The Choate News

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Boars Open Doors for Newly Admitted Students

By **Taeyoung Kim '28**
Reporter

Choate welcomed over 220 newly admitted students during Spring Visit Days on March 30-April 2, offering prospective students and their families a first-hand experience of Choate life.

The week included student shadowing, panel sessions, a Community Fair, and an opportunity to see the new admissions building, Carr Hall, in action. As guests arrived, they were greeted by Choate students, Gold Key Ambassadors, and Boar Pen, who guided them to Colony Hall, where Head of School Dr. Alex Curtis and Chief Enrollment Manager Mr. Jeffrey Beaton delivered their opening remarks. At the conclusion of the speeches, several deans joined together in dance to celebrate the students' acceptances, marking a joyful start to the day.



Photo courtesy of Joey Avena

Choate students enthusiastically welcome prospective students.

The campus experience started with families taking photos with Choate's wild boar mascot. Prospective students, paired up with their student hosts, stepped into classrooms, participated in discussions, shared a meal in the newly renovated dining hall, and fully immersed themselves in the life of a Choate student.

Meanwhile, parents and guardians attended Q&A sessions led by various faculty members. These panels allowed parents to ask questions about academic support, athletics, Signature Programs, and study abroad opportunities. Carr Hall served as the foundation for many of these activities, providing welcoming spaces for families to relax and connect. "We had a coffee hour and dessert," Assistant Director of Admissions Ms. Beth Berestecky said. "After lunch, families would come back here, and we had different faculty members and current parents mingle with [them]."

Carr Hall, a new welcome center, transformed the Admissions experience and left a lasting impression on visitors. "It's a beautiful building that had an impact on visitors," Juliet Eller '27 said.

While Carr Hall served as the foundation of the week, its impact was best seen through the experiences of the many student hosts who brought the space to life. "We [received] a lot of instruction beforehand from the admissions. Carr Hall was helpful for training sessions," said Eller, who toured a prospective 3rd former from Texas. Jacob BriseBois '28 hosted a prospective student interested in hockey, and the two quickly bonded over their shared love of the sport. "There was a lot of good energy," BriseBois said. "Carr Hall also helped. It is a beautiful building that made a great impression on the visitors."

Outside scheduled classes, student hosts led informal campus tours, allowing prospective students to explore areas not included in the official itinerary, such as visiting dorm rooms, common spaces, and specific athletic fields. Aidan Su '29 toured a prospective student-athlete from New Haven who was interested in science and robotics. "I took him to the Lanphier Center and went down to the i.d.Lab," Su said.

At the end of the day, visitors met with their families at the Seymour St. John Chapel and, following a speech from the student body president, headed to the Community Fair. Students explored various clubs, engaged in conversations with team captains and coaches, and learned more about Choate's specific departments.

"The community really made it a successful week," Ms. Berestecky said. "We are trying to yield as many kids as possible, and last year we did. So our goal is to hopefully ... match that [but also] to make people feel welcome and get to know us better."

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Choate's Muslim Community Hosts Celebrations for Eid al-Fitr

By **Sophie Chung '27**
Staff Contributor



Photo by Kadija Benzinane '27/*The Choate News*

Students pose beside festive Eid decorations.

An Eid celebration hosted by Choate's Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) club, the Muslim Student Association (MSA), and the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion brought together students and faculty on March 20. The event marked the end of Ramadan and was celebrated with food and music. Eid al-Fitr is one of the most significant Muslim holidays, bringing to a close a month of fasting from dawn to dusk. For many students observing Ramadan on campus, the MSA-hosted event was both a celebration and a way to feel connected to home. Ms. Sanaa Sofiane, an Aide for the Health Center and Student Activities who helped organize the event, explained, "The goal was to make students feel like they are home, so we give them love and food."

The event also highlighted the dedication required for fasting for a month. Mr. Yassine Benzanine, who serves as the Muslim Chaplain on campus and a faculty member in the Language Department, said that fasting for 30 days is "quite a big deal...I just want to show how much we appreciate them [the students]."

Food was an integral part of the evening, too. This year's menu featured authentic local Moroccan food from Moroccan World Shop, including dishes such as Tagine, kufta barbecue, and traditional tea and cookies. One attendant of the event, Gulaid Muse '26, noted the variety and quality of the food: "I saw some samples from Senegal, I saw some samples from Nigeria."

Beyond the food, the organizers worked to incorporate other cultural elements and activities, including henna, drumming, traditional dress, decorations from Mr. Benzanine's classroom, and a Moroccan tea pouring activity. These activities aimed to balance authenticity and accessibility, as this event was open to the whole Choate community. Although smaller than other larger cultural events on campus, the community was warm: Muse said, "The community felt close-knit, and everyone was talking to each other." For students who celebrate Eid like Muse, the event carried personal significance. "The food and community felt like Eid at home in the sense of gathering together with people who feel like family," he said.

The event also served as an opportunity for cultural learning. Mr. Benazanine emphasized the importance of sharing the meaning of Eid with the broader community, hoping students would "get some knowledge about what Eid means; when we finish fasting, we celebrate." This increased awareness already impacted our community as students continued conversations about Ramadan and Eid beyond the event itself.

Looking ahead, both organizers and attendees said that more advertisements would help expand the event's reach. Mr. Benzanine suggested that future events may involve broader outreach, potentially by collaborating with other schools.

As Muse said, "I think it is something that we should always do, we should always be able to have our own cultures." Ultimately, the Eid celebration demonstrated the value of cultural events in strengthening the Choate community.

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English Faculty Tackle Food Insecurity At CT Foodshare

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

On Monday, the 23, Choate faculty returned to campus for Department Day, which for many involved routine meetings. However, the English Department used the opportunity to do good within the broader Wallingford community through a day of service at Connecticut Foodshare in Wallingford. The day was intended not only to build rapport but also to understand the importance of empathy, awareness, and responsibility for those affected by food shortages through hands-on meal packing.

At CT Foodshare, faculty spent hours sorting and packing food. The result was approximately 13,000 prepared meals weighing in at a whopping 15,000 pounds. Reflecting on the experience, English teacher Mr. John Cobb shared, "It was work ... we were going for straight hours." However, he also noted that the challenge and the separation from the typical department routine made the experience meaningful. "It's always good for people to get outside the bubble, go in, do something good, a random act of kindness," Mr. Cobb said.

Inspiration for the event came from a broader departmental initiative to engage in shared experiences beyond teaching. English teacher Dr. Mary Roca explained that the department has been thinking about "sustainability as it connects to what we do in teaching literature." She also said that the trip encouraged her to consider "what are the systems that we need to be thinking about ... that are going to make life sustainable for everyone?" While these ideas may appear disassociated from the discipline of English, Teaching and Learning Center Support teacher and member of the English Department, Ms. Megan Shea, deemed them to be grounded in the department's values around, as she put it, "how to live good and right."

Community service similarly aligns with the goals of literature. As Ms. Shea said, "one of the values of reading good literature is to learn how to be empathetic and kind." The trip reflected the curriculum's core values, like exposing issues such as socioeconomic disparity and global inequality, which are topics frequently discussed around the Choate Harkness table. "Food is kind of a central way in which you see the split between the wealthy and the poor," Ms. Shea said. In this way, the program allowed faculty to gain hands-on experience with the concepts they teach every day and to better understand the impact of service on communities. Dr. Roca also noted that the day was deeply rooted in the department's commitment to "praxis," or the notion of putting theory into practice. She said that the trip was about "not just teaching concepts but living them," emphasizing the department's focus on public humanities and "the value of service learning in support of literary studies."

The trip fostered a sense of collaboration among faculty, something often hard to come by amid the hustle of a packed day at Choate. Mr. Cobb appreciated how the day offered a space for collaboration: "I think bringing us together outside of the school setting to do a shared enterprise was worth it," Mr. Cobb said.

For the English department, the day was neither a break from their work nor a random act of service, but rather an extension of the values that Choate educators incorporate in their teaching every day — as well as an opportunity to deepen their own bonds with one another.

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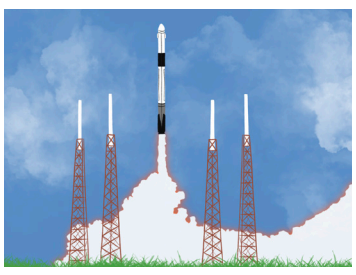


Photo courtesy of @gochoate on Instagram

English teachers pack fruits into boxes.

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Read it, then recycle it.

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SCHOOL NEWS

HOW CHOATE CHOOSES ITS COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER



Photo courtesy of photos.choate.edu

Seth Myers gives a speech at Choate's Commencement ceremony.

By **Drew Wolfson '27**
Staff Contributor

Every spring, the Choate community waits in anticipation for the announcement of the commencement speaker. The Class of 2026 was fortunate to hear from Billie Jean King, Adrian Greiner, and Seth Meyers during their first three years at Choate. As the Class of 2026's own graduation approaches, anticipation is building around the announcement of the commencement speaker.

The selection process is led by the Head of Student and Academic Life, Ms. Jenny Elliott, and the Head of School, Dr. Alex Curtis. According to Ms. Elliott, "Dr. Curtis plays the central role in thinking through who the speaker should be. We try to find a speaker that honors our institution's values and presents a voice that we hope will be inspiring and meaningful for our graduating students."

Timing is important when finding the right speaker, with graduation sometimes falling on Memorial Day weekend. In past years, the speaker was announced early in the year, while for others the announcement was delayed until weeks before commencement. Occasionally, speakers will change their plans as the date approaches, so Choate is often in contact with many different speakers.

According to Ms. Elliott, the School seeks "someone whose career or life decisions feel consistent with things that we really care about ... I think it has been important to us to think about folks who have worked to make the world more just and demonstrated that they are lifelong learners."

Ms. Elliott said that during he graduation speaker's remarks, she looks at the seniors and thinks about how they are responding to the speaker's words. Ms. Elliott acknowledged that students may be looking for different things in a speech. In reflecting on Seth Meyers' speech from the '24-'25 academic year, Ms. Elliott said, "I do think [he] is probably someone that they were really responding to. I think in large part because Seth did work to learn about our kids and about our campus. I think comedians will do that to land the jokes, and so I think that was fun for our kids."

With regard to the students, Ms. Elliott said, "Some are looking to be really reflective of their time at Choate, so they want someone who is able to help them think about that, while others are looking for someone to really inspire." A divisive or provocative speaker will not likely appear on stage; instead, Choate is looking for "someone whose message will land with as many of our students as possible and our families."

As the administration finalizes this year's guest, Ms. Elliott and Dr. Curtis look to balance the speaker's speech, their own speeches, and the senior remarks on graduation day. Ultimately, they are hoping to find a speaker whose message will feel fresh and meaningful to the Choate community.

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A KINDER GROUND VISITS CHOATE

By **Malaika Fonkem '29**
Reporter

A Kinder Ground Cafe provided meals on campus to Choate faculty and staff over spring break, connecting members of the Wallingford community and committing to the nonprofit's overall mission of inclusion for differently-abled people.

A Kinder Ground Cafe is a restaurant located in Wallingford that provides differently-abled adults with employment opportunities in a supportive environment. Attendees said that the event gave them a space to gather, connect, and enjoy lunch, in addition to introducing many attendees to A Kinder Ground Cafe's commitment to inclusion.

The purpose of the occasion went beyond hospitality. Through inviting A Kinder Ground Cafe onto campus, Choate created an opportunity for the nonprofit to share its commitment in an impactful way on a large-scale platform such as the School's social media. The cafe's set-up was designed to support hands-on experience and work, allowing members of the program to build confidence and independence. Many of Choate's staff members who attended the event saw this mission in action and noted the inclusive environment. Chief Communications Officer Ms. Alison Cady said, "I admired that they allowed differently-abled employees to do the work almost completely alone without badgering [the workers]." Bringing this mission to campus helped strengthen and connect the school to those throughout the Wallingford community, and reinforce respect, opportunity, and inclusion.

The event was met with enthusiasm from the Administrative Assistant at the Dean of Faculty's Office, Ms. Kathy. White, who said she "appreciated the event's intentions to bring awareness to this issue [disallowing differently abled people to be in the workplace] in a lighthearted and positive manner." Many other attendees agreed with Ms. White's appreciation of the event. During the event, attendees asked questions about the cafe's programs and reflected on how similar themes could be explored in their own classrooms or offices, in addition to appreciating the meal. For many, it was an introduction to an important organization, but for others, it reinforced the importance of engaging with the community.

Overall, the event supported the broader significance of Choate partnering with service groups in Wallingford. Through institutional support, Choate continues to build connections with the Wallingford community around shared values of inclusion and accessibility.

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Photo courtesy of @gochoate on Instagram

Teachers line up to be served a hot meal.

Spring Break Travels: From the Whitney Plantation to the Dartmouth Green

By **Mary Higashi '29**
Copy Editor

While many Choate students chose to spend spring break at home, others spent it walking through the legacy of the American South or imagining their futures on college campuses. Whatever opportunities Choate students chose to explore, Spring break was a time that the entire Choate community rested, relaxed, and pursued their personal interests and passions outside the classroom.

The trip, South on a Spoon, was organized by American Studies teacher Dr. Amber Hodge, Dean of Equity and Inclusion Dr. Rachel Myers, and Associate Dean of Equity and Inclusion Ms. Cindy Okrah. The process of developing this program involved extensive coordination and involvement. "It has been at least three years that the trip was in planning," Dr. Hodge explained. Students who visited New Orleans, Jackson, and Memphis explored the history of the civil rights movement and slavery in the South, as well as Southern culture through workshops and local cuisine.

One standout moment Dr. Hodge noted occurred in New Orleans, where students got the opportunity to visit the Whitney Plantation. Dr. Hodge described the museum and memorial, dedicated to the history of enslaved people, as unlike "romanticized versions of what the postbellum period was." This experience, along with many others, touched on the core theme of this trip: to "step into those hard truths about U.S history, but doing it in an accessible way, where there are also moments for joy as well," as Dr. Myers explained.



Photo courtesy of @gochoate on Instagram

Choate students on their visit to Dartmouth College.

A lot of these moments of joy came from culinary experiences. By trying beignets, fried dishes, and po'boy sandwiches, students got an authentic taste of Southern cuisine. Dr. Hodge recalled dining at Dooky Chase as one of her favorite meals on the trip, noting that "one of the big chefs associated with [the restaurant] is actually the inspiration for Tiana from Princess and the Frog." Beyond trying local cuisine, students explored the cultural roots of the food in Black Southern and West African traditions by visiting the Crescent City Farmers Market and even engaging in hands-on experience through a cooking class where students learned to make gumbo, a thick, flavorful stew made with dark roux, mixed vegetables, and a choice of sausage or seafood

Both Dr. Myers and Dr. Hodge brought personal and academic connections to planning the trip. Having degrees in Black studies, Dr. Myers described feeling particularly connected to the activities they planned. "It was really visceral... because you're experiencing it, walking in a situation, not just reading about it," Dr. Myers said. Dr. Hodge, who studied and lived in Mississippi for six years, recommended local activities to create an authentic experience. "I think I brought some good local recommendations that we might not have seen otherwise," Dr. Hodge said, while also crediting the travel team they worked with.

While South on a Spoon was about understanding the past, the spring college tour was about switching focus to the future, and thinking ahead to where students might see themselves in the years to come. Over four days, students visited seven colleges in the Northeast across a wide range of sizes, locations, and campus atmospheres.

Associate Dean of College Counseling Mr. Mo Zelaya described the goal of the trip as helping students "better understand diverse college types, begin developing college research skills, [and] feel empowered to ask thoughtful questions aligned with their interests."

Having a variety of college environments on the tour helped students to understand their own needs when pursuing higher education. "It really gave me a better sense of what kind of college would be the best fit for me," Arushi Krishnan '27 said. Krishnan explained that being on campus in person shifted perspectives, as a college that seemingly "checks all your boxes" may not feel right once you visit.

One aspect in particular that stood out to the participants of the tour was the opportunity to talk to Choate alumni from each university. Students met with 13 alumni across the seven colleges. "Seeing Choate alums at these colleges made the experience feel more real, and it helped me imagine myself at these colleges more clearly," Ema Silfa '28 said. Through the spring college tour, students were able to form their own impressions and figure out what they value in an environment for their four years after Choate.

Through two very distinct spring break trips, Choate students were offered a chance to connect with one another. "I got to meet people that I really wouldn't have communicated with otherwise," Yui Sugimoto '28 said. "Students built connections by bonding over discussing Southern culture or future plans in college, and gained insight through specialized opportunities."

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NEW COMMUNITY SERVICE INITIATIVES LAUNCH

By **Sophie Chung '27**
Staff Contributor



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

Each year, Choate students complete their 10 hours of community service in many ways, often through club events, school programs, Community Service Day, or other opportunities outside of school. For many, these 10 hours might feel like another box to check; for others, community service is a unique opportunity to help and engage with the community around them. This year, Choate students are taking this initiative a step further by integrating their service projects into the Wallingford community.

Arushi Krishnan '27 and Violeta Rodriguez '27 are forging deeper connections with members of the Wallingford community. Their new community service project, Building English Bridges, invites Spanish-speaking students of all levels to work on English skills with native Spanish speakers. Working with American Building Maintenance (ABM), Choate's janitorial service, students will have the opportunity to interact with the team while also learning some Spanish.

Building English Bridges began when Krishnan, who was already helping native speakers in her local community, decided to take the next step. Rodriguez, who is Chilean, also got involved, and the two worked with Spanish teacher Ms. Azucena Alvarez Alonso to submit their club proposal.

To get Krishnan's proposal approved, the original club plan had to undergo some revisions. While the project was open only to language students at level 350 and above, it was now open to all Spanish-speaking students. Another challenge they faced was finding a local group to work with; Krishnan and Rodriguez started by reaching out to Holy Trinity Church and other local groups, but found that facilitating engagement was difficult. While Building English Bridges has not yet started running sessions, it holds promise as a beneficial program for students and ABM staff alike. "It's helped me learn more about myself, and I hope people can experience that," Krishnan said.

In addition to the Building English Bridges program, Maya Abeles '28 had initiated the Choate x Wallingford Common Canvas after noticing an excess of empty space in the visual arts section of the Paul Mellon Arts Center (PMAC). After reading an article, she learned about budget cuts for arts departments at many local public middle schools. As an artist herself, Abeles understood its importance for middle schoolers.

After connecting with Manager of Arts Center Operations Ms. Carol Jones, Abeles worked through several meetings and self-imposed deadlines to submit a proposal to the Community Service Club and by reaching out to the art club, the arts faculty, and Wallingford public middle schools. As a result of Abeles' efforts, the Choate x Wallingford Common Canvas project will start small on May 3 by working with 10 students from a local middle school to create a collage.

While it is still in its early stages, Abeles hopes that the number of students who can become involved will expand over the next few years. Abeles views Choate x Wallingford Common Canvas as a symbiotic relationship, and hopes the project can impact the student body in the same way art did for her, as she explored how art can be a positive creative outlet for students.

"Through art, it doesn't really matter how old you are, what school you go to, since art really transcends existing divides, and that is something that community service always strives for," Abeles said. "It's easy to let academics and other stresses drain the creative spirit out of you. I hope this is something that can bring that back for Choate students."

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A Dinner for All: Wallingford Annual Easter Dinner

By **Malaika Fonkem '29**
Reporter

Food, laughter, and joy abounded at the annual Wallingford community Easter dinner on April 5. Wallingford Community Dinners (WCD) President and event organizer Ms. Kathy Wallace explained that what began over 40 years ago as an effort to make sure no members of the community were alone or hungry during the holiday has since grown into a meaningful tradition.

This year, Easter dinner was served at the First Congregational Church from 12 p.m - 2 p.m, giving community members time to eat, relax, and socialize. "To me, the community is more apparent when people come and eat in because they sit and share," Ms. Wallace said. "I want [volunteers] to sit with them so they feel welcome and part of the group."

The initiative first began when Former Gaylord Hospital clinic pastoral Ms. Nancy Freyberg provided a counseling service called Parents and Kids Foundation. With the help of volunteers, she began hosting communal dinners on various holidays, such as Thanksgiving. Her role was eventually passed to Ms. Wallace, who is now the president of WCD.

She said that the initiative's core motive has remained consistent, with menus remaining almost unchanged over time. Ms. Wallace explained how the organization's effort is volunteer-based. "The need has gotten more intense. I think there are more people in need of food at this point," she said. "The biggest challenge to organizing this is getting all the volunteers ... we will definitely make do, and have a good time, and serve everyone."

Through events like the annual Easter dinner, everyone in Wallingford can share a home-cooked meal, connect with friends and family, and celebrate the holiday with joy and laughter. Ms. Wallace and Ms. Freyberg's dedication to serving the local Wallingford community serves as a reminder of the power of simple acts of service, such as providing a simple meal and joining a community together with a shared purpose.

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Photo by Ashley Wu '28/*The Choate News*

The First Congregational Church, where the Easter dinner was held.

"Egg Lady" Preserves Ukrainian Culture In Wallingford



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

By **Maya Abeles '28**
Reporter

Ms. Gloria Paproski Horbaty has been preserving Ukrainian culture in Connecticut, one Easter egg at a time. Ms. Horbaty, better known as the "Wallingford Egg Lady," is a Ukrainian American artist and activist who shares her people's story through community, tradition, and eggs. Pysenkeh, or Ukrainian Easter eggs, differ from the regular Easter eggs in that, rather than just paint, they are often crafted from an ancient wax-resist technique and covered with patterns of stars, wheat, and crosses. Though Ms. Horbaty grew up in Newtown, Connecticut, the spirit and heart of her household originated in her family's home country.

At a time when the Ukrainian struggle for independence was not widely known, Ms. Horbaty's mother taught members of their local community to make Pysenkeh to share their Ukrainian heritage and to raise awareness for the challenges faced by friends and family back home. Through these gatherings, she also spoke about the realities of life under Communist rule. "She was telling them how the Communists treated the citizens of their countries, and these people were just flabbergasted that this is what was happening in another part of the world," Paproski said. Ms. Horbaty noted people's surprise as they learned about an aspect of Ukrainian heritage that remains relatively underrepresented. "They just couldn't believe that they didn't have the freedom like we have in America," Horbaty said.

While Ms. Horbaty was a member of a variety of cultural activism groups, her first encounter with cultural activism occurred rather recently in adulthood, when she was invited to give a 15-minute talk on Pysenkeh to the Wallingford Community Women organization. Ever since, she has become thoroughly dedicated to sharing Ukrainian culture and art, helping set up exhibits and workshops at various Ukrainian churches and festivals around Wallingford. From national costumes to embroidery to wood carving with pearl inlays, Ms. Horbaty described the Ukrainian people as an "artsy nationality." The decorations on Pysenkeh all present happy images: birds for fertility, deer for health, and zigzags for protection.

To Ms. Horbaty, this mix-up is far from insignificant. "[The Soviet party] rewrote history to their advantage," she said. " When Ukraine got independence, they were coming to other countries, particularly America, looking for history books about the history of Ukraine." Not only that, but she recounted horrific stories of children and family members being abused and even murdered by the Soviet military, influencing her to advocate for and amplify Ukrainian voices.

Ms. Horbaty's story presented a question to us all: What will you do in the face of injustice? To Ms. Horbaty, the answer is clear: keep creating and sharing the important aspects of your identity and culture. She urges every young person to visit both the Rochester and Stanford Ukrainian Festivals and to attend one of her Pysenkeh workshops to learn more.

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HOLLYWOOD? MORE LIKE WALLINGFORD!

By **Will Seery '28**
Reporter

Lights, camera, action! Starting this April, Wallingford is stepping into the spotlight as production begins on the independent horror film *The Itinerant,* bringing big-screen attention to the town where Choate proudly resides. For students and local residents alike, this project offers a rare chance to gain insight and watch a feature film in their own backyard.

The film is a psychological horror piece that prioritizes the unsettling aspects of human behavior over conventional gore. The movie's co-producer Mr. BJ Mezek explained how "the actual inspiration is Dan [Kearney] taking a deep dive into psychoanalysis." Mr. Daniel Kearney, a Wallingford resident, also directs, produces, and co-stars in the project, highlighting his personal connection to his hometown.

The Itinerant follows a man, played by Mr. Kearney, who returns to the community where he was kidnapped from decades earlier, setting in motion a gradual, disturbing unraveling of sanity and control within the town. "He wants to go back to where things were [before he was abducted], and realizes that's never going to happen, and it's a sad realization, and then he has to deal with those things," Mr. Mezek said.

Rather than leaning on supernatural tropes, the narrative engages with themes of trauma, memory, and violence, reflecting a broader shift in contemporary horror toward psychological tension rather than visual spectacle. Mr. Mezek wants audiences to come away from *The Itinerant* with a deeper curiosity about the human psyche. "You don't know who's sitting next to you," he said. "And, more than that, you don't know what that person's been through ... [then] you start seeing little quirks and things that just kind of make you cock your head and go, 'wow, what was that about?'"

Production will take place throughout Wallingford and nearby areas, with filmmakers using real locations to anchor the story in a familiar setting. Several local businesses, including Mr. D's Gourmet Sweet Shop and Gaetano's Tavern on Main, will serve as filming locations, allowing the production to capture the town's everyday character. This approach not only strengthens the film's realism but also situates the community within the creative process.

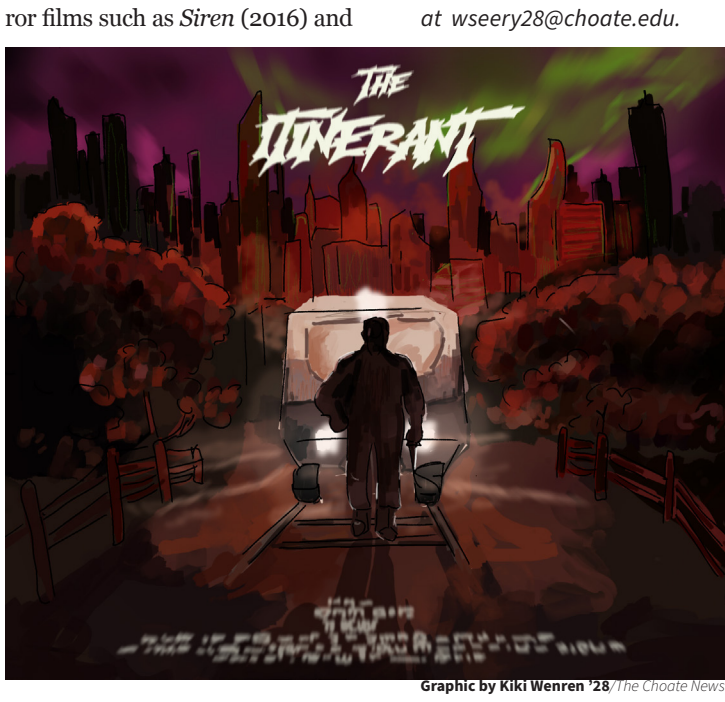
The project emphasizes connections between the film industry and local education. Kearney had collaborated with Middlesex Community College to offer students hands-on experience in film production. Through this partnership, students engage directly with onset work, from technical responsibilities to production logistics, underscoring the increasing value of experiential learning in the arts.

In addition to its local roots, the film features established actors, including Hannah Fierman, known for her work in various horror films such as *Siren* (2016) and *The Unwanted* (2014). The combination of experienced performers and emerging talent positions *The Itinerant* within the growing independent horror scene, a sector of the entertainment industry that has seen notable expansion in recent years.

For Choate students, the arrival of a professional film production nearby offers more than momentary excitement. It provides a concrete example of how storytelling, artistic expression, and industry intersect beyond the classroom. Whether encountering a film crew in town or simply following the project's development, the filming of *The Itinerant* will immerse both students and Wallingford residents in the production of a movie and offer insight into the filmmakers' creative process.

With a projected release in early 2027, the film may soon introduce audiences beyond Connecticut to the town that Choate students and so many more call home — this time, through the lens of psychological horror.

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Graphic by Kiki Wenren '28/*The Choate News*

The Choate News

120th Masthead

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Sleepy But Supported: Current Jet-Lag Policy Suffices

By **Anna Park '29**
Copy Editor

While jet lag is a real challenge for many international students returning to campus after breaks, the school's current system already provides enough support that additional policies are not necessary. For example, after a fourteen-hour flight from Incheon International Airport in Seoul to John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York, I landed feeling as though I had missed two days' worth of sleep and spent the rest of the day fighting the desperate urge to shut my eyes. When I finally closed my eyes to go to sleep, I worried that I would not be able to wake up for the first day back to school. But to my surprise, at 3:30 a.m., an unexplainable force jolted me awake. This experience isn't unique to me; it is a recurrence that haunts international students after every school vacation.

The most common symptoms of jet lag are difficulty sleeping at night and sudden bouts of daytime drowsiness that impede students' performance during the classday. Jet lag negatively affects academic performance in ways such as ability to understand class material, recall class content, and complete homework. Currently, Choate offers a sleep-in on the first day of school after break in consideration of international students returning to campus from different time zones. In terms of social support, the faculty generally understands that international students are jet-lagged and respond considerately to their concerns.

Additional policies to alleviate jet lag-related stress do not need to be implemented, as international students already have resources available. To reduce academic pressure, students can easily request extensions from teachers to complete assignments. Natalie Sun '29, an international student from Hong Kong, was given an essay assignment for her Chinese class but reported being unable to finish it on time due to fatigue. She said, "It was due today, but I couldn't finish it, so I asked my teacher for an extension, and she gave me one. This really helped me; I had more time to prepare and do other homework as well."

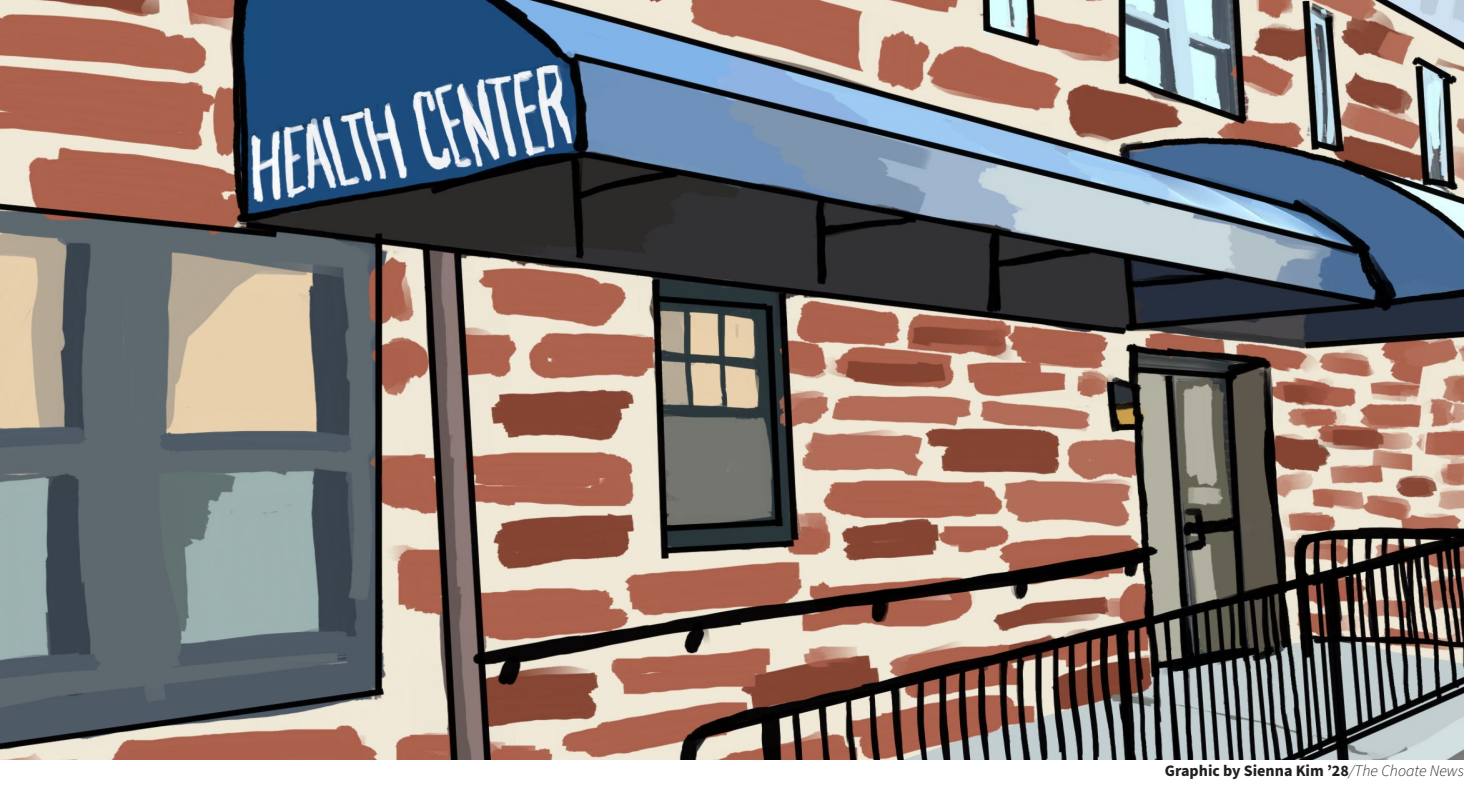
Students have also reported finding it easier to adjust due to understanding from faculty and coaches. Ethan Yu '29, an international student from China, said, "My coach allowed me to skip [basketball] practice because I was jet lagged...I would have been really stressed if I had to go practice when I was really tired." Dorm parents have also helped Kanami Yazaki '29, an international student from Japan, relieve fatigue. She said, "Once, the dorm parents let me sleep during study hours, which helped me a lot because I [had] already finished my work."

Earlier dates for international students to return from their home countries are another form of assistance. Sora Miyahara '28, an international student from Japan, said, "International students can come back to campus one day before the domestic students come back from break. When I came back from winter break, I came two days before school started. That extra time really helped me adjust."

International students often experience fatigue during the first few weeks, which can disrupt their daily schedules and academics. However, as most of the community is aware and understanding of the circumstances, international students have a concrete support system to rely on. In navigating such an exhausting period, International students can rest easier knowing that current procedures for dealing with jet lag are effective for most and treat students with empathy, compassion, and understanding.

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No Fever, No Excuse?



Graphic by Sienna Kim '28/*The Choate News*

By **Jinx Hartong '27**
Opinions Writer

You wake up to gray skies pressing against your window, the kind of weather that makes getting out of bed feel impossible. Your nose is stuffed, so you reach over to grab a tissue, but the box is empty. You emptied it out last night. Your head pounds, an up-and-coming migraine squeezing your brain. It's time. Reluctantly, you begin to walk to the Health Center. You sign in, selecting "Yes" for the missed class on the tablet. You sit in the waiting room, trying your hardest not to let your heavy eyes drag you back to sleep. A nurse brings you into an evaluation room and takes your temperature. Completely normal. Odd, because you feel like you've been run over by a semi-truck. They inform you that since you have no fever, you must attend your class. This has become the reality for too many Choate students.

Lately, the Deans' Office has implemented a new policy requiring students to indicate whether they're missing a commitment or a test when they check in to the Health Center. This policy's original purpose was to require that students who missed a test complete it within a two-day window after recovery. Another purpose of the policy is to ensure that students aren't intentionally skipping commitments.

According to Dean of Students Mr. Will Gilyard '98, "The purpose is to ensure that deans and advisers [can] ... notice patterns, and better support students who may be struggling, and distinguish between isolated instances and something more consistent that may require attention." However, he noted that the questions when checking in are not new, and were typically asked verbally when meeting with a member of the Health Center.

From an outside perspective, this policy makes sense. Delaying a test or missing a class can result in students falling behind, while they study the material others have moved on from. However, this policy has been met with significant pushback. Students who are genuinely unwell increasingly feel pressure, or are outright told to return to class while sick. Some students dealing with very painful symptoms have shared that they have been sent back to class without being allowed to rest, despite their symptoms disrupting their ability to concentrate in class. Experiences like these suggest that, in some cases, students may feel that their symptoms are being weighed against their commitments. And at Choate, commitments always seem to take precedence.

Choate students are no strangers to pushing through discomfort, and most of the time, a common cold doesn't slow down a Choate student's work ethic. However, that doesn't mean we can work through everything. Even without a fever, a student can still be sick enough to need to miss class.

The goal of the Deans' Office is understandable, but it shouldn't come at the expense of basic well-being. A student's health cannot always be measured by a thermometer, and forcing sick students to attend class to take a test only leads to longer recovery and ultimately, burnout.

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CHOATE CLUBS: STRAPPED FOR CASH?

By **Anna Park '29**
Copy Editor



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

A budget change has prompted the Student Committee of Programming and Engagement (SCOPE) to change how it distributes funding to Choate Clubs, replacing a $200 annual allocation from the SCOPE budget.

This year, to manage their budgets and obtain funds for events, club leaders are directed to SCOPE, or the Director of Student Activities, Ms. Alex Long, and the Assistant Director of Student Activities and SCOPE advisor, Ms. Colleen Kazar, to receive approval for every club expenditure or event. While the current policy may initially seem restrictive, it should remain in place because it is the most practical and realistic way to fairly manage club funding.

The new system, which requires the Student Activities Directors to oversee each expenditure, allows for an effective distribution of funds on a need basis. SCOPE member Ari Peres '26 said, "Clubs can just email scope@choate.edu, which goes to Ms. Kazar and Ms. Long. If you give a good reason and what you're going to use the money for, it's usually pretty easy to get funding for anything with a reasonable price." Clubs can also choose fundraising methods where they hold their own events. Many fundraisers on campus are for specific causes and charities, but some proceeds go into individual club budgets to run and host events. Otherwise, as far as SCOPE-allocated funding goes, the current system is effective and reasonable.

This year, SCOPE has dedicated more funding to school-wide club events, making the process more equitable. Ms. Kazar said, "For the most part this year, we weren't covering the cost of food for club meetings as we have done in the past. We would only cover the food for larger-scale events. The Lit, for example, has weekly meetings. If they came to us and said, "' We want to have pizza at our regular meetings, ' we wouldn't cover that. But when they had The Lit Launch in the winter, we covered the cost of food for that event."

Rather than distributing funds blindly and giving certain clubs an unreasonable or unfair amount of funding, the current process ensures that funding is only allocated to initiatives that are deemed meaningful and impactful.

Of course, the current system is not perfect. For instance, newer clubs with limited membership may find it difficult to justify funding applications. "It would be an interesting idea to put more of the money into newer clubs that need help starting up, and then some of the clubs that already have foundations and a lot of funding, maybe get less funding," SCOPE member Elizabeth Burgstahler '26 said.

However, as Burgstahler explained, in most cases, SCOPE will try its best to meet such requests. "Ultimately, if a club does need extra funding beyond their allotted amount, SCOPE will try to work with that club to figure out ways to move beyond that."

As of now, with a limited SCOPE budget, it is important to manage funding prudently. Through the current system, Student Activities Directors can continue to ensure all student clubs are taken into account and that funds are fairly distributed.

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The Ugly Truth About "Looksmaxxing"

By **Andy Stahlman '26**
Opinions Writer



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

Bone smashing, mewing, canthal tilt, bone lengthening, and facial symmetry. If you have heard these terms, you have been exposed, maybe unknowingly, to the growing internet culture of Looksmaxxing. At the most surface level, Looksmaxxing seems consistent with the two words the internet has mashed together — a culture, or set of actions, in which people of a predominantly male internet subculture subscribe to to "max"-imize their "looks," oftening focusing on qualities such as height, facial structure, body fat percentage, eye tilt (the angle of the eye's outer corner relative to the inner corner), and other aspects of one's physical appearance. What separates Looksmaxxers from those seeking to improve one's health through conventional methods is often the extent to which Looksmaxxers are willing to go to achieve "better" looks — often involving risky surgery, unstable substances, and imposing self-harm, all for the possibility of being more conventionally attractive. There are two main aspects of the new ideology pertinent to our understanding of Looksmaxxing. First, Looksmaxxers believe that one's appearance defines the majority of their experience in society; and second, there are objective parts of one's body that can always be changed to maximize one's attractiveness.

The former claim, underscoring the importance of looks, isn't entirely baseless. A 2023 study by Krysta Knox and Michael TenEyck noted that "physical attractiveness significantly decreased the odds of criminal behavior by 18 percent, arrest by 11 percent, conviction by 14 percent, and incarceration by 28 percent." With this information, it may seem easy to conclude that one should, in turn, maximize their attractiveness to reap these so-claimed societal benefits, but this conclusion only shares half the truth. The same study found that, "When controlling for personality and grooming, however, physical attractiveness results in a 47 to 53 percent increase in the risk of experiencing these outcomes, while having an attractive personality and being well-groomed significantly reduced such risk." So while Looksmaxxers abandoned their personalities for looks, they may be failing to achieve their primary goal: social privilege.

Beyond the data, Looksmaxxing can be seen as a continuation of a long-held tradition of negative reinforcement that built the norms of appearance in the status quo. While the TikTok trends are new, the toxic reinforcement of impossibly high body standards is not. This brings me to the second big part of Looksmaxxing — the idea that there are a host of objective aspects of your body that can be changed to become more attractive. While being healthy and active is certainly good, the idea that self-improvement has no end is incredibly dangerous. Many Looksmaxxing methods have entailed extreme forms of so-called " bodily improvement," including getting implants or surgeries, such as double-jaw or femur-extending surgery; intentionally starving oneself, often leading to eating disorders and extreme muscle loss; or the abuse of anabolic steroids to gain naturally unachievable physiques. The popular method of "bone smashing" — the process of smashing one's facial bones to alter facial structure — has not only not resulted in permanently ameliorated results, but instead caused serious consequences like tooth loss, soft tissue trauma, and concussions.

Tragically, the stories of those who engage in Looksmaxxing follow an old pattern imposed on men for generations. Prominent Looksmaxxer Braden Peters, known to most as Clavicular, has referenced a history of bullying in his childhood life stemming from his appearance. While not everyone is subjected to harassment at the same level, weight, and appearance-related bullying are the most common forms of adolescent bullying. In a 2022 study, Yang Xie et al. found that "overweight boys were more likely to bully others and be bullied by peers compared to normal weight boys." What draws most followers to their so-called "journey of ascension" is a feeling of rejection by society at large. This rejection is often violent and harmful, and frequently leads to an unfortunate reaction: they begin to project the same harassment they faced towards others.

While the self-improvement aspects of Looksmaxxing can be great for someone's health and body image, time after time, Looksmaxxing fuels self-hatred instead. The ideology creates a system in which your failures are not your fault, but can rather be attributed to "society." Furthermore, this ideology fuels an anti-women agenda, maintaining that it is women who are the ones setting the unachievable body standards that are "forced" on men, making Looksmaxxing the only way for men.

But the true tragedy of Looksmaxxing is how close we could have come to real, productive, masculine relationships. Instead of helping someone on their journey of self-improvement and allowing them to become truly happy with themselves, Looksmaxxing has become a way to put others down and further male isolation. So, put down the hammer and stop smashing your jaw; instead, go on a run with your friend or try a new spring sport. Self-improvement should build you up, not break you down.

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FADING FINE ARTS

By **Shaleen Sheth '27**
Staff Contributor

We've all seen the video. On February 21, 2026, Timothée Chalamet sparked outrage among the online masses by making the seemingly audacious claim that he wouldn't want to work in industries like ballet or opera, as they are art forms that frequently feel propped up by nostalgia despite the lack of modern interest. Backlash erupted immediately, celebrities issued public scoldings, keyboard warriors launched social media campaigns, and countless opera and ballet institutes voiced their offense at his words. Much of it missed the surrounding context of the widely shared 15-second clip, which was really about his hopes for the acting industry and theatrical cinema to thrive on genuine public enthusiasm rather than artificial life support.

Chalamet's blunt observation touched such a nerve because it reflects a reality few want to accept: traditional fine arts like ballet and opera have seen declining viewership and a weakened presence in pop culture for the past 50 years, especially among younger generations. Attendance data shows opera and ballet drawing tiny percentages of the U.S. adult population compared to decades past, often sustained more by dedicated older patrons who will return again and again in place of mass appeal. The furious reactions by the public voice merely reflect society's discomfort with admitting that high culture is, in fact, declining in America.

In an era of endless short-form content, quick dopamine hits, and fragmented attention spans, the chance to sit down and enjoy an hour-long ballet starts to feel like a relic of another age. Yet it is important to acknowledge that these aspects of culture offer a rare space for collective awe of performances that are practically indescribable in words. Rather than mere relics of our grandparents' time, as they are so often portrayed, they are achievements that demand excellence from performers, genius from writers, and nothing less than rapt attention from audiences.



Image courtesy of Edgar Degas

Of course, these institutions are expensive to produce and attend, pricing out the majority of potential viewers in today's economy. Furthermore, younger generations don't engage with them as frequently, turning instead to the digital world for sources of entertainment. Respecting our past doesn't require forcing universal participation but rather valuing these forms as living memories of thousands of years of human history, maintaining subsidies and encouraging attendance while understanding the difficulties surrounding modern attendance of such high art forms.

Chalamet did take too much heat for stating an observable truth regarding relevance in a market-driven United States. Online audiences' outrage without full understanding of the context is almost emblematic of how the erosion of high culture and long-form entertainment has damaged individuals' comprehension of issues. Ultimately, the backlash represents a broader unwillingness to accept the reality of cultural change; yet without this acceptance, the change cannot begin to be combatted. High art in America will inevitably fade without the attention and support of the American people. The real question is whether our society will choose to make space for it.

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Democracy Is More Than a Trend



Photo by Chris Volpe/*New Haven Independent*

A crowd fills the Green for another "No Kings" rally.

By **Leela Curry '29**
Copy Editor

The "No Kings" protests are a series of nationwide rallies opposing concentrated power and authoritarian tendencies in government. Since 2025, they have drawn millions of participants across multiple waves, making them some of the largest protests in recent United States history. At a moment when American politics is more divided and personality-centered than ever, the "No Kings" protests are incredibly relevant. The slogan is dramatic, but that is why it works. In a country founded on rejecting monarchy, the idea that Americans are once again marching to declare that no one should hold unchecked power is both historically significant and genuinely unsettling.

According to Britannica, the first major wave of the "No Kings" protests in June 2025 attracted roughly four to six million people, followed by nearly seven million in October, marking the events as one of the largest single-day protests in modern U.S. history. A third wave on March 28, brought demonstrations to all 50 states, with Reuters reporting more than 3,200 events nationwide. This shows a clear and visible scale of dissatisfaction towards current politics among the population.

In a political culture where outrage is constant and attention spans are short, it is easy to assume that public protest has lost its power, but the size of the "No Kings" movement suggests the opposite. Even as political engagement increasingly happens online, millions of people still choose to show up in person. Their protests are not just reposts, likes, or anonymous arguments in a comment section. They are real, loud, and on the streets of the very country they are fighting for. That kind of public visibility deeply matters in a democracy.

Still, protest alone is not enough. The bigger issue is that American politics now thrives on polarization. Politicians benefit when every election simulates a final battle. Activists gain momentum by framing every issue as urgent. The media, especially social platforms, profit from conflict because outrage spreads faster than nuance ever will. Even a protest meant to defend democracy can get absorbed into that same cycle — signs become Instagram posts, speeches become clips, and complicated issues are reduced to a rudimentary "us versus them."

The real risk of the "No Kings" movement is that the message is powerful, but if it is diminished to just another viral moment, the movement ends up feeding the very division it aims to attack.

That is also why the generational question matters. One opinion piece about the protests noted that many attendees seemed older, with relatively few young people in the crowd. That should matter to students. If younger Americans are disengaged or see protests as more performative than practical, movements lose their long-term force. If democracy is actually important, it cannot exist as a mere slogan on a sign. It has to appear in the voting. It has to show up in local organizations. And it has to manifest in continued attention after protests are over.

Ultimately, the "No Kings" protests matter not because they solve everything, but because they make one thing clear: democracy depends on people being willing to defend it publicly. The harder question is what happens after that. In 2026, that is the real test. It is not whether people are angry enough to march, but whether they truly care enough to keep showing up once the moment passes.

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FEATURES

Spikeball, Smiles, and Sunshine: Spring Has Sprung at Choate

By **Nick Aston '28**
Copy Editor



Graphic by Mariana Regaldo '28/*The Choate News*

As temperatures rose on April 1, students packed away their winter coats and the campus atmosphere began to shift with a sneak preview of spring weather to come. The warmth of lingering afternoons, the hum of conversations near Hill House lawn, and shouts from intense spikeball competitions signifed that spring at Choate was on its way.

For some, the warmer weather that characterized the first week of the term was received with joy and excitement. Savannah Emery '26 said, "When we had the first nice day of the year, everyone was in front of Hill House and playing spikeball in the fields." Emery noted how the day brought her and her friends together as prepared to gear to celebrate their final term at Choate. "I'm really excited for all the events and all the activities my friends and I have planned out, but obviously feeling nostalgic and sad that the year is coming to an end," Emery said. For Emery, the season is filled with bittersweet feelings as she prepares to bid campus farewell this June.

For other members of the Class of 2026, this spring is a time to let loose as the heavy workload becomes a distant memory. Maya Garman '26 explained that senior spring feels different from years prior, as academic pressure has become less intense. "I'm doing a lot more stuff with people instead of sitting in my room doing my work," Garman said.

Sixth-form students aren't the only ones getting excited for spring. Esther Schonberger '28, a new student from New Haven, noticed Choate's efforts to distinguish each term. "Spring at my old school was not any different than the rest of the year. But in Choate, every season feels different. In spring, I'm sure we're gonna have dances, tournaments, and unique form events," Schonberger said. As a new student, Schonberger has yet to experience everything that spring at Choate has to offer. She has, nonetheless, heard "about people hanging out on the lawn and playing spikeball and lots of fun things that are floral and garden-related."

While students spend time outside and soak up the sunshine with friends, the Student Activities team has remained hard at work planning events for the community to enjoy. Director of Student Activities Ms. Alex Long attributes her love for spring at Choate to the warm weather and the shift in campus atmosphere. "It feels different than the rest of the other terms because we're constantly go, go, go. But with the weather, it also feels like things slow down," Long said.

With the arrival of spring, Ms. Long reflected on the laid-back, slower vibe around campus, which, to her, makes the season a highlight of the Choate experience. She also noted the upcoming events, both old and new, such as Powder Puff, the 3/4 Dance, Last Hurrah, and a beach-themed Student Activities Center (SAC) dance for the spring term. Ms. Long advised students to "Go to the events; even if you go for 15-20 minutes, getting you there is what is important to me."

With the Student Activities Team's thoughtful planning, spring of 2026 is bound to be a term to remember. Whether students plan to spend their spring playing spikeball with friends or reading a favorite book in an Adirondack chair, it is evident that the Choate community is eager for the warmer weather and light-hearted laughs ahead.

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Check Out Choate's Community Closet

By **Ava Hult-Falk '27**
Staff Contributor

Every day, hundreds of students walk in and out of the Humanities building, but often pass by an important student resource tucked away in the basement: Choate's Community Closet. Easy to miss on a busy day between classes, the closet resources available to Choate students, such as winter coats, sports equipment, and even commencement dresses.

Choate's Community Closet was established by former English faculty member Ms. Cathryn Stout to provide winter clothing and special academic dress to students in need. Since then, the closet has held a permanent space in the Humanities building, stocked with donations from students and families. However, many Choate students remain unaware that the closet exists, leaving the donations unused. Each year, stacks of folded sweaters, hangers of jackets, and other clothes quietly collect in the space, ready for use but often unnoticed.

For the past two years, the closet has been run by Manager of Parent and Community Relations Ms. Cheryl Madden. Since she took on the role of managing the Community Closet, Ms. Madden has relocated it to the basement of the Humanities building and kept it organized and supplied with donations.

While the Community Closet's primary role is to provide clothing to Choate students, it has also been used in recent years to aid the local Wallingford community. Earlier this year, Choate's Adaptive Skate community service program partnered with Social Sabby, a youth social services organization in the Northeast, to provide children on the autism spectrum with an environment to enjoy skating. As part of the event preparation, Choate Adaptive Skate repurposed a collection of old hockey helmets discovered in the Community Closet during a recent cleanout. Assistant to the Dean of Students Ms. Judy Senft helped facilitate the cleanout and explained the value of having helmets available from the Community Closet. "The kids [participating in the Adaptive Skate program] weren't going to be allowed to skate without having a helmet," she said. "And here we had helmets sitting in the closet that had been there for two years. So, we got them over for the adaptive skate [event]." The skating equipment that had been collecting dust in storage became an essential part of another community initiative, an example of how the closet's contents can find new life in unexpected ways.

To access the items in the closet, students must contact their advisor or dean, who will accompany them as they browse. To donate, students can contact their dean or Ms. Madden directly. Donations of any clothing are always welcome, and will directly support Choate students. Whether donating or borrowing, all students are encouraged to make use of the closet in whatever way best suits their needs.

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

CAMPUS BIG BROTHERS AND SISTERS: CHOATE'S PERFECT PREFECTS

By **Elliot Sun '28**
Copy Editor



Photo by Harry Kim '28/*The Choate News*
Hill House prefects smiling on the second floor of Hill House.

Sixth-form prefects serve as mentors, friends, and leaders in the dorms they live in. They play an invaluable role in students' dorm experience by planning dorm events, checking in on rooms, and making sure everyone feels supported. This environment and the examples prefects set often stay with boarders long after the year is over. In Nichols, East Cottage, Tenney, and Hill House, prefects have actively shaped their dorm atmospheres, creating a more comfortable environment for students.

Nichols House

Nichols House is the largest freshman girls' dorm on campus, located on Memorial Circle. There, prefects Nicha Tongdee '26, Elizabeth Burgstahler '26, Scarlett Burwell '26, Norah Davis-Jeffers '26, Emma Schwerin '26, and Dominique Welcome '26 have been at the center of helping their third-form prefectees adjust to Choate's school environment.

For Tongdee, the most important part of the job has always been maintaining a consistent dorm presence and being there for the students. "You really talk to them, listen to them, and be fully present with them," she emphasized. "Some of them are on the quieter side, but as long as you're there and talk to them, they know to come to you when they have problems." She described moments when prefectees would come by, sit in her room, play the guitar, and just talk — helping form strong relationships in the dorm.

East Cottage

East Cottage, once home to President John F. Kennedy '35, is a freshman boys' dorm that houses 13 students. In East Cottage, prefects Ian Cho '26, Nico Clary '26, and Max Weber '26 have spent the year trying to make it feel like a place worth remembering.

For Cho, who lived in East Cottage as a third-former, returning to the dorm as a prefect has been a personal journey that has allowed him to reconnect with his memories. Cho attributes his love for the dorm to his former prefects, whom he described as "older brothers" and strong role models, inspiring him to leave a similar impression on his current prefectees.

Clary brought a different energy to the dorm. He described the dorm as "common room oriented" on weekend nights, with students playing games, talking, and spending quality time together. "We actually have a kid in our dorm who does magic," Clary said. "And it's been a lot of fun to just bond with kids from all [over] the world." Cho shared a similar perspective on the impact of spending time in the dorm. "We've played a manhunt, and then we also played capture the flag, we did some karaoke together. [It was] not only a good way to get to know everyone in the dorm, but also a good way to build relationships," Cho said.

Tenney House

Tenney House, one of the largest boys' dorms on campus, houses sophomores and juniors and is characterized by its tightly bonded dorm community.

Tenney prefect Lucas Carlson '26 lived in Archbold during his sophomore and junior years, and credited his former prefects with making his transition to Choate more seamless. His experience in Archbold shaped how he has approached his role in Tenney. "Creating a good environment is the biggest thing as a prefect," Carlson said. In Tenney, that meant building something intentional — a dorm full of people who work hard and push each other to be their best selves.

Carlson noted that he put extra time and effort into connecting with students who approach social life at Choate in different ways, an experience that has felt personally rewarding for him. "I think a challenge for sure is getting to know those people who are mostly not involved in the dorm community," Carlson said. His method was simple: show up during check-in, ask real questions, and invite them to play frisbee, spikeball, or soccer. "Once they do open up, I feel like I've gotten to know them really well," Carlson said.

Hill House

Hill House sits on Hill House Lawn and is one of Choate's newer dorms, complete with fingerprint-locked doors. It is co-ed, which makes it one of the more unique living situations on campus. Ian Wu '26, Ada Tieanworn '26, Liya Nichols '26, and Ethan Zhang '26 took on the responsibility of being prefects there.

Wu said the reason he wanted to prefect came down to connection. As a senior, he sometimes felt disconnected from the rest of the school. "It's a way for us to get to know more people on campus," he said. The conversations he had with his prefectees were among the most meaningful he's had at Choate.

Tieanworn brought a different perspective. For her, prefecting felt like a natural extension of who she already was. "One of the central aspects of my identity is taking care of younger students, like my siblings," she said. "I wanted to relive that through taking care of my prefectees."

The common room in Hill House serves as a gathering place, with guitar sessions and impromptu hangouts becoming part of the dorm's shared identity. "I sometimes cook for people since Hill has a huge kitchen. I call people over to share the Chinese food I cooked, and this is a really nice bonding experience," Wu said. "Once, we even had a spicy ramen-eating competition in our common room. I think these are things that make our and our prefectees' experiences in the dorm more special."

At Choate, dorms are both communities and support systems, so having a thoughtful and caring prefect is crucial. At the end of the day, prefects are not remembered for enforcing lights-out, but for making the dorm a more comfortable place for the students.

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ARTS AND LEISURE

A Cultural Crescendo: Choate Symphony Tours Seoul

By **Oola Breen-Ryan '29**
Copy Editor



Photo courtesy of Mr. Gene Wie

Symphony Orchestra members wear traditional hanboks in front of Gyeongbokgung Palace.

Whether it was donning traditional Korean hanboks, sampling rice cakes, or performing alongside numerous talented instrumentalists, the Choate Symphony Orchestra immersed itself in Korean culture and music during its spring break tour to Seoul, South Korea from March 7–14.

During the tour, 56 Choate students and eight faculty and staff members spent a week participating in what HPRSS Department head and trip chaperone Ms. Kyra Jenney described as "a mix of cultural sightseeing, social time, and also rehearsal and music-centered time." Ultimately, the trip culminated in a concert at the Gabin Art Hall in Seoul's Gangnam district.

The concert featured works by both Korean and English composers. Mrs. Carol Jones, Manager of Arts Center Operations and trip chaperone, emphasized the value of being "exposed to ... forms of music other than what you're used to," and "learning from those other cultures."

In between rehearsals, students participated in a K-pop dance class, a rice cake-making workshop, a trip to the Lotte World amusement park, and a Nanta comedy show. The group also explored the Jogyesa Temple and the Korean War Memorial, offering a glimpse into Korea's history. Spanish teacher and trip chaperone Ms. Le'ah Griggs especially enjoyed visiting the Gyeongbokgung Palace — the first royal palace of the Joseon dynasty. She observed "a juxtaposition of the new, modern buildings" in the surrounding city with "the really old, ancient architecture style" of the palace. While visiting the palace, the group wore hanbok, traditional Korean dress. The goal was to "engage with local customs and dress and cuisine," Instrumental Ensembles Director Mr. Gene Wie added.

Mr. Wie described the visit to the Seongbuk Center for the Visually Impaired as "one of the most meaningful visits" of the tour. Members of Choate's Symphony Orchestra learned about the difficulties of playing an instrument without clear sight by watching the students take lessons and sitting in on one of Seongbuk's orchestra rehearsals. "I had a lot of students who told me how the visit helped transform their perspective on what music access looks like, and how we take for granted how easily we can [access music] here at Choate," Mr. Wie said. "Seeing these [visually impaired] kids and how hard they have to work to be able to [play their instruments] ... it really struck a chord." Students from the Seongbuk Orchestra also performed two pieces as the opening act in the Choate Symphony Orchestra's Gabin Art Hall concert.

Later in the trip, Choate's orchestra played side by side with the Yonsei University Orchestra, a renowned musical ensemble at one of South Korea's top universities. Sound Technician and Assistant Technical Director Mr. Michael Abbatiello, another faculty chaperone, said that "it was very informative for them to see what level these students are at ... they're college students who've been studying this as well." Isabel Gargamelli '26, a clarinet player, mentioned that she and the bass clarinetist from Yonsei University "didn't speak the same language but were playing the same music," leading her to realize that "music is a universal language."

The trip also strengthened students' bonds with one another. Katherine Zhou '27 said that "one big part of music and playing in an orchestra is that every single person has their own part ... when you're able to form connections with more people in the orchestra, you're able to feel more comfortable...being yourself around them." Gargamelli particularly enjoyed getting dinner with friends, as the "family-style" meals "were very personal, very unifying, in a sense ... a lot of camaraderie." Zhou agreed, noting that it was "nice to be able to take two hours every single day to just really be able to enjoy each other's company" without needing to adhere to a schedule.

The students and adults each took away something unique from this once-in-a-lifetime experience. Zhou was appreciative of her newfound connections with the rest of the orchestra and "being able to make new friends ... and really solidify my connections with my current friends, as well." Slater Boms '29 liked how the Choate community spirit remained strong thousands of miles away from Wallingford. "That kind of made it feel real, the globalness of Choate," she said.

Mr. Wie echoed how the trip brought the Symphony Orchestra together. "Being together here on the tour, I definitely saw how much closer and how many more new friendships were established between all the people in the ensemble," he said.

While performing and touring abroad, the Choate Symphony Orchestra was able to immerse itself in a new culture and audiences through music. "To be able to go somewhere else and experience your passions in other areas and with other cultures ... those opportunities are really special," Ms. Jones reflected.

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Choate Musicians Take on the All-State Stage

By **Sophie Chang '29**
Reporter

From March 26–28, a group of Choate students who qualified for All-State Orchestra and Band traveled to Hartford, Connecticut, to practice and perform their repertoire. The Connecticut Music Educators Association (CMEA) festival, held at the Connecticut Convention Center, drew student musicians from schools across the state.

From Choate, Aiden Cho '28, Will Covey '28, Rachel Fan '27, Katherine Zhou '27, and Arjun Ramnath '28 qualified for Connecticut's All-State ensembles. To do so, each student had to audition virtually for a competitive spot in the orchestra. "Judges evaluated us on a chunk of our audition piece, a couple [orchestra] excerpts as well, and then some scales," Ramnath, a cellist, said. "They ranked us out of 252 points, and the cutoff was around 246. If you got higher than that, then you [qualified]."

Once accepted, the students in All-State Band performed two pieces: Adoration by Florence Price and First Suite in E-flat for Military Band by Gustav Holst, while the All-State Orchestra performed Tragic Overture by Johannes Brahms and Metropolis by Zhao Tien. Covey, an oboe player who performed in the band, said that "although it was my first time going to All-State, it was really cool ... everyone knows their rhythm, and everyone knows their notes, so, you focus more on feeling [the music]."

Outside of the music itself, other Choate students reflected on the connections they created through the experience. "Experiencing both [All-State Orchestra and the Choate Symphony] has deepened my appreciation for how music can create connection — whether across distances or within a close-knit community — and how each ensemble, in its own way, fosters a sense of belonging through a shared language of expression," Zhou said.

For others, the All-State experience was another way to meet new people and become friends with musicians across the state. "What I really liked was that I was able to become close to some people that I would've never been able to meet before college, like my friends from Fairview High School," Cho said.

The students' preparation ultimately culminated in a final performance, before they walked away from All-State Orchestra and Band with newly formed connections across the state and a deeper appreciation for music.

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Photo courtesy of Mr. Gene Wie

All-State Orchestra musicians stand after performing at CMEA.

Visual Arts Con Students Put On an (Art) Show



Photo by Zahabiya Khokha '27/*The Choate News*

Visual Arts Concentration students display their work in the PMAC Gallery exhibition.

By **Anna Park '29**
Copy Editor

If you were to walk past the Paul Mellon Arts Center (PMAC) Gallery, you would probably see pieces of art hanging on the walls and sitting on display. But if you took the time to go inside, you would discover the immaculate attention to detail and passion the students of the Arts Concentration (Arts Con) Signature Program put into their pieces. The Visual Arts Concentration exhibition was on display in the PMAC and held its reception on March 27.

Students were able to experiment with various artistic styles and messages in their work. "There were mainly two art styles that I focused on, one of them being hand paintings and the other one focusing on oil pastels," Nairoby Liriano '29 said. "The hand paintings focused on small details like dots and swirls ... while pieces with the oil pastels showed imagination and creation." Liriano particularly wanted to convey how art doesn't always have to be fancy or sophisticated. "You can have art that can be considered as childish but means something [deeper]," she said.

Phoebe Dey '28 expressed her love for fashion through a ceramic vase. "It has this rim that I sculpted to make it look like lace," she said. "I tried to sculpt a seam that goes through or down the vase, and then I put buttons on it." However, choosing ceramics as her primary medium came with challenges. "You get one crack in the middle of the plate, and it's just done, you can't use it, no matter how hard you try to save it." Despite this, Dey reflected positively on the experience. "I've never had the time to commit this much of my time to my artwork," she said. "That's been really great for me and for the future of my art."

Drawing inspiration from reality, Ann Ma '28 intentionally changed her color palettes to black and white for creative expression in her paintings. "I exhibited three pieces, the square-looking one, that's depicting a Chinese woman [from the Yi ethnic minority group]," Ma said. "She's wearing traditional clothing and representing her culture. The inspiration was from this set of photographs that I found online." The cultural aspect of the collection was especially touching for Ma: "I almost teared up seeing it because I feel like there's always an under-representation of ethnic groups in general, especially in China," she said. Ma described her personal style as realistic and colorful to evoke certain ideas and emotions. "I always like a realistic touch to things ... which provides the foundation for things. And then I try ... to change up the colors ... I feel like different colors convey different messages and different feelings."

Ma also noted that it was beneficial to "talk to my other peers from Arts Con about their process ... it's always good to just chat with them, see what else they might want to share." Growth was a common theme amongst all the artists, in technical and personal aspects. The exhibition represented Choate artists' hard work, bringing the winter term to a successful conclusion.

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Choate Dancers Take A Bow At the Spring Concert

By **Prudence Chen '28**
Copy Editor

On March 27, the Spring Dance Concert opened with a bang, or rather, an elegant flutter with "Ode for St. Cecilia," a ballet piece choreographed by the Choate Repertory Dancers and guest artist Ms. Claire Kretzschmar. Unlike other performances, the music was performed live by Choate community members.

At this year's Spring Dance Concert, several pieces were choreographed by Choate's own student dancers. Ballerina Maddie Baldwin '27 choreographed a heartfelt dance to artist Birdy's "Deep End" later in the program. "Being able to explore my own movements and creating segments and then teaching them to my dancers was very fun and rewarding," she said. "The most rewarding part was standing on the side, in the wings, and seeing [my] piece come to life on stage ... there's nothing like standing backstage and watching your dancers hit the timing ... and dance together."

While it was Baldwin's first time as a choreographer, Mia Cueto '28 was no stranger to the role, calling it her "favorite thing to do." Her dance drew inspiration from a previous mentor, Suzanne Dervish-Ali. "She introduced me to a style of dance I'd never seen before. I don't even have a name for it. It's like jazz, funk, fusion, and contemporary. The movement [in my choreography] was heavily inspired by Suzanne's," Cueto explained.

Cueto accommodated the wide range of students' abilities in her dance and worked with dancers to take her choreography to the stage. "I worked so hard with my dancers to count every single beat and snap all at the same time, and they hit it perfectly every single night, which made me burst into tears," she said.

Dancer Arthur Utoktham '29 performed two different pieces during the concert. Utoktham played a gang member in a funky mix of "Ma Baker" by Bonney M and "Golden Gun" by BigWav3. The piece began with a spotlight on a cartoonish money bag and ended with the dancers escaping with it offstage.

His second piece, choreographed by dance teacher Ms. Shelley Morgigno, paid homage to "The Wiz," with Utoktham cast as the cowardly lion. Along with Jaime Chen '29, Kanami Yazaki '29, and Chloe Cho '29 (the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Dorothy, respectively), he boogied down the yellow brick road Broadway style.

"It was also my first year doing jazz," Utoktham said, reflecting on his experience in the piece. "I've never actually taken a jazz lesson before [this], so that was really fun."

Step Squad brought chromatic, choreographed chaos to the stage with their percussive routine. Step Squad Junior Officer Samia Mowafi '27 described the rehearsal process as enjoyable but occasionally challenging due to inclement weather. "[We] did require a Zoom step practice one of the weeks ... that's how we learned the first half of the dance," Mowafi explained.

Mowafi emphasized that, to her, Step Squad is more than just dancing. She noted, "I wanted to make sure that [step] was something that I learned to do, because if I want people to learn about my culture, I need to learn about other people's culture too."

The production of the concert and scheduling of all 75 dancers is credited to Dance Program Head and Arts Department member Ms. Pamela Newell. Ms. Newell's job, as she puts it, was to "bring everything together, to make sure everyone has costumes, everyone has lights, and to make sure it looks like a good show."

The concert became truly rewarding for Ms. Newell when she witnessed the final product. "I had tears in my eyes," she said. This year, Choate's sixth-form dancers decided to perform a senior piece, dancing to "Vienna" by Billy Joel. "It was really important to them ... it was very meaningful for them, and it was meaningful when I saw it on stage," Ms. Newell reflected.

Baldwin, who watched the seniors perform their piece, added, "Seeing all the seniors dance one last time together on stage ... was probably one of the most special moments I've experienced in my years of dance."

Tears were shed, stories were told, and dancers shined on the Colony Hall stage at this year's Spring Dance Concert. Though it may have been a final bow for some, every student involved certainly earned a bravo.

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Photo courtesy of Katelyn Nguyen '27

Dancers smile together after the Spring Dance Concert.

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SPORTS

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Andy Lowe Memorial Award to Jiao '26



Photo courtesy of @choateswimdive on Instagram

Isabelle Jiao '26 poses with Head Coach Silbernagel beside the pool.

By **Adrienne Prater '28**
Reporter

On March 8, 2026, Isabelle Jiao '26, team captain of the Choate Rosemary Hall Girls' Varsity Swim Team, received the Andy Lowe Memorial Award. Voted on by coaches and faculty, students are nominated by their coaches from the 13 schools represented. The award is given to one female and one male swimmer at the annual New England Division I Swimming & Diving Championships who exemplify good character, leadership, and humility.

Hearing her name called to receive the Andy Lowe Memorial Award, Jiao said the moment felt "surreal." She stood in shock while her teammates were "jumping around ... it was such a crazy moment. My hands were over my mouth." The award summed up everything the swim team represents: supporting each other and putting the team first. This sentiment was also reflected in Jiao's mindset about the award as a recognition of her team, not just her individual success.

As a freshman, Jiao struggled to balance the new demands of Choate and finding her community. The swim team helped her develop a sense of belonging with her teammates and grow as a swimmer and a person, shaping her through support and encouragement. Over the last four years, Jiao said, "I really found my own family on the Choate swim team ... as a family, we are loving and supportive together."

As a senior, Jiao has grown into a leader, embodying the captains and teammates who supported her in the past. She exemplifies the program's team-first mentality and finds joy in small moments and difficult situations. Her strong leadership skills are not defined by a significant change, but by leaning into her character and personality. Winning the Andy Lowe Memorial Award represents resilience and connection for Jiao, who has dedicated the award to her team, who made her Choate journey unforgettable.

However, what makes this recognition so meaningful is the clear reflection of Jiao's impact on her teammates and coaches. Will Swan '28 said, "She's constantly energetic and optimistic and supportive towards every person on the pool deck." Similarly, Varsity Swim Team Head Coach Nolan Silbernagel added, "She is always embracing newer swimmers, younger swimmers, and is the ... first one on the pool deck, last one to leave."

It is moments like these that highlight that the Andy Lowe Memorial Award is about more than just performance. It honors character, selflessness, and support. Jiao's journey shows the value of community and how success is measured in small moments of joy rather than individual accomplishments. It demonstrates that an award is more than an achievement for the recipient; it also honors the people who shaped and supported them.

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GIRLS' HOCKEY AT NATIONALS

By **Dylann Kong '29**
Reporter

Each spring since 1938, USA Hockey has hosted the annual National Championships, bringing top teams from across the country to compete in different cities. This year, the National Championships featured over 7500 players in various locations and divisions, including youth, girls, high school, adult, sled, and warrior hockey. Several players from the Girls' Varsity Ice Hockey Team at Choate Rosemary Hall participated in the National Championships. For these athletes, the tournament was an opportunity to test their skills, while also building teamwork, perseverance, and sportsmanship. Beyond the games themselves, the event offered moments of camaraderie and learning, leaving each player with memories that lasted well beyond the ice.

Bella Welch '26 traveled to Rockland, Massachusetts, to compete in the U19 Tier II National Championship. "It was basically my last rodeo for hockey," said Welch, who plays for the Mid Fairfield Stars alongside four other Choate athletes. "We made it all the way to the semifinals, and we lost 2–1 in that game. But overall, we did pretty well as a team, especially considering that with club teams, we don't play together year-round." For Welch, the most meaningful part of the experience was the opportunity to compete at the national level and appreciate those final moments on the ice.

Maggie Swanson '26 traveled to Buffalo, New York, for her tournament. "You either win regionals or get an at-large bid. We did not win regionals, but we performed well enough during the regular season to earn one of the four at-large spots," she said. Swanson emphasized the strong sense of positivity and support within her team. "I feel like that was a really good ending to my club hockey experience ... We're just very positive with each other, and we cheer each other on. Everyone has a role that they play." In a team sport like hockey, these qualities are essential to success, helping players stay motivated, overcome challenges, and maintain focus even under pressure during crucial games.

For Swanson, the National Championships marked the culmination of years of dedication to club hockey. "[Nationals] was a really good ending to my club hockey experience," she said. Overall, the USA Hockey National Championships provided Choate players with a high level of competition, lasting memories, and meaningful team experiences.

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BOYS' VARSITY TENNIS: KITT KINGS OF THE COURT

By **Ignacio Granda '27**
Reporter

As the spring season kicks off at Choate, the Boys' Varsity Tennis Team is wasting no time making a statement. At the Kingswood-Oxford Invitational Tennis Tournament (KITT), a two-day event from March 28–29 featuring some of the top prep school programs in the region, the team secured first place by just one point.

The KITT is a tournament the team has traditionally used as an early-season test for the players. Head Coach Ned Gallagher said, "Our team goes into this event treating it like a scrimmage, a chance to see where we are at the beginning of the season and have a look at some of our traditional rivals." With tryouts wrapping up only days before, the team had limited time to prepare. Practice zeroed in on serve and volley play and quick patterns suited for the fast indoor courts at Kingswood-Oxford School. Coach Gallagher tailored doubles strategies to each pairing's strengths, something players credited throughout the weekend.

In singles, all four players finished in the top three of their draws. Reid Bock '27 placed third in the first draw, Captain Johnny Guo '26 took second in the second draw, Captain Andrew Watcharananan '26 placed second in the third draw, and Jonathan Liu '27 earned third in the fourth draw. In doubles, Watcharananan and Guo grabbed third in the first draw, while Truman Barbie '26 and Bock won the second draw championship outright. Watcharananan's favorite moment was watching Barbie play a backhand lob volley to secure the title. The results were all the more impressive, considering that Liu, Guo, and Barbie arrived at the tournament on short notice. As Liu put it, "Going in, we felt like the underdogs, and so this tournament taught us to believe in anything. We can do it. We can win anything as a team."



Photo courtesy of @choatetennis on Instagram

Boys' Varsity Tennis KITT champions pose for a victory photo.

Teammates supported one another during the KITT. Guo said, "Everybody was trying to come together and ... [doing] what's best for the team." Teammates spectated, encouraged players, and offered advice from a distance, helping in whatever ways they could. Watcharananan thanked Barbie for buying him sushi between rounds and noted that "his kind acts won't go unappreciated."

Coach Gallagher was pleased with how the team competed, especially under pressure. "A few kids got into some tough matches, and they had to figure out how to problem solve and come from behind," he said. He credited the team's preparation, too, noting they always arrived before anyone else to warm up. After the tournament, he encouraged the team to stay humble. "I would hope they don't get cocky," Coach Gallagher said. "I would hope they still are hungry to improve their games."

Though the spring season is just beginning, the Boys' Varsity Tennis team has already made an impression on the courts, carrying their humility into how they support one another. "I'm really proud of the team, and I'm really excited to continue to build on ... the way we're playing," Guo said. Watcharananan also reinforced the importance of team support: "When we have each other, we play a lot better." Together, their camaraderie remains key to their growth and success on and off the courts, promising a strong season ahead.

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SUNSHINE, SCRIMMAGES, AND SPRING PRESEASON

By **Norah Wang '27**
Staff Contributor

Choate's spring preseason features an array of team-building activities, practices, and nights out, helping teams bond before spring term rolls around. Whether it's rowing in Florida or golfing in Scotland, every team aims to strengthen sportsmanship for the upcoming season.

For the Girls' Varsity Crew Team, Co-Captain Saylen Blake '26 said she had "high expectations ... with [preseason] being one of [her] favorite times of the year," because of "the fact that you can bond with the members of your team, the coaches, and disconnect from that school focus." Blake's daily routine in DeLand, Florida, started with a morning row followed by lunch, and then more rowing. What stood out to her the most was their evenings: "Captains hosted different events every night ... that was also really fun." By the end of the trip, Blake felt that she deeply appreciated the experience.

Meanwhile, in St. Andrews, Scotland, the Girls' Varsity Golf team balanced their practices with sightseeing. Co-Captain Elizabeth Burgstahler '26 explained that, unlike other Choate preseason trips, hers included a strong cultural component. "There's more of an emphasis on learning about Scottish culture ... like a historical tour of St. Andrew's or playing historically accurate, 1800s Scottish golf," she said. Even in such an iconic location, the challenges of the sport remained the same. Burgstahler emphasized the mental demands of golf, describing it as "more of a mental game than a physical sport," reflecting on how important it was to stay composed during difficult rounds.

For Nate Kesselmark '27, the Boys' Varsity Baseball Team's preseason had a more relaxed but still driven tone. A typical day involved "waking up, making some breakfast for the boys, going to practices or games, going back, getting some dinner, and going to bed." Overall, the team performed well, noted Kesselmark, even "exceeding [their] expectations." His most memorable moment was the final night, when the team had a barbecue and spent time together, highlighting how team bonding is just as important as preseason practice.

The Girls' Varsity Lacrosse preseason in Naples, Florida, balanced structured practices with time to bond with teammates. The team trained during the day but also went to the beach and spent time together at the hotel. One of Tori Vollero '27's favorite memories was a team bonding night where "we got to go to the beach, and then we got to go to dinner in town ... just enjoying Florida and being together." Smaller moments also stood out, such as when "one of our goalies was playing guitar, and we all sang in the lobby. It was really cute." Vollero also noted that preseason helped the team understand how to "mesh" better during gameplay, specifically through their preseason scrimmages.

Preseason trips at Choate go beyond just physical preparation. They provide opportunities for student-athletes to bond and grow together. As Blake put it, the team-building led everyone to feel "more in tune with the people around [them]" and improved the team dynamic. Whether through practices or simple moments off the playing fields, these trips serve as the start of a strong, unified team heading into the season.

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Photo courtesy of @gochoate on Instagram

The Girls' Varsity Crew team out on Floridian waters during their spring preseason trip in DeLand.