administrative position sparks concerns, confusion

by LIGHT DOHRN
Arts & Entertainment Editor

An opening for a full-time U-High administrative position, a dean of student success, was published online for applications on Feb. 5. The administration said that this fourth administrator role is being restored rather than created, but the opening has nonetheless prompted a range of reactions from faculty and others.

"The return of a fourth administrative team member has been under consideration for some time since a resignation left our division with three in 2020," Mr. Woods wrote in an email sent to U-High faculty on Feb. 5 and obtained by the Midway, titled "Expanding Leadership to Support Our Students."

The role focuses on tracking student academic progress, coordinating support plans for those in need, and identifying broader school-wide trends to improve programming, as well as working closely with the learning and counseling team to proactively address challenges.

The posted salary range is $83,160 to $115,500 per year.

Mr. Woods emphasized Lab's "Theory of Action," and suggested that the position's restoration will be a positive addition to its overall learning environment as well as the general experience of students.

"This new role presents an opportunity to bring greater clarity to our Theory of Action," Principal Woods wrote, "reinforcing our strong commitment to academic excellence while ensuring that students thrive in an environment that nurtures their intellectual, social, emotional, and identity development."

The hiring process will be partly influenced by a committee, which will include faculty and other members, that will review candidates, though the final decision will be made largely by Mr. Woods and Director of Schools Tori Jueds.

U-High faculty chair Matt Martino, who will play a role in the committee selection process, noted that it is still taking shape.

"While I am not sure who other than three or so faculty members will be on the committee, all of those people who are on the hiring committee will have input into the decision," Dr. Martino, a science teacher, said.

Dr. Martino said the position has been met with a range of reactions from both students and faculty.

"My take is that overall faculty opinion on the new dean role is mixed," Dr. Martino said. "Student support seems like a good and valuable thing that we should care about and think about at all times, and that opinion has been expressed. The need for another administrator — a number of faculty members do not think that that case has been made."

As the hiring process moves forward, Mr. Woods has framed the role as an investment in student well-being and academic success.

"By adding this role, we are deepening our investment in student well-being," Mr. Woods said, "creating more touchpoints for academic and personal growth, and ensuring that every student has the guidance and support they need."

job description

Here are a few responsibilities for the dean of student success:

- Work in tandem with dean of students, and learning and counselling
- Integrate new students
- Oversee "Summer Bridge" program for rising ninth graders
- Develop transition plans for soon-to-be high schoolers
- Create and implement academic intervention protocols
- Supervise minor disciplinary infractions

Source: Laboratory Schools

Administration: Be transparent

University review gives opportunity for more clarity

as the midway sees it.

This represents the opinion of the U-High Midway editorial board.

In early February, more than two months ago, the administration posted two job listings: one for assistant director of safety and security, and the other an administrative position called dean of student success, a role that would consolidate responsibilities that currently rest on the shoulders of many other administrators. U-High administrators described the dean position as being reinstated rather than added, and maintained that it would improve the quality of education for U-High students. These administrative positions are being added without widespread community consultation at a time of budget cuts, program cancellations and employee layoffs.

This reflects a broader pattern: many schools and universities have succumbed to administrative bloat even while they raise tuition and cut programming, and many members of Lab's community have recently noticed the administration announcing important hiring decisions while both obscuring the reasoning that led to these decisions and sowing mistrust among relevant stakeholders.

Members of the community have a deep investment in Lab and deserve to understand how and why these decisions are being made, especially if the school and the university are strained financially. Though faculty members did receive an explanatory email, administrators have provided no announcement or explanation of the new positions to parents or students. Also troubling, the decision to hire a new dean comes less than a year after significant program cuts — among them, an entire language course, sports and library aide positions. U-High's tuition was raised 5% this year — those paying it have a right to know how it is being allocated.

We understand that schools are constantly evolving, and that all educational institutions must safeguard resources and balance competing priorities. Some private planning and strategizing will of course have to take place within an organization's leadership before any public announcement of a new initiative.

It also makes sense that decisions at the university and the Laboratory Schools may be taking shape under new pressures, especially given the difficult climate for fundraising and the federal government's assault on institutions of higher learning. Though some of the blurriness in recent budgetary decisions may not be an intentional lack of transparency, it still provokes alarm, confusion and distrust when it seems the administration is failing to seek consensus or at least buy-in on major hiring decisions from parents, students and faculty.

Perhaps the review of the Laboratory Schools launched by University of Chicago president Paul Alivisatos and led by a university dean who is also a Lab parent is a chance to institutionalize such transparency.

We are encouraged that the review committee solicited feedback through email and a community survey and offered open meetings with teachers, students and parents.

Hopefully, the results of the review will be similarly open and accessible to the community, and the administration will take advantage of the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to clarity and open dialogue. Clear communication and consultation with all stakeholders — especially when it comes to significant hires and cuts — are essential to maintaining trust and fostering a sense of shared responsibility.

The Lab community deserves to understand not just these decisions but also the thinking behind them and how resources are used to ensure the continued success and wellbeing of students and faculty alike.



Midway illustration by Ilana Umanskiy

College applications provide much-needed direction

by JAYA ALENGHAT
Editor-in-Cheif



For years, I imagined how daunting the college application process would be, even spending last summer preparing for the challenge. But staring at the blank document in front of me — my head filled with the ideas and possibilities of who I want to be for the next four years — I am able to craft essay after essay. Suddenly, it all clicks into place.

Everyone hears about the college application process — the dread that extends over the summer and through the first months of senior year. Whether you stay on top of deadlines or put things off until the last minute, the process is exhausting. Therefore, few would expect the process itself to bring personal growth.

While the college application process is often associated with stress and uncertainty, it offers students much-needed clarity and direction for the next stage of their lives. Going into the process, I knew what interested me within high school, but I was unsure about how my interests might apply outside of high school. I knew I enjoyed biology — dissections, lab work, scientific papers — and I knew I loved journalism — writing stories, leading a team, informing the public — but I never thought I could connect these two, seemingly very separate, fields of interest in my future.

However, the application process forced me to be in that mindset, thinking about how I could use my interests and experiences to form a possible future career path. In my research, I was pleasantly surprised to find many interdisciplinary majors that touched on the connection between science and journalism. Additionally, the many supplemental essay prompts forced me to explore my intersecting interests even further — self-reflection I didn't know I needed. Looking back, I left the process knowing more about myself than I did going into it. It's no secret that the process can be overwhelming for first-semester seniors, with years of pressure and experiences culminating in a single moment. A common misconception is that applications lock students into a lifelong path. While some seniors have a clear career direction, others have the freedom to explore during this process, as I did. Rather than feeling restrictive, the process can offer valuable clarity by highlighting personal values and interests. Most importantly, these decisions are always flexible.

So, while rising seniors may only be feeling dread, they should go into the application process with an open mind. It can provide them with a better overview of the college experience and where their interests might fit within it.

Students should prioritize friendships as much as academics

by CHLOË ALEXANDER
Editor-in-Chief



Listening to guest speaker Andy Dunn talk about friendships and mental health during the wellness assembly Feb. 27 made me think of the great friendships that I now have after my four years of high school. I have people who I deeply trust and call my best friends. Looking back at my earlier years of high school, I can see how I struggled. I struggled to find a balance between my schoolwork and a social life. For two years, I chose school and I struggled emotionally because of my choice.

Lab and U-High students must work to promote having good friendships as much as they push students to get good grades — because social well-being is as important as academic success.

In October, Director of Schools Tori Jueds shared Lab's results from the spring 2024 Independent Schools Association of the Central States survey. About 83% agreed or strongly agreed that "Lab fosters students' academic achievement." But only 56% of parents and just 33% of students felt that Lab does an excellent or very good job helping students develop life skills.

Lab students lack well-developed life skills, mainly because most of us have always gone to the same school with the same people. Stuck in the "Lab bubble," we haven't had to work hard to maintain friendships when we've been around the same people for up to 15 years.

We need to make more school-wide social events during school. One of the easiest ways for students to spend time with each other is through the few school-run social events like ArtsFest, grade-wide movie nights and lock-ins, and school dances outside of classes and clubs during lunch.

These allow students to spend social time with friends without having to sacrifice doing school work or extracurriculars.

> **"I know that getting good grades, in all of our minds, has a clear benefit: getting into the best college."**

I know that getting good grades, in all of our minds, has a clear benefit: getting into the best college. And I can also admit that on the surface, having good friends and maintaining friendships doesn't appear to have direct benefits, but good friendships help you more than you would know. According to the Mayo Clinic, having strong friendships helps support your mental health, eases anxiety and allows you to have a strong coping mechanism.

In life, what matters most is not the A you got on a test or the time you've spent studying, it's about the connections you make. I know I won't look back at my high school years thinking about the AP Calc BC test that I did well on or the English 2 "Great Gatsby" paper I wrote, but I'll think about the late nights at senior retreat talking with my friends or the homecoming soccer games we went to every year.

As they say, it's not what you know, it's who you know.

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mission and editorial policy.

The Midway is an independent newspaper that strives for excellence across all of our platforms. We are a student-run newspaper for the entire University of Chicago Laboratory High School community. We aim to not only represent the multitude of thoughts and experiences at U-High but also inform community members through transparent, timely and complete reporting.

In a time when the press is criticized, the U-High Midway seeks to inform, educate and serve the community of University High School. The Midway is developed and managed by students, for students.

In every story we write, the Midway should give a voice to the experiences of people at U-High. We will report on the people, activities and thoughts that make our school unique, striving to include the voices we haven't heard yet.

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PHOTO ADVISER ..... Jayna Rumble, MJE

Ha-ha for healthy healing

Laughter manages student stress and strengthen bonds

by ABHAY CHANDRAN
Audience Engagement Editor

"Laughter is the best medicine." We've all heard it before. But can laughing at social media, comedians and your friends really improve your health? According to both students and experts, the answer is a resounding yes. Laughter drives several physiological and psychological changes in the body, and ultimately results in stronger social connections, a healthier immune system and above all, a less stressful life.

> **"We use laughter to show we understand each other, ... to deal with stressful situations and to maintain social bonds."**
>
> — Sophie Scott, professor of cognitive neuroscience

Laughing can relieve muscle tension, enhance your intake of oxygen and reduce stress, something that ninth grader Adrian Greenstone has seen firsthand through his time co-leading an improv comedy club at Lab, Thursday Afternoon Live, and performing at The Second City.

"It's just a sort of a different way of thinking about the world," Adrian said. "When I'm performing, it's like there's less stakes, and I can just feel comfortable when I'm doing it."

Adrian thinks that you don't need to be a comedian to feel the benefits of humor. Just cracking jokes with your friends can be enough to de-stress.

"When I'm talking to my friends, and we're joking and stuff, it's a way to just get out tension during the day," he said.

In fact, according to Sophie Scott, a professor of cognitive neuroscience at University College London, laughter is an intrinsically social expression, and people are more than 30% more likely to laugh when they are with someone else.

When animals laugh, it is always associated with social contexts, whether through interactions between parents and infants or through the playful behaviors that are common amongst mammals. According to Dr. Scott, human laughter isn't too different.

"It has that same role for humans, but as we get older we start using laughter in a more communicative way," Dr. Scott said in an interview. "We use laughter to show we understand each other, ... to deal with stressful situations and to maintain social bonds."

Genuine laughter activates the hypothalamus, a region in your brain crucial for releasing hormones, and in doing so drives a lot of physiological changes in the body, the first of which is a sharp reduction in the fight-or-flight hormone, adrenaline.

"If something scares you and you feel your heart rate race, that's adrenaline at work," Dr. Scott said. "Laughter leads to the exact opposite of that: If you measure your heart rate before and after you've been laughing, you'll find that after laughing it's lower, and that's just the reduction in adrenaline at work."

Laughing can also make day-today life less stressful by increasing the production of endorphins, the body's naturally circulating painkillers, and by slowing the brain's production of a hormone called cortisol.

"If you're working too hard, staying up too late, you're really stressed at work or stressed at school, that sort of horrible nagging feeling you get is cortisol," Dr. Scott said. "Over a longer timescale, when you've been laughing you start to get a reduction in cortisol, and with lower levels of cortisol you may be less stressed."

By increasing the body's production of human growth hormone and endorphins, laughter also helps you grow and boosts your immune system's health.

"Human growth hormone is obviously very important when you're a baby or child and your body is growing," Dr. Scott said, "but it actually continues being important even when you're an adult and have stopped growing physically taller because it remains important in your immune system."

With its many benefits, you may be wondering how you can bring more laughter into your life. According to Dr. Scott, the answer is simple: connection.

"Everybody has a different sense of humor, there isn't one thing that everyone thinks is funny. But while we do laugh at the stuff we find funny, most laughter happens when you're in social interactions," Dr. Scott said. "So if you want to laugh more, the thing would be to make time to spend time with the people with whom you laugh most. For me that's my family. When I'm with my partner, when we're with our son, that's when the most laughter happens for me."



Midway photos by Henry Benton, Juliana Daugherty, Elspeth LaCroix-Birdthistle, Estelle Levinson, Calder Wong

LAUGH IT OFF. Laughter helps in reducing stress, strengthening your immune system and bringing people closer together. In fact, you're 30 times more likely to laugh when you're with someone else than when you're alone.

find laughs

Different people will find different things funny, but everyone has something that make them laugh. Here are some of mine:

Hasan Minhaj

Hasan Minhaj is an American comedian, writer, producer and writer/performer in stand up specials like "Off With His Head" and TV shows like "The Patriot Act." Mr. Minhaj's comedy does a great job of first acknowledging the bizarreness of the reality live and then turning that reality into a joke. And aside from his pieces on the news, his jokes about life with Indian parents couldn't be more accurate or more funny.

DougDoug

DougDoug is a Twitch streamer best known for his coding, gaming challenges and absurd interactions with his Twitch chat. Whether through an hourong "five-minute coding adventure" or through a hilariously bad AI he designed to turn Twitch chat's messages into Shakespearean plays, DougDoug's livestreams and videos are always silly, ridiculous and hard not to laugh at.

John Oliver

John Oliver is a British and American comedian best known for his work on "The Daily Show" and his show "Last Week Tonight with John Oliver." Every week, "Last Week Tonight" brings an update on the status of the world and an extremely informative deep dive into a random topic, all the while Mr. Oliver provides hilarious graphics, creative jokes and impeccable comedic timing.

Second City Teen Ensemble

The Second City Teen Ensemble is an improv/sketch comedy group. Students who have had previous comedy experience are put into various ensembles in which they spend three months preparing to put together both an improv show and a scripted sketch comedy show. (I have been part of one of these ensembles for the last six years, and nothing has shaped my sense of humor and made me laugh like my ensemble-mates and the shows we write have.)

— Abhay Chandran

Experts doubt traditional obesity weight classification



Midway illustration by Asher Dennis

FLAWED FORMULA. Once a primary tool for diagnosing obesity, BMI is now being challenged for its oversimplified approach to health. The formula was created for population studies, not individual health assessments.

by NAOMI BENTON
Audience Engagement Editor

Body mass index, BMI, is a scale traditionally used by doctors to diagnose clinical obesity. Recently, however, this tool has been controversial.

Doctors now believe that other factors, including muscle mass, health conditions, and waist measurement must be considered.

According to a literature review published in Cureus, doctors have used BMI since the 1830s, when Adolphe Quetelet documented multiple men's height and weight in search of the measurements of an "average man."

According to the scale, a healthy weight is a BMI of 18.5-25. Overweight is considered to be between 25 and 30, and obesity is diagnosed at over 30.

While BMI has been considered a helpful tool for doctors to diagnose and treat clinical obesity, it is now being discredited due to its narrowness. BMI's simplicity overshadows important health factors, and experts argue that it should not be the sole tool used to diagnose obesity.

According to the new parameters for diagnosing obesity published in the Lancet, a medical journal,, BMI measures of obesity can overestimate or underestimate body fat, giving incomplete health information.

The commission sought to diagnose clinical obesity when someone is overweight and experiencing one of the diseases caused by adiposity, or excess body fat, rather than solely using a BMI number to determine health.

Junior Xia Nesbitt was not aware that BMI is being discredited, but finds the conflict particularly interesting due to its relevance in the media.

"There are so many websites where you can look up your own BMI, and there are so many old, 2000s reality shows which were super focused on BMI, and it kind of defined if you are healthy or not," Xia said.

PE teacher Luke Zavala said that while BMI can be a useful metric for detecting diseases or tracking weight loss, it does not tell the full story of a person's health.

"An NFL runningback, who is 5 '10 and 240 lbs, is going to have a BMI that says they are obese," Mr. Zavala said. "If you look at the way their body is built, or if you ever see them running as a performance athlete, you can tell the person is not obese."

While the creation of BMI was an innovative development in its time and has been used for centuries by medical professionals to diagnose obesity, it has become less relevant due to other advancements.

"BMI is an imperfect tool," Mr. Zavala said. "Now science has come so much farther in being able to either help people lose weight or help people understand nutrition."

BATTLE *of the* Brands

While selecting athletic gear, U-High athletes balance performance, style

by **KABIR JOSHI**
Opinion Editor

In high school sports, the right gear can make or break your game. Whether it's about performance, comfort or looks, athletes selectively choose their gear from the brands they most trust: the brands that they can rely on day in and day out. From Nike and Asics to Adidas and New Balance, sports gear isn't just about function but about representing your identity through what you use to dominate your sport.

The properly stringed racket or the warm socks can give that extra boost of confidence in a stressful game, or a pair of matching shoes can give a sense of unity among athletes. But, with so many options available, athletes have to choose among many brands. Do they prioritize style but lose out on reliability, or do they prioritize comfort and lose out on identity? Five U-High athletes share their choices and how they feel they made the correct decision.



Midway photo by Devyn Moubayed

nike

Isabella Huang, a junior who is a part of the volleyball team, chooses Nike. For volleyball, the brand of gear is limited, and the gear that Nike offers is at a good price point and has many options for both quality and style.

"I think that Nike is a really common volleyball gear store that people always tend to gravitate to, especially their shoes, because there's a lot of color and design, and I feel like that kind of facilitates a lot of the younger audiences ... It's more accessible than other brands as well as being better pricing wise," Isabella said.

adidas



Bryce Poston, a sophomore who is part of the boys soccer, indoor track and baseball teams, chooses Adidas. The comfort that Adidas offers is the main reason that he gravitates towards the brand, as the time he spends utilizing the equipment can range from an hour to an entire day with practices and games.

"I have a little bit wider feet, and the fit that they are makes them comfortable and makes them stand out which gives them that extra versatility," Bryce said.

asics



Shivan Shachdev, ninth grader who is part of the boys tennis team, chooses Asics. He feels that Asics makes products specifically designed for tennis, which gives him that competitive edge when he needs it.

"They have gear designed for tennis, which I think makes me play a little bit better than if I were to use some other gear from another brand that's just designed for any other sport," Shivan said.

new balance



Osvaldo Carretero, a junior cross country, indoor track and outdoor track runner, chooses New Balance. The wide variety of products that New Balance offers compounded with their style and quality makes it the most appealing brand.

"My favorite gear is probably New Balance, I like their training shoes because they are very comfortable and last a long time and their spikes for racing. I feel like they also look very nice and are just overall very comfortable and versatile," Osvaldo said.

adidas

Maya Pytel, a senior who is a part of the volleyball, indoor track and soccer teams, chooses Adidas. She really appreciates Adidas' quality and versatility for the three sports she plays and finds that their German design gives them a boost in reliability and quality.

Adidas has good quality stuff all around other than their running shoes, but I think that they are really good and then things just like sweaters and shorts are really good," Maya said.

Athletes depend on recovery routines to prevent injury, stiffness

by **JAYA ALENGHAT**
Editor-in-Chief

Every day after school the U-High Fitness center buzzes with student athletes — some training, some passing through, but most working on recovery.

Whether through ice baths, stretching or just getting enough rest, caring for their bodies helps them stay in the game. U-High student athletes push themselves to excel, but they have also learned that recovery is just as important as training.

Trainer Hannah McCarrel plays a key role in this process, helping athletes recover and prevent injuries while encouraging them to prioritize healing.

She noted that while students tend to favor feel-good treatments, like cupping, massage and warm compresses, she prefers cryotherapy, using ice to reduce pain and boost circulation. She added that many overlooked methods also help the healing process.

"Eating is a form of recovery. Sleeping is a reform of recovery, and sometimes even just taking a day to fully rest is a form of recovery," Ms. McCarrel said. "Obviously, we want to play hard, and we want to compete, we want to do well, but if your body is telling you one thing and you're feeling one thing, always say something right away."

Ms. McCarrel noticed that even amid the pressures that U-High student athletes face, they frequently find time to take recovery seriously, especially after seeing its success.

"Rehab is like a job," Hannah said. "It's annoying, no one really loves to do rehab or recovery, but if you do it, you can also prevent yourself from getting injured down the road too. So, you're kind of just covering all your bases."

Varsity girls soccer captain Orly Eggner, dealing with persistent ankle issues, saw Hannah regularly and practiced toe exercises daily before practice when her injury was at its worst.

"This year, I'm obviously encouraging my teammates to do it a lot, but I'm not as good at doing it myself," Orly said, "but I do think it's important and it works if you stick with it. Especially last year, when I did it every day before practice, it definitely helped with strengthening my ankles and my achilles."

When observing her teammates and other student athletes, Orly noticed that Hannah's relationship with the students plays a large role in them prioritizing recovery.

"A lot of people like Hannah a lot, and so people go to see her more often than they used to see the personal trainer," Orly said. "People are more willing to listen to her and more willing to work with her and care about their injury more, because she's so nice."

Ms. McCarrel's connection with the students not only makes them seek her out, but it helps them trust her when she has to make tough calls about their injuries during games.

"Is it really bad? Will this get worse? Will I make them worse if they go in and play?" Ms. McCarrel said, "If any of that's a yes, then, yeah, we're not playing — which is like the hardest thing to tell someone is, like, you can't go back."



Midway photo by Aubrey Felsen

RECOVERY RITUALS. Senior Alex Giles, a soccer and basketball player, smiles as she works through a resistance band stretch after school in the fitness center. The exercise improves ankle mobility, preventing injuries during sports.

THURSDAY, APRIL. 10, 2025
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Driven to serve: Alumni pursue careers in public service

Through the various classes, clubs and school events available, U-High students are always exposed to numerous career paths they could choose. Some of the students who graduate from U-High choose to go on a path of public service, focusing their lives and work on politics, policy and helping people. This year, with the political tides in the air, students can learn from the acheivements, experiences and inspirations of alumni.

JOYCE MALLIET, 1980

From the classroom to U.S. attorney's office

by KABIR JOSHI
Opinion Editor



1980 Now

Joyce Maxberry Malliet works as a senior trial counsel with the National Security Unit of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the, District of New Jersey. She works closely with law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute individuals responsible for terrorist activities. Prior to this, she worked in civil litigation and even was a part of the librarian staff at U-High. She finds lots of inspiration from activities that she partook at during her time at U-High and loves doing what she does.

Looking back on your time at U-High, what experience or moment had the greatest impact on shaping who you are today?

"The debate assignment in Mr. Earl Bell's social studies class. The assignment taught me valuable research and advocacy skills that I still use to this day."

What achievement in your career are you most proud of, and why does it stand out to you?

"I'm most proud and honored to serve as the chief of national security at the U.S. Attorney's Office in New Jersey. I enjoy working with law enforcement agency partners and leading a team to disrupt and/or to prosecute those responsible for terrorist events."

What is one goal or aspiration you still hope to accomplish?

"Whenever I retire, I would like to work again at a library, to come full circle to my first job working in the U-High library."

When you were at U-High, what career path did you envision for yourself, and what inspired that choice? How does your current career compare to what you once imagined, and what led to any changes in direction?

"I envisioned becoming an attorney from my seven grade social studies class at Lab in which we studied Supreme Court cases for the whole year and participated in mock trials. I thought this would be a career with always-changing facts and law, and that I'd always be challenged. This has definitely proven to be true. I, however, never imagined that I would be a federal prosecutor practicing criminal law. I started my legal career doing civil litigation, became a law firm partner in that field, and then after a harrowing accident in which I fell between a train and train platform, I ultimately pivoted to public service, first becoming a chief operating officer for a non-profit, and then going to the U.S. Attorney's Office."

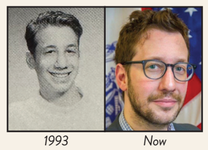
Five facts:

- While she started out in criminal law, she made the switch to becoming a federal prosecutor.
- She heads the National Security Unit for the New Jersey U.S. Attorney's office, which focuses on investigations and prosecutions of threats to critical infrastructure, violations of export control laws, defense contractor fraud, and large-scale immigration offenses.
- She also works closely with the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force and other law enforcement to prevent terrorist operations before they occur and to investigate and prosecute any planned, threatened or executed acts of terrorism.
- She is a winner of the Van Y. Clinton Award, named after the Supreme Court justice of the same name. The award is given to individuals who have made a significant contribution to the legal profession.
- She was the first African American lawyer, male or female, at a medium-sized law firm that was founded in 1937.

CHARLES BLACKSTONE, 1995

From freelance writing to food policy expert

by TAARIQ AMHED
News Editor



1993 Now

Charles Blackstone, Class of 1995, is the chief of staff at the New York City Mayor's Office of Food Policy. He previously worked at the City of New York's Department of Homeless Services. A novelist and literary writer, he is the author of "Vintage Attraction" and other works, with his writing appearing in various literary journals.

When you were at U-High, what career path did you envision for yourself, and what inspired the choice? How does your current career compare to what you once imagined, and what led to any changes in direction?

"On the PSAT, there was a question about careers with bubbles for different fields of interest, and I remember filling in 'TV,' 'film,' 'entertainment industry.' I had done some drama and was writing at the time. That didn't seem like it would take me anywhere. I never had any real ability to see the future. By the time I had to make decisions, I knew I wanted to write and study English. I work for the city of New York in the Office of Food Policy. It's been almost 10 years, and my roles have all had communications at their core. What connects these seemingly disparate roles is storytelling."

Looking back on your time at U-High, what experience or moment had the greatest impact on shaping who you are today?

"Freshman year English was the first time I was really exposed to literature. I remember the stories vividly, both because they made an impression on me at the time and later when I put them on syllabi for courses I taught in grad school. Alice Walker, Joyce Carol Oates, and Salinger. It's when we discovered 'Catcher in the Rye.' That was the first time I truly connected in a serious way to storytelling."

What key experiences or influences guided you toward your current career path?

"I think reading more books, discovering contemporary realistic fiction, and absorbing everything while continuing to write as a teen and beyond was always my focus. At Lab and U-High, a liberal arts curriculum always made sense to me. While others felt pressure to major in something that led directly to a career, I was more focused on learning, the pursuit of knowledge and experience."

Throughout your career, what event or experience has most challenged or reshaped your understanding of the country?

"As a younger person, I felt a personal connection to politics, paying attention long before I probably should have. A real turning point was the 1992 presidential election — I remember watching the inauguration in the library when TVs were rolled into classrooms, feeling a strong connection to the country and the world. That optimism carried me until the chaos of the 2000 election, which distanced me from that feeling. Despite the turmoil of the last election, I've felt a recommitment to writing. I've always written, but it's never been during quiet times. It's the chaos that compels me to work, not stillness."

What achievement in your career are you most proud of, and why does it stand out to you?

"I think my last novel, 'Vintage Attraction.' I look at it sometimes and wonder: How did I pull that off? Bringing a story into the world feels big. ... 'Vintage Attraction' is about a dissatisfied academic who, as I always say, falls glass-first into the world of food and wine when he meets a sommelier and TV personality. It's a love story on some levels, but also a story about figuring out what you want to do, even after doing something for a long time. It's about finding yourself and meaning in a world that's always changing, where the objectives are constantly shifting."

What is one goal or aspiration you still hope to accomplish?

"With writing, I've never been someone who's constantly producing. When I finished the first draft of my last book, I remember thinking, 'I don't know what's next.' And for years, I really didn't. But in the last few months, I've been thinking about it again, outlining ideas, which I hadn't done before. To write another book, that would be exciting. At the same time, I hope to continue doing meaningful work for the city."

KAREEM SALEH, 1997

From Paris accords to AI entrepreneur

by LILA COYNE
Assistant Editor



1997 Now

Kareem Saleh, Class of 1997, was editor-in-Chief of the Midway. Mr. Saleh is the founder and CEO of Fairplay AI, a company which seeks to ensure fairness in finance by evaluating the potential biases of the artificial intelligence models behind lending, credit risk and fraud detection. During the Obama administration, he helped manage the team which negotiated the Paris climate agreement.

Looking back on your time at U-High, what experience or moment had the greatest impact on shaping who you are today?

"Journalism: writing about things that affect your constituency, or that affect the kind of the broader world, in ways that resonate with them, ways that teach them things they didn't know before, in ways that provoke thought, provoke emotion. So these are just essential skills for life, being able to communicate and persuade effectively."

What achievement in your career are you most proud of, and why does it stand out to you?

"I founded this company, Fairplay AI, about five years ago. We call ourselves the world's first fairness as a service company. We allow anybody using an algorithm to make a high-stakes decision about someone's life to answer five questions: Is my algorithm fair? If not, why not? Could it be fairer? What's the economic impact to our business of being fairer? And finally, did we give the folks our algorithm rejected a second look to make sure we didn't deny somebody an opportunity they deserve?"

What is one goal or aspiration you still hope to accomplish?

"The mission of the company is to build fairness infrastructure for the internet to de-bias digital decisions in real time. So, financial services to start, but when we're, you know, done with financial services, we're going to move to insurance and employment and health care and all of these other domains where algorithms are being used to make high-stakes decisions about our lives."

When you were at U-High, what career path did you envision for yourself, and what inspired that choice? How does your current career compare to what you once imagined, and what led to any changes in direction?

Even when I was at U-High, I knew that I wanted to build something. For a time, I thought that was maybe, you know, to serve in the government somehow and work on development projects in emerging markets, or I thought maybe it would be a nonprofit. And as you go out, the great thing about U-High is that it gives you a very versatile skill set and the ability to digest a lot of information and quickly determine what's relevant. So, I think, you know, as I went on in my journey, I found that being able to ask those questions, being able to think critically about information and the options in front of me led me from the nonprofit sector to the government sector, to the legal sector, and now to be an entrepreneur in Silicon Valley.

What key experiences or influences guided you toward your current career path?

"Honestly, the network that I built at U-High, I mean, just a terrifically smart group of people who are constantly pushing you to be your highest and best self. I maintain the friendships with the folks I went to U-High with to this very day. And I think it's really been a journey of learning and inquiry, and, you know, we forged some really deep bonds that not only unite us to this day as friends, but also as thought partners, as interlocutors, as good citizens."

Throughout your career, what event or experience has most challenged or reshaped your understanding of the country?

"Negotiating the Paris climate agreement. The United States is the indispensable nation. If we don't lead then we cede some of the most important questions facing humanity to countries, frankly, that may have their self-interest at heart, and their self-interest may conflict with America's self-interest. I do believe that American leadership was required to achieve the Paris climate agreement. A climate agreement without the participation of the United States would have made no sense because we are the largest emitter in the world. What working through the U.N. process to negotiate that agreement really drove home for me is that, for any shortcomings we may have, America is still the indispensable nation."

DANIEL HORNUNG, 2008

Fom the White House to economic policy

by NAOMI BENTON
Audience Engagement Editor



2008 Now

Daniel Hornung, Class of 2008, went on to become a lawyer, deputy assistant to the president, deputy director of the National Economic Council, and is currently employed at the Urban Institute. His experience at Lab and growing up in Hyde Park fostered a deep interest in public service, inspiring him to question and improve the economy.

Looking back on your time at U-High, what experience or moment had the greatest impact on shaping who you are today?

"The experience of growing up and going to school in Hyde Park, which has, on the one hand, the huge reach of a university where you're grappling with important and interesting ideas, and then on the other hand, is in a community that is racially diverse and economically diverse. I think that combination opened up for me a whole set of questions about why we have the economic inequality that we have in our country. The everyday experiences of seeing the big disparities that exist on the South Side of Chicago and having the tools and exposure to big global issues at the University of Chicago shaped a lot of my interest in public service."

What achievement in your career are you most proud of, and why does it stand out to you?

"I was part of a small team that worked to come up with and pass the American Rescue Plan, which was the pandemic legislation early in the Biden administration. I am very proud of the role that I played in that and the impact that it had on so many people. As a result of that legislation, child poverty that year dropped almost in half, and it is just a reminder of the power of government to impact people's lives in a positive way."

What is one goal or aspiration you still hope to accomplish?

"I want to continue to try to address the barriers in our society that prevent some people from having the economic opportunities that people like us who went to Lab were so lucky to have. I just hope to continue to be engaged in these issues, and over time, collectively help our society be better at solving those problems."

When you were at U-High, what career path did you envision for yourself, and what inspired that choice? How does your current career compare to what you once imagined, and what led to any changes in direction?

"From a pretty young age, including in high school, I thought that I wanted to be involved in public service and economic issues. Barack Obama started to run for president when I was a junior in high school, and it was right there in Chicago, so I started volunteering on the Obama campaign. A bunch of things changed. I became a lawyer, and I'm not sure if I knew I was going to be a lawyer. Housing policy was one that I kind of knew I was interested in because it is so integral to how people think about communities and was so relevant on the South Side of Chicago."

What key experiences or influences guided you toward your current career path?

"Starting at Lab, I took an economics class, and I spent most of my academic time in college on economic issues and economic history. I just loved the big questions about how do you structure society. How do businesses engage with their customers? What is the government's role in trying to improve outcomes for people?"

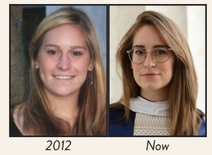
Throughout your career, what event or experience has most challenged or reshaped your understanding of the country?

"I've sat in the White House on the day that Donald Trump was elected, both times — both when I was working in the Obama White House and working in the Biden White House — and certainly the first time that he won, and this time too, challenged many of my assumptions about what economic policy our politics speak to people or don't speak to people. One of the important things that I hope can happen in the next year or two is that we are able to think about how we change our policies and our politics to be more responsive to real pain in the country."

SYDNEY SCARLATA, 2012

From Peace Corps to foreign service

by CLARE McROBERTS
Editor-in-Chief



2012 Now

Sydney Scarlata, Class of 2012, works in the State Department as a Foreign Service Officer. She serves in embassies and consulates abroad, protecting the interests of United States citizens. Most days, Ms. Scarlata spends about four hours in the morning interviewing hundreds of people who want to travel to the United States for tourism, as temporary workers or as international students. In the afternoon, she confirms that all of the cases that she approved actually move forward.

Under this new administration, I understand that it has had an effect on many State Department workers. Has it had an effect on your job in any way?

"I think that we've been pretty lucky — we as in the whole of the Foreign Service — in terms of how the new administration has affected our operations and our current posture overseas. That said, everything can change day to day, including new policy that could affect our jobs or if we still even have jobs."

Looking back on your time at U-High, what experience or moment had the greatest impact on shaping who you are today?

"Lab taught me how to ask good questions, how to think critically about the world, how to be open and curious, and how to thrive in new and diverse spaces. So I don't think there was any one moment, but just studying in the U-High environment made this career possible."

When you were at U-High, what career path did you envision for yourself, and what inspired that choice?

"I thought I would be a journalist after working on the Midway for four years. And it's funny, some people I've run into, who I haven't kept in touch with, will even ask me if I ever became a journalist, given who I was at Lab. But I think that experience taught me how to talk to any type of person. And that's a huge part of my job here, so it still translates a little bit. Also being a good writer is always an asset."

What led to that change in direction?

"After Lab, I studied international relationships and was inspired to work and live abroad. I joined the Peace Corps after undergrad and served in Morocco for two years. The Peace Corps inspired me to continue doing work in public service."

What achievement in your career are you most proud of, and why does it stand out to you?

"Before moving to Toronto, I worked in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the U.S. government has a very large and influential presence. The country is still recovering from the 1990s war, and unfortunately there's a huge amount of corruption in the country today. A lot of my work in Bosnia was to combat this corruption by holding bad actors accountable for their actions."

Throughout your career, what event or experience has most reshaped your understanding of the country?

"It's pretty clear to me that many Americans don't know how our system of government works, what we do in the government and what we do for American citizens. Honestly, it's been a real honor to serve the public. And I try my best to help people understand how the State Department works for them and at the end of the day, works to uphold the U.S. constitution."

What do you think about public service? Is there anything else you would like to add that you think U-High students should know?

"I think government work gets a bad reputation as lower paying and pushing paper through a slow moving bureaucracy. That said, I've had the opportunity to live in three different countries working for the US government. I got paid to learn a foreign language for nine months. I developed and implemented a girls empowerment program in rural Morocco. There's just so much diversity in government work and something for everyone. So if you have a passion for service, it could be a great option."

GRACE WATSON, 2019

From watching over budgets to law school

by ORLIE WEITZMAN
Assistant Editor



2019 Now

Grace Watson, Class of 2019, was on the girls soccer team and an editor-in-chief of the U-Highlights yearbook. She earned a B.A. in public policy from the University of Michigan and is now an assistant analyst at the Congressional Budget Office, a role she began in 2023, and will start law school this fall.

Looking back at your time at U-High, what experience or moment had the greatest impact on shaping who you are as a person today?

It's not a specific moment but I think that the general U-High community, both the students and the teachers, faculty and staff and the location in Hyde Park certainly shaped my worldview. I grew up and learned alongside people who were different than me, who had different experiences, who had different viewpoints, who looked differently from me and it's definitely because of that that I learned that people's various situations don't occur in a vacuum. It's because of Lab that I learned about systemic issues that various marginalized communities face. I think that's what really instilled in me a drive for activism and public service.

When you were at U-High what career path did you envisage for yourself? What inspired that choice and how does that compare to your career now?

I somehow have managed to go down the career path that I envisaged for myself when I was at Lab. I always knew I wanted to be a lawyer. I went to Lab my whole life and I remember in eighth grade doing a unit on the Constitution and I thought it was so interesting. U-High students used to be able to go to the UChicago Law School and take a joint class with law students in the evening. That was amazing and really opened my eyes up to the law as a career. I love to read and write and loved the English and history classes I took at Lab, so I knew the way I could help people and make an impact on my community was through the law.

What's one achievement in your career that you're most proud of?

Back 30, 40 years ago, Congress was passing legislation left and right that was going to be costing state local private entities a ton of money and not really thinking about the cost that those entities would be bearing. That's why our unit was created so that the Congress could be aware of how much potential policy proposals could affect those entities. There's been a couple times that I have heard back from specific companies or local governments that would have been affected by the legislation and been thanked by them for my work. CBO's whole mantra is that we work for the Congress, but the Congress works for constituents all the way down to everyday people. I feel most rewarded when I get positive feedback from the constituents rather than Congress.

Is there one goal or aspiration that you still hope to accomplish in your job?

I'm about to finish up my job to go to law school in the fall, so I honestly feel like I've done what I set out to do. My main goal within my position was to do good work and then also set myself up to continue on a legal career path and I feel like I've done that.

Throughout your career, what event or experience has most challenged or reshaped your understanding of the country?

The easiest and most obvious answer is the most recent presidential election. There's so much discourse right now around federal government workers and people who work in public service. I have friends who are doing really good work for the country who have lost their jobs for no good reasons. I can attest based on the people that I have worked alongside, who are so smart and dedicated, it's been a challenging time to see that being questioned.

Do you have any advice for young people who want to get involved in public policy?

Do it! Don't let anybody tell you or try to convince you to go down a different path. If you find yourself leaning toward public service and policy, and know that you want to do it, stick to it. There is no better time to be working in public service and in your local communities, and it's really important that we get young, active voices involved. Block out the noise and do what you're passionate about.

Loving language: Junior strives to preserve, share minority languages

by CAROLINE SKELLY
Audience Engagement Editor

Only about 3% of the books published in America are works of translation. Through his role as editor-in-chief of the Ouroboros literary translation journal, junior Adam Tapper is hoping to change that.

Since joining Ouroboros as a ninth grader, translation has been an integral part of Adam's identity. He has been able to draw inspiration from his cultural heritage, seeking to make minority languages accessible to all readers and connect with his own ancestry. Adam is Jewish and eastern European.

"I think part of what drives me and a lot of other people in translation is raising awareness — not really awareness, but making people aware that literature doesn't only exist in English, French and German," Adam said. "It also exists in all these other minority languages that people don't normally think of."

Adam's passion for reading and writing began during the pandemic when he was looking for things to do to pass the time. He found translation a bit later during his first club shopping event.

"I saw the club video. I had heard about it from my siblings, and I thought it sounded interesting, so I decided to go and see what the club was like," Adam said. "I thought it was cool, so I stayed with it. Eventually, I started to really appreciate it and become passionate about it."



Midway photo by Nika Nelson

LEADING IN LINGUISTICS. Junior Adam Tapper has found a passion for creating literary translations, from Yiddish and German, two languages in which he feels a deep connection due to his eastern European and Jewish heritage. Adam has won an award for his translating and is active in two literary clubs.

Adam primarily translates from Yiddish and German, two languages to which he feels a deep connection due to his family's heritage. Yiddish is a language spoken by Jewish people in central and eastern Europe. In the beginning of the 20th century, part of Adam's family spoke German, while the majority spoke Yiddish. However, these languages began to fade as they were no longer passed down through generations.

"My grandfather spoke Yiddish, but he never taught it to my mom or my aunt, and it kind of died with him," Adam said. "So being able to speak these languages and bring their literature into English has helped me reconnect with a part of my history and culture that feels maybe isolated."

Through his translation from Yiddish, Adam hopes to revive and connect with a part of Jewish culture that he believes is quickly disappearing. It is estimated that there are about a quarter million Yiddish speakers in the United States. Before the Holocaust, there were about 11 million Yiddish speakers worldwide.

Adam's fellow Ouroboros member, senior Lucie Bhatoey-Bertrand, admires Adam's dedication to translation and his connection with his culture.

"Adam's passion for translation is honestly something I find really inspiring," Lucie said. "I think that it's something he really values and something that he is so excited about, which brings other people joy, and I think that they get more excited about doing translation through seeing his passion."

Lucie recognizes the intersection of translation and identity, and she believes that translation is not just about language but also expressing a part of yourself.

"It's about identity and sharing a part of yourself, which I think Adam has tried to engage with," she said.

Adam's work in translating has not gone unnoticed. In December, he placed first at the 2024-25 Illinois High School Translation Competition for translating part of a contemporary German novel into English.

Adam is also a part of the Renaissance literary magazine, and through his work in both magazines, he has identified an intersection between translation and writing.

"Being exposed to a lot of different styles from across the world has helped me when I go to write. I think about these things that I have translated, not just what I have read in English," he said. "I've kind of created a fusion of these different styles that I think has improved my writing. I've been able to incorporate a lot of interesting foreign concepts in my writing."

After high school, Adam hopes to continue translating and giving voices to minority languages.

"I definitely do want to continue translating, I think that over the past three years it has become very integral to my identity," Adam said. "Throughout my life after high school, I would like to continue publishing my work, maybe explore the possibility of a book-length manuscript translation, just continuing to spread translation and literature from minority languages to the American population."

Bad Bunny's new album is an ode to Puerto Rico

Rapper stands out in new versatile album

by ORLIE WEITZMAN
Assistant Editor

The first Spanish-language artist to ever become Spotify's most-streamed artist globally, with over 8.3 billion total streams. The fastest male artist to create a project amassing 1 billion streams. A three-time Grammy Award winner in 2021, 2022 and 2023. These are just a few of the accomplishments of Puerto Rican rapper Benito Martínez Ocasio, better known by his stage name, Bad Bunny.

On Jan. 5, the eve of Dia de los Reyes (Three Kings' Day), one of the most important holidays in Latin America, Bad Bunny released his sixth studio album, "DeBÍ TiRAR MáS FOToS" ("I should have taken more photos"). The entirely Spanish album features 17 tracks, including hits such as "DtMF" and "NUEVAYoL," proving Bad Bunny's ability to create yet another stand out and versatile album.

Although I'm not a native Spanish speaker, U-High Spanish teacher Suzanne Baum recommended that my Spanish class listen to this album as a way to incorporate Spanish into our everyday lives. I'm so glad she did, as I have not only learned new phrases but found myself enjoying several tracks, some of which have made it onto my main playlist.

While I can't understand every word, the memorable rhythms combined with Bad Bunny's smoothly delivered verses make this album accessible and entertaining, even for non-Spanish speakers.

A standout track is "VOY A LLeVARTE PA PR." The beat is irresistibly catchy and perfectly captures the vibrant spirit of Puerto Rican culture. Mr. Ocasio passionately raps about his homeland, saying: "Vo'a llevarte pa' PR, mami/ Tráete a tu amiga si te gusta la idea/ dile que esta noche vamo' a janguear," or "I'm gonna take you to PR, baby/ Bring your friend if you like the idea, tell her tonight we're going out/ We're gonna have a great time."

Several of the tracks feature upbeat tempos, though some are catchier than others. The first track, "Nueva Yol" also has a fun and electrifying beat. This song opens with a sample from "Un Verano en Nueva York" by El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico and Andy Montañez, a Puerto Rican salsa hit from the '70s, before seamlessly transitioning into Bad Bunny's rapping. The transition is neither jerky nor abrupt. Instead, the sound eases into a more urban but still upbeat style.

On the other hand, "EL CLúB" attempts to blend genres as well but feels slightly more forced. The electronic notes appear discordant at times, and the track overall doesn't deliver the energy its title suggests until over a minute in only to drop off again near the two-minute mark.

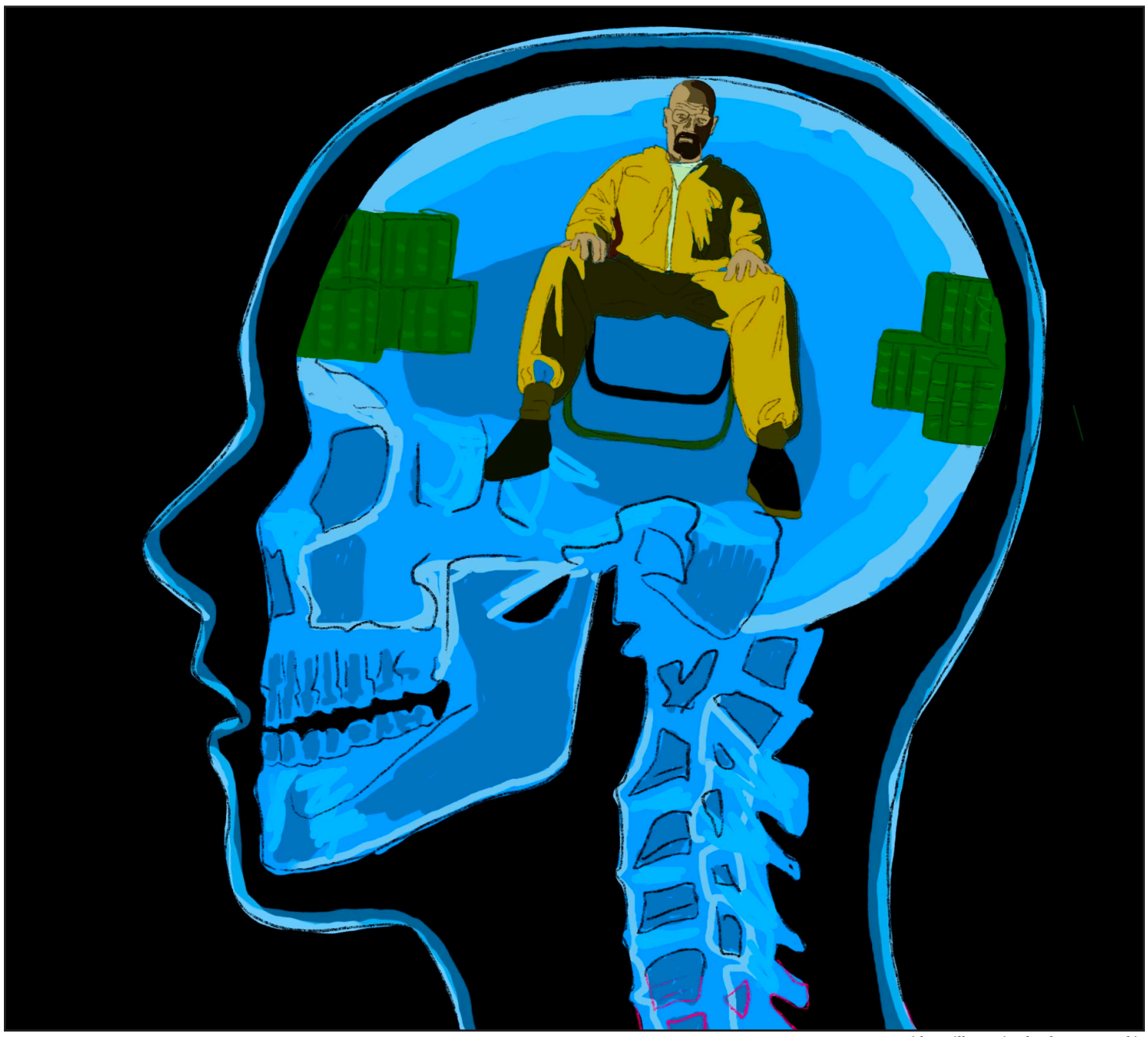
A less-popular but equally beautiful track is "LO QUE PASO A HAWAii," one of the few songs on the album that doesn't feature rapping and my favorite overall. Its reflective lyrics are backed by soft guitar and rhythm from a güiro, a traditional Puerto Rican instrument used in folk music. The lyrics are very powerful, as Mr. Ocasio likens the displacement of Hawaiians to the colonization of Puerto Rico and worries about Puerto Rico losing its native culture. He sings, "Quieren el barrio mío y que tus hijos se vayan/ No, no suelte' la bandera ni olvide' el lelolai" ("They want to take my river and also my beach/ They want my neighborhood and for your children to leave/ Don't let go of the flag or forget the lelolai").

The album is essentially a love letter to Puerto Rico, a fusion of rap, salsa, reggaeton and house. It tells a powerful story while also getting listeners up on the dance floor.



Rimas Entertainment

THE BADDEST BEATS. "DeBÍ TiRAR MáS FOToS," released by Puerto Rican rapper Bad Bunny on Jan. 5. blends different music genres including rap, salsa, reggaeton and house. Hits include DtMF and NUEVAYoL.



Midway illustration by Ilana Umanskiy

Comedy of despair

Prestige TV transforms complex themes, ideas into addicting dramas

by MIA LIPSON
Managing Editor

"The good news is hell is just the product of a morbid human imagination. The bad news is whatever humans can imagine, they can usually create," said Harmony Cobel in the opening episode of the show "Severance" streaming on Apple TV+.

Ms. Cobel is a manager at the fictional company Lumon, which takes its best shot at hell on earth in what is called the Severed Floor. Those who work on the floor undergo a procedure called severance, where their memories are "specially dictated." When the employees are on the Severed Floor, they know nothing about their lives on the outside world. When they leave the office, they know nothing about their work.

"Severance" falls under the category of "prestige television," marked by its high production quality, narrative depth and inclusion of complex characters.

This is where "Severance" thrives — alongside shows such as "The White Lotus," "Breaking Bad" and "Succession" — in the space between sharp comedy and gut-wrenching drama, the personal and the political.

"Severance" focuses on Mark, who joined Lumon after the death of his wife, Gemma. Because of severance, he no longer has to remember his pain for eight hours a day. He works with three other severed individuals, but when his best friend doesn't show up one day, his work starts to derail.

Though it is categorized as an office comedy, the show transforms into something with more of a gut punch — a commentary on love, grief and the ways we try to detach ourselves from society.

Another strength of Severance is its ability to weave in social commentary about themes beyond the office, such as the promise of happiness promised by religion and capitalism. Each viewer may experience these themes differently.

Prestige television introduces depth and complex themes in a uniquely beautiful way, from the cinematography to the dialogue. These themes challenge us to view ourselves and the power structures that surround us differently.

The same can be said for film, of course, but prestige TV has a special ability to tell a story over 8 to 10 episodes rather than a movie's single sitting.

Take "Breaking Bad" for example. In its five-season run, the show received 248 award nominations and 92 wins. It is one of the most streamed shows of all time and remains in the vein of pop culture, despite ending over 10 years ago.

Its central plot — a high school chemistry teacher working with a former student to cook crystal meth — is shocking and humorous at times.

Nonetheless, the very reason the famed Walter White begins to pursue a treacherous path of crime is to afford health care after a terminal lung cancer diagnosis, a very real social issue.

A more recent show, HBO's "Succession," follows a similar pattern. The dramedy, which ended its four-season run in 2024, received 250 award nominations and secured 92 wins. Its plot revolves around the Roy family, who owns the fictional media empire Waystar Royco (loosely based on the media tycoon Murdoch family).

At the heart of the show is a vicious battle for company control, but at its heart it offers a Shakespearean commentary on generational trauma and narcissistic family structures.

These shows are not always heartwrenching. A more lighthearted example, "The White Lotus," slowly and satirically dissects the privilege of the wealthy with a little murder mystery mixed in. Each season takes place at a new White Lotus resort, a fictional luxury hotel that attracts a range of peculiar guests, from movie stars to (very) dysfunctional families.

Though the show is notably less tragic than the others, its brilliant cinematography and intricate plot makes it similarly appealing. For a teenage audience, the drama and sophistication of these shows makes them as alluring as they are captivating, keeping the viewer tuned in from start to finish. As a genre, these shows are captivating, thought-provoking, and always worth a watch and a debrief.

for more

Prestige television shows are known for their high quality design and production, depth of characters, and narrative and complex social or political themes. Each of these series offers a unique viewing experience, challenging audiences with moral complexity. If you're looking for your next great series, here are a few standout picks:

'Mad Men'

"Mad Men," set from 1960-1970, is a period drama about a Madison Avenue advertising agency and the people that work there, specifically Donald Draper, a talented ad executive with hidden layers within his life and self. "Mad Men" is highly acclaimed because of its excellent execution, writing, memorable characters, and performances. Mad Men is available to stream on AMC and Apple TV+.

'The Leftovers'

"The Leftovers" is a drama that is set three years after the disappearance of 2% of the world's population. It follows a small community in New York that is trying to cope with the fallout and search for answers. Combining both joy and sorrow, 'The Leftovers' expertly showcases a world full of uncertainty. "The Leftovers" is available to stream on Max.

'Better Call Saul'

If you loved "Breaking Bad," then "Better Call Saul" is a perfect follow-up — or rather, prequel — that dives deeper into the complex universe of creator Vince Gilligan's world. Set around six years before the events of "Breaking Bad," the series follows struggling attorney Jimmy McGill, a small-time con artist turned lawyer, as he transforms into the morally grey and flamboyant Saul Goodman. The full series is available to stream on Netflix.

— compiled by Sohana Schneider

podcast roundup.

Enjoying a moment of free time? The right podcast can be the perfect friend. From bookish banter to chaotic comedy, these podcasts offer something for every listener.

'BOOKMARK'D'

When I became a dedicated reader a year ago, I started to consume more book content to get recommendations and hear people talk about the hobby that I like so much. I soon found the podcast "Bookmark'd" on Spotify. It is run by two women who have their own book-focused YouTube accounts, Sara Carolli and Destiny Sidwell. When listening to their podcast, it feels like I am on FaceTime with two best friends who are casually chatting and laughing. With charming personalities and funny, diverse content, "Bookmark'd" is a cozy podcast for any reader!



— Sohana Schneider

'THE BROSKI REPORT'

No piece of written, filmed or spoken media has ever quite captured the rushing and chaotic essence of a young woman's mind like "The Broski Report." Whether its host, Brittany Broski, is unpacking deeply meaningful writing, chronicling what she had for lunch or randomly breaking out in song, her podcast truly gives the feeling of chatting with a friend. I find myself revisiting 'The Broksi Report' anytime I feel lonely, and Ms. Broski's lighthearted humor mixed with profound sophistication normalize so many characteristics of both girlhood and general life.



— Light Dohrn

'CALL HER DADDY'

"Call Her Daddy" has gained a cult following due to its pure honesty, advice on a wide range of themes and its celebrity and influencer guests. At its core, "Call Her Daddy" is all about empowerment and the importance of creating our own narrative. Ms. Cooper's bold and hilarious personality brings a fresh perspective to topics many are hesitant to discuss, making it a must listen for anyone wanting unfiltered insights.



— Caroline Skelly

'EMERGENCY INTERCOM'

While this podcast's name was created as a joke, "Emergency Intercom" is perfectly fitting: cohosts Drew Phillips and Enya Umanzor demand your attention with their complicated, crass humor and hilarious friendship, letting listeners in on the inside joke. Drew and Enya also work through a range topics with their listeners: experiences with addiction, stories about an exploitive manager they had as teenage internet stars and the challenges of mental health in the current political atmosphere.



— Clare McRoberts

'MONSTERS AMONG US'

If you're into spooky, spine-chilling monster stories, "Monsters Among Us" is a podcast you do not want to miss. Host Derek Hayes has an ominous, crunchy voice that adds to a serious and spooky factor of the podcast. Mr. Hayes reports them as hears them without judgement and never opines on whether these encounters are true or fake. He also provides excellent historical context As a monster skeptic, I appreciate this.



— Juliana Daugherty

Splashing & Saving

Lifeguarding classes educate students, foster close community

by **EDWARD PARK**
Health & Wellness Editor

As senior Julia Grotthuss steps into the dimly lit pool deck at a local pool in north suburban Niles, the water reflects only the artificial glow of overhead lights. She glances at the lifeguard chair she'll take for her weekend shift then heads to the pump room to check the pool water's chemical levels.

Her day as a year-round lifeguard at her pool has begun.

Lifeguarding offers teens like Julia a chance to gain real-world skills and work experience with hourly wages that often exceed the state minimum wage by several dollars.

However, securing the job requires more than simply filling out an application. It demands rigorous training and, in some cases, additional certification. Despite the challenges, some students recommend and enjoy lifeguarding.

At U-High, students can get a head start on this process through a specialized physical education elective course currently offered in three different P.E. units.

According to Thomas Piane, who teaches the school's lifeguarding program, students become certified and professional rescuers through the Red Cross, with training in CPR, AED and first aid. Then, students are able to learn different saves under water.

While the Red Cross certification allows students to apply for lifeguarding jobs in many locations, it doesn't meet all the requirements to work for the Chicago Park District, which mandates an additional waterfront certification.

Junior Maya Livni, who worked in summer 2024 as a lifeguard at 57th Street Beach, learned this firsthand. Maya initially thought the certification she received from Lab was sufficient but had to receive additional training for her summer job.

"I had to take a two-week course at a local pool after school to get that certification," Maya said. "It was three hours a night, and I had to complete it in a really short period of time."



Midway photo by Henry Benton

LIFEGUARDING LIFESTYLE. Students practice lifeguarding skills in Sunny Gymnasium as part of a U-High class. Teenagers age 16 and up can begin the certification process through the Chicago Park District.

Such extra training required by pools represents the high level of responsibility and pressure that comes from the job. Julia thinks that the sense of anxiety even adds up to the pressure.

"The biggest challenge for me is just kind of the fear that like anywthing can happen at any moment," she said. "Especially working alone in the morning. There's not really anyone there to help you essentially. There's guests that are like nurses. Of course they help but in general, the uncertainty."

Julia added that even small moments like someone closing their eyes in the hot tub can be stressful due to the difficulty of telling whether the person is simply relaxing or experiencing a medical emergency.

Despite the rigorous process, Maya and Julia say they find it to be a rewarding experience. Maya appreciates the bonds with other lifeguards she created during the process.

"It's probably one of the most fun jobs I've ever had," Maya said. "You get to know everyone in your entire lifeguarding team. You become very close friends with them."

Julia agreed and emphasized the strong sense of community lifeguarding offers.

"One of the best experiences is and talking to people building those relationships with the members," Julia said. "They help you out sometimes and you know that if anything happens there's gonna be people in my corner."

Maya said being able to watch different activities like volleyball and outdoor parties at the beach enhanced her lifeguarding experience.

Being a lifeguard provides experience for future job applications and college résumés.

"This is our first taste of being a first responder," Daniel Dyra, another Lab P.E. teacher who teaches lifeguarding, said. "The character and discipline to maintain being a lifeguard is difficult, but when you graduate out of these years or you move on, you can ask for letters of recommendation as a character reference for your next job."

Julia echoed Mr. Dyra's sentiment.

"Knowing how to react in an emergency is a skill everyone should have," she said. "You never know when you might need it, whether you're a lifeguard or not."

get involved

How to become a Chicago Park District lifeguard

While Red Cross certification is a strong starting point, working for institutions as a lifeguard — and earning $19.75 an hour — requires extra steps. Here's how to get certified.

Enroll online

Visit the Chicago Park District website at https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/lifeguards to register for lifeguard certification and job consideration. Lifeguards must be 16 by July 1 and reside in Chicago.

Take a swim test

You must pass an in-person skills assessment. The test includes a 200-yard timed swim, a 20-yard underwater swim, and a retrieval of a submerged object.

Complete your paperwork

Bring required documents such as a social security number and photo ID to verify eligibility. You must have your W4 tax form, a direct Deposit form, a Proof of residency form and your I-9 form.

Earn your waterfront certification

If not already certified, enroll in a two-week paid training course to meet Park District requirements. Full certification - 40 hours (5 days) is $400, and recertification - 13 hours (1.5 days) is $100. Partakers will receive a stipend one they have completed the course.

— Edward Park and Ari Novak

Pilsen's 5 Rabanitos restaurant adds Hyde Park location

by **LUCY SHIRRELL**
Assistant Editor

Plastered across the wall of 5 Rabanitos' Hyde Park location is a mural covered in bright colors. Centered between images of plants, hummingbirds and radishes is the mural's focal point: a person crouched down in a bright yellow jaguar mask.

This mural tells the story of the owner, Alfonso Sotelo, selling radishes as a child with his four brothers in towns around the Mexican state of Guerrero, a place represented by the jaguar.

This new Hyde Park location of 5 Rabanitos, a Mexican restaurant based in the Pilsen neighborhood, is now open at 1301 E. 53rd St.. The location serves authentic Mexican food with dishes from many different regions of Mexico.

Fernando Sotelo, the son of the restaurant's owner, has been working as general manager since graduating college last year, and part time since he was 16. Although Fernando Sotelo's father had been looking to expand for years, he felt he needed more support to take on the stress of opening a new restaurant. With him joining the full-time staff, Mr. Sotelo's father felt that this was the opportune time to open a new location. The new location serves almost the exact same menu and is decorated similarly to the Pilsen location to maintain consistency across locations.

> **"If you're keeping your customers happy, then you can go on for that many years. I mean, we're about to hit 10 years here in Pilsen, so I assume we're doing something right."**
> — Fernando Sotelo, 5 Rabanitos owner

"We wanted to keep the same identity. We didn't want to do different, like, 'Oh, well this place is going to be more upscale, or this place is going to be for a certain amount of people,'" Mr. Sotelo said. "No, we wanted to keep the same identities and everything."

Senior Isabella Alvarez and her family have been visiting 5 Rabinitos' Pilsen location for many years and attended the Hyde Park location's grand opening.

"It's amazing to have the same restaurant closer to home and in a location that I think will expose people in Hyde Park to authentic Mexican food," Isabella said.

Isabella appreciates the way the restaurant accurately represents Latinx culture without perpetuating stereotypes.

"I think they did a really good job at, like, mixing the cultures, making it look elegant, but still incorporating different hints of Latino culture," Isabella said.

Despite the community expressing some concern about previous restaurants in the space struggling to stay in business, Mr. Sotelo is optimistic about 5 Rabanitos' future in Hyde Park.



Midway photo by Simon Vaang

GRAND OPENING. A second location of 5 Rabanitos, a Mexican restaurant based in the Pilsen neighborhood, is now open at 1301 E. 53rd St.

"The customers, if you're keeping your customers happy, then you can go on for that many years," Mr. Sotelo said. "I mean, we're about to hit 10 years here in Pilsen, so I assume we're doing something right."

Cooking up successes

Student accounts, businesses elevate culinary passion

by LILA COYNE
Assistant Editor

Junior Daniel Wu stands in his kitchen, listening to the faint hum of the oven. His math binder rests on the counter, tucked away from shiny metal mixing bowls, a small brown bottle of vanilla extract, and a crinkled bag of flour.

The oven light is on, a modest orange rectangle. On the other side of the oven's illuminated window, a flat copper baking tray holds six perfectly spaced cookies. Soon they'll be ready to be packaged and shipped off to the latest customer.

Lots of U-High students are passionate about cooking or baking. But Daniel is in a small group who take this passion to the next level through social media accounts or small businesses, seeking tangible rewards for their hard work amid a high school environment of constant competition and pressure to succeed.

Daniel has been the owner of his business, Mille Feuille Bakeshop, since summer 2022, before his ninth grade year. He developed his baking skills during the coronavirus pandemic.

"I found a lot of peace doing it. I was able to be really creative and channel my creativity through it," he said.

Daniel is always looking for new creative ventures. He saw baking not as an opportunity to follow the recipe but to challenge it.

"Sometimes the recipe isn't always right," he said. "I feel like that's another thing — just challenging what you're given."

Daniel's parents were initially opposed to the idea of him owning a small business.

This opposition made him even more determined.

"They said, 'You shouldn't do that, and I think you should focus on math,'" Daniel said. "And I think again, this is how baking kind of forces you to challenge what you're told because if I had just listened to my parents, I would have never started it."



Midway photo by Calder Wong

OPEN OVENS. Founder and owner of a small baking business, Junior Daniel Wu places a batch of his everything cookies, made with marshmallows, pretzels, toffee and four kinds of chocolate into the oven. Some U-High students have taken their passion for the culinary arts to the next level through social media accounts or small businesses.

Through baking, Daniel said he learned time management, having to constantly multitask as cookies bake in the oven or cool on the counter.

Senior Elizabeth Grace Sharp began her business, A Piece of Grace, as a sophomore and, similar to Daniel, she has felt her capacity to bake decrease as the intensity of school work increased.

"My first two to three years of high school, I was really into it and I tried to do it as much as possible," she said. "I think senior year, end of junior year it definitely got to be too much to handle."

Elizabeth Grace started her business so she could connect two of her passions, advocacy and baking. At the end of high school, she intends to donate all of her profits to the Maria Shelter, a homeless shelter that houses women and children.

Baking also served as a form of escape for Elizabeth Grace, something she says felt accomplishable and tangible in the face of pressure about school.

"In high school, there are a lot of things you can't control, right? Or like a lot of times you feel out of control," she said. "But I think the thing about baking is that I could make something and I could say I have something to show for it."

Sophomore Sadie Ellis looks at cooking similarly, as an "outlet."

Sadie has run a cooking Instagram account, sadie.anne.cooks, since Thanksgiving 2023 when she spatchcocked a turkey — a difficult method that involves cutting open, pressing flat and cooking the bird.

Since then she has made frequent posts, developing connections throughout the school as people interact with her Instagram.

Sadie loves that her cooking skill allows her to make dishes independently. Like Daniel, she improves on recipes, tinkering with the instructions because of her experience.

As Sadie describes cooking: "It starts as a craving and leads to creativity."

tasty treats



Provided by Daniel Wu

Daniel Wu showcases a variety of baked goods, such as this **fresh fruit tart with orange peel pastry cream**, on his business' Instagram account, @millefeuillebakeshop.



Midway photo by Skye Freeman

Elizabeth Grace Sharp sells baked goods, like these **M&M cookies**, through her business, A Piece of Grace. She plans to donate all profits to a local homeless shelter when she graduates high school.



Provided by Sadie Ellis

Sadie Ellis posts dishes she cooks, such as this **Kalamata olive pasta with homemade tomato sauce**, on her Instagram account dedicated to her cooking @sadie.anne.cooks.

— *compiled by Lucy Shirrell*

New policy prompts fear among transgender students

Despite support, concerns mount in face of attacks



Midway illustration by Asher Dennis

by CHLOË ALEXANDER
Editor-in-Chief

President Donald Trump returned to office on Jan. 20 and signed dozens of executive orders, and just over two months later, March 31 was International Transgender Day of Visibility.

Among President Trump's executive actions were several attacks against transgender Americans, from banning them from serving in the military to blocking gender-affirming care.

For transgender students at U-High, there is a looming fear of the government's actions, even when surrounded by supportive friends and family.

"I have a support network, and I have a community around me that is sort of ensuring that I am not getting hit with the brunt of this," sophomore Valkyrie Laurence, who identifies as transgender, said. "However, that's not the case for many, many trans people."

Transgender activist Rachel Crandall Crocker organized International Transgender Day of Visibility in 2009 to celebrate transgender people rather than just mourn their losses.

> **"I have a support network, and I have a community around me that is sort of ensuring that I am not getting hit with the brunt of this, however, that's not the case for many, many trans people.**
> — Valkyrie Lawrence, sophomore

Spectrum club president Sylvie Bartom, a senior who identifies as transgender, feels national actions and state legislation will not affect her as much as it will the opinions of people she is around. It's also affected her college plans.

"Just like existing as a trans person and, specifically for me, as a senior, what that has affected is what colleges I'm looking at," she said.

"Especially with legislation specifically varying a law by state, there's been more than half of the states in the U.S. I've just been like, 'Oh, nope.'"

While she will have to put more thought into the state where she will attend college, she remains hopeful for the future and transgender rights because of supportive spaces provided by the Trevor Project, which has good resources for LGBTQ+ young people, and clubs like Spectrum, which provides a safe space for Sylvie and other LGBTQ+ students.

Valkyrie feels transgender people, who make up less than 1% of the U.S. population, are an easy target for conservatives.

"This rhetoric can be more effective because it's not something that people are familiar with," she said. "A lot of people are afraid to have conversations that really wouldn't be offensive but would just get people more information because they're scared they are going to offend trans people."

Even with everything going on, Valkyrie tries to stay open and optimistic.

"Just because things are bad now, it doesn't mean they'll stay this way," she said. "But it also doesn't mean that you're not allowed to experience joy."

Even now, the Trump administration removed over 150 terms and words from being used on federal websites, including numerous terms associated with the transgender community.

Although Transgender Day of Visibility has just passed, Sylvie says students and faculty can still take a stand.

"I think that this is kind of the thing that just being vocal or protesting or sending petitions to the government to make it heard about how much people do care about these things," she said.

Military:

One excutive order President Trump signed on Inauguration Day was restricting transgender Americans from serving in the military. The order claimed concerns over unit cohesion, military readiness and effectiveness, and medical costs. Federal judges have blocked the ban.

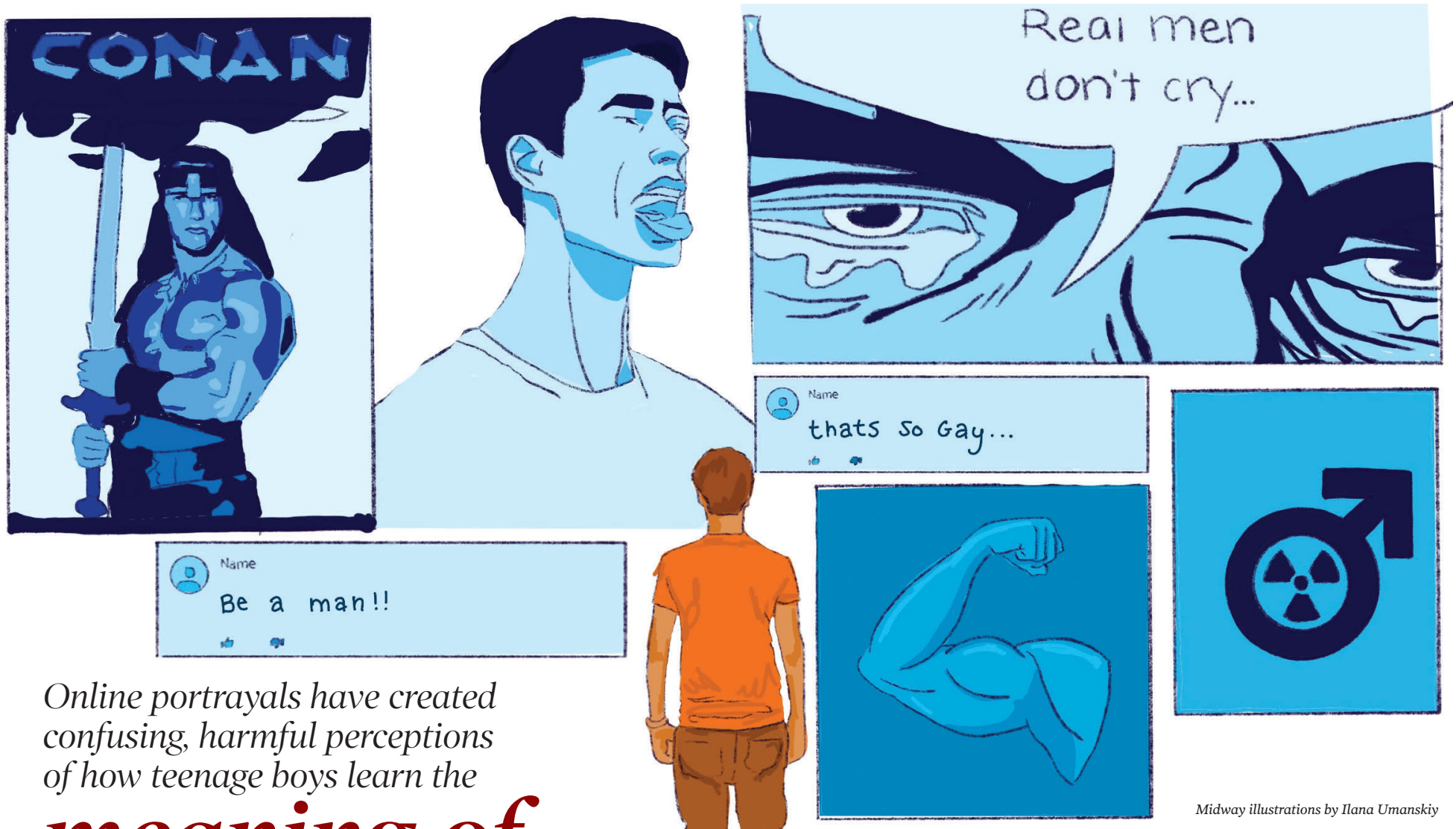
Gender-affirming care:

Another of Mr. Trump's first executive actions prohibits government funding from supporting gender-affirming care of anyone under 19. A January 2024 Harvard study found that there were no gender-affirming procedures performed on children 12 or younger and only 2.1 of 100,000 procedures on teens aged 15-17. In March, a federal judge blocked the order.

Protection and vocabulary:

Another first-day action stated that the federal government would recognize only two sexes: female and male. This order claimed to protect women from "gender extremism." This order, along with the other 150 terms and words banned from federal websites rolls back protections for transgender Americans.

— *compiled by Chloë Alexander*



Midway illustrations by Ilana Umanskiy

Online portrayals have created confusing, harmful perceptions of how teenage boys learn the

meaning of MASCULINITY

by DECLAN SMITH
Assistant Editor

For teenage boys, contradictory opinions on "masculinity" and what it means have been a longstanding issue. From political figures such as JD Vance and Sen. Josh Hawley claiming masculinity is suppressed and under attack to social media influencers offering tips on how to act and be perceived as more masculine, U-High students have been left to find personal definitions of masculinity.

New York University professor Niobe Way has been studying behavioral psychology since 1988. Her book, "Rebels with a Cause: Reimagining Boys, Ourselves, and Our Culture," discusses masculinity and the identity crises it creates for young boys.

Dr. Way argues that "masculinity" is traditionally equated to "hard" attributes: stoicism, determination, and aggressiveness, while "femininity" is traditionally equated to "soft" attributes: empathy, thoughtfulness, and appreciation. She says that her research has shown that humans need both soft and hard attributes to function.

Contradictory online information and portrayals of "masculinity" in popular culture have led young people to develop certain senses of masculinity and femininity.

Dr. Way's research has shown that some of these definitions of masculinity can even be damaging to teenagers.

Sophomore Saahir Patel feels many people conflate two different concepts: manliness and masculinity.

"Masculinity is more about being strong, independent and holding others up, while manly is more about being tough and stoic and unemotional and not reactive," Saahir said. "Masculinity, in a negative sense, is usually just a misinterpretation of what it means to be masculine, because masculinity isn't, like, a look or a sound."

Saahir's definition of masculinity is, in part, inspired by observing and learning from his father.

> **"Masculinity is more about being strong, independent and holding others up, while manly is more about being tough and stoic and unemotional and not reactive. Masculinity, in a negative sense, is usually just a misinterpretation of what it means to be masculine, because masculinity isn't, like, a look or a sound.**
> — Saahir Patel, sophomore



"My dad ... demonstrates what it means to be a father, and I aspire to be like him if — maybe when I have children later in my life," Saahir said, "because I think he demonstrates masculinity very well."

Like Saahir, sophomore Caleb Richards also defines masculinity as having so-called masculine traits.

Ever since he was young, he has been exposed to videos about masculinity and online influencers discussing masculinity.

"Of course, I've seen it all around. It's kind of an internet thing," Caleb said, "but there's always going to be a community for it."

According to senior Zarak Siddiqi, one troubling aspect of masculinity, or at least the expectations to be masculine, is the sense of homophobia he has seen among men in his community and online. He's noticed the use of the term "gay" as an insult among boys and men.

"A lot of internalized homophobia is in the community," Zarak said. "You do something that's, like, not considered manly, 'you're gay.'"

Zarak has also noticed that men are often stereotyped in relationships and over-sexualized.

Ian Taylor, an English teacher and father, has tried to raise his son and daughter contrary to stereotypical masculine and feminine roles, which he considers a social construct.

"[I've taught my son] to be kind, to be vulnerable, to talk about the things that are bothering him," Mr. Taylor said. "Those are the kinds of things I've done to not perpetuate this idea of maybe toxic masculinity."

Dr. Way wants to spread the message she's found from her research: By embracing both what is stereotypically considered masculine and what is stereotypically considered feminine, teenage boys avoid hurting themselves.

"When you grow up — as a boy in particular — it harms you when you can only emphasize half of your humanity," Dr. Way said.

She feels that the pressure to constantly be masculine leads to mental health problems, difficulty having friends and overall struggles in life.

Even after 40 years of research, Dr. Way still encounters similar challenges and perceptions around young men.

For generations, the question of what masculinity means and what masculinity is has troubled young men, and with the spread of social media and pop culture, she feels this issue has been brought to the forefront for many male-identifying students to deal with.

roundtable



Ares Cajas | *Whit Waterstraat* | *George Ofori-Mante* | *Teddy Stripling*

Four male-identifying members of the U-High community sat down for a discussion about masculinity. Responses were edited for clarity and length. An extended version of the discussion is available at uhighmidway.com.

— Interview conducted by Clare McRoberts, editor-in-chief

We're in a moment where people are talking a lot about masculinity. What does masculinity mean to you?

George Ofori-Mante, senior: I don't even know. I think it's something that most people have an intuitive understanding of, but no one can really define it. I feel like people would have similar answers if you said, "What is femininity?"

Whit Waterstraat, junior: I think I have to look back to who I looked up to when I was a kid, because that is who I strive to be and a lot of masculinity played into that. I watched a lot of YouTube growing up... DanTDM, Stampylongnose... I had no idea what was going on in their life outside of that, but I knew when I got home, there would be a video there, and it would make my day. So when I think of masculinity, I think of the people who showed up every single day and put all of that personal stuff away from an audience and were able to show up and just be there.

Scan the QR code to read more responses from our guests at the roundtable.

Ares Cajas, ninth grader: I think it's unfair to define masculinity by one thing or one character trait, or like a couple character traits. It's different for everybody and the circumstances they've been in.

Teddy Stripling, counselor and adviser to Young Men of Color club: I keep thinking of the [role] models that we've had. A lot of that I got from my father or my uncles, or like people that I watched on TV, because we didn't have YouTube back then. Stereotypically, if you're masculine, you have to have big muscles and be real strong. I'm an '80s baby, and so I'm thinking of, like, "Conan the Barbarian" and all those other superheroes that were just, like, ripped and running around... those are some of the things that you think of when you think of masculinity, like, 'Oh, I have to be strong. I have to use force' or 'I have to save people.'

Tell us about your experiences surrounding perspectives on masculinity at Lab. How has that shaped your understanding of masculinity?

George: I don't think there are many conversations about masculinity at Lab to begin with, so I don't think that shaped my perspective that much.

Ares: I feel like the emphasis on it is kind of not as prevalent at Lab as other schools. In my experience, Lab has a lot more spaces you can fit in, because of the offerings it has. So I feel like there's not as much emphasis on defining masculinity.

Whit: Growing up at Lab, there was a lot of talk about sexuality more so than masculinity or femininity. For years, I was in a world in which people would just be like, "Hey, are you gay yet?" So I was always questioning my sexuality and nothing was coming from it. I felt a lot of my masculinity was stripped away from me because people put this defining feature that wasn't representative of me in the forefront of their minds. And therefore it took a long time for me to have a conversation with myself and figure out who I am, what masculinity means to me, who I want to be, and escape this idea that other people get to define me.