



THE CHOATE NEWS

THE OFFICIAL STUDENT NEWSPAPER OF CHOATE ROSEMARY HALL SINCE 1907

Choate Rosemary Hall
333 Christian Street
Wallingford, CT

Vol. CXIX · No. IX

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2025

THECHOATENews.CHOATE.EDU

LEARNING BEYOND WALLINGFORD: STUDENTS STUDY IN JORDAN, SPAIN, AND ITALY

By **Sabrina Liu '28**
Associate Editor

This fall, 13 Choate students studied abroad in programs across Jordan, Spain, and Italy, participating in Choate's Global Engagement opportunities focused on language immersion and cultural learning.

According to Director of Global Engagement Ms. Ashley Sinclair, five students studied at King's Academy in Jordan; seven studied in Sevilla, Spain; and one attended St. Stephen's School in Rome, Italy. While a program in Toulouse did not run this year due to limited interest, Ms. Sinclair noted that the School is optimistic that it will return next year.

For Samia Mowafi '27, Jordan was deeply personal. "My background is Arab. I'm Syrian, Lebanese, and Egyptian," she said. "I was an overall happier person...living around my culture. And I really wanted to re-live that because I speak Egyptian Arabic with my dad, but my mom speaks a completely different dialect that I understand, but I didn't speak."

Her first impression of school life was challenging. "It was difficult adjusting," Mowafi said. "I think the school is a lot more strict than I was expecting it to be." Still, she eventually came to understand the structure. "They believe that when you go to school, you should be dressed a certain way because it shows respect to your teacher," she added.

One of the most meaningful parts of Mowafi's experience was a course on the history of Palestine taught by Dr. Ethan Jerome. "It was one of the best courses I've ever taken in my life," she said. "The teacher was phenomenal." Mowafi described Dr. Jerome as both



Photo courtesy of Samia Mowafi '27

Students standing in front of El Oso y el Madroño in Madrid, Spain.

serious and supportive. "He would show us the truth, the reality of things. But he would also be understanding of both perspectives," she said, adding that she does not think she will ever forget him.

Outside the classroom, Mowafi described traveling across the region with her family. "It was the first time I've ever seen Syria," she said. "I got to meet some of my family that I've never met."

For Gage Hakim '28, studying abroad in Jordan was a way to reconnect with his family heritage. "Studying Arabic is one of my big objectives at Choate, especially since I'm a quarter Syrian," he explained. "My Dad doesn't speak Arabic, and he's half Syrian, so I think it always made sense to me to

...relearn this language that has been left behind."

Hakim described King's Academy as highly structured. "They have a no phone policy," he said. "You also can't return to your dorm during the day, if you get found, they put you in detention."

Academically, Hakim said the biggest benefit came from immersion. "If you never ... go on a trip like this, then you really never learn the local language," he said.

For Elin Bergh '27, studying in Rome began spontaneously. "It was kind of like a spur-of-the-moment decision," she said. "I wanted to explore a new city and immerse myself in a new culture." Her first impression was immediate. "Rome was so beautiful," she said. "My dorm ... was a

five-minute walk from the Colosseum." Bergh also described the community as close-knit. "It felt more like a family community," she said. "I got really close with all the kids in my grade there ... really quickly."

The highlight of the term for Bergh was traveling to various places. "We went to Mount Etna, which is this volcano in Sicily," Bergh said. Still, some of her strongest memories came from daily life. "My daily walk to school, and being able to walk by the Coliseum," she added. "Rome was just like ... a museum in itself."

For Cora Lloyd '28, the decision to study abroad stemmed from both curiosity and encouragement. "It's a really rare and special experience to be able to study abroad in high school,"

she said. "I thought this would be a really amazing way to really immerse myself in a different culture and be able to learn Spanish in ... [a] different and more immersive way."

Daily life was completely different for Lloyd in Spain. "We only had classes from 9 a.m. to noon every day," Lloyd said. "We would have lunch around three, and then we would have dinner around 10 every night."

Food was one of the biggest adjustments. "The host mom was making the food, and then we would eat it, and that was our meal," Lloyd said. "The culture of food there is just really different from the United States...sometimes [it] did not hit."

Still, Lloyd described moments of retaliation. "I was walking back from the gym and ... I was walking

through the city by myself, and I was like, it's just insane that I'm living here," she said.

For Carly Covey '28, Spain was closely tied to her family history. "I have family of Argentinian descent," she said. "By going to Spain, I could really improve my Spanish skills to be able to communicate with that side of the family, because before learning Spanish, I was never able to really talk to them."

Upon arrival, she noticed an immediate difference. "Everything is so clean," Covey said. What stayed with her most was the social culture. "People are so nice, and people are so warm," Covey said. "When you're talking to people, you start out with, 'Hi, how are you? How's the family?' and then it's like a hug and two kisses."

Reflecting back, she emphasized that the experience was not primarily academic. "If you're going into it thinking you're gonna have a rigorous academic experience, you're not," she said. "This is a cultural learning experience."

Across all three locations, students emphasized language immersion, cultural adjustment, and independence as defining parts of their fall term abroad. From early-morning walks past the Colosseum to late-night dinners in Sevilla and tightly structured days in Jordan, students returned with new perspectives shaped by daily life beyond Choate's campus.

Looking ahead, Choate also plans to launch new programs in Taipei and Rabat for the 2026-27 academic year. "We had been trying to get a program for Chinese language learners off the ground for the last three years," Ms. Sinclair said. "I'm sure you can imagine how excited we are about the new option in Taipei."

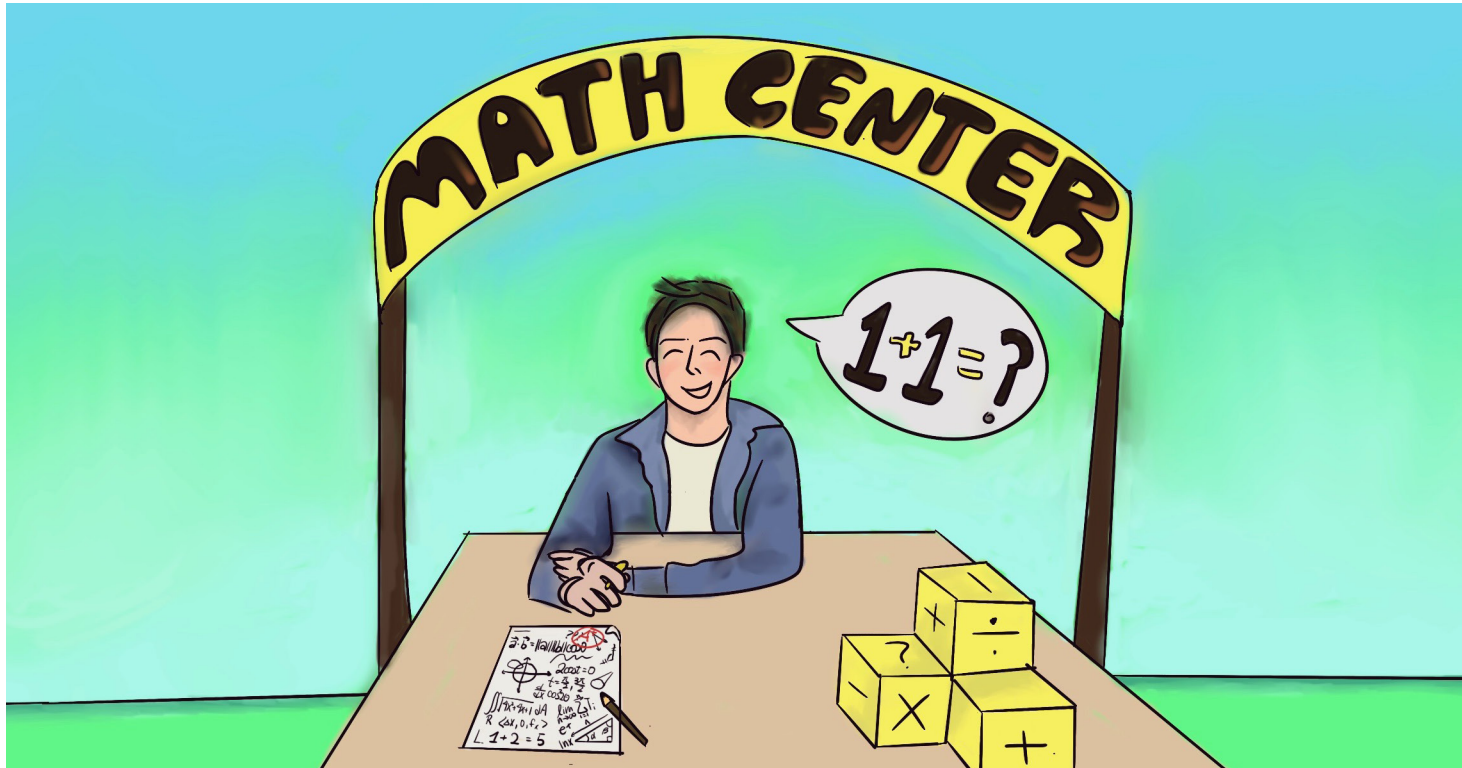
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Need Math Help? The Math Center Returns

By **Nick Aston '28**
Staff Contributor

Every student at Choate has experienced that familiar feeling of panic that sets in the night before an important test, especially when your teacher isn't available. While students often seek help from peers with their writing assignments in the Writing Center for humanities classes, what is there to be done when you need help with math?

This year, the Andrew Mellon Library is reopening its math tutoring center, where students can receive immediate feedback from their peers across all math courses. Math Department Head Ms. Andrea Sorrells noted that maintaining the tutoring center had been a challenging task in the past. "It did run two years ago for part of the year, but there were some issues that arose. And last year, I didn't have anyone who could step up to take on the supervising," Ms. Sorrells said. Despite past difficulties, Adele Ding '26, whom Ms. Sorrells credits for the return of



Graphic by Rachel Fan '27/The Choate News

the Math Center, helped ensure that students have access to math tutoring at Choate.

Ding worked closely with Ms. Sorrells and the Library to bring her vision to life by

sending out forms to gather tutoring interest, as well as assisting in creating guidelines for the center. "I give credit to Adele; she reached out to me and really wanted to get it go-

ing, and she was willing to take the time to make sure that we did it right," Ms. Sorrells said. For Ding, the tutoring center is a way for students to seek help right when they need it, wheth-

er it's for a quick question or a more in-depth explanation of a topic. "It doesn't matter what your math level is; we all need help... It's [also] a really great way for students to get the help

they need without any judgment," Ding said.

The Math Center also offers meaningful benefits to the tutors themselves. In addition to brushing up on their math skills, tutors are also eligible to earn service hours for their work in the tutoring center. Julie Ha '28 applied as a tutor after hearing about it at School Meeting. "I thought it was a good opportunity for me because, as a reclass, I'm very experienced in math, and I wanted to help people learn. Plus, I get community service hours," tutor Julie Ha '28 said.

Thanks to the hard work of Adele Ding, Ms. Sorrells, and the Library, the student body now has a place to receive the extra help they need in math. The Math Center is open from 7:15 PM to 9:15 PM, Sunday through Thursday, and students of all math levels are encouraged to visit the tutors whenever they need help.

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MS. JENNY ELLIOT NAMED EXETER'S NEXT PRINCIPAL

By **Maia Shah '27**
Associate Editor

From her legendary “three crush theory” to reminding students that they “get to do hard things,” her reflective school meeting speeches and greetings at the Colony Hall doors every Tuesday morning have set a tone of cheer and connection at Choate. As a HPRSS teacher and Girl Varsity Squash Assistant Coach, she has shown the community what joyful leadership looks like. After almost four years as Head of Student and Academic Life, Ms. Jenny Karlen Elliot will embark on a new journey starting next year as Principal of Phillips Academy Exeter.

At Choate, Ms. Elliot, fondly referred to as “Jelliot” by her students, has been responsible for overseeing and advising all that makes a Choate student’s experience special, whether it is academics, residential life, wellness initiatives, or doing what she is best at: curating a welcoming and vibrant community culture.

It is with optimism and congratulations, but also with bittersweet sentiment, that the Choate community will send Ms. Elliot to New Hampshire at the end of this academic year, where she will assume the title of the 17th Principal at Phillips Exeter Academy.

Reflecting on Ms. Elliot’s indelible mark on the community, her students and colleagues regard her with incredible respect and admiration. Chase Gore-Grimes '27, a student in her Honors American History class, said, “The best advice she



Photo courtesy of Choate Photos

Ms. Elliott speaking on stage during Prize Day 2025.

gave me was to prioritize time for myself. Ms. Elliot really took time every class to check in on us. She made me feel seen.” Gore-Grimes appreciates the way that Ms. Elliot truly understands the student experience and encourages well-being. “She often reminded us that

every day we needed to find something that we enjoyed, something that was just for us to ease our minds. I hadn’t really thought about that before, doing something just for me,” she added.

Alisha Gashu '27, another one of Ms. Elliot’s students,

emphasized Ms. Elliot’s passionate teaching style. “Her historical knowledge and perspectives, paired with the personal stories she shared, made every class feel meaningful and reminded me why learning matters beyond the classroom,” she said.

Similarly, Ms. Elliot herself feels she has learned much from the community’s offerings: the warmth, care, and how the community is “committed to the growth, progress, and well-being of students.” Looking forward to a new school setting, Ms. Elliot hopes to cherish the lessons and

guidance Choate has provided her and use them to inform her leadership elsewhere. She plans to draw upon the laughter, motivation, and warm culture that Choate works so hard to preserve to guide her decision-making and goals.

As she reflected on her next chapter, she added, “Choate strikes an amazing balance between hard work and joy; this coupling aligns with what I think learning communities should be. I will focus my efforts on listening and learning—as I sought to do when I arrived at Choate.”

The Choate community knows no one will capture the excitement of Valentine’s Day quite like Ms. Elliot, no one can make daunting tasks feel almost exciting the way she could, and no one else will bring a life-sized carnival to campus as she once did, and, of course, school meetings won’t be the same in the upcoming years. However, the community will always remember the lasting impact she has had on Choate. Previously, she has advocated for new wellness and technology policies to inspire connection and foster laughter, she has encouraged student voice and feedback, and she has ensured respect, collaboration, and a balance between delight and rigor.

With all of these lessons in mind, Ms. Elliot hopes the community will carry forward her guidance: “Cherish the people around you; feed your curiosity; express gratitude; get more sleep; when you work, work hard; and prioritize joy.”

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American Studies Students Visit The Mark Twain House



Photo courtesy of marktwainhouse.org

Photograph of the Mark Twain House in Hartford, Connecticut.

By **Eliza O’Neill '27**
Staff Contributor

This winterlude, students enrolled in American Studies traveled to Hartford, Connecticut to visit The Mark Twain House & Museum and the Stowe Center for Literary Activism. The sites are located on the same campus and separated by just a short walk; however, each site offered students a distinct insight into the intersection of history, memory, and literature.

Trip coordinator and American Studies teacher Dr. Amber Hodge shared the motivation behind the trip: “[Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe are] both great figures in American literary history...this was an opportunity to take that extra step—thinking not just about who they were, but why and how we remember them.” For American Studies in particular, this notion has been a specific area of emphasis. The course challenges students to recognize the social and cultural

conditions in which significant texts were created, forcing them to examine beyond the initial text itself.

Dr. Hodge also noted that the two houses “were very different experiences.” The Twain House focused on Twain’s family life and workspaces, such as the Billiard Room where he spent time writing and entertaining his friends. On the other hand, the Stowe Center centered around the ideological repercussions of Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, exposing the brutal realities of slavery in the nineteenth century. These disparities reflect the authors’ distinct personalities and architectural eras, and also encourages students to develop an appreciation for the behind-the-scenes work and preparation that go into choosing the concepts.

Before the trip, students engaged in various in-class discussions on the idea of memory and how chosen artifacts shape it. These discussions were comple-

mented by exercises and readings that provided historical context relevant to the conditions under which both authors wrote. Aggie McPartland '27 said, “The topics in the classroom really prepared us well for the trip... We had already done some initial reading...so the classroom gave us a good background into the context of these people and what they’re remembered for.” By providing students with a foundational understanding of Twain and Stowe before the trip, they were able to fully absorb and delve into the information presented to them at each museum. The primary source readings were analyzed in historical contexts, and completing the pre-trip questions also enabled students to be fully prepared to stretch their comprehension beyond the surface-level knowledge they already possessed.

Jaxx Friedman '27 echoed McPartland’s acknowledgment that preparation deepened students’ engagement, adding that

seeing the authors’ houses in person offered a new layer of knowledge. “It’s one thing to read what they write...It’s another to see the environment they wrote in, especially seeing the lifestyle that their writing provided them,” he said. Both students recognized that visiting these luxurious homes reaffirmed the authors’ literary success.

For the students on the trip, it was more than just a day of visiting lavish mansions; it was also an opportunity to learn about and challenge the narratives of the past. “Next time I go to a museum, I’ll be thinking about why a story is told in this way,” McPartland said. This sentiment epitomizes Dr. Hodge’s and the rest of the American Studies teachers’ hope for the trip: to motivate students to approach museums with a passion for inquiry and critical thinking.

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“Be Undefinable” Nears Its End

By **Drew Wolfson '27**
Staff Contributor

“Be Undefinable.” These are the first words when we visit the School’s website. “Be Undefinable” is printed on the T-shirt that every Choate student gets upon admission to Choate. “Be Undefinable” is what Choate students are encouraged to strive for throughout their journey. “Be Undefinable” has been the ethos for every Choate student since the term was first introduced in 2021, encouraging students to explore deeply, take intellectual risks, and refuse to be limited to a single defining characteristic. However, after five years, “Be Undefinable” will be retired and give way to a new slogan.

According to Director of Communications Alison Cady, “This is a rebranding project designed to update the look and feel of our messaging, both with words and visuals across various platforms ... It is not intended to reflect something different, rather simply the most current reality of what Choate is offering its students today.” What resonated five years ago may no longer fully capture the breath of opportunities and student experiences that define Choate today. In fact, every three to seven years, Choate embarks on a rebranding campaign to keep their brand in line with their student body.

According to Ms. Cady, “Be Undefinable” has “worked really well for us.” It has become a recognizable part of Choate’s identity as a school, resonating strongly with prospective families and current students alike.

As for the new slogan, it remains a mystery. Working

with an outside firm, Choate is collecting research and developing creative concepts to help tell its story. The School has also sought input and guidance from parents, students, faculty, and staff. “The goal of this project is to share the Choate story in a way that encourages prospective students to choose Choate,” Ms. Cady said.

It is critical that the new slogan is reflective of Choate’s values. The slogan also works to quickly identify the School to families who may be encountering Choate for the first time, as well as attract talent as a rallying point. “I hope our work will impact the school by attracting the next generation of talented and engaged Choate students,” Ms. Cady said. “It is always essential that our messaging, whether we are advertising the School or communicating directly about our institution, is grounded in the School’s mission, values, and vision for the future.”

Gold Key Leader Zoey Schamis '26 recently participated in a panel discussion about a potential new slogan. Schamis enjoyed discussing her experience and representing Choate. “I understand why we say ‘Be Undefinable,’ because we are not just one thing. There are so many opportunities at Choate,” Schamis said. “I’m interested to see the new motto they come up with.”

As we await the new mystery slogan next year, we should all continue to “Be Undefinable” and embrace the individuality that has defined Choate students.

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Holiday Stroll Lights Up Center Street

By **Sabrina Liu '28**
Associate Editor

Downtown Wallingford transformed into a winter wonderland for the annual Holiday Stroll on December 5. Drawing community members to Center Street, the event aimed to celebrate the holiday season while supporting local businesses. The sound of Christmas carols, blended with the chatter of families and friends exploring the Stroll, while crowds paused frequently to admire window displays, many of which were specially arranged for the event. Now in its 17th year, the Holiday Stroll continues to grow as a beloved community tradition.

Ms. Liz Davis, executive director of Wallingford Center Inc., said, "It was another way to bring people to shop locally ... to promote the local merchants down here." She explained that the event welcomes everyone, noting that there is no specific "target audience." Wallingford Center Inc. organizes and promotes the event, bringing together over 70 vendors in this year's Stroll.



Photo by Zahabiya Khokha '27/The Choate News

Local businesses set up festive displays outside storefronts.

Throughout Center Street, local businesses opened their doors to crowds of families, students, and residents eager to experience night of holiday-themed activities. Mr. D's, a neighborhood dessert shop in Wallingford, once again joined the celebration. Owner Ms. Heather Williams said the business has participated for the past several years. "It's a really fun community event," Ms. Williams said. "Wallingford Center Inc. reached out to us, and we were more than happy to be involved."

This year, Mr. D's offered a variety of festive attractions for visitors, including a snow machine and gingerbread cookies. "We have little free samples of mini cupcakes. And then we'll have an assortment of our hot chocolates and coffee drinks available as well." She noted that the Holiday Stroll attracts

larger family groups than typical business days, creating a distinct atmosphere separate from everyday operations.

Green Kettle, a cafe located on Center Street, has participated in the Holiday Stroll every year since opening its doors. "Our very first day of opening was the holiday stroll in 2022," Manager of Green Kettle Ms. Haley Evans said. This year, Green Kettle introduced a special holiday hot chocolate for the event, which Ms. Evans said is a major attraction for families with children. "People just come, and they're all in a good mood. They get their hot chocolate, and warm their little hands," she said.

Wallingford Flower, a family-owned business that has been in operation for 76 years,

has also remained deeply involved in the Holiday Stroll. Owner Ms. Tammy Sirois said she has worked at the shop for 42 years and that the store has participated in the Stroll for nearly its entire history.

Ms. Sirois described the emotional importance of flowers during the holiday season, particularly for those experiencing grief despite the festivities. "If family or someone is experiencing a loss or there's other things going on in their life, there is... something special and comforting about holiday greens or flowers," she said. During the holiday season, the shop also provides weekly floral and diffuser deliveries for Choate students from parents. "They do it every week through the holiday," Ms. Sirois said. "It is really cute."

Furthermore, Words on Wood, a downtown shop known for custom wooden signs and gifts, has participated in the Holiday Stroll every year since opening nine years ago. Owner Ms. Jackie Valentine said the event continues to be one of the busiest nights of the year for her business. "We usually have between 2,000 to 2,500 people that come through during the Holiday Stroll," Ms. Valentine said.

The store offered free photos with Santa, drink specials at its Woodshed Bar, featured holiday products, and seasonal sales. "So many kids come in every year, that, by now, they know Santa," Ms. Valentine said. "They're so excited because they've interacted with that Santa for nine years now, so it's just magical." She de-

scribed the Stroll as "the most wonderful night for us."

Choate students also took part in the festivities. Zahabiya Khokha '27 attended the Holiday Stroll after seeing the event advertised on Instagram. "We went last year as well, and it was really fun, so it was definitely something I wanted to check out again," Khokha said. Her favorite moments were watching the tree lighting at the gazebo and taking photos with Santa. She also enjoyed the food: "We got these really good s'mores," she said.

The Holiday Stroll helped Khokha feel more connected to the Wallingford community. "It was really fun to see so many people there and just getting to feel a little bit more integrated within the community," she said. She encourages other Choate students to attend, especial-

ly during the colder months. "I think it's a really great way to get yourself out of your dorm when it's cold," she said.

By the end of the evening, Center Street had seen several hours of continuous activity as visitors made their way through the full range of offerings. As the Holiday Stroll continues to expand, Ms. Davis emphasized that its mission remains the same. "It's decorated [nicely], and the merchants are out there trying to get people to come in and purchase from them," she said. With thousands of visitors and festive activities, this year's Holiday Stroll once again demonstrated how deeply local businesses and community support are woven into Wallingford's holiday traditions.

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DEMOCRATS REGAIN CONTROL IN TOWN COUNCIL AFTER 15 YEARS

By **Sophie Chung '27**
Reporter

After a decade and a half of Republican leadership, Wallingford voters have begun a new chapter in the town council. Known as the elected group that manages budgets, passes town policies, oversees public safety, and stimulates economic development, the council has recently undergone a historical transfer from red to blue. However, this flip didn't just happen overnight.

Spearheaded by Democratic Town Committee Chair Ms. Alida Cella, this initiative underwent five years of development and careful execution. "On the state level and federal level, we already have the voters," Ms. Cella said. "What we needed was to be connecting on the municipal level with those voters. So every year since 2020, every municipal cycle, we've been seeing those gains, and I just knew it was a matter of time, whether it would be this cycle or next cycle, when

we would be able to overcome that barrier to winning."

During her first year as chair of the Democratic Town Committee in 2020, Ms. Cella and her colleagues recognized issues they felt were not being addressed efficiently under Republican leadership, such as "the lack of investment in infrastructure." In an effort to remedy this, Ms. Cella leveraged her union-building background to establish a group that would take the first step in addressing these problems. Her first step was

to communicate with Democrats about existing issues and brainstorm the following changes.

Her committee started this communication in 2020, developing their communication systems, website, social media presence, and compiling an extensive email list. This work paid off in small increments, with each election cycle showing greater gains and establishing the hope that motivated them to continue working despite losses. Ms.

Cella explained this period of steady progression: "We could see that we were making gains and we had all the markers ... as long as we kept improving them, eventually we'd be able to win." Looking back on her years of dedication to the cause and the time that led up to this historic victory, Ms. Cella believed that the key factor in acquiring this control "was [the] concerted effort to outreach and relay messages about our perspective in Wallingford,

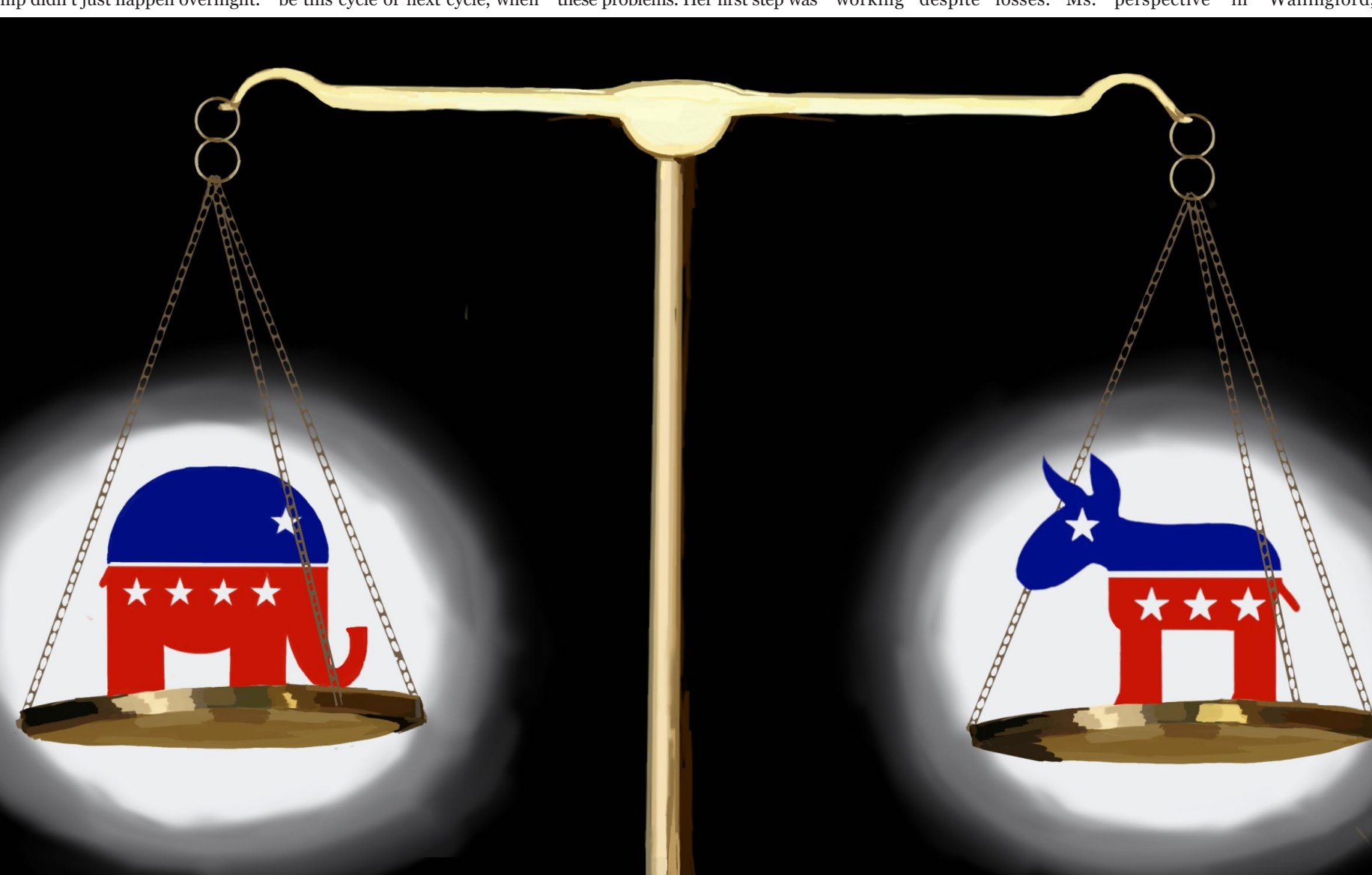
helping voters to understand why it's a problem."

Mr. Vincent Cervoni, the current Republican mayor of Wallingford, has stated that he intends to work with the Democratic council and maintain a respectful relationship. He hopes that rather than focusing on opposition, both parties will instead work together for a better Wallingford, regardless of political affiliation: "I have historically had good relationships with the Democratic councilors, and I'm gonna look to maintain those. I believe that once elected, we can put the work of government ahead of politics," he said.

With this win under their belt, the Democrats plan to move forward with their agenda. Democratic Councilor Mr. Vincent Testa Jr., receiving 6,763 votes, said, "We want to focus more on increasing the affordable housing opportunities." He further added, "We want to be more attentive to the needs of the school system, as well as adding more recreational opportunities."

Ultimately, Ms. Cella emphasized the importance of investing in the school system: "With good, creative thinking, we can figure out how to fund our schools and make sure that our schools show improvements in our ratings." The new council's planned investments in education, housing, and recreation aim to reshape Wallingford's future and make the town more accessible to families of all ages. As the first Democratic majority in over a decade takes office, residents now look ahead to see how these priorities will translate into promising policy and long-term change.

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Graphic by Sienna Kim '28/The Choate News

THE CHOATE NEWS

119TH MASTHEAD VOL. CXIX



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NEW VISITATION, BETTER INCLUSION



Graphic by Leah Han '27/The Choate News

By **Harry Kim '28**
Associate Editor

Found on page 36 of the Choate student handbook, the visitation policy provides insight into an integral aspect of community life at Choate. Since the School adopted the new visitation policy this year, students across the community have expressed a wide range of opinions. However, despite its criticisms, the current visitation policy is an effective form of regulation for the student body because it creates a more inclusive system.

The previous visitation policy was based on the gender binary: students of the same gender could visit one another's dorm rooms at any time after the class day ended, while visitation between students of other genders required in-person permission from a dorm faculty member. However, several issues emerged with the previous visitation policy, structured entirely from a binary perspective. It applied equally to heterosexual students and to those who identify as LGBTQ+, meaning the policy was not equally accessible or convenient for all students. In some

sense, it was discriminatory to those who do not conform to a heterosexual identity.

Under the current policy, crafted with consultation from multiple student and faculty committees, students are grouped into form-based clusters to determine which rooms students can visit. Third-form has its own cluster, fourth- and fifth-form constitute another cluster, and, lastly, sixth-form also has its own cluster. Within the cluster, students only need to change their location in the REACH student tracking system, regardless of their gender identity.

When visiting rooms across clusters, students need to call the Duty Associate or the Dean on Duty to request permission. Dean of Students Mr. Will Gilyard '98 explained, "These changes stem from things that the student council was pushing and also from thinking about our policy shifts, moving away from gendered language and thinking about us holistically as human beings."

From my perspective, I firmly believe that the current visitation policy is an effective system that is both inclusive and retains the core purpose of visitation. I'll admit that having to REACH to

friends' dorms can feel tedious, and I sometimes forget to "un-REACH." Others, such as Nirek Thakkar '28, also agree: "Compared to last year, I feel like it's more tedious, especially with the REACH, and if you forget it, you get in trouble." Visiting my same-gendered friends' dorms was definitely more convenient under last year's policy.

However, I must acknowledge that this small shift to the REACH system has had a positive impact on many students at Choate. Ryan Rousseau '28 noted, "Now everyone can visit each other's dorm within their clusters, just by using REACH. And that's the main change, which has made [visitation] more inclusive." By creating a more inclusive system that allows students to spend time with their friends regardless of gender, the policy provides opportunities that were previously inaccessible to everyone. While REACH may feel annoying and tedious at times, a few taps on a phone is a small price to pay for a more equitable system.

Of course, the current visitation policy is not perfect. There are still areas for improvement, such as revising the REACH system, extending visitation hours

further, and modifying the cluster system. Director of Residential Life Mr. Pat Dennehy said, "We're all in this new system, so we're trying to figure it out. We're listening to a lot of people, both adults and students, and we have some ideas, such as [improving] clustering, that we'll consider."

Although there is various feedback and pending adjustments, the new visitation policy has integrated well into the Choate community. Mr. Dennehy said, "There are a lot of people who are doing it [visitation], and they're doing it well. But we really need students to buy in and hold each other accountable. Let's put our best foot forward and be compliant with the expectations."

The policy has both strengths and drawbacks, but in my opinion, it is a far more equitable model for visitation at Choate than the previous policy. As Mr. Dennehy encourages us, we should continue to work together to refine the system, making it even more inclusive and fair for every member of the Choate community.

Harry Kim is a fourth-former from Seoul, South Korea. He may be reached at hkim28@choate.edu.

IT SOUNDS A LOT LIKE CHRISTMAS

By **Teya Tejavibulya '28**
Associate Editor

There are clear signs when the fall comes to a close: trees are bare, temperatures drop without warning, and the sky darkens long before dinner. There is a brief stretch after Halloween, when campus feels suspended between seasons — too cold to be fall but not cold enough to be winter.

With the start of winter so uncertain, questions about when the holiday season begins and when Christmas music can be played naturally arise. While some who celebrate Thanksgiving may delay the start of the holiday vibes until December, for me, November 1 is the right time to start listening to Christmas music.

My instinct about when the season begins comes from growing up in Thailand, where Halloween and Christmas blend into one long, energetic celebration. Every year, I watched decorations change almost instantly. Sometimes the timing clashed: ornaments appeared beside skeletons, and Christmas trees stood next to cobwebs. But one thing never changed: during the first few days of November, the festive atmosphere always emerged. As a result, November 1 feels like the true starting point of the holiday season, and when Christmas music should begin to be played.

My childhood alone does not determine my stance. Another reason November feels right is that Christmas is not a holiday confined to a single day,

and playing music early sets the tone for the season. Although December 25 is fixed as Christmas Day, Christmas stretches across weeks of dedication and preparation. The season works best when it unfolds gradually — whether it is shopping for gifts on Black Friday sales or revisiting old traditions like decorating Christmas trees.

Easing into the celebration doesn't happen overnight. Playing holiday music is the best way to kick the holiday season off in November, right when these tasks begin. Truly, all anyone needs is to hear some Christmas music and start belting out to Mariah Carey, putting them in the mood for the holiday season.

As an international student, November means something different to me. I never celebrated Thanksgiving, so there was never a celebration in November that delayed the buildup to Christmas. Instead, the anticipation carried throughout the month, and I got accustomed to the rhythm. Without Thanksgiving acting as a pitstop, starting the season on November 1 every year feels customary.

Now, thousands of miles away from where those habits were first formed, I see playing Christmas music starting on November 1 as both a small reminder of home and a familiar way to begin the holidays — one that still feels right, no matter where I am.

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Graphic by Eliza Aldrich '27/The Choate News

SLEIGHING SECRET SANTA 101

By **Reid Bock '27**
Associate Editor

The successful Secret Santa has one simple job: make someone feel special. However, between budget limitations and the pressure to not be "boring," the tradition can quickly turn into a stressful game of brainstorming gifts rather than a fun holiday activity. The good news for you is that nailing your Secret Santa gift isn't hard — you just need to be observant and intentional.

The best Secret Santa gifts don't come from scrolling through "gift idea" reels; they come from paying attention. Listen for the comments people make without thinking. The person who is always cold, always tired, or always hungry has already given you a direction to follow. Notice their patterns: the drink they always order at Lanphier Café, a favorite color, a favorite artist, or a sports team they repeatedly bring up.

Based on those habits, you can easily think of good gifts: a "cozy" person might love a soft blanket or a mug for their hot chocolate. Someone "artsy" might appreciate a new sketchbook or gel pens. A bookworm might enjoy a new bookmark, a booklight, or the next volume of a series they love.

What separates a memorable Secret Santa gift from a forgettable one is how clearly it feels like it belongs to that person. Personalization can be as simple as choosing their favor-



Graphic by Leah Han '27/The Choate News

ite color, referencing an inside joke, or picking something that fits their specific habit.

Small bundles work especially well. When you pair a mug with their favorite tea and some cookies, it feels much more intentional. Personality is far more important than a gift's flashiness or its price tag.

However, the most important part of a Secret Santa gift is the handwritten note. Too often, people treat the handwritten note as a cherry on top, yet it's one of the most meaningful parts of the whole exchange. A short, thoughtful message can make even a simple gift truly special. Mention something specific: a moment they made

you laugh, a trait you admire, or something you genuinely appreciate about them. The tone doesn't have to be overly sentimental — a few genuine sentences are enough.

Though there are many things you can do, there are also a few things that you should be wary of. Any gifts that hint towards "fixing" something may be seen as an insult. Avoid gifting hygiene items, or anything that could be taken as a criticism. Generic gift cards, without thought or personalization, can feel more transactional than thoughtful. Going significantly over an agreed-upon budget can also backfire, potentially mak-

ing others feel uncomfortable about the amount of money they spent on their gifts. Additionally, consider the recipient's perspective. If you were the recipient and would be hesitant to unwrap it in front of your friends, it's probably not the right choice.

Nailing Secret Santa does not require a massive budget or creativity. It simply takes effort to notice little things and choose your gift with intention. Ensure your gift is personal and conveys the intended meaning, and your recipient will surely feel special.

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THE AI BUBBLE ISN'T JUST COMING, IT'S NECESSARY

By **Steven Kee '27**
Associate Editor

Between March and October 2000, the NASDAQ Composite stock market index dropped by 77%. This crash was triggered by the burst of the “dot-com bubble,” where investors realized that many internet-based companies were overvalued, cash-burning, and non-revenue generating. However, this crash weeded out unprofitable companies, leaving successful businesses such as Amazon and Microsoft standing. The burst had limited impact on the broader economy, and the surviving internet infrastructure helped permanently increase the U.S. GDP by 2%.

Today, the situation in the artificial intelligence (AI) sector is similar in many ways. The current AI bubble, built on speculation, unsustainable debt, and circular financing, will eventually burst, promoting future industry progress grounded in true value creation while limiting its broader financial impact.

Currently, AI companies are fueled by unsustainable debt and lofty expectations. OpenAI, the privately held AI company behind ChatGPT, a chatbot which has over 800 million weekly users, is the prime suspect. Currently, nearly 92% of Fortune 500 companies, the largest revenue-generating corporations in the U.S., use ChatGPT. However, according to a report by consult-

ing firm McKinsey & Co., over 80% of such companies have reported no material contributions to earnings from AI usage. In other words, the widespread adoption of AI technologies have had a limited impact on workplace productivity. Moreover, despite popular use of its technology, OpenAI is still not profitable. According to HSBC, OpenAI is not projected to become profitable until 2030, and until then, it will continue to burn through investors' cash.

Yet, at the same time, OpenAI has taken a \$4 billion line of credit, and has pledged \$1.4 trillion in deals with chipmakers. Its public company data center partners, such as Oracle and Softbank, have borrowed over \$100 billion for new AI infrastructure. You don't have to be an investment banker to see that this business model is unsustainable. With so much debt, so little revenue, and no near-future profits, OpenAI's foundations are shaky. Facing steep competition from the likes of Google and Microsoft, the company will collapse before it can meet its financial obligations.

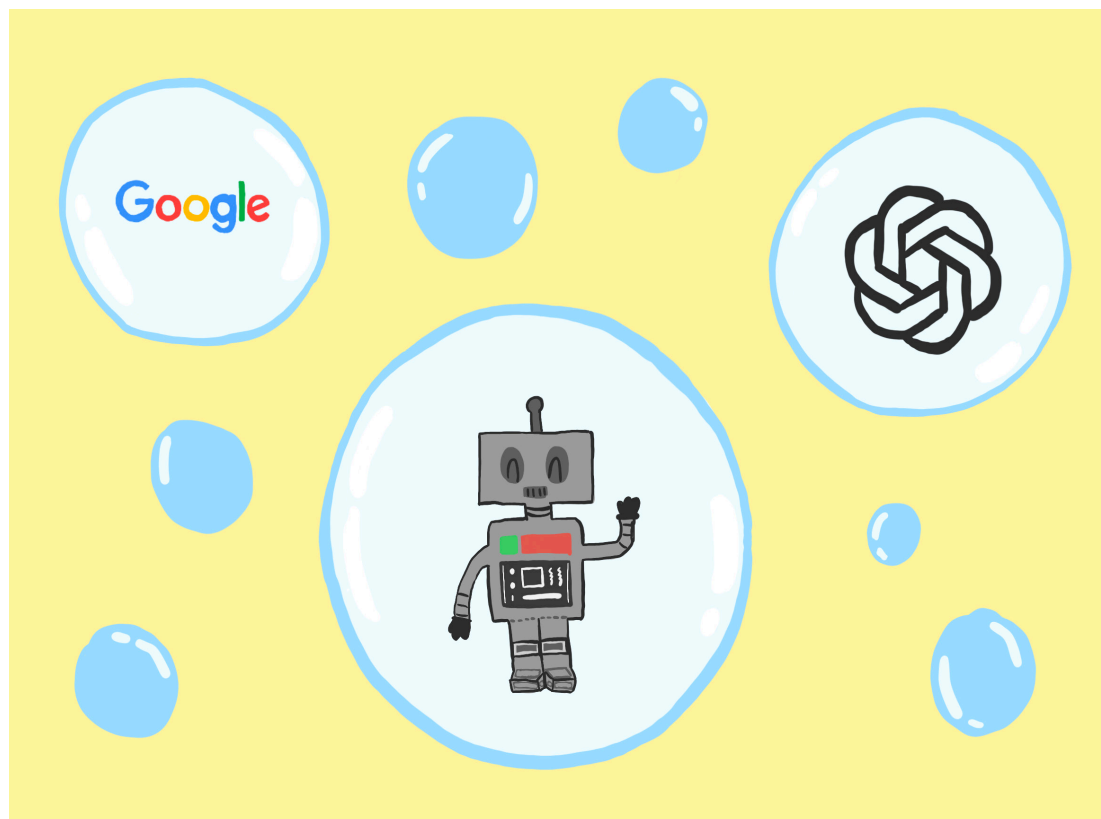
While OpenAI is private, its data center partners are not, and if OpenAI shuts down, their partners would have poured billions into what seems to be a financially fruitless project. Investors may even lose confidence before OpenAI's inevitable collapse, selling the public technology stocks related to the company and, as a result, tanking the technology sector. Either way, the current trajectory of

companies such as OpenAI, fueled by unsustainable debts, unrealistic expectations, and lackluster realities, will cause a sell-off, bursting the inflated AI bubble.

Beyond the hollow potential of certain AI companies, revenues are often overinflated by the phenomenon of “circular financing,” leading to overvaluations. The biggest culprit is the chipmaker Nvidia, currently the most valuable company in the world at \$4.43 trillion as of December 2025. Every quarter, Nvidia beats earnings estimates by significant margins.

This, however, is merely a facade. A big chunk of those earnings come from Nvidia itself. Essentially, Nvidia invests money in OpenAI, and, using that money, OpenAI gives it back to Nvidia to buy chips, circularly inflating revenue. Essentially, Nvidia is taking money from itself, rather than external investors. As a result, this artificial demand excites speculative investors, raising the stock price of Nvidia to where it is now. Frankly, it is surprising that investors have not reacted, as the current stock price has remained relatively stable. However, investors are not oblivious. They will eventually begin to recognize Nvidia's overvaluation. And many will sell off the stock, cratering the company's value. Overvalued AI companies are part of the bubble that will burst when investors recognize their actual valuations.

An inevitable “bubble burst” may seem daunting, as the afore-



Graphic by Elly Koo '28/The Choate News

mentioned AI companies dominate the stock indexes that most everyday retail investors and pension funds heavily rely on. However, its true impact on the broader economy, like the dot-com bubble burst, will be limited.

Though large companies such as Meta, Amazon, and Microsoft have invested heavily in AI, they are not at risk of defaulting on their debts. Unlike the 2008 financial crisis, in which banks could not meet their obligations and collapsed, there will be nothing nearly as severe or impactful in an AI bubble burst. While the AI burst may hit stock prices, companies themselves will sur-

vive, and they will recover stronger when their valuations truly reflect their revenues.

Companies such as Meta that have utilized AI effectively will continue to make advancements in the arena. Meta has seen 21% year-on-year revenue growth, which the company attributes to AI use. Such companies will eventually see their stock prices recover if they continue to make genuine advances in AI. Other companies — such as OpenAI — that are less productive or profitable due to broken business models, will be weeded out. After the dot-com bubble, existing infrastructure initially built for failed companies can be redirected to

more productive ventures, enabling greater growth for effective models. An AI bubble burst is not as bad as it sounds, as we will reap the benefits of truly productive AI models.

The AI stock bubble that currently exists will burst when investors realize the unsustainable debts and overvaluations behind many AI companies. However, when it does burst, AI technology advancement will accelerate. This is how nature has always advanced: let the systems that are broken fail, and those that survive, thrive.

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How Charlie Kirk's Death Changed Politics

By **Olivia Mancha '28**
Opinions Writer

If you want to understand why extreme voices take over political movements so fast, you don't need a textbook — you just need to look at what happened after Charlie Kirk was killed earlier this year. Whether people liked him or not, Kirk functioned as a stabilizing force within youth conservatism. He kept younger conservatives energized without letting things spiral into full radical chaos. When a person like that suddenly disappears, the center of gravity collapses. That “middle” is a loose one — not a true political moderate, but the most institutionally powerful figure holding the movement in place. And once that center collapses, people don't drift toward moderation, they run to the loudest person remaining.

Before he died, Kirk had already been dealing with pressure from more extreme figures. His ongoing conflict with Nick Fuentes, a far-right white supremacist and nationalist, had been building for years. Fuentes's supporters, the “Groyper,” would show up to Kirk's Turning Point USA events trying to corner him on immigration, foreign policy, or any other issue that could place him in a poor light. Conservative and mainstream conservative outlets covered this tension: Kirk was trying to build a clean, mainstream version of conservatism that could appeal to moderate student audiences. On the other hand, Fuentes was telling his followers that Kirk was controlled by donors and was not hardcore enough. Fuentes built an online movement focused on anger, shock value, and saying the most extreme thing in the room.

The only reason all that conflict stayed contained was because Kirk existed as a counterweight. He had donors, institutions, events, and a presence large enough to keep the movement somewhat centered. There was a structure holding things in place. Kirk's death ripped that structure out instantly, and everything shifted faster than anyone could react.

This kind of shift is not new, and it is not unique to the right.



Graphic by Leah Han '27/The Choate News

It is something political movements repeat over and over again. When the steady, middle-ground figure is removed — whether by scandal, violence, or a simple power struggle — the extremes do not rise slowly. They surge, because no one is left to compete with their certainty. It is like political gravity: the second the center disappears, the edges start pulling everything toward them.

That is exactly what happened with Fuentes in the wake of Kirk's death. Within a week, his livestream numbers skyrocketed, and he gained tens of thousands of new followers. Larger right-wing platforms featured him more, his clips spread farther, and his voice suddenly felt unavoidable in the media. None of this happened because of a sudden agreement with his ideas. It happened because a vacuum opened, and he was already positioned to fill it. Fuentes's rise was not about persuasion. It was about timing, volume, and the fact that no one was left to balance him out.

Movements need a center. They need someone who can connect different factions, set boundaries, hold people accountable, and keep the message from spiraling into something extreme. Even with all his flaws, Kirk spent years trying to establish a respectable, structured presence. Meanwhile,

Fuentes built an online rebellion that was never meant to coexist with structure. When the stabilizer disappeared, the rebellion naturally took over, because chaos spreads faster than organization.

Kirk's death did not “make” Fuentes popular. It simply removed the one figure who had the size, resources, and influence to keep him in check. That is the larger lesson here. Political movements do not automatically move back to the middle, no matter how many people claim they are “moderate.” Movements drift toward those who speak with the most confidence when things feel unstable. They drift toward whoever fills the silence after the stabilizing voice is gone. And in 2025, that silence was loud enough to reshape the entire landscape of youth conservatism.

Unless a new anchor steps in — someone strong enough to rebuild a center and withstand the pressure that comes with it — the extremes will keep growing, not because people actively want them, but because no one shows up to steady the movement. Sometimes it is not the loudest voice that changes politics, but the empty space left behind when the middle disappears.

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THANK GOD THE PENNY IS GONE

By **Jai Midha '27**
Associate Editor

The year is 1787, and Benjamin Franklin has just minted the very first penny. In a couple of years, the penny will begin circulating as a staple currency in the newly formed United States. Jump to 2025, when the last pennies have been stamped in Philadelphia. After 232 years of service to everyday life, the life of the penny has ended. So, should we have stopped minting pennies? Yes, we should have. As a matter of fact, I believe the end of the penny should have come many decades ago.

In 1978, the penny was worth what the nickel is worth today. And yet, in 1978, the economy functioned just fine without having a coin worth one-fifth of a penny. But it isn't just the impractical function that bothers me; it is the cost. The penny itself costs four times more than a penny to produce. Imagine going to the bank, handing the bank teller a penny, and asking, “May I get four cents for that?” and the teller says yes. That is exactly what is happening with the U.S. Mint every time they print a penny, except the U.S. is the bank teller losing the money. Printing at this cost also means that every year, about 85 million federal taxpayer

dollars go into subsidizing the existence of pennies. But that still isn't the underlying problem.

I would say that pennies are worthless, but to be worthless, something would have to be worth nothing. Pennies are worth much less than nothing. Let me explain this through opportunity cost. Opportunity cost is what you give up by doing anything. Being on your phone for two hours means you give up the opportunity to do work for two hours. That is the cost — the opportunity cost — of being on your phone. So why care about opportunity cost? Several studies have shown that just the time Americans spend fiddling with pennies costs us up to a billion dollars a year. One billion. The mere existence of the penny costs us a billion dollars a year in lost productivity. So to recap, every year American taxpayers pay 85 million dollars to have the opportunity to lose a billion dollars in productivity. That does not make sense.

There is no conceivable argument to support the existence of the penny. Many studies have shown that its removal would not raise prices or reduce charitable contributions. The only thing that benefits from the existence of the penny is a company in Greenville, Tennessee, called Jarden Zinc Products, which produces the raw

materials for the U.S. Mint. For everyone else in the United States and the world, pennies are not only worthless but also incredibly expensive. But that is not even the last reason to get rid of the penny. The ultimate reason is to think about what money is made for: to facilitate the exchange of goods and services. And pennies do not even do that effectively. Most places that use coins, like parking meters, vending machines, laundromats, and telephones, do not accept pennies because, quite simply, they are worthless.

I never thought the day when pennies would stop being printed would come. The only reason we even had pennies for this long was because so many people grew up with pennies, liked them, and loved Abraham Lincoln on the penny. But if Abraham Lincoln were alive today, and you handed him a penny, he would probably ask, “Why is my face on a coin that is worth one-thirty-ninth of what a penny was worth when I was president?” For far too long, these bacteria-ridden coins have slowed the efficiency of our economy. It is time for this coin to finally be removed.

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Graphic by Lauren Bellissimo '27/The Choate News

FRATS AND TUNNELS: MYTHS ON CAMPUS

By **Slater Boms '29**
Reporter

Myths offer something to believe in, whether that means hope for the future or comfort about the past. From the legends of ancient gods to folklores told today, they appear throughout human history. At Choate, such myths existed, from old fraternities to rumors about underground tunnels.

With more than 100 different clubs on campus today, it's not out of the question to wonder if secret societies existed at Choate. Indeed, past issues of Choate's yearbook, *The Brief*, show direct evidence of Greek life organizations. The 1908 edition of *The Brief* states, "The Eta Delta Fraternity announces the election of one additional member ... [and] the Phi Sigma Psi Fraternity wishes to announce that, during the year 1907 to 1908, [they] now the largest chapter of any of the fraternities in the school." Another article in the 1908 edition of *The Brief*

states, "The following have been elected to membership of the Eta Delta fraternity during the year 1907-1908" and proceeds to list various names.

While a Greek life system existed at Choate at the start of the 20th century, no reports of its activity have been found in later years. It is now believed that when Headmaster Seymour St. John arrived in 1947, such groups were shut down. To call such organizations secret societies is a stretch from the truth, but they were an important part of Choate's history.

While Greek life shaped Choate culture above ground, rumor has it that there existed tunnels beneath the Paul Mellon Humanities Building. The October 18, 2002 issue of *The Choate News* provides a detailed account of the rediscovery of an underground tunnel. The school archivist at the time, Ms. Lee Sylvester, said, "The passageway was built connecting the two buildings [Humanities and Memorial House] so that pipes could

carry heat from a boiler in Memorial House basement to the science building." The science building referenced at the time is now used as the Humanities building today, which required a heating system for the winter. Additionally, the article mentions the possibility that the tunnel "was used as a bomb shelter during World War II," though this was simply a rumor and not confirmed.

The investigation into these two long-standing campus myths reveals that both are rooted in historical fact, though not always in the ways modern rumors suggest. Choate once had a Greek system that later disappeared, and a functional underground tunnel still remains beneath the Humanities building and Memorial House. While these stories have evolved over time, their foundations highlight lesser-known aspects of Choate's social and physical history.

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Photo courtesy of the Choate Archives

Members of the Phi Sigma Psi Fraternity in 1903 pose for a photo.

Choate Students Take On DJ-ing

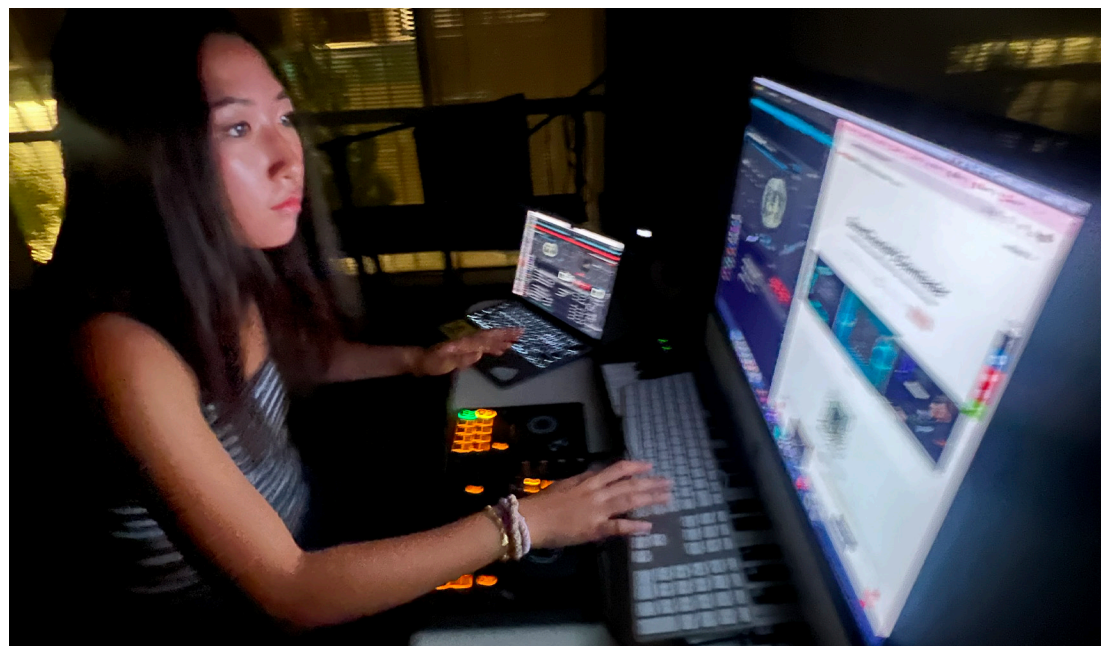


Photo courtesy of Dana Chung '26

Dana Chung '26 practices her DJ-ing skills.

By **Jai Midha '27**
Associate Editor

The staple of any party, of icon of music, and the epitome of music fests: DJs. With their headphones and bobbing head, the DJ and their scratching of vinyls has been ingrained into all facets of pop culture. At Choate, several students have also explored the art of DJ-ing.

Jamie Lee '27

Lee began DJ-ing last summer when messing around with friends in Hong Kong. After sparking an initial sense of curiosity, he purchased a DJ board and began to play with the multitude of buttons and sliders. Soon after getting the hang of it, Lee ventured out into doing his own set, a curated collection of songs mixed together by a DJ, at a party that very same summer. "The set went pretty well; it was a little hectic and the music was very, very loud, but it was memorable and very fun. Definitely nothing beats DJ-ing with your friends all around you hyping you up," Lee said.

However, like any art, there are also struggles. Lee found the hardest part of DJ-ing to be finding original and not over-played songs. He sees DJ-ing as a fun hobby he wants to continue. "I

definitely want to continue doing [DJ-ing] because it brings me joy, and it's really a way to connect with people," Lee said. His favorite song to DJ is "Slow Burner" by Interplanetary Criminal.

Luke Hegarty '26

Hegarty has made his DJ presence known on campus by DJ-ing at a Boar Bash, Choate's version of homecoming. Similar to Lee, his journey began when his best friend started DJ-ing and taught Hegarty. "My very first set was with a group of my friends. It was in a house, and it went well; it was really fun," Hegarty said. Mentioning the SAC Dance, Hegarty said the hardest part of DJ-ing "is finding music everyone likes, especially at a SAC Dance, because it is hard to satisfy all different crowds."

Looking further down the road, Hegarty wants to continue DJ-ing while simultaneously engaging in music production, an interest he sees as indispensable to being successful in the DJ world. Hegarty aims to perform at a Boiler Room, a prestigious event where there is "a massive rave packed with people playing hardcore EDM music, laser beam lights, and everything." Hegarty's favorite song to DJ is "The Days"

by NOTION or "Summer 91 (Looking Back)" by Noizu.

Dana Chung '26

Chung started to DJ by listening to house music in the winter of her sophomore year and found that "DJ-ing is more accessible than I initially thought," she said. Chung taught herself through TikTok and YouTube videos. Her set up includes the following: a DJ board, a laptop with a DJ software program (her preferred being VirtualDJ), headphones, and a speaker.

Unlike the difficulties in song choice that Lee and Hegarty found challenging, Chung finds the equipment side of things more demanding. Chung said, "I think the most challenging aspect is definitely the equipment, because, especially when DJ-ing in front of people, the sound system really matters and you need a good speaker to really engage everyone to make it sound good."

The prospect of DJ-ing may seem intimidating, challenging, or unlikely. However, from learning off TikTok to DJ-ing at the SAC, these student DJs have all found their own ways to connect with the art.

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CELEBRATING WINTER TRADITIONS ACROSS CULTURES

By **Sophie Chang '29**
Reporter

Across the world, rich cultures and traditions bring families together to celebrate the spirit of the winter holiday season. At Choate, students embrace this time of year in countless ways, showing that, while many honor familiar customs, the joy of the season can take many forms. From cooking favorite holiday recipes to meeting extended family, here's how Choate students spend the holidays.

Anna Park '29, an international student from South Korea, celebrates Christmas during the winter holidays with a large family dinner. While she initially celebrated by decorating Christmas trees and unwrapping presents, Park now enjoys spending time with her relatives. "I don't get to see my extended family that much, so I think it's a really good time for bonding and enjoying the company of your family during the festive time," Park said.

Similar to Park, Jack McGuane '26 also celebrates Christmas with his entire extended family. On Christmas Day, McGuane's family attends church and unwraps gifts, and they also cook a different meal every night during the holiday season, often including prime rib, king crab legs, and chicken parmesan. "I'm a very religious person, so Christmas is important in honoring my faith. But it's also a great time to celebrate the season with family and be in good spirits," McGuane said.

Nonetheless, Christmas is not the only tradition that is celebrated during the winter holiday season. Levi York '26 commemorates the Jewish hol-

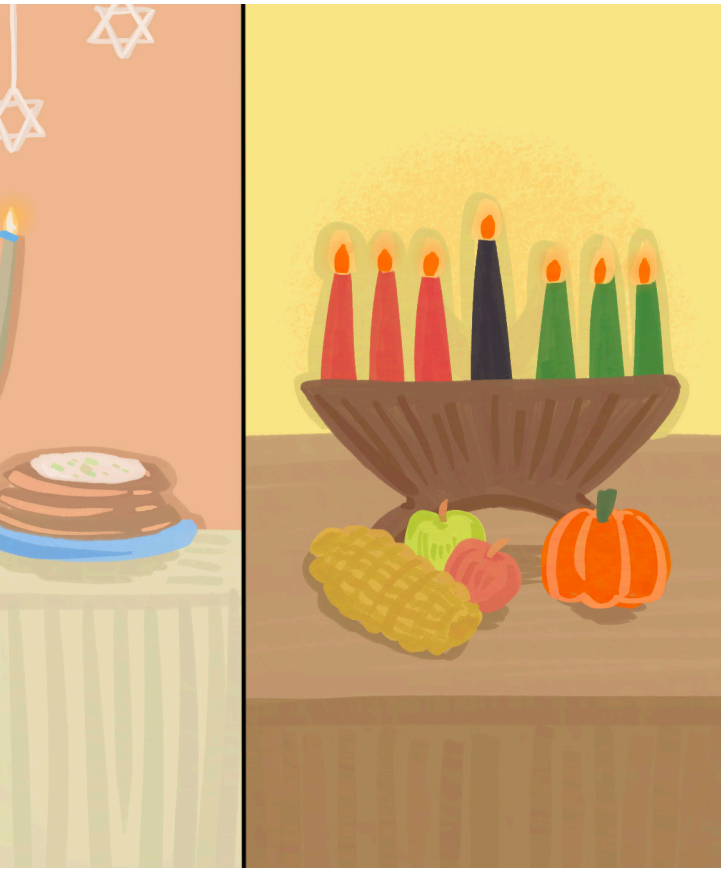


iday Hanukkah, an eight-day-long tradition that celebrates light and dedication. York said, "During Hanukkah, we get to eat great food, like Latkes, which are pancakes of shredded potato and onion that we eat with applesauce or sour cream, and sufganiyot, a jelly-filled doughnut." For York, Hanukkah is a time to see family but also a time of gratitude and anticipation. "There's an embedded theme of hope in the holiday, which is especially important during the winter months when it can get darker and colder," York said.

In Chinese culture, the holiday season usually occurs around late January or February for Lunar New Year. Rella Wang '26 celebrates

Lunar New Year, though she sees it as more of a time to gather with family rather than to partake in large festivities. "My family doesn't really do big celebrations," Wang said. "The only thing we do is ... a big family dinner, but it's still very meaningful for me, because I can see my cousins and ... my aunt. It's just a really good time for people to gather together, share food, and talk about things that happened in the past year."

One of Wang's favorite traditions takes place on Lunar New Year Eve. "My grandma always makes dumplings with coins in it," she said. "Whoever gets the dumplings that have these coins means that person has good luck for the rest of the year." She also looks for-



Graphic by Leah Han '27/The Choate News

ward to receiving red packets, a traditional gift of money from elders to younger family members.

Balancing school schedules with Lunar New Year celebrations can be challenging, as the holiday does not coincide with Choate's winter break. Nonetheless, Wang still finds comfort in Lunar New Year events on campus. "Choate hosts the Lunar New Year banquet with Chinese Club and Korean Club [Choate Korea Friendship Association]," she said. "I feel like I'm not completely missing the traditions and the holiday feelings because we can still gather together with our friends."

Many students come from diverse backgrounds, blending various traditions to create their

own unique holiday experiences. Mila Mak '29 is both Danish and Chinese-American, and she celebrates New Year's with a blend of Danish dishes and Chinese New Year celebrations. Similar to Wang, Mak celebrates Lunar New Year with family dinners and the act of passing out red packets. Mak also enjoys cleaning, decorating, and getting a haircut, which "brings good luck for the new year and cuts off old energy from the previous year."

To celebrate her Danish heritage, Mak eats a rice pudding called Risalamande, mixed with whipped cream and almonds and served with a warm cherry sauce. "[The holidays] are really cool because I get to express dif-

ferent sides of my heritage and really come together with all of my family," Mak said.

For Tim Anantanavanich '27, his favorite holiday to celebrate is Loy Krathong. "Loy Krathong is a festival I celebrate in Thailand, and it's held annually on the full moon of the twelfth lunar moon, usually in November," Anantanavanich explained.

The holiday roughly translates to "floating basket," honoring the goddess of water and offering a symbolic way to wash away one's misdeeds from the past year. Participants make small lotus-shaped rafts called krathongs and gently release them into the water. Anantanavanich said, "It's apologizing for all the sins that we've committed." Unfortunately, Anantanavanich does not really get the opportunity to observe the holiday on campus but still finds ways to engage in it. "It's a shame, but I don't really get to celebrate Loy Krathong at Choate ... I call my family every time it happens, and they video call me. I get to watch it, even from here," he said.

As the holiday season approaches, Choate students engage in the festivities in diverse manners, whether that be unwrapping presents for Christmas, eating Latkes for Hanukkah, receiving red packets for Lunar New Year, or releasing krathongs for Loy Krathong. Despite different traditions, their stories show that the spirit of the season lies in gratitude, connection, and gathering with the people you love.

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THE ARTS DEPARTMENT BRINGS HOLIDAY CHEER

By **Ha Jin Sung '28**
Associate Editor

As the temperature drops below freezing and holiday decorations are hung up, students return to campus for three weeks of Winterlude, where various music performances and leisure activities await them.

Lessons and Carols

Established in 1963, the Festival of Lessons and Carols takes place in Seymour St. John Chapel every Winterlude. This year, the event took place on the evening of December 14.

“[Lessons and Carols] is open to everyone ... It’s a combination of Christmas hymns and biblical readings in the Christian tradition about the coming and birth of Jesus, capped off with a candlelighting ceremony and singing ‘Silent Night,’” Director of Spiritual Life Reverend Aaron Rathbun explained.

During Lessons and Carols, several of Choate’s music ensembles perform various traditional Christmas carols. The Choate Chorale and the Concert Choir will perform pieces to the likes of “Angels We Have Heard on High,” “I Wonder as I Wander,” and “O Holy Night.” Members of the Choate Chamber Orchestra will also per-

form Paul von Hindemith’s “Tut-tüt-fantchen Suite” as a pre-service music concert.

Reflecting on Lessons and Carols, Choral Director Dr. Julie Hagen explained why she enjoys participating in the event. “[During the wintertime,] by the time we’re going to dinner or when most of us wake up, it’s dark ... so there’s something really special about doing a special service and bringing lightness,” she said.

Jazz Band Holiday Performance

Every Winterlude, just before students leave for winter break, Choate’s Jazz Band performs during the holiday programming for the entire student body.

This year, on December 18, the Jazz Band will go on stage in holiday-themed costumes and play Christmas and holiday-themed pieces, including “A Charlie Brown Christmas” arranged by Paul Murtha, “Baby It’s Cold Outside” by Frank Loesser, and “Comfort and Joy” arranged by Rick Hirsch.

Arts Department Head Mr. Matthew McLean expressed his enjoyment of performing during the holiday season. “I think music elevates the holiday spirit for most people ... When it comes to holiday songs, people know all the words; they can sing along; and it feels re-

ally good to be a performer where what you’re playing is recognized and known,” he said.

“[The concert] is after Winterlude, so everyone’s decompressing, and it’s a fun way to bring the community together,” trumpet player Bowen Jin ’26 added. “I think it’s more fulfilling to play the holiday concert, because we get to wrap up Winterlude.”

SAC Activities

In addition to the music and performances, the Student Activities Center (SAC) offers students various holiday-themed leisure activities for Winterlude.

“We will bring back the gingerbread house competition, and we’re also including ornament making,” Director of Student Activities Ms. Alex Long said. The SAC also hosted this year’s Holiday Ball (Hol Ball) on December 13, with the theme “Winter Wonderland,” and held a “Stuff-a-Creature” event the evening prior where students can stuff their own winter-themed stuffed animals. The SAC is also providing students with popular winter-themed treats through activities, such as a holiday cookie decorating event and a hot chocolate bar hosted by Psychology Club.

Ms. Long hopes that these SAC activities can bring students together during the holiday season. “Winterlude can be very difficult because it’s a really fast-paced three weeks. With events and activities in the SAC, we want to foster community, being together, and having fun,” she said.

Even though the sky darkens quickly and the air is cooling, students have the opportunity to check out the various Winterlude arts and leisure activities that could help boost their holiday spirit.

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Photo courtesy of Choate Photos

The members of Quantrell 2025 dressed in spirited reindeer costumes.

MUSICAL MEETS FUNDRAISING AT MISCAST

By **Prudence Chen '28**
Reporter

Any musical theater aficionado knows that a musical isn’t just singing, dancing, and fun — although it certainly may be — there’s always a message behind the melodies. The musical *Miscast* embodies this sentiment, weaving together music and advocacy. Created by the Manhattan Class Company (MCC) Theater, *Miscast* served as a fundraiser for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, a nonprofit organization that strives to fund AIDS medication and provide relief for those suffering from the disease across the United States. As a result, Choate’s performance of *Miscast* on December 12 also acted as a fundraiser for the very same cause.

Regarding the musical’s plot, co-director Alexandros Antonopoulos ’26 explained that *Miscast* “is a cabaret performance that seeks to explore and ... challenge some of the facets of gender expression and gender identity within the musical theater canon.” Going into the production with some experience, Co-director Leanne La ’26 grew up watching MCC Theater’s video recordings of the musical. Together with Antonopoulos, La worked to share her childhood show with the rest of the Choate community.

La and Antonopoulos are no strangers to the spotlight, both having participated in Choate productions and drama classes since their freshman year. However, *Miscast* was La’s first producing gig, which entailed casting, assembling the creative team, and communicating with the Choate Arts Department. In addition, La and Antonopoulos worked to get the necessary legal rights needed to perform the musical, working with the Manager of Arts Center Operations, Mrs. Carol Jones. “Getting the rights to the show has been really hard because



Photo by Finn Wikstrom '26/The Choate News

The cast and crew of *Miscast* pose after a full dress rehearsal.

we didn’t know we had to do that. Mrs. Jones has been very instrumental in helping us figure that out smoothly,” La said.

The co-directors highlighted the themes of queerness, gender, and AIDS in their production. La acknowledged that *Miscast* “inherently explores gender because it is a miscast,” but La aimed “to use songs and its lyrics as a commentary.” The performance also weaved in drag performance and puppetry to emphasize its themes.

For Sophie Eliades ’27, a seasoned member of the arts community, *Miscast* marks their first time fully creating lighting for a production with Erica Santamaria ’27. Unfortunately, the rigging system is quite limited at Gelb Theatre, where the musical is taking place, and Eliades has faced some challenges. “[We’ve] been messing around with color and then balancing the cool effects with making sure that the actors’ faces are visible,” Eliades explained.

Working on *Miscast* taught Eliades the relationship between lighting and thematic messaging through the stage. “Lighting isn’t telling your own story,” they clarified. “It’s accentuating the story that’s already there.”

In regards to student actors, La has mentioned that “the heart

of *Miscast* is the students that are involved.” Actor Benoit Bracey ’28 has found *Miscast* extremely rewarding. He described the fundraising aspect as an enjoyable and meaningful opportunity. “It’s important work, and it’s also an opportunity to get to do something I haven’t done before ... That’s why I decided to join,” Bracey said.

Members of the *Miscast* cast worked to make their performance unique, including recontextualizing classic songs and adding monologues and characterizations. Throughout the creation of the show, Antonopoulos enjoyed collaborating with the other cast members. “It’s been such a great experience, going into every rehearsal and ... having these rehearsals where we’re being very productive and we’re really creating this art together,” he said.

La echoed his sentiment. “[*Miscast*] is a really fun, culminating performance ... It’s been really great to share the stage with my friends,” she said.

Reflecting on the musical, Antonopoulos emphasized that “art, and theater especially, is such a powerful tool for social change.”

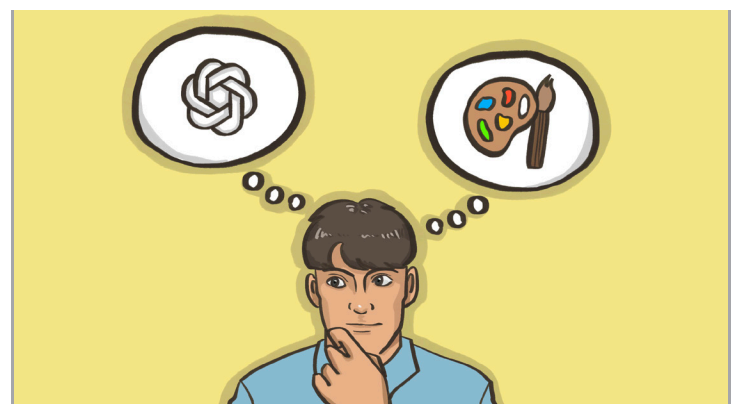
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NAVIGATING AI USAGE IN THE ARTS DEPARTMENT

By **Bridget Rivard '28**
Reporter

Classes, school meetings, and advisory sessions have all been plagued by discussion of artificial intelligence (AI). Students commonly think of AI as a tool used in an academic classroom setting, making it difficult to create concrete policies for AI usage in the arts. Art is a nuanced and complex field where creativity is valued, and the idea that art is uniquely human has led to a debate over whether non-human AI entities can genuinely replicate it. But regardless of the morality of the debate, are the arts really safe from the potential dangers of AI? With so much uncertainty about AI in other aspects of our lives, what are the implications of AI creating original artwork, one of the most humanistic and soulful fields in humanity? The Arts Department has been working to address some of these questions in the classroom.

Acting teacher Mr. Bari Robinson has put careful thought into the role of AI in the theater department. Mr. Robinson describes theater as a “physical and human behavioral social art form.” Although the use of technology is important in the technological aspects of theater, such as lighting and mechanics, he believes that “actors must be embodied ... They can’t depend, or even pretend to depend on computers.” When performing or doing acting exercises, Mr. Robinson does not permit the use of AI of any kind, because he believes that student actors learn how to become their characters through real-life experiences rather than through a computer program. “AI is sort of antithetical to the actual art form itself ... When you get on stage, you have to know what it feels like to do it yourself,” he said. However, Mr. Robinson encourages acting students to use AI as a tool to sharpen their artistic talents in other ways, such as generating scripts to prac-



Graphic by Leah Han '27/The Choate News

tice reading from. In music, the approach to using AI is slightly different, as existing technologies are capable of producing music.

Orchestra Director Mr. Gene Wie teaches Music History, where he embraces AI as a tool for students to explore rather than create. “We do use AI, not in the sense that we’re using it to generate content, but we look at different AI tools to see how it has affected adoption and consumption over time,” he said. His students use a tool called suno.ai, a software that allows users to generate pop songs with a short and simple prompt of their choice. After producing the song, students then learn how to apply audio editing technologies, using the generated pop song as a blank canvas for their projects.

In the field of music, Mr. Wie believes that AI is a tool to learn about the artistic process rather than replace human creation. “We really want to take the time to investigate and see what its value is, and how it impacts our learning. If it’s something that is going to help us with our understanding of the topic, let’s move it forward ... If it’s just AI for AI’s sake, no, let’s not do it,” he explained.

The visual arts are a field heavily influenced and affected by the use of AI. Visual Arts teacher Ms. Catherine Adams believes that AI could possibly limit creativity, especially as students are learning. “Art making, and especially exercising and strengthening one’s

creativity, requires the iterative process,” she said. Ms. Adams sees the “instant gratification” of AI art creation as limiting creative growth. “Removing yourself from the responsibility as the director of your artwork, the decision-making may be unintentionally relinquished or lost along the way,” she added, explaining that she believes mastering something like the visual arts requires human intention, engagement, and presence.

However, Ms. Adams isn’t opposed to exploring AI as a tool to help create art, but she still wants to learn more about its potential before applying it in the classroom. Currently, Ms. Adams believes that AI offers a way to skip key parts of the artistic process that can be detrimental to learning how to create art. “Understanding how to travel through the creative process and then applying [it] to one’s life is an important skill,” she said.

Different faculty members of the Arts Department have taken a progressive approach to learning about how AI can be used and integrated into their respective disciplines. Although many believe that AI should not replace human creativity in any art discipline for now, using it to help learn about the arts could aid learning without detracting from the artistic process, a vital part of art creation.

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COMMUNITY, COLOR, AND CROCHET WITH THE WPL

By **Sophie Chang '29**
Reporter

Picture this: colorful strips and squares of wool wrapped and strung as far as the eye can see, covering the usually recognizable benches, bushes, and trees of North Main Street. This colorful view is part of an October project hosted by the Wallingford Public Library (WPL): yarn bombing.

Katie Dygon, a librarian at the WPL, hosted the crocheting event in hopes of connecting the local community. “We wanted to create the installation as a community art project. The goal was to bring people together to work on the crocheted or knitted squares,” she said.

Dygon was first introduced to this style of crocheting over public infrastructure, such as trees and benches, during her undergrad-

uate years in college. During her time at college, Dygon encountered a visiting artist who had yarn-bombed the trees around her campus. “It always stuck with me as an interesting form of art and something that could be done to bring the community together,” Dygon recounted. “I was happy there was an opportunity to have a yarn bombing for the [WPL].”

The WPL hosted an in-person event on October 13 for locals to either donate homemade crocheted squares or come to the library to create them with provided yarn, knitting needles, and crochet hooks. Local organizations, such as the Wallingford Senior Center, also provided large donations of crocheted squares. “It was wonderful to have so many people working on one collective project while talking about their craft, or mingling,” Dygon said, reflect-

ing on the event. “It was more time-consuming than we originally realized but well worth it in the end.”

After the event, the crocheted squares were stitched onto the trees along North Main Street by staff and volunteers. “The goal was to have the installation up for both Halloween night and the Holiday Stroll, since those are two evenings where a lot of people are walking around the downtown area and would have an opportunity to see it,” Dygon said. “I hope when people walk or drive by, it brightens their day because a lot of the squares are very beautifully made. It’s also nice to experience something that is so lovingly made by so many community members.”

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Photo by Angel Soto '29/The Choate News

The crocheted projects on the trees in front of the Wallingford Public Library.

FIELD REPORT

Choate Fall Record
17 - 8 - 0

Varsity Games

Girls' Squash (1-0)
vs. Squash Haven, 8-0

Boys' Ice Hockey (1-0)
vs. Lawrence Academy, 5-3

Girls' Basketball (1-0)
vs. Exeter, 58-28

Boys' Squash (1-0)
vs. Squash Haven, 8-0

Girls' Ice Hockey (1-0)
vs. Lawrence Academy, 4-1

Boys' Football (8-2)
vs. Exeter, 44-42

Boys' Basketball (0-1)
vs. Dexter / Zero Gravity,
48-53

Girls' Soccer (11-2-4)
vs. Worcester, 0-1

Boys' Soccer (16-5-2)
vs. Taft, 1-3

Girls' Volleyball (13-5)
vs. B&B and Nichols, 0-3

J.V. Games

Girls' Basketball (1-0)
vs. Hopkins, 54-14

Boys' Squash (1-0)
vs. Squash Haven, 7-5

INSIDE CHOATE'S ATHLETIC PAST

By **Adrienne Prater '28**
Reporter

Although today's Choate athletics revolve around familiar sports, the School's history tells a different story of discontinued programs that were once offered. A look through the Archives shows how these teams impacted Choate, and how they emerged and faded as student interest changed.

Originally, Choate Rosemary Hall consisted of two separate institutions: the Choate School and Rosemary Hall. Rosemary Hall was an all-girls school led by Headmistress Ms. Caroline Ruutz-Rees, who formed the girls' cricket team in 1880, a notably progressive move for its time. The cricket team helped set a new precedent for girls' sports. The team did not participate in many matches due to the rarity of girls' sports in the area. In 1895, however, the team competed against Pelham Hall, a girls' school in Pelham, New York, in a home game, ending in a Rosemary Hall victory.

In 1889, cricket was discontinued due to declining interest in combination with a new-found focus on different sports like basketball and field hockey. However, cricket has left an indelible mark on the School's history. Noe Shoemaker '28 reflected, "It is amazing to hear about the value and importance of girls' sports in Choate's history. Hearing about these stories makes me appreciate the sports and opportunities we have on campus today because they would have been impossible without teams like this."

For afternoon activities in the early 20th century, students at The Choate School typically visited the shooting range in the Worthington Johnson Athletics Center (WJAC). In 1915, riflery was a club — The Gun Club — before becoming an official varsity sport in 1951. Over the years, the team earned impressive recognition, winning the Western New England Prep

School Championship eight times and being the Prep School Gallery champions twice.

Riflery ended in 2001 due to difficulties in finding a replacement for longtime head coach Mr. Carl Johnson, combined with the rising cost of ammunition. During the later renovation of the WJAC, the shooting range was removed. Max Velasquez '28 commented, "It would be interesting to have riflery as a sport again at Choate. Lots of high schools nationwide still offer it, and it is also in the Olympics. While I've never done it before, it would be fun to try and learn how the sport works."

Another discontinued sport was horseback riding, connecting Rosemary Hall and The Choate School. Rosemary Hall established a riding program in 1916, achieving success quickly. At the 1930 spring meets, riders won the Ruth West Campbell Cup for the most overall points and secured the M.E. Lowndes championship trophy. At the Choate School, riding was more recreational. The equestrian barn was originally located where Archbold now stands before being moved to the area near Remsen Arena in 1928. By the 1930s, however, declining interest made the cost of maintaining horses unsustainable, and the barn was eventually repurposed for the Dramatics Club. Riding officially ended at both schools in 1972. Through its various forms, the program serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of athletes and school culture.

Other sports, including skiing and fencing, were offered at Choate but are no longer available today. While students no longer ride horses across campus or compete in cricket matches, these discontinued sports programs have left a lasting impact on Choate's history and identity.

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Photo courtesy of the Choate Archives

Rosemary Hall girls on the cricket team pose for a photo.

Break Time is Race Time for Swimmers

By **Reid Bock '27**
Associate Editor

Over fall break, Choate's swimmers made the most of their time off, diving into club meets to sharpen their skills and set the stage for a strong winter season. Boys' Varsity Swim Team Co-Captains Andrew Furtado '27, Neil Alejandro '27, and teammate Taeyoung Kim '28 raced at the West Hartford Aquatic Team Age Group Qualifier on November 21 to 23, competing in a wide range of events, including the 500 freestyle, 200 individual medley, 100 butterfly, 100 backstroke, 100 breaststroke, 100 freestyle, 50 freestyle, and the 200 butterfly.

"The main goal [of the meet] was to gain more racing experience and feel out some events that I'm going to be doing at my mid-season championship

meet," Furtado shared. Similarly, for Alejandro, the meet served as preparation for the upcoming swim season. The meet, he said, helped him "practice race strategies for [his] upcoming championship meet." At school balancing sports and academics is no easy feat. Kim juggled an intramural sport twice a week while using free blocks and study hours to keep on top of homework. "It was ... a significant time commitment," he said.

According to the swimmers, the purposes of club and school meets vary. "[Club swimming] is more of an individual affair," Alejandro said. "Choate swimming ... is more of a team effort." Furtado agreed, explaining that Choate meets are about "swimming for something that's bigger than yourself." Kim also noted how club training emphasizes each swim-

mer's strongest events, while at Choate, swimmers often step into races that "benefit the team."

With the season ahead, Furtado is focused on building a supportive team environment and hopes to see the team "crack into the top two at [the New England Preparatory School Athletic Council League (NEPSAC) Championships]." Similarly, Alejandro is looking forward to making "great memories" this season and improving his sprint performances. For Kim, the goal is simple: "I'm looking forward to another awesome season in and out of the pool," he shared.

As these swimmers return to Choate, their fall break racing sets a competitive and motivated tone for the winter season ahead.

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WARM UP WITH THESE COOL SPORTS MOVIES

By **N'Adom Darko-Asare '29**
Reporter

As winter break approaches, many Choate students search for ways to relieve stress and stay out of the cold weather. This list of sports movies provides students with a fun indoor activity to relax and keep warm.

Iris Elliott '28 - A League of Their Own

Iris Elliott '28 recommended the movie *A League of Their Own*, a 1992 film that follows two sisters who join the first professional American baseball league during World War II. Elliott noted that students could learn dedication and persistence from the movie. "If these girls had given up when they had first been told no, the movie would have ended in the first five minutes," she said. The film depicts strong women who fight for what they believe in, sending an inspiring message to its audience.

Noah Velasquez '29 - Miracle

Noah Velasquez '29's movie recommendation was *Miracle*. The film chronicles the true story of the 1980 U.S. Olympic Hockey Team's 'miracle on ice' during the Cold War, which was a widely-celebrated



Graphic by Leah Han '27/The Choate News

underdog victory story. Velasquez described the film as "a super uplifting movie about overcoming challenges and triumphing over seemingly impossible odds." He added that the movie had a lasting impact on him: "I watched it when I was super young, and I partially attribute it to why I play hockey so much nowadays. It also taught me how to stay persistent," Velasquez said.

Sara McLaughlin '26 - Rocky

Sara McLaughlin '26 chose the *Rocky* movie series, which follows underdog boxer Rocky Balboa as he rises to become a world champion. The films highlight his victories, losses, and struggles, as well as his passion and determination for boxing. McLaughlin said the movies "would make Choate [athletic] teams work harder, and it would just be a good team bonding experience." If Choate were to create its own sports movie, she

hoped that it would be about the Women's Wrestling Team and how it came into existence.

Lucas Knauff '27 - Creed

Lucas Knauff '27 selected *Creed*, a spin-off of the *Rocky* series that follows Adonis Creed, the son of a legendary boxer, as he finds his place in the boxing world. With Rocky Balboa as his mentor, Adonis confronts difficult opponents and the pressure of living up to his father's legacy.

Knauff noted the film's influence on his athletic mindset, saying, "It also shows that the more effort you put into something, the more you'll get out of it."

Whether in need of hype for a game or just inspiration to study, these films offer a way to get motivated and recharge.

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