The Choate News

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World History Students Explore Museum Ethics at Yale

By **Maia Shah '27**
Associate Editor



Photo courtesy of Ms. Courtney DeStefano

World History students speak with Yale University Art Gallery curators.

Amidst the chaos of Winterlude, Choate's World History students took a step back from their usual classroom routines for a field trip to the Yale University Art Gallery. Planned by History teacher Ms. Courtney DeStefano, this trip gave students the opportunity to explore the ethics of museums and the moral questions surrounding the repatriation of looted cultural artifacts.

While the World History curriculum focuses mainly on items housed in Western museums, such as the Benin Bronzes and the Elgin Marbles, understanding how to view and extrapolate information by observing artifacts in a public setting is critical to the unit.

All 200 World History students were excused from class to visit the museum over two days. Once at the museum, cohorts of approximately 50 students were split into groups by individual class sections to receive a guided tour by Yale graduate students working in the museum's education department.

Throughout the visit, each group explored different exhibits and focused on four key artifacts with a global perspective: a ceramic pot from the Asian Art collection, a painting from the European Art collection, a tapestry from the Indo-Pacific collection, and a painting paired with a statue from the African Art collection. The museum guides provided context and prompts for students to illustrate, discuss, or write about in their journals. Though the museum curators provided relevant context, Ms. DeStefano said, "Next year, I also would consider running the visit myself and not have the museum curators run it. Our teachers in the World History section are so capable, able, and curious, and I think they would run cool mini workshops."

The Yale Art Gallery features an extensive collection of works from across the globe, including Africa, Indigenous America, Europe, and South Asia. The trip was designed to give students a better understanding of the ethical implications surrounding the collection and display of artifacts in museums. Students were challenged to consider whether these items should remain in museums in the West or be repatriated to their countries of origin.

Before visiting the museum, World History students conducted readings and participated in discussions to understand the origins of contested artifacts in prominent museums. The discussions centered around questions to get students to think critically about the ethics of museums: Who is truly able to claim cultural heritage? Is it right to allow countries and institutions to profit from stolen items?

The trip prompted students to think deeply about these conversations and to contemplate the origins of the art they viewed in person. Katherine Pan '27 said, "We learned how white European powers stole artifacts without permission, but then we got to see it, which made the unit much more real to me." While class conversations stressed the importance of museums balancing their educational mission with the ethical dilemmas often posed by their collection, "[this trip] made me more empathetic towards the countries that have been stolen from, and the museum visit helped me form a stronger opinion on what should be done with these contested artifacts," Pan said.

Tim Anantanavanich '27 echoed a similar sentiment: "[Seeing these artifacts in person] really made me realize that [they] deserve to be repatriated to their home countries." He added, "Going to a museum and seeing the nice facilities made me understand how much people deserve to appreciate items and their cultural heritage in their place of origin. It's sort of a dubious way to make money [and] to profit off of another country's cultural items."

Though students did not visit the museum's contested objects during their trip, the Yale Art Gallery has published a formal statement regarding the provenance of ethically contested pieces. Its website states, "If internal research demonstrates that a work in our collection has been stolen or unlawfully appropriated without subsequent restitution, then the museum will notify potential claimants and make efforts to resolve the matter in an equitable and appropriate manner."

This year marks the first year that students were able to visit the Yale Art Gallery. While the trip was momentous and valuable to many, it caused conflicts with missing classes during a critical part of the Winterlude. Ava Hult-Falk '27 said, "Even though the trip was fun and a short half-day experience, I missed two review periods for exams that week, and in those classes, I played catch-up until winter break." She added, "I've never been on a field trip at Choate before, but I felt the trip was a bit misconstrued in the sense that what we saw at the art gallery didn't really align with what we were doing in class ... We were restricted to seeing three art pieces without contested origin, with no free time to explore by ourselves."

To address student concerns, Ms. DeStefano is brainstorming ways to better align future visits with class material. However, she believes that the museum visit was worthwhile. "I think that a lot of students were introduced to a really great museum, and I know a lot of people said this [visit] was valuable," she said.

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U.S. Coast Guard Band Performs at Choate

By **Drew Wolfson '27**
Reporter

Choate welcomed the United States Coast Guard Band to the Ann & George Colony Hall on January 12 for a special afternoon concert, open to both the Choate and Wallingford communities. Based in New London, Connecticut, the U.S. Coast Guard Band is renowned for performing for prestigious events around the world, such as state dinners and presidential funerals. The band is composed of 54 instrumentalists, command staff, and one vocalist.

Bringing the U.S. Coast Guard Band to Choate involved significant coordination and planning by Paul Mellon Arts Center Director Mr. Matthew McLean and other Arts Department faculty members. Planning began at the end of the fall term, as "the background logistics involved figuring out the timing, how many performances there are going to be, and how many people were going to be involved," Instrumental Ensembles Director Mr. Gene Wie said.

Despite careful planning, the event faced a unique challenge as the band had just performed at former President Jimmy Carter's funeral in Washington, D.C. the week prior. "[The band] had [requested] to change the program slightly because the band was completely exhausted," Mr. Wie said. Despite this challenge, the Arts Department was still able to coordinate with the Coast Guard Band to ensure that the Choate community could watch the band's performance.

The concert offered students and community members a rare opportunity to experience repertoire they might not typically encounter. Some pieces that were performed included "Lokk from Green Island" by Torstein Aagard-Nilsen and "That's A-Plenty" by Benny Goodman. Mr. Wie highlighted the importance of student exposure to professional musicians: "I think that sometimes being here in the Choate bubble, we have good players, but [for] our growth we need to get out there and hear what people who make music for a living are capable of doing."

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Photo courtesy of @uscoastguardband on Instagram

U.S. Coast Guard Band performs in Colony Hall.

Library Celebrates Year of the Snake

By **Sabrina Liu '28**
Reporter

This January, the Andrew Mellon Library is celebrating Lunar New Year and welcoming the Year of the Snake with a vibrant display that highlights a variety of Asian cultures and traditions. Organized in collaboration with the Chinese Club, the Asian Student Association (ASA), and the Choate Korean Friendship Association (CKFA), the display aims to engage the Choate community with various curated resources, featuring cookbooks, traditional Chinese artifacts, and a Lunar New Year music playlist.

Librarians Ms. Molly Dewey and Ms. Nicole Brothers arranged the Lunar New Year displays by gathering books, audiobooks, eBooks, and other types of resources that highlighted Lunar New Year themes. "I also helped work on designing different signage, including eBook cards, posters, and flyers around campus," Ms. Dewey said. To ensure the display accurately represented the diverse traditions and meanings of Lunar New Year, the team also collaborated closely with student organizations for their input.

President of CKFA Lindsay Hong '25 and President of Chinese Club Dana Tan '25 contributed to the display. "We had some preliminary meetings with the librarians, and they actually had a lot of resources and stuff left over from previous years. We took a look at that, and then they also allowed us to submit new books or movies or other resources," Hong said. "One thing I really like is that they have a very wide variety of things that they include."

Students are encouraged to visit the Library throughout January to learn about the Lunar New Year's traditions. "Come look at the displays to catch a glimpse of what Lunar New Year means and learn something new!" Hong said.

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Decoding History: Inside Choate's Annual Paleography Competition

By **Laveenya Seenivasagam '27**
Reporter

Each year, the School Archives host the Paleography Contest to challenge both faculty and students to decipher historical handwritten documents. This competition allows participants to test their skills in reading historical scripts while providing a glimpse into the School's rich history.

Participants are to decipher twentieth-century historical documents from the Choate Archives. Five different manuscripts are presented each day, and the difficulty increases progressively. Choate's Archivist and Special Collections Librarian Ms. Stephanie Gold and her team selected these manuscripts from the Archives. The student who submits the most accurate translations wins the competition.

Director of the Andrew Mellon Library, Dr. Sherry Newman, who helped organize the event, shared the origin of the competition and its significance to the Archives. "This competition started as a way to encourage people to engage more deeply with our historical documents," Dr. Newman said. "In this really rich technology world, it is important for the community to understand that there are other forms of history that are out there that actually need to be read and put down on paper."

Faculty members also play an active role in the competition. "I love history, and this is a fun way to engage with Choate's past," History teacher Ms. Abby Kandel said. "Plus, who doesn't want a chance at winning a $25 Bees Knees card?" She also shared her experience visiting the archives section. "I'd love to bring my students here more often, especially after seeing how interesting and valuable these documents are," she said.

Student participant Elle Kim '25 shared her perspective on reading old manuscripts. "It's so much fun deciphering these letters. I think [it's] also because as students at Choate, we're moving towards a world of technology, and with apps like Notability, we're not really writing anything on paper," she said.

Through this competition, the Archives invites the Choate community to step back in time, sharpening their paleographic skills while connecting with the history of the School.

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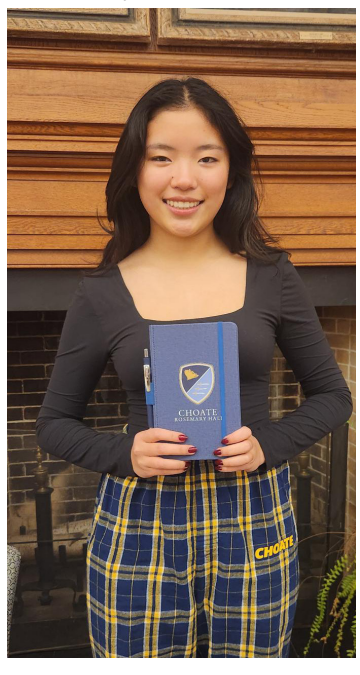



Photos courtesy of Mrs. Stephanie Gold

Norah Wang '27 and Summer Programs Coordinator Mrs. Debbie Carpenter receive their prizes.

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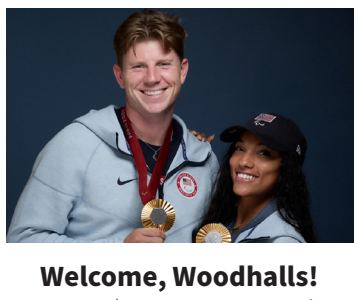

Welcome, Woodhalls!
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Read it, then recycle it.

Visuals by Leah Han '27, Libby Dai '25, Harry Kim '28, and the Woodhalls.



SCHOOL NEWS

MUN and Manhattan: Choate Delegates Takes On CMUNCE

By **Deyi Meng '26**
Associate Editor

From January 16-19, the Choate Model United Nations (MUN) team participated in the 24th annual Columbia Model United Nations Conference and Exposition (CMUNCE), hosted at Columbia University in New York City. Students stayed in Times Square and served as delegates on various committees, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the U.S. Senate, and the 1974 Cyprus Crisis committee. Each committee simulated diplomatic negotiations with students representing various countries and positions.

At CMUNCE, delegates are assigned to two primary committees: Crises and General Assembly. Crisis committees, typically smaller with 18 to 25 members, cater to more advanced delegates and involve fast-paced decision-making and problem-solving skills. In addition, the topics for Crisis committees are typically more informal, such as Minecraft Village Council, the Watergate Scandal, and the Fall of the Han Dynasty: Coalition & Emperor.

General Assembly committees, intended for newer participants, generally consist of 80 to 100 members and focus on broader, more basic, and structured discussions. The topics align more with the actual United Nations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW). Delegates simulate United Nations proceedings by representing a nation or a position, engaging in debates on issues, drafting resolutions, and collaborating to develop solutions — all while adhering to parliamentary procedure and honing diplomatic skills.

Choate MUN Vice President Zoie Wang '26 represented Serbia at the UNESCO committee and found her experience to be meaningful. "MUN is very worthwhile and important because it teaches you about a lot of the issues worldwide, and it also improves your collaboration and public speaking skills," she said.

Addy Hawthorne '27, who represented Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky in the U.S. Senate committee, echoed Wang's words and shared her perspective as a first-time delegate. She said, "This is my first time doing MUN and doing research, having to learn how to work with people outside of your school, and writing bills [resolutions] is what really separates Model UN from other extracurriculars at Choate." In addition, Hawthorne appreciated the chance to enjoy New York City for a few days on top of attending serious committee sessions. "Being able to explore New York [was] a really fun and good learning experience. Balancing those two things is what makes so many people want to do MUN," Hawthorne added.

MUN advisor and HPRSS Teacher Ms. Cindy Okrah was a chaperone for the trip. She highlighted the numerous educational benefits of participating in conferences like CMUNCE: "Model UN offers a great opportunity for students to learn about global citizenship and see how the world is a complex place, and [that] there are a variety of perspectives and views and people should be able to compromise," she said. "MUN helps reinforce some of the skills we value at Choate like public speaking and research, and [it] provides a great experiential learning experience."

CMUNCE proved to be a fruitful and enjoyable experience for students and faculty alike. "All the committee members in the General Assembly session were very hard working. I saw plenty of great public speakers, and it inspired me to practice more life skills through participating in these conferences," Wang said. The Choate MUN team looks forward to attending their next event at the 51st annual Yale Model United Nations Conference, which will take place on January 23-26.

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Photo courtesy of Zoie Wang '26

UNESCO committee members celebrate a successful conference.

CHOATE UPGRADES CROSSWALK LIGHTS

By **Ellie Porter '25**
Staff Reporter

Winters in Connecticut are dark, which makes it challenging to navigate campus safely without proper lighting. In the summer of 2021, flashing beacons were installed at all of Choate's crosswalks to ensure pedestrian safety. However, this January, the beacon system has been refreshed to further improve visibility by adding automatic bright lights to illuminate the crossing itself.

After a year of extensive discussions with various contractors, careful budgeting, and the selection of the latest technology, Director of Operations Mr. Bill Wright led the effort to improve Choate's crosswalks. These enhancements were made to make navigating campus safer for students and faculty, and automatic flashing lights have been installed at the crosswalks to improve visibility for drivers.

Many students have already expressed appreciation for the improvements. "I think that it really increases safety because you don't have to worry about pushing the button," Madeline Baldwin '27 said. Similarly, Blake Steremberg '26 appreciates that the new beacon system addressed previous concerns. "Hopefully, the lights will make it so that students are clearer for drivers, especially since there were some problems with some of the lights not always turning on," they said.

The beacon system has not only impacted current Choate community members but also demonstrates Choate's priority for safety to prospective families. Gold Key Ambassador Victoria DeVito '27 makes a point of demonstrating the beacon system to prospective Choate students. "It is really important to show families that campus is safe," she said.

Updating the beacon system is just one of Mr. Wright's many projects. He is constantly working to improve campus safety and mitigate accident risks for the community. "If there's something that our community feels we should be doing differently, please let us know," Mr. Wright said.

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Photo by Victoria Tang '27/*The Choate News*

Upgraded crosswalks illuminate street crossing.

Clinton Knight Flood Brings Chaos, But Strengthens Inter-Dorm Bonds

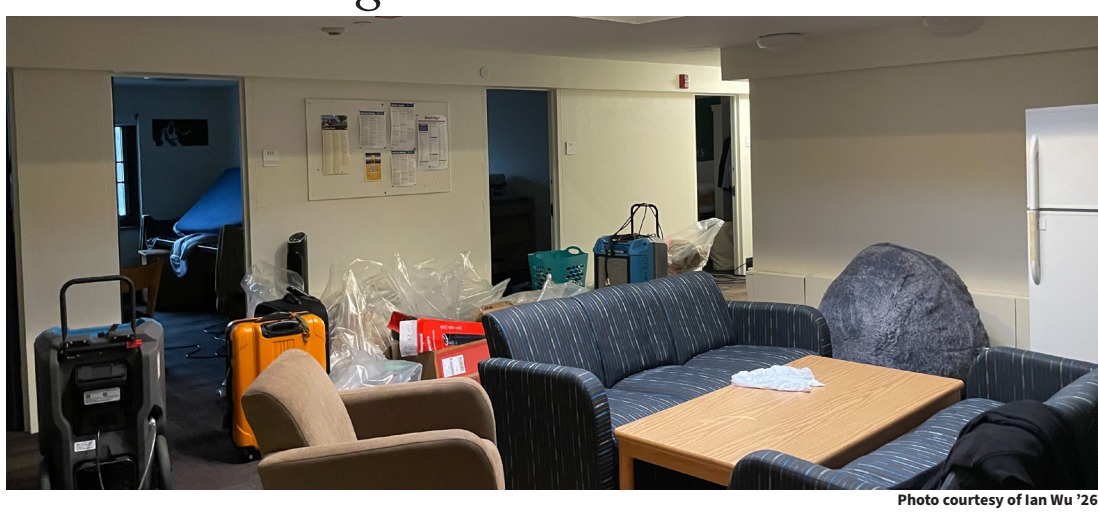

Photo courtesy of Ian Wu '26

Clinton Knight House was evacuated after flooding.

By **Eshana Hora '27**
Reporter

This past December, an unexpected and unusual incident brought a new buzz to campus. On December 10, Clinton Knight House (CK) flooded due to an accidental sprinkler activation. What followed was a night of swift action and resilience as students and staff worked to navigate the challenges that followed.

According to Head of House Mr. Jorge Rodriguez, his family and the dorm's residents were forced to evacuate at around 10:30 p.m. after a sprinkler was accidentally set off in a student's room. They initially moved to McCook House and later to Lanphier Center, where they stayed until further arrangements were made. Local firefighters, Choate Community Safety officers, Dean of Students Mr. Will Gilyard '98, and other faculty members rushed to the scene to assess the situation in the dorm. Upon closer inspection, it was clear that the dorm would be uninhabitable for at least one week, leaving students in need of new living spaces for the rest of Winterlude.

Soon after the evacuation, Sally Hart Lodge's Innkeeper Mr. Brian Sahlin received a call informing him that CK's residents would be temporarily housed at the Choate Rosemary Hall Inn and the Sally Hart Lodge. He recalled the chaos of the night as residents moved into their temporary rooms. "It was probably a total of 27 or 28 boys … We had to bring in mattresses because then everyone could sleep in a bed," Mr. Sahlin said. American Building Maintenance (ABM) Facilities Management worked closely with Mr. Sahlin to ensure the comfort of students staying in the Inn and the Lodge. Fortunately, students were permitted to return the following day and grab their clothes, school materials, and any other essentials they would need for the remainder of Winterlude. Mr. Bjorn Bjorkdahl, Head of Operations for ABM at Choate, highlighted the role ABM had in supporting the temporary move, including cleaning the housing every day and collecting the affected students' belongings to be cleaned at a nearby laundry facility.

In the weeks following the flood, Choate staff worked tirelessly to restore CK and clear out the floodwater. The process of ensuring the dorm was safe for students was complex. "The first phase was to make the repair and extract the water," Director of Facilities Mr. Stephen Harrison said. "Then we worked closely with knowledgeable contractors to ensure that the building was properly dried out, and then finally we reinstalled damaged material such as drywall and wall base before completing a final cleaning."

Despite the efforts of the Administration, the displaced students still faced challenges while transitioning to their temporary accommodation. For example, when the flood started, Mr. Rodriguez mentioned that there was "an avalanche of questions" with students uncertain about what to expect. Additionally, it was already a stressful week for most students due to impending tests and college decisions.

While the last two weeks of Winterlude were filled with uncertainty and changes for CK residents, some good also came out of the incident. According to both Mr. Rodriguez and CK prefect Daneel Polakoff '25, there was a stronger bond between all residents upon returning to the dorm. Polakoff noted, "The event brought CK together [and] everyone bonded over the situation." Similarly, Mr. Rodriguez said, "[Before the incident], not everyone was well connected. But after this common challenge, it was impressive to see that all the residents had the opportunity to connect with each other."

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ACCOMPLISHED, YET ANXIOUS: DR. CASTONGUAY'S ADVICE TO CHOATIES



Photo by Emily Ma '25/*The Choate News*

Dr. Castonguay advises Choate students on navigating their futures.

By **Ethan Zhang '26**
Associate Editor

On January 17, Executive Director of the Gordon Career Center at Wesleyan University, Dr. Sharon Belden Castonguay, spoke to fifth and sixth-formers in a talk titled "Accomplished and Confused: Why the Best and Brightest are Anxious About Their Futures." With a Master's degree in education from the University of Michigan and a Doctorate in human development and psychology from Harvard University, Dr. Castonguay's talk in Ann & George Colony Hall aimed to help students navigate the challenges presented by the dynamic and variable 21st-century job market.

Dr. Castonguay began her talk by referencing the famous fable of *The Three Little Pigs*, using it as a metaphor for the importance of minimizing risk by planning ahead and preparing oneself for any situation. She then moved into a discussion of the "tensions" that students face for college admission and jobs. She explained that as the college admissions process becomes more competitive, the student experience becomes more stressful. For example, students experience the tensions of conflicting views on the significance of attending prestigious colleges. Dr. Castonguay explained that on the one hand, some argue that prestige of a college doesn't matter, while on the other hand, many students feel immense pressure to gain admission to Ivy League institutions or similarly prestigious schools.

Another tension that Dr. Castonguay highlighted was rooted in the ambiguity of the job market. Although high school students are often urged to plan for the future, the future job market is constantly changing. Dr. Castonguay used the tech industry as an example, pointing out how the job market for computer scientists a few years ago was far more stable than it is today. To help combat these tensions, Dr. Castonguay advised students to "learn to mitigate risk" rather than always try to avoid failure through three "risk vectors:" economic stability, group identity, and meaning or purpose. She argued that if students can learn to mitigate risk, they will be much better off in the future and experience less stress in the present.

Dr. Castonguay concluded her talk by returning to *The Three Little Pigs*, emphasizing that the pigs' houses were not stable structures, and they had to adapt to changing circumstances. In the same way, students must develop adaptability to succeed in an unpredictable future.

Students found Dr. Castonguay's advice both helpful and engaging. "Dr. Castonguay's talk was incredibly reassuring," Isa Marvin '26 said. "She helped me realize that it's okay not to have everything figured out right now. Her advice about focusing on adaptability and mitigating risk rather than trying to avoid failure entirely made me feel more confident about approaching the future." Libby Dai '25 commented on her explanation of tensions: "It felt like she recognized all the stress in high school." She added, "Her 'mitigate-risk' point was a new way to look at it. I'll try and use her advice to help with my anxiety [through] senior winter."

Dr. Castonguay's work is featured in prominent news outlets like *Oprah Magazine*, *Forbes*, Inc.com, and Apple News. Her expertise in the job market will continue to guide the next generation of the workforce, including current Choate upperclassmen.

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Connecticut Lawmakers Seek to End Lethal Injection Drug Production

By **Ha Jin Sung '28**
Reporter



Graphic by Cora Slowe '26/*The Choate News*

On January 10, Connecticut lawmakers introduced a bill to ban Connecticut companies from selling and manufacturing lethal drugs that can be used to carry out death sentences.

Despite the abolishment of the death penalty in Connecticut, Absolute Standards, a company based in Hamden, Connecticut, has allegedly manufactured pentobarbital in previous years. The drug was produced for the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) to use in lethal injections in federal executions. The company was also supposedly involved in the sale of pentobarbital used for lethal injection in other states.

As a result of these allegations, state lawmakers asked Absolute Standards to stop the production of pentobarbital to eliminate the possibility of the drug being used for lethal injections. Based on a letter sent by Absolute Standards President Mr. John Criscio to lawmakers, including State Representative Josh Elliot (D-Hamden), the company had already stopped production and sale of the drug in December 2020 and had no intentions to resume manufacturing. However, for the lawmakers in Connecticut who proposed the bill, it is imperative that the state terminate the production of any medical instruments or tools, such as lethal injection drugs, that would contribute to the death penalty. "We know Absolute Standards voluntarily ended production of its products, but we do not want [companies] to operate on a voluntary basis in the future," the office of Connecticut State Senator Saud Anwar (D-East Hartford), one of the leading proposers of the bill, said.

This issue has become especially important since President Donald Trump P'00 won the 2024 election because he has often threatened to accelerate federal executions. Senator Anwar explained that it is crucial for no other Connecticut companies to manufacture or sell similar drugs going forward, as it would contradict "what the people of Connecticut previously decided," which was the abolition of the death penalty.

"[In 2012], Connecticut made the decision to end the death penalty, reflected by the desires of its residents. This reflects our opposition as a state and we do not want to contribute to executions occurring in other states, full stop," Senator Anwar said.

The bill must go through Connecticut's General Law Committee and a public hearing before it can be passed. "It has been proposed and will be raised by the General Law Committee in the coming weeks. From there, the Committee will need to raise the bill and have a public hearing," Senator Anwar's office said. "After which, there's an opportunity for comment, approval, and movement to the rest of the legislature."

As a change in presidential administration will likely impact the future of the death penalty for the United States as a whole, there is ongoing discussion on the effectiveness of the Connecticut bill if it were to be passed. President Trump's administration in 2020 reinstated the death penalty after 17 years of no federal executions, and President Trump has publicly announced that he wishes to resume the death penalty and federal executions in his second term as president. While the future of the bill remains uncertain, its implications are clear: Connecticut lawmakers aim to solidify the state's stance against the death penalty and ensure that no companies within its borders contribute to its enforcement elsewhere.

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Holocaust Survivor Speaks at Wallingford Public Library



Graphic by Evelyn Kim '25/*The Choate News*

By **Max Garsten '27**
Reporter

On January 14, Holocaust Survivor Mr. Endre (Andy) Sarkany told the story of his childhood in Hungary during World War II in the Wallingford Public Library. Mr. Sarkany said he wanted to demonstrate the importance of remembering history so that we don't repeat it. People in attendance found the experience valuable because, in a few years, the opportunity to speak with someone who actually lived through the Holocaust won't exist.

Mr. Sarkany shared that when he was a young boy, the Nazis invaded his home city, Budapest, Hungary. He remembers the kindness that the residents of his building showed by helping take care of over 150 orphans who lived in the complex.

Mr. Sarkany said, "The Nazi occupation only took place in 1944, but antisemitism and a hatred of Jews existed before." Then, he told the story of his first year in elementary school.

In first grade, as Mr. Sarkany walked to school, people yelled antisemitic slurs at him. Young Mr. Sarkany even faced physical violence. He said that antisemites would "push me down on the pavement, spit on me, shove me around; it was too much to take."

After a few weeks of experiencing this abuse, Mr. Sarkany decided to stop going to school. This coincided with the time his father was sent to the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria.

During his talk at the Wallingford Public Library, Mr. Sarkany showed pictures of Nazi soldiers wearing the swastika on their sleeves, and then he flipped to a picture of a 2017 white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. Mr. Sarkany drew connections between the two events, explaining the hateful intent behind such symbols and arguing that people must learn from their mistakes and fight to stop these symbols and ideas from proliferating.

The organizers of the event said that it had been fully booked for months, demonstrating the importance of the event for the Wallingford community. When asked about this event's significance, many attendees seemed to have the same thoughts as Mr. Sarkany.

"It's a very important time in our history, and remembering everything that happened helps us to understand why we can't let it happen again," Wallingford resident and attendee Mr. Derek Parker said. "If we don't study history, then we'll repeat it in the future." Mr. Sarkany also quoted Winston Churchill during his talk: "Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

Choate History teacher Ms. Beatrice Voorhees attended the event. Reflecting on her experience, she said, "It's really important to hear first-person testimony. You don't get to hear that about every historical event, so I think it's really important to keep alive those stories and that narrative."

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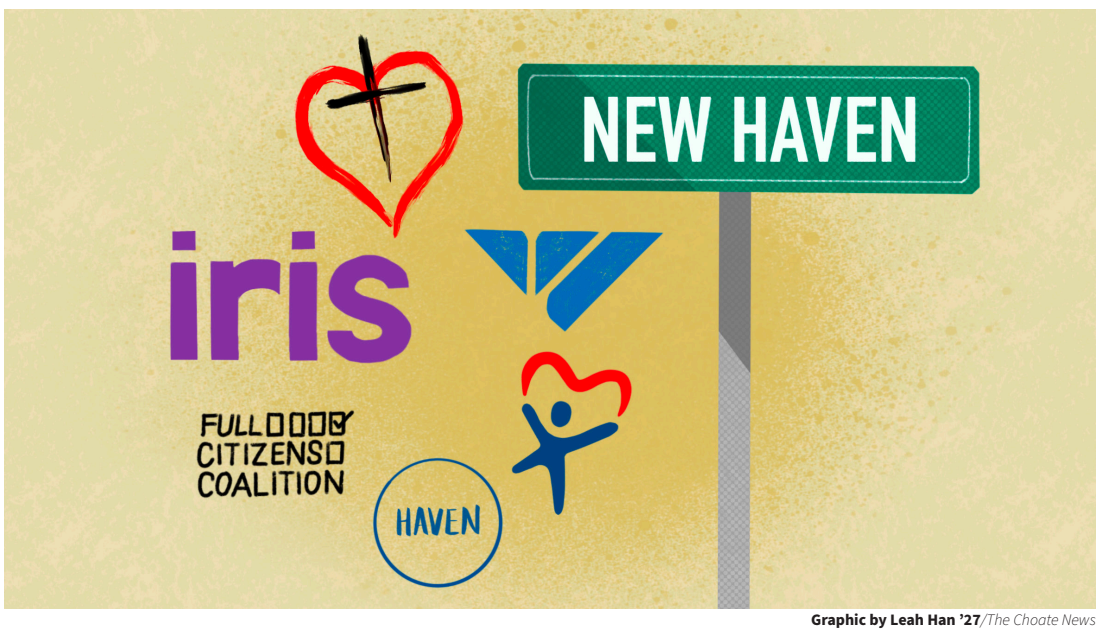
Connecticut Health Foundation Grants $1.4M of Funding for Health Equity

By **Reid Bock '27**
Staff Contributor



Graphic by Leah Han '27/*The Choate News*

In late December, the Connecticut Health Foundation (CT Health Foundation) awarded grants to six New Haven-based organizations. These awards were part of a larger initiative that distributed 39 grants totaling over $1.4 million to organizations and health departments across the state in the past quarter.

The CT Health Foundation has been awarding grants since its inception 25 years ago. Ms. Ellen Carter, CT Health Foundation's Vice President of Program, explained the organization's unique focus: "Since the beginning..., the founders decided that we should be an organization focused on health equity in Connecticut," she said.

The grants given to these New Haven-based organizations targeted both healthcare and community action. The CT Health Foundation awarded $20,000 to Yale New Haven Health, to help with network-building efforts of the Healthier Greater New Haven Partnership, and granted $10,000 to HAVEN Free Clinic for free medical care to uninsured adults. On the community action side, Full Citizens Coalition received $30,000 to support grassroots organizations led by people of color, Christian Community Action received $25,000 to help train new advocates for their HEALTH (Helping Everyone Achieve Lifelong Trusted Healthcare) project, and Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services Inc. was awarded $20,000 to aid their work in supporting refugees and immigrants in Connecticut, including providing healthcare services.

Before being awarded the grants, the six New Haven organizations went through a thorough vetting process. Ms. Carter said, "We have a pretty rigorous process for finding and vetting our grantees. We work with organizations that are either directly related or connected to the communities that we're trying to improve outcomes for and aligned with our mission."

The CT Health Foundation's success relies on incorporating various people when responding to policy or system changes. Ms. Carter explained, "We're investing in those voices to be heard. We believe that you need a variety of people on the ground to make policy change. So you need the people who are closest to the issue organizing and sharing their stories. You need people who are doing research to better understand where the gaps are in coverage, and what policy could be changed in order to make improvements and reduce health disparities."

The Connecticut Health Foundation's strategic grant selection process enabled six community organizations to expand the scope of their work and support people in need. These grants have allowed the Foundation to further address inequities and amplify the voices of those affected the most, reinforcing its 25-year commitment to advancing health equity across Connecticut.

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Sustainability Meets Style: Everest Isles Opens in Wallingford

By **Claire Liu '28**
Reporter

A new sustainable clothing boutique, Everest Isles, recently opened its first in-person store in Wallingford. The store sells a variety of clothing, ranging from hoodies and sweatpants to sportswear and swimsuits. However, Everest Isles stands out most for its unique focus on sustainability.

Everest Isles, founded in 2012 as an online brand, aims to reduce waste and promote environmental responsibility and has been collaborating with many manufacturers to accomplish their goals. Instead of using common materials like polyester, which is not biodegradable and sheds microplastics, the company uses 100% ECONYL Nylon, a substitute that is manufactured from recovered fishing nets and comes entirely from waste. When the concept was created, Everest Isles was one of the only clothing brands that used sustainable materials in their products.

Throughout the years, Everest Isles has partnered with many celebrities, such as the Philadelphia 76ers and companies that design environmentally friendly clothes. They collaborated on track pants, bucket hats, tote bags, and their signature Beacher trunks in support of Philadelphia's playoff run. These items are displayed in Everest Isles' Wallingford location and have attracted several Choate customers with their designs and sustainability-focused mission.

Maddy Childs '26, who visited the store, said "Everest Isles has a more sleek and modern design; it uses high-quality clothing. They are supposed to last you forever, which is good for the environment."

After gaining much success with the online store, Everest Isles founder and Wallingford native Mr. Jefferey Hladky decided to open his first in-person location on Center Street. Mr. Hladky said, "I thought that it would be pretty unique to have a store that kind of belonged in some place like New York or Paris or Miami and put it in a place like Wallingford just to see how people would react." He also claimed that there's nothing else like Everest Isles anywhere in Connecticut. "The quality of the clothing and the design of the clothing are different from any local brands that are out there in this area for sure."

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Photo by Scarlett Park '27/*The Choate News*

Outside view of the Everest Isles storefront.

The Choate News

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RETHINKING EXCELLENCE IN THE CLASSROOM

By **Rachel Fan '27**
Associate Editor

Around the time of midterms, talk about grades become as common as the dining hall's orange chicken on Tuesdays. From hallway chatter to late-night dorm debates, students constantly wrestle with the unspoken assumption that grades equal excellence. But is this really the case?

The belief that grades are the paramount measuring device of excellence is limiting, particularly in a place like Choate, where academic pressure often feels like a constant treadmill. It's time to ask ourselves: is chasing a number on a report card the same as striving for excellence? Spoiler alert: it's not.

Let's break down what grades actually measure. At their best, they reflect your understanding of a subject at a given moment. At their worst, they reflect how well you can cram for a test or jump through hoops, and how willing you are to align with teachers' preferences. I've seen my friends rewrite World History reading responses three or four times before turning them in —not to clarify their thoughts, but to submit what they thought their teacher wanted to see.

In an ideal classroom setting, excellence should be about curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking. But when we equate good grades with excellence, we reduce learning to a transactional process: you give the teacher what they want, and they give you the grade you want. That's not education: that's compliance.

This issue becomes more apparent in creative fields like English or art. One student might write a short story that's stark and thought-provoking, but it doesn't follow the rubric to a tee, so they get a B. Another student might produce a perfectly polished essay devoid of originality and walk away with an A+. But who's *really* more excellent?

This isn't to say that grades have no value; after all, schools use grading systems for a reason. They're a tool, a benchmark to show where you are in the learning process. But they shouldn't be a finish line. The moment we confuse grades with excellence, we lose sight of what truly matters: growth.

And let's not forget how this mindset fuels unnecessary competition. If grades are the only measure of excellence, every group project becomes a battle and every class discussion a silent calculation of who's "winning." Instead of encouraging collaboration, we only create increasing insecurity.

I've experienced this mindset firsthand as an athlete. In fencing, excellence entails not just the winning matches but all the strategies in the offense and defense you utilize during the game. You can have a great match and still lose on the scoreboard, but that doesn't mean that you failed. The same logic should apply in the classroom. Sometimes, your best work won't translate into a perfect grade — and that's okay.

So, how can we shift this mindset? The solution isn't to eliminate grades altogether, but rather to contextualize them. Teachers should emphasize giving feedback over numbers, helping students understand where they have excelled and where they can improve. Schools should celebrate achievements that can't be quantified — from a provoking thought in class discussion to a perfectly executed titration in a chemistry lab.

Ultimately, excellence is about striving for something more than a letter on a transcript. It's about taking risks, making mistakes, and pushing yourself to think in ways you never have before. If we let grades define that, we shrink excellence into something too small, too simple, and far too boring for a place like Choate. So, next time you see a number on your report card, remember that it's just a snapshot, not a summary. Excellence is what you bring to the table, not the letter you take away on your transcript.

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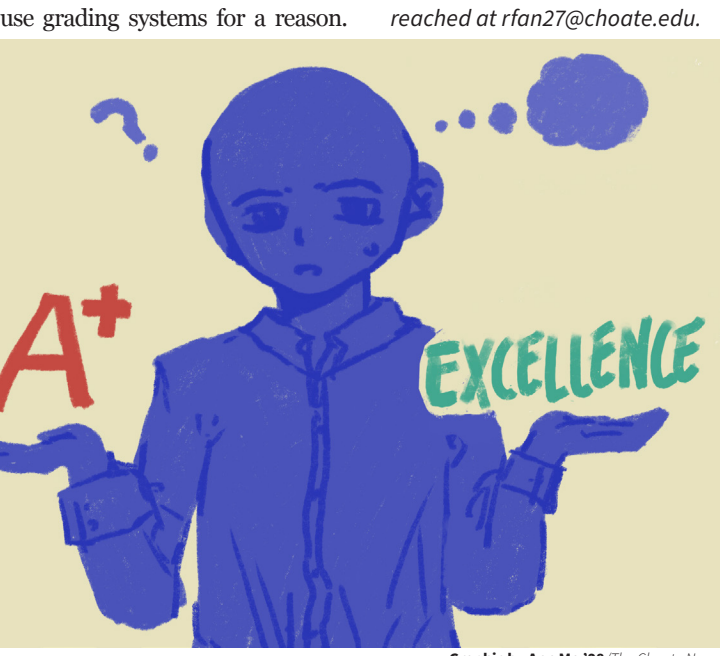


Graphic by Ann Ma '28/*The Choate News*

Choate Without TikTok: A Boon in Disguise

By **Ethan Zhang '26**
Associate Editor



Graphic by Eliza Aldrich '27/*The Choate News*

With over 170 million users in the U.S. alone and a massive influence on the Choate community, TikTok was set to shut down on January 19. Although this shutdown was temporary, the app's impermanence still looms large, with the temporary extension allowing the app to operate lasting for only 75 days. Over the past few months, the U.S. government has expressed concerns that the app poses a national security risk due to its Chinese parent company, ByteDance. Beyond its potential political consequences, what would the shutdown of a major social media platform mean for student life at Choate? My guess is it would help boost student productivity a considerable amount.

Many students, especially when they're alone, instinctively open TikTok whenever they have even a second of free time — before sports, between classes, or in the morning. I'll admit, I've also fallen victim to watching ten-second basketball edits while brushing my teeth in the morning. While this in itself isn't necessarily harmful, the bigger issue is how it leads us to become disconnected from everything around us. TikTok erases those little moments in the day when you could be doing something more productive that keeps you in the moment, like calling your parents or keeping a gratitude journal. We are constantly getting consumed by the media we consume.

With its highly intelligent personalized algorithms that shape users' "For You Pages" (FYP), TikTok can keep students glued to their screens when they could be spending their time doing something better. At its core, TikTok is a procrastination manifestation — when students have an eight-page history paper due the next day, they would probably rather scroll through their FYP shoving dopamine-soaked video after video of content curated for their personal interests.

TikTok's real danger lies in its apparent innocence: "I can scroll for a couple of minutes and then get my work done," students often think. "I deserve a quick little break before grinding my work." But those "few minutes" turn into ten, then thirty, then an hour. Before they know it, two hours have passed, and they haven't made any progress on their assignments. Obviously, this is a bit of an exaggeration — students also typically have some semblance of self-control — however, TikTok is so dangerous because it makes this harmful scenario feasible and much more likely to occur.

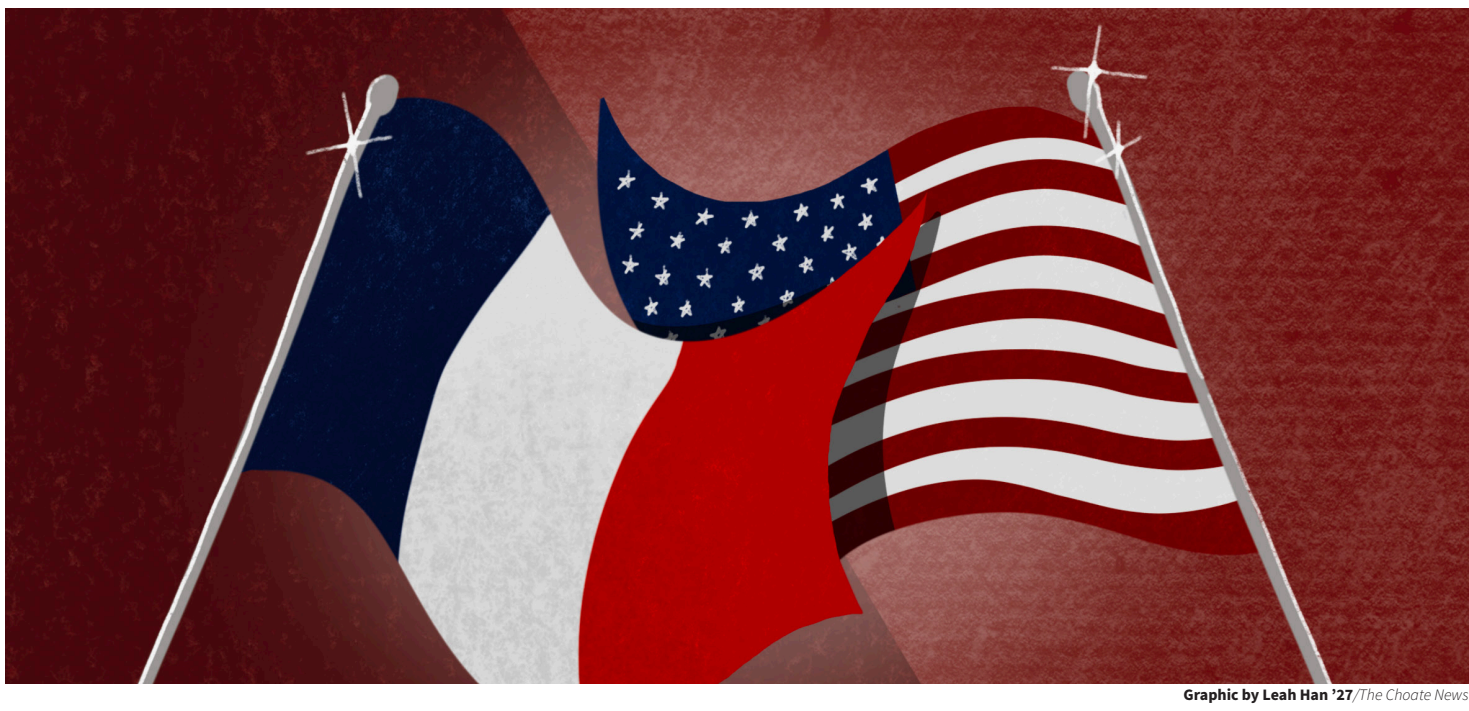
I'm speaking from personal experience — I love watching TikTok before I go to bed, and it's so ingrained as a habit that it's difficult to sleep without picking up the app. Embarrassingly enough, this has led to many nights where I slept an hour less than I could have. While this is my fault for simply not swiping up and turning my phone off, it ties back to how easily TikTok glues users to their phones.

TikTok targets younger audiences who are more susceptible to fast-paced, easily consumable content and tend to be on their phones more. I encourage myself and my peers to have the self-control to delete TikTok and spend less time on their phones, but can I really fault them if they don't? Along with the aspects of TikTok specifically designed to glue younger students to their phones, with such busy and tiring lives at Choate, students often don't have time to simply relax. So, when they do get a moment of rest, scrolling through TikTok is a quick, easy way to enjoy that downtime.

With a government-mandated TikTok ban, the app will hopefully start to lose its prominence in our community either by being glitchy or requiring a virtual private network (VPN) to access. Regardless of what happens, I urge my peers to live more in the moment and recognize how harmful TikTok is. With many alternative fast-paced-consumption social media options ike Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts on the rise, TikTok isn't the only platform that could damage student life. This shutdown should serve as a reminder to reflect on the benefits of ditching social media.

Ethan Zhang *is a fifth-former from Acton, MA. He may be reached at ezhang26@choate.edu.*

FROM TOULOUSE TO WALLINGFORD: A STUDY OF CONSTRUCTIVE PATRIOTISM



Graphic by Leah Han '27/*The Choate News*

By **Cam Merritt '26**
Opinions Writer

This fall, I had the opportunity to study abroad in Toulouse, France. Within a few weeks, I sensed that the French displayed patriotism differently than how we do in the United States. Rather than an overwhelming sense of self-superiority and exceptionalism, the French approach to patriotism seemed to be rooted in pride for their culture, traditions, and values. I immediately felt that exploring this contrast could yield valuable insights into reforming American culture.

This observation led me to create the idea of "comparative patriotism" — a potentially valuable field of study that could improve the way citizens display love for their country. While in France, I conducted research on patriotism and nationalism and designed a survey to compare French and American views of both.

Throughout the world, patriotism plays an essential role in the strength of every nation. By fostering unity and a collective sense of purpose, patriotism inspires citizens to contribute to the common good of society and support government institutions and policies.

Yet, when patriotism leans towards nationalism, it can pose significant dangers to a nation. Patriotism brings the best out of each citizen and places a duty on them to demand improvement in their country and live up to an ideal. On the contrary, nationalism often demands vigorous and blind devotion to one's country, leading to a sense of superiority and an exclusion of diverse beliefs. While patriotism encourages constructive engagement and collective progress, nationalism fosters conflict both within and beyond a nation's borders.

In my survey, I asked participants to define patriotism, describe what it means to them, and share how they feel about their respective countries. I surveyed a diverse group of French respondents, including several of my teachers, peers, and even strangers I approached on the street. I sent out the survey in the United States and compared the responses from the two nations.

One of the most striking differences I discovered was that, when asked what values they associated with patriotism, Americans leaned heavily towards loyalty and national pride, emphasizing unwavering allegiance and a readiness to defend the country. However, the French associated patriotism more with an appreciation for their cultural heritage, traditions, and cuisine.

When asked about national superiority, the French answered far differently than the Americans. While 26.7% of Americans believed that their country was superior to other countries around the world, only 12% of French people did.

Another question asked participants to rate the "greatness" of their country on a scale from one to 10. The average American rating was a six out of 10, while the French average was only a 4.5, which indicates that Americans have a more "exceptionalistic" view of patriotism than the French. French patriotism appears to be more inwardly focused, centered around cultural pride and a respect for traditions. American patriotism, on the other hand, appears to be more outwardly focused on national power and international dominance.

The French perspective, with less of an emphasis on global comparison and superiority, emphasizes unity through shared cultural experiences. Because French patriotism focuses more on cultural innovations, there is less stress on exclusive national unity and more respect for diverse cultures.

The United States has much to learn from France, notably how to steer clear of nationalism. Adopting a more constructive approach to patriotism, like the French, will foster unity and encourage a collective American identity that transcends political, economic, and racial differences.

The Choate community can engage in this constructive patriotism by focusing on pride in the School's diverse culture and traditions, as opposed to focusing on exceptionalism and global superiority. By celebrating the unique aspects of American heritage like our history, arts, language, and shared values, we cultivate a sense of belonging and connection. This will create a much more unified community within our school and all around the country.

Schools around the U.S. should promote the study of "comparative patriotism." Although my survey specifically compared France and the U.S., "comparative patriotism" can provide priceless insights when applied to any set of nations. By promoting cultural patriotism and acceptance, nations can foster more harmonious communities that value shared identity over division and self-superiority, ultimately strengthening our democracy.

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Lessons from Jeju Air Disaster

By **Harry Kim '28**
Opinions Writer


Graphic by Rielle Reyes '27/*The Choate News*

On December 29, tragedy struck as Jeju Air Flight 7C2216 crashed at Muan International Airport in South Korea, leaving only two survivors out of 181 onboard. This devastating accident, the deadliest of the year, should send an urgent message to strengthen airport safety regulations across all Korean airports and update safety guidelines to meet essential requirements.

A series of dire circumstances ultimately led to the tragic crash. An unexpected bird strike — a collision between a bird and an airplane — forced the pilots of the flight into an emergency landing. When its landing gears failed to deploy, the plane skidded off the runway at Muan Airport and crashed into the airport's localizer, a ground-based radio navigation system containing a solid concrete barrier. The impact caused the plane to explode into pieces, leaving only two survivors who were critically injured and pulled out by rescuers. While this appears to be a total freak accident, experts suggest that it was caused by the airport's safety deficiencies and could have been prevented.

One of the primary failures was the airport's inability to prevent the bird strike. Muan airport recorded the largest budget deficit among 15 Korean domestic airports in 2023, and this financial instability led to an inability to hire permanent staff tasked with mitigating bird hazards. This shortfall is especially critical given the Muan region's status as one of the world's most famous migratory bird destinations, which inherently increases the risk of bird strikes around the airport. Muan Airport's insufficient consideration of bird hazards during flights significantly contributed to the crash's deadly outcome.

Furthermore, the airport directly violated the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) safety guidelines. For the risk of collision in an emergency, ICAO requires installations within the airport to be made of easily destructible materials. However, Muan Airport's localizer was constructed with a solid concrete barrier, which caused the airplane to explode upon impact. Moreover, after the accident, the concrete top remained unharmed, indicating that the plane absorbed the full force of the collision. If the localizer had been built with breakable material, the severity of the crash might have been significantly reduced.

If safety inadequacies had been properly addressed, this accident could have had a significantly different outcome. Authorities are investigating the different causes of the Jeju Air Crash, but Muan Airport's violations of ICAO safety regulations are clear. The crash has sparked nationwide grief for all the bereaved families who lost their loved ones.

Currently, there are still seven Korean airports with localizers built on concrete or steel that pose a similar risk. Many other Korean airports owned by the Korea Airports Corporation, such as Gwangju Airport and Yeosu Airport, operate under deficient safety regulations and are putting passengers' lives in jeopardy as a result. Government officials should step forward and strictly investigate all domestic airports and enforce necessary safety requirements. All airports should also have company policies that regulate local checks on localizer housing structures to prevent future accidents from occurring.

The staggering 179 lives lost should not be neglected but rather serve as a call for immediate and effective changes. Airports worldwide must prioritize and enforce safety regulations to ensure both passenger and crew safety. Traveling should always come with a guarantee of safety, and it is the responsibility of all airports to uphold these standards.

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Spotify AI Degrades Art

By **Ethan Zhang '26**
Associate Editor

The music streaming service Spotify's latest iteration of its Spotify Wrapped — once a well-curated compilation of music, podcasts, and audiobooks listened to throughout the year – is facing widespread backlash for its disappointing production. From boring "Audio Auras" to bland statistics and visuals, thousands of online users have expressed disappointment over the 2024 version of the year-end tradition.

Many users believe Spotify's mass layoffs and, consequently, its rumored utilization of AI in its production of Wrapped are the reasons for its lack of flair and uniqueness. "This has to be fake. This is actually the worst Spotify wrapped ever in terms of graphics and data, all included," one X user posted, accruing nearly 200,000 likes. However, our concerns should be focused on the greater implications of Spotify's AI usage, not solely on its lackluster execution of 2024's Wrapped.

Spotify has openly embraced its AI usage for years now, implementing an "AI DJ" using Sonantic, an AI Voice Platform, and the Spotify Wrapped AI podcast built using Google's NotebookLM. While these features have mostly curated playlists rather than created music, the platform has recently been accused of showing leniency toward artificially generated music, including recommending unlicensed covers of songs by artists who don't exist. This then poses the question: what's stopping Spotify from expanding AI's application to music production?

In December 2023, Spotify laid off nearly 20% of its workforce, increasing its reliance on AI usage. This was in part an attempt to increase profit margins, but nevertheless conveys an alarming message: large corporations will invalidate art for an extra penny.

The issue behind the prioritization of profit at the expense of human originality by Spotify is that music is a form of art and serves as the purest form of human expression. However, when the largest music streaming service in the world allows artificially generated music to infiltrate the playlists of millions of their listeners, it invalidates what music is meant to be: a human creation.

But if the music is good, does it matter where it comes from? Yes. AI has no emotion, identity, or experience but rather creates music by learning from and imitating millions of online songs by human artists, reducing all that hard work to simple replication. Music is more than just a soundtrack and AI reduces complex emotions and stories to mere algorithmic patterns. If AI has no emotional depth, it simply can not be allowed to generate music because music is rooted in human emotion. Yet, Spotify sees cheap, algorithmic-based marketing and jumps on that opportunity.

Customer dissatisfaction with this year's artificially generated Wrapped is an imperative pushback against this increasingly alarming adoption of AI usage. Spotify's decisions are foreboding: money drives large corporations, not the legitimacy of the products they are selling. If users don't demand authenticity, the inherently human nature of music is at risk of becoming another casualty of a profit-driven innovation.

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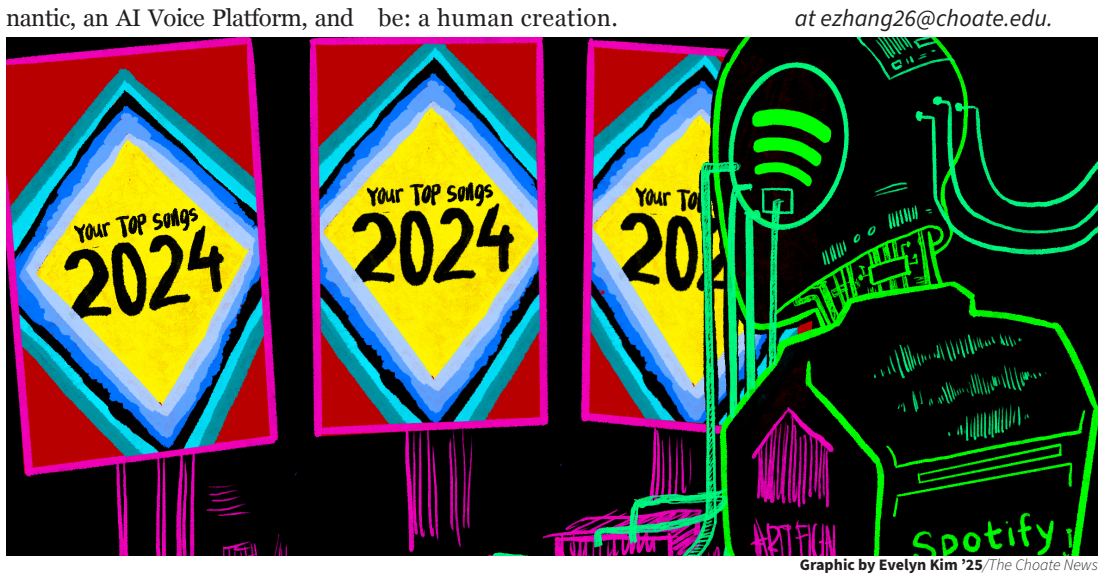
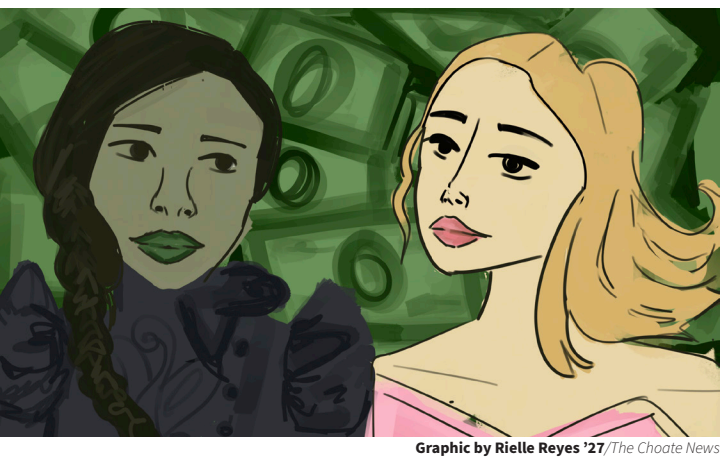


Graphic by Evelyn Kim '25/*The Choate News*

Wicked's Unoriginality


Graphic by Rielle Reyes '27/*The Choate News*

By **Sophie Chung '27**
Opinions Writer

From Elphaba and Glinda-themed Starbucks drinks to Shiz University sweaters at Target, it's hard to miss the staple green and pink colors of the two icons from Universal Pictures' new 2024 film *Wicked*. And yet, the record-breaking commercial success of the film holds concerning implications for the film industry and Hollywood as a whole, particularly in its increasing reliance on marketing dominance over originality.

The movie *Wicked* was adapted from the Broadway Musical of the same name, which was made as a rendition of Gregory McGuire's book *Wicked* (1995), a prequel to the *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). When the show first began in 2003, audiences were ecstatic to see the Wicked Witch's perspective in this legacy prequel. *Wicked* has already broken numerous records, with ticket sales ranking as the third-best domestic debut of the year and surpassing *Grease* (1978) in the highest-grossing Broadway film adaptation.

However, *Wicked*'s success shows a troubling trend in Hollywood. While experiencing *Wicked* as a movie is different from experiencing it as a musical, the plot remains virtually identical. The overwhelming success of the movie sends a dangerous message to filmmakers: that retelling the same story, rather than investing in original plots, can be just as or even more successful than the original. This pattern can be seen throughout the last few decades, with other remakes of Hollywood movies such as the animated *Aladdin* (1992) and its live-action remake *Aladdin* (2019). And now, with the unprecedented success of *Wicked*, this trend of sidelining originality in favor of familiar, marketable stories will only continue further.

Mass public consumption of remakes and the massive profits that come with that process can take away a sense of creativity and authenticity in movies. When filmmakers are more focused on recreating existing narratives, it discredits the original creators and further discourages existing filmmakers from coming up with new ideas and unique concepts. In other words, it limits creative liberty in filmmaking. The best movies that are known and cherished are a direct product of filmmakers' creativity and innovation. Original storytelling has the power to captivate audiences with new and unexpected narratives that remakes simply cannot.

The charm and impact of films depend heavily on the filmmaker's originality. While *Wicked*'s bold marketing techniques and presence in the media have propelled it toward success, filmmakers must be vigilant of the loss of creativity as a direct result of it. *Wicked*'s accomplishments aren't a reason for filmmakers to replace innovation with remakes — they are a warning against the pursuit of success through unoriginality.

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Mangione is the Symptom, Not the Disease

By **Zaki Shamsi '26**
Associate Editor

The American healthcare system doesn't just fail us — it exploits us, draining both finances and hope from people at their most vulnerable moments. It's a grim reality that, like other exploitative systems, is normalized until an extraordinary event forces us to confront its brutality. The alleged murder of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson by Luigi Mangione has ignited a firestorm of debate, but the true focus shouldn't be on Mangione — it should be on the system that drove so many to sympathize with his actions. Now is the time to reckon with the desperation and outrage born from a healthcare industry that constantly prioritizes profits over people.

For millions, healthcare feels more like extortion than care. Nearly half of Americans report difficulty affording basic medical costs, and one in four Americans have delayed or skipped necessary care due to financial constraints. Prescription drugs are no better — 21% of adults have avoided filling prescriptions because they couldn't afford them. Even those with insurance aren't spared, with 48% worrying about affording their premiums and 41% still carrying medical debt. These numbers reveal a system where survival is interlocked with financial privilege, leaving those without resources to navigate a maze of denials and delays that often end in bankruptcy or worse.

This isn't a series of accidents — it's by design. Insurance companies maximize profits by creating barriers to care while their executives rake in seven-figure salaries. Meanwhile, patients are forced to crowdsource for help or cut their medication doses in half just to make them last. It's a business model that preys on vulnerability, and the cracks are widening. The support for Mangione's actions is not an endorsement of violence — it's a powerful indictment of a system that so many view as morally bankrupt.

Desperation breeds outrage, and neglect only feeds it. When people are forced to choose between their health or financial ruin, anger becomes inevitable. Mangione's actions, while indefensible, are a stark reflection of this reality — a symbol of the rage that festers when the system consistently prioritizes profits over people. The longer this desperation is ignored, the more it metastasizes, eroding trust in institutions and fueling a dangerous cycle of frustration and unrest.

Thompson's death, while tragic, has become a flashpoint for this frustration. The memes and online discourse surrounding his role as CEO of UnitedHealthcare aren't about him as an individual — they represent the widespread anger people feel toward a healthcare system that reduces people to policy numbers and revenue streams. This anger is not irrational. It's the inevitable outcome of living under a system where an unexpected $500 medical bill can mean choosing between debt and basic necessities.

But outrage alone won't solve this problem. Reform is not just a moral imperative — it's an economic one, especially in a country as wealthy as the United States. America spends more per capita on healthcare than any other nation, yet it consistently delivers worse outcomes. A system that prioritizes people over profits is long overdue. Solutions like expanding access to government-funded healthcare programs and capping prescription drug prices are not radical — they're common sense in most other developed nations.

The U.S. is the richest country in the world. There's no excuse for a healthcare system where nearly 75% of people worry about unexpected medical bills, and millions are one illness away from financial ruin. We can afford better. What's needed isn't incremental tinkering but a commitment to ensuring that no one's health — or life — is determined by the size of their bank account.

If we fail to act, the cycle of desperation and outrage will continue. Reforming the American healthcare system isn't just about fixing an economic injustice — it's about restoring humanity to a system that has long abandoned it. Let's channel anger into action and demand a system that treats healthcare as a right, not a privilege. Because in the wealthiest nation on Earth, no one should have to crowdfund their survival.

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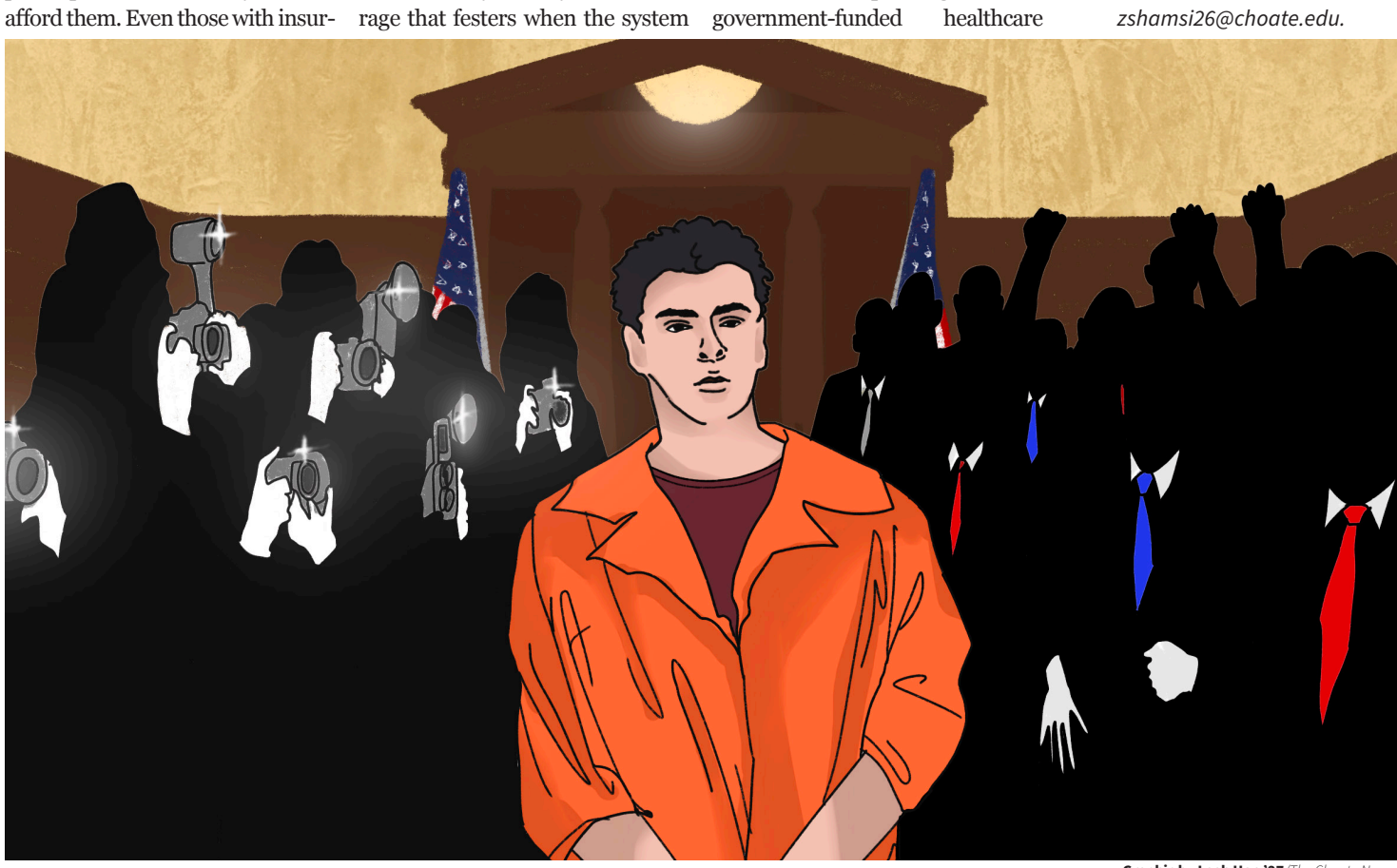
Graphic by Leah Han '27/*The Choate News*

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO BATTLING JET LAG

By **Steven Kee '27**
Associate Editor



Graphic by Rielle Reyes '27/*The Choate News*

All international students know the pain of overcoming jet lag; restless nights and mid-day naps barely rival the mental anguish faced as you toss and turn in your bed at 3 a.m. on the first week of school. Here are some strategies to help students overcome the vicious curse that is jet lag.

Workout

Jet-lagged students often find themselves waking up too early. To combat this, Chengdu, China native Ryan Liu '26 uses exercise to adapt to the 13-hour time difference. "I work out after I arrive, which makes me tired, so I can sleep better at night," he said. This method helps Liu conquer jet lag in just two days.

Gisele Yeung '27, from Hong Kong, shares the same approach to adapt to the 13-hour time difference. She said, "Swim practice definitely helps get me tired, so I can sleep better at night, [while] having to go to practice forces me to stay up." Yeung noted that she'd likely be asleep by 4 p.m. if she didn't need to attend practice.

Adjust on the Plane

As most international journeys take over 10 hours, there is plenty of time for students to try and adjust to their destination's time zone even before landing. Puchong, Malaysia native Laveenya Seenivasagam '27 does not feel significantly affected by the 13-hour time difference, as she begins the adjustment process during her flight. "When I get on a plane, I usually try to fall asleep according to the time of my destination. It usually takes me a very short time [to overcome jet lag]," she said.

Pete Areewong '27, from Bangkok, Thailand, had the same recommendation. He said, "Try and adjust on the plane." By starting to shift their bodies' internal clocks on the plane, Seenivasagam and Areewong can eliminate jet lag in around two days.

Try to Stay Up

For many international flights from Asia, students arrive early in the morning and have to fight the urge to take a nap during the day. However, Dana Tan '25, from Singapore, keeps herself awake by staying busy throughout the day. "Sometimes I watch a movie, decorate my room, or go and do something with my friends," she said.

Despite the struggle of feeling tired throughout the day, Tan credits jet lag for helping her maintain a solid sleep schedule for the first few days of returning to campus, as she would usually be asleep by 10 p.m.

Gage Hakim '28, from Shenzhen, China, also suggests staying awake and sleeping late to overcome jet lag. He said, "I drink coffee in the morning, and then at night, I just get so sleepy that I pass out." By resisting the urge to nap after arriving in the States, Tan and Hakim find themselves able to overcome jet lag within three days.

Eat Well

Going to bed on an empty stomach is never a good idea — especially when jet-lagged. Ben Lee '27, a resident of Seoul, Korea, relies on eating a large amount of food before bed to adjust to the 11-hour time difference.

Eating enough food ensures that he doesn't wake up in the middle of the night feeling hungry, allowing him to have a more restful sleep. Using this strategy, it takes Lee one week to fully adjust to the time change.

Just Don't Try

Who said jet lag must be a bad thing? For DD Chawaldit '26 of Nonthaburi, Thailand, jet lag isn't a problem; "[it's] a benefit." He tries to resist adapting to the 12-hour time change, saying, "I enjoy jet lag, as it makes me productive," allowing him to work late into the night.

To prolong the effects of jet lag, Chawaldit tries to sleep as early as possible and, consequently, wakes up as early as possible. "[Using this method], I can wake up at five [a.m.], go to breakfast, and then do my work," he said.

The next time you find yourself jet-lagged, try one of the strategies above — or don't if you want to maximize early morning productivity in the first few days. Whether staying up by keeping yourself busy or adjusting time zones on the plane, jet lag can be easy to overcome if you arrive to your destination with a plan.

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MUG NIGHTS: A CHOATE TRADITION

By **Chelsea Branch '25**
Copy Editor

Nothing brings people together quite like food. That's why mug nights have become a quintessential Choate tradition — they help foster connection within our campus community. Despite its name, no mugs are required during these celebrations; instead, dormmates gather in their common room to share a savory snack or sweet treat. No matter which dorm you call home, each house puts its own unique spin on the tradition.

Nichols House, a third-form girls' dorm, uses mug nights as a way to help its residents feel at home. With 40 girls under the same roof, it's hard to go more than one week without a mug night celebrating a birthday or a student's accomplishment.

For Nichols residents, mug nights are a beloved tradition. Liyana Nazer '28 said, "I like spending time with my dormmates and eating food." Similarly, Sophie Cho '28 said, "I don't usually get to see all of the people that live in my dorm, but mug nights give us the chance to all celebrate as a community."

In addition to those individual food-filled parties, Nichols's mug nights are often paired with dorm events. Prefect Virginia Nelson '25 reflected on the dorm-wide karaoke night Nichols House hosted at the start of the school year. "I felt like everyone really came together and bonded, and I saw a lot of people jump outside of their comfort zone in a way I hadn't seen before in the dorm," she said. Prefect Nao Murata '25 shared a similar sentiment when she recalled the game of Sardines Nichols House played in the Paul Mellon Humanities Building. "It's one of those ways as a prefect to bond with your prefectees," she said.

And when dorm members weren't singing their hearts out or frantically seeking a new hiding spot, they snacked on chips, dip, veggies, pretzels, and Chick-fil-A.

Sharing food during mug nights is in no way exclusive to Nichols. Rather, it's a staple of any good dorm gathering. To offer some much-needed encouragement to Bungalow House's sixth-form residents, House Mentor and Community Service Director Ms. Melissa Koomson hosts "Monkeybread Mondays." "Ms. Koomson makes her delicious monkey bread, and we all sit together and have a good time," Bungalow resident Zein Kabbani '25 said.

Hall and West Wing, two fourth- and fifth-form girls' dorms, merged into a single residence this academic year. Since then, students have been eager to create new mug night traditions. So far, these gatherings have been a hit! Prefect Syna Mathod '25 recalled one night in particular, saying, "We had a really great cookie decorating event for the fall, ... and we're hoping to do that again in the winter."

In addition to creating new mug night customs, Hall and West Wing will continue to honor its traditions, including Hall's famous "Deck the Halls" celebration. "We do it right before winter break where we put up a Christmas tree as well as some Hanukkah decorations," Prefect Lila Gizzie '25 said.

In the hustle and bustle of Choate life, it's important to pause and spend time with the people who make our high school experience all the more worthwhile. Mug nights are perfect opportunities to do just that. As Sadie Cameron '28 said, mug nights make Nichols House "feel like ... one big family."

For the sixth-form girls living in Bungalow House, mug nights are a good way to get to know their fellow seniors. "It's a way to get to know the people in your dorm. We get to ask questions, play games, and support each other," Vuyisa Kahla '25 said.

Whether it's decorating Christmas trees in Hall and West Wing or singing karaoke in Nichols, each dorm's take on the mug night tradition brings students a wonderful way to destress and form community bonds.

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Photo by Libby Dai '25/*The Choate News*

Bungalow residents meet in the common room for mug night.

How To Avoid Microwave Mishaps



Photos by Harry Kim '28/*The Choate News*

By following the advice below, you can keep your microwaves intact (like the ones pictured above)!

By **Eliana Li '26**
Associate Editor

You're probably tired of hearing, "Ugh, someone blew up the microwave today." At this point, it's a rite of passage at Choate; can you consider yourself a boarding student if you haven't been forced out into the cold because of a cooking adventure gone aflame?

As many of us have experienced, there is an exceedingly thin line between a hot meal and a kitchen catastrophe. But fear not — here's your guide to keeping the microwave in one piece (and keeping your dormmates happy).

1. Water

Make sure there's enough water involved when whipping up Kraft's famous mac and cheese or a chocolate mug cake. Forgetting water can lead to a smoke-filled kitchen — "It's going to burn the food and cause the alarm to go off," Nao Murata '25 said. It's a lose-lose situation for both your snack and your sanity. To be safe, you can even add extra water to prevent an explosion.

Pro Tip: If reheating pizza, place a small cup of water in the microwave alongside your slice. It keeps the crust from turning into a rubbery chew toy.

2. No Metal or Tinfoil

Keep metal utensils and those convenient to-go containers with foil lining far from the microwave. "Metal in the microwave is the key to a disaster; it can easily cause sparks and smoke that would set off a fire alarm," Dana Chung '26 advised. If you are reheating your leftovers, double-check for any sneaky metallic edges on wrappers or your container. After all, your Chipotle burrito can't be "lit" if it's on fire.

3. Stay Close, Stay Safe

You must keep a close eye on your food in the microwave; though it may seem like it, the machine does not have a set-it-and-forget-it timer. That two-minute clock may seem like a perfect opportunity to speed-run a bathroom break, scroll on Instagram, or chill on the sofa, but unattended microwaves lead to disasters.

"People need to stay close so that if their food starts smoking, they can quickly intervene," Murata said. However, if you are far away, you won't notice until the fire alarm goes off. But by then, it's too late.

4. Bonus: What To Do If Disaster Strikes

If you are following these tips, you shouldn't have to worry about a disaster. However, if you find your food burning, resist the urge to toss the food into the trash immediately; it's too late to hide your accident. Instead, it will only make it worse and might start a trash fire. To prevent possible social ostracization, you should unplug the microwave (if safe), keep its door closed, and alert an adult immediately.

By following these tips, you'll save yourself a lot of hassle and avoid the embarrassment of being "that person." So, the next time you're cooking up a storm, remember: it's a microwave, not a toy. Adding enough water, avoiding metal, and watching your food cook can help to avoid any microwave mishaps.

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Art Clubs at Choate: Photography, Magazines, and More

By **Elizabeth Burgstahler '26**
Associate Editor



Graphic by Leah Han '27/*The Choate News*

Throughout the academic year, Choate students have the opportunity to join an array of clubs on campus, allowing them to decompress amidst a busy schedule by doing something they are passionate about. In particular, arts and publication clubs allow students to share their creativity with their peers and express themselves freely. With opportunities to write satire, draw, and create, Choate has a multitude of artistic club opportunities for students to explore. Here are just a few of the many offerings:

The Photography Club

Meeting on Wednesdays monthly, The Photography Club gives students the opportunity to share their work and have a dedicated time period to take photos with other members. The cabinet aims to teach new photographers techniques for effectively taking and editing photos using Adobe Photoshop, while also creating a space for experienced photographers to experiment and share their work.

Vice President Xyla Kiang '26 aims to use the club to make photography more accessible to the Choate community. "We plan to have a Padlet or gallery where people can submit and view student photography," Kiang said. "Half of the purpose of the club is to teach members how to photograph, and half of it is sharing art."

Like many of the other special interest clubs on campus, The Photography Club gives students the opportunity to pursue interests that they would not have time for otherwise. "It's important to have a creative outlet," Kiang said, "When it comes to art, I can put exactly what I'm feeling at the moment into a piece of work."

Lorem Ipsum

Lorem Ipsum, Choate's "best and only satire magazine," gives students the opportunity to express their humor to a larger audience. It allows writers to poke fun at Choate life in an unconventional way. Editor-in-Chief Teniola Obayomi '25 described the uniqueness of *Lorem Ipsum*: "We provide something that other publications might not. Writers get a different experience because, for satire, you're making up the news: the themes and issues are [real] but the actual details and narrative are not. People get the opportunity to exercise their creativity and try something different."

yarn@choate

As one of the newest clubs on campus, yarn@choate already has many events planned for the rest of the school year. Founding members Obayomi, Kaya Weerasuriya '26, and Chloe Lee '26 have worked diligently to bring their vision for the club to life. Obayomi said that each member of the founding cabinet has brought a lot of event proposals and ideas to the table as they get the club running.

The club is committed to making crocheting and knitting more accessible to the Choate community; the cabinet members do not want a lack of experience or materials to stop anyone from joining. Looking ahead, Obayomi said, "We haven't had that many meetings yet, but we have been overlaying how we're going to run and asking people for suggestions. In the future, we hope to do more teaching sessions, and we want to supply materials from the I.D. lab."

The Lit

As one of the oldest publications on campus, *The Lit* has significantly impacted the Choate community. The publication makes an effort to host frequent meetings where writers and artists can express their creativity by offering a diverse range of events, such as Lit Launch, an annual publication launch held in the Student Activities Center (SAC) for their winter issue.

Editor of Layout Rafia Pasha '26 has been involved in *The Lit* since her freshman year. She enjoys submitting her visual art, especially her photography, to *The Lit*. Reflecting on the diverse opportunities *The Lit* offers, Pasha said "There are other publications where you have to talk about a specific thing, but at *The Lit*, you can just submit anything that you're really passionate about."

While *The Lit's* physical magazine is important, its meetings are equally significant to the culture of the publication. "My favorite event last year was the Deerfield Day tie-dying event, but I also enjoy this one meeting that we do every year where we draw part of a picture or write part of a poem and then pass it on to someone else to complete. It's very creative!" Pasha said.

From photography and satire to knitting, Choate's artistic clubs and publications allow students to express their creativity and pursue their passions. Whether you are a seasoned artist, a budding writer, or just looking to try something new, come join the art club life on campus and see what's in store!

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A Journey of Dreams: *Eire We Go* by Ms. Tracy James Terry



Photo by Harry Kim '28/*The Choate News*

Ms. Tracy James Terry in front of the PMAC, home to students who have supported her in her ventures.

By **Sophie Park '27**
Reporter

Besides her regular role as an Acting teacher and Costume Designer for Choate's theater productions, Ms. Tracy James Terry has also proved herself to be a skilled screenwriter. Her screenplay *Eire We Go* has been nominated for awards at five film festivals, winning Best Comedy Feature at the Georgia Comedy Film Festival.

The film features a fictional theater company that is falling apart entitled The Wilde Players Theater, whose actors stumble upon a contest in Ireland that could potentially save their theater. Despite personal issues and cultural differences, they manage to make life-changing memories throughout their journey. The first draft of the film started as a 15-minute play based on Ms. Terry's personal experiences and adoration of Ireland's people, culture, and beauty, and it has now evolved into a full-length film script awaiting the big screen.

After winning the playwriting contest at the Gaelic American Club (GAC) in 2014, Ms. terry developed her play into a single 50-minute act in 2016, premiering the new version in Ireland, the place where the story is based.

Three years later, the production made it to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival as a sold-out show with rave reviews, which influenced Ms. Terry to return to graduate school at the NYU School of Professional Studies for Screen and Television to start screenwriting professionally. "I went back to school, read every book on screenwriting, and learned how to write for film," she said. Reflecting on her writing process for "Eire We Go," she said, "The first time, you're going to have to edit and edit and redo. I am still working on it, but I am still learning."

Eire We Go won Best Comedy Feature Screenplay at the 2024 Georgia Comedy Film Festival, was a finalist in the Mystic Connecticut Film Festival, semi-finalist in the Rhode Island International Film Festival, and was also nominated for the SilverScreen International Film Festival.

Regarding these awards, Ms. Terry mentioned that she was especially thrilled with her win at the Georgia Comedy Film Festival. "I was speechless. My friends were more excited because I was stunned, ... but it was good," she said.

Ms. Terry has been a Choate faculty member for 10 years. She explained how her connection with students at Choate has played a key role in the filmmaking process. "I've shown them the trailers. They're good cheerleaders. They're my biggest fans."

Ms. Terry is currently focused on the fundraising part of the filmmaking journey, and she looks forward to the filming of *Eire We Go* in Ireland, which is scheduled for 2025. "It's slow, but it's going," she said. "I intend to give back to the community that helped create this story in the first place by helping facilitate the growth of film in Limerick, [Ireland]."

Aside from *Eire We Go*, Ms. Terry plans to continue her career as a screenwriter and is currently working on a brand new script for a supernatural thriller. She encourages students who are newly into screenwriting and filmmaking to "just practice [and] practice. "You can do it. I am still working on it and am still learning. Just keep learning all the time," she said.

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Spicing Up Your Home Away From Home: Dorm Room Design

By **Eliana Li '26**
Associate Editor

For Choate students, dorm rooms are more than just places to sleep. From carefully curated Pinterest-inspired themes to spontaneous designs with sentimental touches, students have turned these spaces into reflections of their unique styles and needs.

Many students find inspiration from social media platforms like Pinterest or TikTok, where there are countless dorm room tours and aesthetic setups to choose from. "I loved going on Pinterest to see how I wanted my room to look, it gave me so many options to choose from," Nicha Tongdee '26 said. These social media platforms also have a wide variety of decor to choose from, like posters and small lamps, which have helped students make their rooms picture-perfect.

Others, however, have taken a more spontaneous approach, bringing items from home and arranging them as they go. "I didn't really plan in advance — I just threw things together that felt right," Isa Marvin '26 said. Ayaz Zuberi '27 shared the same sentiment: "I put four posters that I found up and called it a day."

For some students, maintaining a theme is key in the decoration process. "I wanted my room to feel like a peaceful space to be in, so the theme in my room is coastal and beachy. When I'm in my room, it just makes me feel so calm," Sofie Leenheer '27 said. Piper Cameron '25 also put much thought into her theme: "My theme is pinky-flowery. I have a pink bedspread and all of my posters are different flowers. I love the floral vibes because it makes me feel at home."

For others, personalization and sentimental items are a major focus. From photo walls to national flags, these items evoke feelings of comfort in their home away from home. "I have a photo wall with pictures of my friends and family. It makes me feel really happy because I get to see moments when I felt happy," Anne Coady '26 said. "I also have a poster with notes from my friends back home on my wall, and it reminds me of them every day."

Similarly, Fernanda Opazo Aravena '25 shared, "I have a Chilean flag and photos of my friends on my wall. They are reminders of what means the most to me." Although these students did not center their dorm room decoration around a specific theme, they have added special, personalized touches that make their rooms feel more like home.

Many students have also focused on creating a relaxing, cozy atmosphere. "We have LED lights and a bean bag in the corner of our room and it makes our room feel super cozy," Tongdee shared. Not only have these items helped students make their rooms a relaxing space, but they also create a space where their friends can hang out all at once. "I have a couch with pillows and blankets on it. My friends and I love to hang out there because there's so much seating," Libby Dai '25 said.

Whether carefully planned or thrown together with a handful of posters and miscellaneous objects, each student has made their dorm room a unique reflection of themselves. Beyond aesthetics, these rooms serve as both functional and personal spaces that make campus life a little brighter.

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Graphic by Evelyn Kim '25/*The Choate News*

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SPORTS

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Boys' Basketball (8-2)
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Girls' Basketball (8-2)
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Girls' Swimming and Diving (2-1)
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Boys' Swimming and Diving (2-1)
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Athletes and Advocates: Get to Know Guest Speakers, The Woodhalls

By **Kaitlyn Yu '27 and Eliana Li '26**
Associate Editors

On January 24, Choate welcomed the long-awaited guests of Diversity Day 2025: American Olympic Track and Field Gold Medalists Mrs. Tara Davis-Woodhall and Mr. Hunter Woodhall. The "power couple" shared their experiences and wisdom in Colony Hall.

The Woodhalls emerged as an internet sensation after Mrs. Davis-Woodhall took the Olympic Gold in the women's long jump at Paris 2024, becoming the fourth American to place first in the event. The moment after her victory became a viral video clip when she ran to her husband to celebrate, as Mr. Woodhall exclaimed, "I'm so proud of you ... you did it ... you needed it."

Less than a month later, Mr. Woodhall became the Paralympic Champion in the men's 400m T62 and ran up to his wife just as she did to him. Since then, they have documented their lives on Instagram and TikTok, garnering over 724,000 and 304,000 followers, respectively. Although Mrs. Davis-Woodhall and Mr. Woodhall's journey to the Olympic stage were forged from separate paths, they have shared a common resiliency to reach the top in their sport.

Mrs. Davis-Woodhall was born in Mesquite, Texas, and her father was a former track and field athlete at Texas A&M University. In high school, she broke the American junior record for the indoor long jump at the Dumanis Sports Group Prep Classic, set multiple school records, and later set the state record in the long jump at the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) State Meet. After graduating high school, Mrs. Davis-Woodhall attended the University of Georgia, where she broke the World Under-20 Record in the 60m hurdles. After a season at Georgia, she transferred to the University of Texas, where she set the collegiate long jump record. Since then, she has collected significant accolades on the international level.

However, Mrs. Davis-Woodhall's journey to the top was not as smooth as it may seem. The two-time Olympian has been open about mental health struggles as a pro-athlete, sharing her experiences battling depression and abusive coaching in college. She even contemplated quitting the sport entirely, but ultimately came to the realization that her life was about more than just a sport, She shared with EssentiallySports, "We can either continue to be sad and be in bed all day, or we can go outside and enjoy life — a life that we only have one time to live." She later shared on her Instagram story, "Because this isn't talked about enough ... leave the mentally abusive coaching situation ... This is your career, not theirs. And coaches, athletes are humans too."

Mrs. Davis-Woodhall's resiliency is also reflected in Mr. Woodhall, who was faced with his own challenges navigating life as a double amputee. Mr. Woodhall was born in Cartersville, Georgia while his father was serving in the military. When he was 11 months old, his parents decided to amputate both of his legs due to fibular hemimelia, a condition that prevents the lower limbs from developing properly. To instill confidence in Mr. Woodhall after several bullying incidents at school, his parents took him to the Vancouver 2010 Winter Paralympics, which ultimately inspired him to join a Paralympic team in 2015. By his senior year of high school, Mr. Woodhall was ranked 20th in America in the men's 400m, had won five state titles, and was named the 2016 Male High School Track Athlete of the Year. Upon graduating, he became the first double-amputee track and field athlete to earn a Division I athletic scholarship, which he accepted at the University of Arkansas. In college, he was nominated for National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Game Changer of the Year and was a four-time first-team All-American.

However, in 2023, Mr. Woodhall also faced a major setback in his career as he broke his prosthetic legs during the World Championships — an incident that crushed his goals and forced him to withdraw from the finals. Before making a return to the world stage, Mr. Woodhall shared on his Instagram: "I've made more changes over the past year than ever in my career. It's scary to see if those gambles are going to pay off, but so rewarding when they do."



Photo courtesy of Dr. Rachel Meyers

Hunter Woodhall and Tara Davis-Woodhall pose with their gold medals.

Together, the couple has accomplished notable feats in their mission to promote diversity and inclusion in sports. "We bring a lot of diversity into our relationship, and we want to be really transparent about that. Tara is a woman of color. I have a disability," Mr. Woodhall said. They have used their platform to inspire countless individuals, creating a space where athletes of all backgrounds feel represented and empowered. They encourage others to embrace their differences and use their challenges as a source of strength. As Mrs. Davis-Woodhall said at the Olympics, "For all the women and girls out there, even the boys, we can do it! You can do it! You matter and everything, everything, exists for you. And your mind is so much stronger than you ever think."

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Unwinding Through Wellness: How Students Use Athletic Facilities

By **Steven Kee '27**
Associate Editor

Choate's athletic facilities aren't just for teams — when faced with stress, many students often utilize the School's sports facilities to step away from work and alleviate academic pressure. From the swimming pool to the gym, here are some of the ways students use Choate's sports facilities recreationally.

Open Skate

Every weekend, amidst the tight schedule of Remsen Arena, an hour is reserved for open skate. During open skate, any student or member of the Choate community can relax, unwind, and simply spend some time on the ice. For Kate Park '27, open skate gives her time alone to unplug from the stresses of the school week. "It's relaxing because it allows me to move at my own pace without the pressure of structured activity ... The low-stress environment helps me clear my mind," Park said. She noted that since open skate is not widely known, only about 10 people are on the ice at once. With it being available only once a week, Park suggested extending open skate times throughout the week for more chances to unwind on the ice.

Open Swim

Another facility that carves out open usage time for the Choate community is the Larry Hart Pool. Students can access the pool biweekly for open swims on Thursday mornings and Sunday afternoons. For Girls' Varsity Swimmer Gisele Yeung '27, open swim differs from her usual swim practices, as it is an opportunity to improve her mental well-being. "I think swimming during open swim is kind of like a mental reset because when I'm in the water, all outside sounds get drowned out, so I have a chance to empty my mind," Yeung said.

On the other hand, Boys' Varsity Swim Captain Daneel Polakoff '25 uses open swim as a chance to continue his training on Thursdays and uses the Sunday session for relaxation. "I usually use Thursday morning [open swim] to do sets outside of practice ... but the Sunday open swim, it's for recreation," he said. Despite the popularity of swimming at Choate, both swimmers highlighted that the pool's crowd size is ideal during open swim. "There's usually around five to seven people in the mornings," Polakoff said.

Pickup Basketball

Not all usage of the School's sports facilities are structured. Students often play pickup basketball on the Worthington Johnson Athletic Center's (WJAC) courts. Frequent pickup player Owen Holbrook '25 described the atmosphere as a friendly, low-stakes competition: "It's fairly competitive, but I think there's a friendly aspect about it. ... [Even] if you miss a shot, you're not going to get yelled at," he said. Holbrook's fondest memory of playing pickup basketball was when his team made a comeback after being down 10 points during halftime. For Holbrook, the sport is not just a source of entertainment but also a stress reliever. "It's a good way for me to get off my screen, [and] to just not have to worry about anything," he said.

Running on the Cross Country Trail

Not all athletic facilities are indoors — some students find refuge in nature. Gulaid Muse '26 finds running on the cross country trail to be a great way to relax. "[The cross country trail] is so special — the land, the trees, the beauty of it all. Sometimes, it feels like you're not even running. I feel like I can do anything, and it is just such an amazing and calm place," he said. Muse also uses running on the trail with friends as time to bond.

Recreational Squash

The squash courts in the WJAC are not just for the squash teams but also for recreational players. Aureliano Applebee '26 often plays squash with his father as a family bonding activity. He said, "I bond very well with the people around me when I'm doing something athletic with them." Additionally, playing squash allows Applebee to reconnect with friends. "It's really great to connect with friends that I haven't talked to in a while. It's an outlet to be like, 'Hey, what's up, guys? Want to go play squash?'" Though Applebee only plays for fun, he sometimes seeks advice from Varsity Squash players.

Going to the Fitness Center

Whether to lift weights or do cardio, the fitness center at the WJAC is undoubtedly a top destination for students looking to improve both their physical and mental health. Tennis player Reid Bock '27 goes to the gym in the morning to improve his fitness for the tennis season and to get in the right mindset for the day. "When I go in the morning, I feel more productive coming into class," he said.

Choate's athletic facilities significantly support students' physical well-being and the community's mental wellness. For many, playing sports is a way to destress and step back from schoolwork. The next time you need a break, try hopping on the ice for an hour, playing pickup basketball with friends, or simply appreciating the winter foliage on the cross country trail.

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Splash of Spirit: Blue vs. Gold Meet

By **Norah Wang '27**
Reporter

Head Swimming Coach Nolan Silbernagel hosted the Blue vs. Gold Swim Meet on December 11, 2024, a tradition he created three seasons ago upon his arrival at Choate. Inspired by the Lakeland Hills Family YMCA Swim Team of New Jersey, where he swam competitively, Coach Silbernagel brought the event to Choate to foster team spirit. As an intrasquad meet, the event provides a low-stakes opportunity for new high school level swimmers to understand the logistics of a swim meet. Girls' Co-Captain Isabelle Jiao '26 said, "Swimming is a very challenging sport, mentally and physically, but having your teammates there to cheer you on makes it so much easier."

The competitiveness started a few days before the meet when the Girls and Boys' captains — Nicha Tongdee '26, Claudia Li '26, Jiao, Daneel Polakoff '25, Antonio Giraldez Greco '25, and Michael Xu '25 — gathered privately in Coach Silbernagel's office to draft swimmers to their respective teams, entitled Blue and Gold. Three captains led each team, so there was quite a bit of back and forth between drafting. "The captains do research and recruiting before [the meet], so it encourages them to get to know the new swimmers," Coach Silbernagel said. Captains compare swimmers' times and get to know new team members, working with each other to understand how they can build the perfect teams. At the meet, each team scores points through swimming the fastest and having the most team spirit.

Some events, like the Boys' 400-meter freestyle relays, exhibited close competition this year, generating considerable anticipation over who would win. "It was neck and neck, and it was really fun cheering for the Gold Team," Tongdee said. Although the swim meet was competitive, it was mostly meant for the enjoyment of participants and spectators alike. In addition to advancing through swimming, both teams were rewarded points for the most team spirit. For instance, each team could boost their total team score by having the most creative poster or the coolest face paint. "Having those fun side competitions along with the low-stakes swimming made the meet very enjoyable," Tongdee remarked.

Although the meet only took up one practice slot, the event's impact on the team will be seen throughout the rest of the season. The captains credit the team's high-spirited energy at every meet to the Blue vs. Gold Swim Meet, believing that its role as a team-building event creates a powerful camaraderie from within the team. "The [Blue vs. Gold Swim] Meet brings us together as one team at the beginning of the season, and we carry that energy to every meet afterward," Giraldez Greco concluded.

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Photo courtesy of Kay Lee '25

Swimmers cheer on their teammates at the Blue vs. Gold Swim Meet.