The Choate News

Year in Review
2025-2026

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HIGHLIGHTS AND RECAP

Convocation: *September 2, 2025*

On September 2, 2025, the Choate community gathered in Colony Hall to mark the official start of the school year with its annual Convocation ceremony. Led by Student Council President Zaki Shamsi ’26 and Head of Student and Academic Life Ms. Jenny Elliott, Convocation was centered on self-discovery, as Shamsi explored in his humorous speech about his own philosophy, “Shamsism.” In addition to celebrating the beginning of the 136th school year, faculty members Ms. Courtney DeStefano and Mr. Will Morris were awarded two new faculty chairs in recognition of their contributions to the school, both inside and outside the classroom.



Photo courtesy of photos.choate.edu

Zaki Shamsi ’26 takes the podium.

Boar Bash: *September 27, 2025*

Boar Bash kicked off the school year on September 27, serving as the school’s first fall formal event, held at the Student Activities Center (SAC), the first in school history. Josh Pan ’27 highlighted that “Boar Bash was fun ... You get kids together [and have] a good time.” The Student Council led the initiative by bringing various options of hot food to the lounge area, arranging a photo booth with decorations, and setting up vibrant signs, lanterns, and candles around the SAC. Boar Bash differed from previous SAC dances as the DJ stand was located near the Tuck Shop, and a set dress code recommended blue or yellow clothing. The event marked an exciting start to the year, charging the SAC space with fiery school spirit.



Photo courtesy of @choatescope on Instagram

Students dance and celebrate during Boar Bash.

Community Service Day: *October 10, 2025*



Photo courtesy of photos.choate.edu

Students beam while packing vegetables.

On October 10, 2025, Choate’s annual Community Service Day brought students and faculty together for over 30 volunteer projects across Connecticut under the theme “With Purpose for People and Planet.” Students participated in various activities such as harvesting vegetables, packing meals, and removing invasive plants, supporting both local communities and environmental efforts. Service projects included partnerships with local food organizations that helped prepare over 100,000 meals, as well as work on farms and conservation sites focused on harvesting crops and restoring native ecosystems. The day connected campus learning to real-world impact.

Deerfield Day: *November 8, 2025*



Photo courtesy of photos.choate.edu

Choate students cheer on the Boars.

Blue and gold face paint, boar onesies, deafening chants, and nonstop school spirit all marked this year’s Deerfield Day once again. As students traveled to Deerfield Academy on November 8, the century-old rivalry came to life with packed sidelines and spirited competition. Behind the scenes, faculty and staff carefully coordinated both team and fan buses, schedules, and chaperones to make the tradition possible. The annual pep rally, including Choate’s iconic boar mascot smashing through the green Deerfield door, set the tone for one of the most unifying weekends of the year. For students and alumni, Deerfield Day was a celebration of community, tradition, and unforgettable blue-and-gold pride.

Diversity Day: *January 19, 2026*

This year’s Diversity Day theme was “Voices of Tomorrow: Youth Activism and the Fight for a Sustainable Future.” Special guests Carissa Cabrera, Jerome Foster II, and Sophia Kianni held an informative panel about their journeys into service work and climate advocacy. Afterward, students broke into workshop groups to discuss environmental justice and climate change. “It was cool that each student got to dive into something particular that they’re interested in,” said Gunther Stewart ’27. Students had the opportunity to submit workshop ideas through the DEI office and run their own sessions. Workshops ranged from discussion groups to beehive-building seminars.



Photo courtesy of photos.choate.edu

Students hang bird feeders from a tree.

Snow Day: *January 26, 2026*

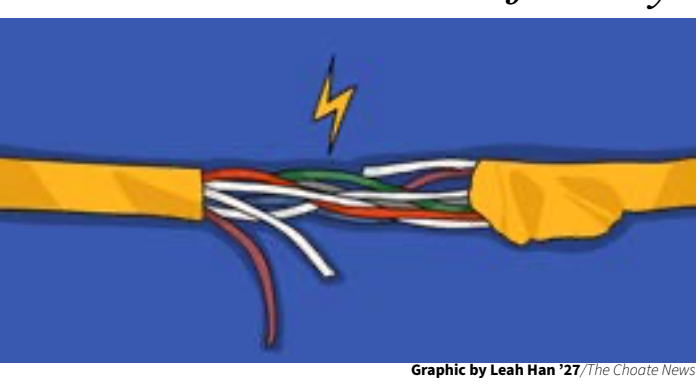
A snowy surprise flooded outlook inboxes on January 26 and February 23, announcing a day off from classes and regularly scheduled programming due to sizable storms of 14 and 16 inches, respectively. While this closed many facilities and caused operational delays, students thoroughly enjoyed the rest. Some students chose to catch up on work, while others played in the snow by engaging in snowball fights and sledding down snow-blanketed slopes. The snow days allowed the Class of 2026 to embark on the special tradition of senior sledding. Austin Zhuo ’26 reflected, “It was bittersweet: seeing people sled down the hill, I came to realize how this was the beginning of our final events together at Choate.” These unexpected yet sweet surprises made the winter term memorable for many.



Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Burgstahler ’26

Nichols House members enjoying the snow.

Power Outage: *January 28, 2026*



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

Uncertainty spread across campus on January 28 when power was cut off to major academic buildings and dorms, due to a blown transformer in Steele Hall. Boarders in dorms without power had to search for places to sleep, with many going to the homes of day students, another dorm with power, or other living spaces with power available. Still, it is during times of unprecedented uncertainty and uncontrollable situations that the strength and support of the community can truly shine. Day student families stepped up to take multiple boarders home, and the Choate Facilities team worked quickly to restore power to campus. “The way people chose connection, patience, and mutual support—even in uncomfortable or uncertain moments — speaks to the strength and resilience of the Choate community,” Dean of Students Mr. Will Gilyard ’98 said.

Revisit Days: *March 30, 2026*

Choate’s Spring Visit Days, held from March 30–April 2, welcomed admitted students and their families to experience campus life firsthand. Visitors attended classes, explored dorms and athletic facilities, and participated in discussions with current students and faculty. Families also attended panels about academics, athletics, and extracurricular opportunities. Carr Hall, the newly opened admissions building, played a central role by hosting gatherings, training sessions, and family events, leaving a strong impression on guests. Student hosts created an energetic and welcoming atmosphere by sharing their experiences and guiding prospective students around campus, showcasing Choate’s strong sense of community and school spirit. Jaxx Friedman ’27, a student host, explained how he “liked how he saw [his prospective student] grow to like Choate more and more every second.”



Photo courtesy of Joey Avena

Students welcome prospective students to campus.

Mr. Will Gilyard: *April 7, 2026*



Photo courtesy of @gochoate on Instagram

Mr. Gilyard in his office smiling for the camera.

Beginning with the 2026-2027 academic year, Dean of Students Mr. Will Gilyard ’98 will be appointed the new Head of Student and Academic Life, succeeding Ms. Jenny Elliott. Mr. Gilyard has served as the Dean of Students since the 2023-2024 academic year, and before that as both a Form Dean and the Dean of Alumni Engagement at Choate, bringing a wealth of experience to the position. Before his return to Choate in 2020, Mr. Gilyard spent nine years in multiple roles at the Kingswood Oxford School, including six years as the Dean of Students. Around campus, Mr. Gilyard is known for his warm presence and ability to prioritize students’ needs. Earlier this spring, Head of School Dr. Alex Curtis spoke directly to Mr. Gilyard’s appointment, saying, “We spoke with many impressive educators and leaders. Mr. Gilyard stood out. Not just because he knows Choate, but because of the way he thinks about schools, about students, and about the kind of community we are trying to build.” As Mr. Gilyard embarks on the next phase of his Choate journey, he is again putting students at the core of his role. “If [students] are feeling safe and taken care of and given space to take risks and try new things, that gives kids the best opportunities that we can provide as a school,” Mr. Gilyard said.

G30: *April 29, 2026*



Photo courtesy of photos.choate.edu

Members of the G30 conference line up for a picture.

This spring, Choate had the honor of hosting the G30 Schools Organization, an international association of secondary school leaders, for its annual convention. The event invited renowned heads of school from around the world to exchange their educational practices, discuss relevant issues, and explore curriculum innovation. This year, Choate was chosen for its prime location, pioneering programs, and unique ability to balance a traditional education with progressive initiatives. Throughout the week, attendees participated in various information sessions, campus tours, a special school meeting, and presentations at the Kohler Environmental Center (KEC). The convention offered a chance to showcase the best of Choate’s community, leaving leaders with renewed appreciation for the distinct opportunities the school offers.

President’s Day: *May 1, 2026*



Photo courtesy of @boarpen on Instagram

President’s Day Spikeball tournament winners.

What started as a mysterious email with a video from the G30 conference quickly turned into one of the liveliest days of the spring term: President’s Day. The night before, students packed the Student Activity Center (SAC) for a dance, where flashing lights, loud music, and shoulder-to-shoulder crowds made it nearly impossible to stand still. The energy carried into the next day, when students gathered for the spikeball tournament and a campus-wide afternoon of fun. A food truck serving mango and raspberry lemonade and fresh cookies kept everyone fueled between games. From packed dance floors to competitive spikeball matches, President’s Day became one of the most memorable community events of the year.

New Bridge: *May 15, 2026*



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

The new bridge stretches across North Main Street.

In the spring, Choate began construction on a long-anticipated pedestrian bridge connecting the Bruce ’45 and Lueza Gelb Track to the top of Colony Hall. The project, which required a 6-3 vote of approval from the Wallingford Town Council in September 2024, aims to improve both campus safety and connectivity. Before the bridge, students crossing between upper and lower campus had to navigate Christian Street on foot, which is a road where “cars can’t stop until they’re very close,” Chief Financial Officer Mr. Patrick Durbin said. Once completed, the bridge will also provide easier access to the cross-country trail, Ruutz-Rees, and Information and Technology Services.

Teeing Up in Scotland



Photo courtesy of @gochoate on Instagram

The Boys' and Girls' golf team at St. Andrews.

For the first time in Choate history, the Boys' and Girls' Varsity and Junior Varsity Golf teams traveled to St. Andrews, Scotland, for their preseason trip. The trip offered a chance to play one of the most iconic golf courses while traveling abroad. However, the trip did not stop at golfing. "There's more of an emphasis on learning about Scottish culture ... like a historical tour of St. Andrews or playing historically accurate, 1800s Scottish golf," Co-Captain of Girls' Varisty Golf Elizabeth Burgstahler '26 said. Throughout the trip, players from both teams played on a variety of courses, broadening their golf skills, deepening their knowledge of golf's history in its birthplace, and bonding with their teammates.

South on a Spoon



Photo courtesy of Dr. Rachel Myers

Students at South on a Spoon posing under a ceiling mosaic.

Over spring break, students ventured to New Orleans, Memphis, and Jackson for the South on a Spoon trip. Coordinated by Dean of Equity and Inclusion Dr. Rachel Myers, Associate Dean of Equity and Inclusion Ms. Cindy Okrah, and American Studies teacher Dr. Amber Hodge, the trip delved into the South's history and cuisine. Students visited historical landmarks, such as the Whitney Plantation, which highlighted the realities of slavery; sampled iconic Southern foods; and even learned how to make gumbo, a flavorful stew originating in Louisiana. "It was really visceral ... because you're experiencing it and not just reading about it," Dr. Myers said. The trip highlighted the intersection of culture, cuisine, and the past and present.

Wired Boars Soar



Photo courtesy of Marianna Mata '27

The Wired Boars posing on stage in Houston, Texas.

During the week of April 29, the Choate Robotics team, the Wired Boars, attended the For the Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST) Worlds Championship in Houston, Texas, where student engineering teams from around the world gathered to compete. After months of preparation, the Wired Boars delivered a record-breaking performance, rewriting Choate Robotics history. The Wired Boars made their way to the final branch, called the Einsteins. Reaching this level is considered one of the highest achievements in high school robotics, reflecting the immense diligence of the Wired Boars. From long afternoons of preparation to competing on stage, Choate Robotics "made it."

AI, Environment, and Sustainability at Diversity Day



Photo courtesy of photos.choate.edu.

(From left to right) Ms. Carissa Cabrera, Mr. Jerome Foster II, and Ms. Sophia Kianni.

At Choate's 35th Annual Diversity Day, Ms. Carissa Cabrera, Ms. Sophia Kianni, and Mr. Jerome Foster II spoke about the intersection of sustainability and diversity. Ocean conservationist and climate activist Ms. Carissa Cabrera brought her scientific and community-based perspective to the keynote panel. Esther Schoenberger '28 reflected that Ms. Cabrera approached environmental justice "from an intellectual standpoint as a scientist" during the panel. Ms. Cabrera shared her expertise in marine conservation and encouraged Choate students to look at climate action and sustainability as a collective responsibility among the entire community. A Stanford alum and co-founder of Phia, a sustainable fashion app, Ms. Kianni spoke about how meaningful change begins with identifying problems and creating solutions step by step. She also discussed the ethics of artificial intelligence in supporting environmental progress, encouraging students to think critically about how technology can be used for sustainability. Youth climate activist Mr. Foster, who previously served as the youngest-ever White House climate advisor, said "[I think] young people have a space to be at the table ... [young] people are left at that awareness stage and don't know the avenues, even when they can take tangible action within their communities." Mr. Foster discussed his experience as a young activist and expressed hope for younger generations to make change. All three keynote speakers highlighted the power young people have to create tangible impact and that age should not limit someone's ability to drive change.

Crash Course: John Green



Photo courtesy of photos.choate.edu

Mr. John Green in dicussion with Lucy Domingo '26.

On September 30, Mr. John Green — the best-selling author of Choate's 2025-2026 All-School Read, *Everything is Tuberculosis,* and other renowned titles such as *The Fault in Our Stars* and *Looking for Alaska* — visited campus to address the community. Mr. Green discussed his writing process, the book's personal significance, and the contemporary and historical impacts of tuberculosis. Students appreciated the themes of advocacy in Mr. Green's speech. "I was inspired to do medical service abroad," Oscar Hyatt '26 said. The post-speech discussion furthered the context behind the process of writing and had more "fun" facts about tuberculosis.

Learning About Our Land with Kimmerer



Photo courtesy of photos.choate.edu

Dr. Kimmerer with students at the Kohler Environmental Center (KEC).

On December 9, students and faculty gathered to hear botanist and *Braiding Sweetgrass* author Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer share her perspective on the natural world. During her morning program at Choate's Kohler Environmental Center, Dr. Kimmerer blended scientific insight with ecological knowledge, encouraging students to reflect on gratitude and our relationship with Mother Nature. Her talk emphasized the importance of being attentive to the land around us and approaching it with humility. The program reflected the School's sustainability goals and left the Choate community with plenty to reflect on.

In Each Other's Shoes: Dr. Jamil Zaki



Photo courtesy of photos.choate.edu

Dr. Jamil Zaki speaking to the Choate Community.

On January 23, the Choate community welcomed Dr. Jamil Zaki to discuss his work on empathy in emotional and psychological contexts, showing how empathy can make a difference in society. Dr. Zaki, a psychology professor at Stanford University and director of Stanford's Neuroscience Lab, was invited as part of the Thalheimer speaker program, which invites speakers to provide insight on broadly defined issues. During his presentation, Dr. Zaki described empathy as a learned skill that one can build to strengthen connections with others. As students worldwide have been facing growing division within their communities and beyond, Dr. Zaki's presentation offered a look at the more positive side of human nature.

BREAKING NEWS: Ms. Robin Sparkman '87 Returns to Choate



Photo courtesy of photos.choate.edu

Ms. Robin Sparkman giving a speech to the Choate community.

Ms. Robin Sparkman '87, Adlai Stevenson Fellow, spoke at School Meeting on February 3. Serving as the Editor-in-Chief of *The Choate News* at Choate and now as the president and Co-CEO of the investigative journalism collective ProPublica, Ms. Sparkman discussed her experience in journalism as a student and as a professional, and detailed some of her most exciting investigations. Ms. Sparkman also emphasized courage as a crutial part of investigative journalism. "Courage is often very cold, painstaking, hard work, late nights, endless stress, and choosing to speak the truth anywhere," she said. "When you hold power to account, whether at a law firm or Supreme Court, you help bring a Little more order, transparency, and honor into our complicated world." Students responded positively. Jenell Karikari '27 said, "I appreciate her connection to the school, and I really respected her approach to hands-on journalism." Throughout her speech, Ms. Sparkman encouraged students to speak out, not be afraid to question authority, and to continuously advocate for what's right.

The Alumni Award Goes to ... Dr. Elad Levy '89



Photo courtesy of photos.choate.edu

Dr. Elad Levy '89 standing next to Head of School Dr. Alex Curtis.

On April 7, School Meeting featured a special visit from Dr. Elad Levy '89, who was awarded the 2026 Alumni Award for his contributions to neurosurgery and medical innovation. In his speech, Dr. Levy attributed much of his determination and resilience to years spent rowing with the Choate crew team. "Bloody hands from rowing became a symbol of grit, resilience, and a work ethic that opened futures I have not even imagined," Dr. Levy said. Dr. Levy noted that the feeling of "bloody hands" grounded him, whether it was before a conference for his medical work or a speech to Choate students. Today, Dr. Levy is best known for his advances in treating patients who have suffered strokes. He attributes these medical advancements to his time rowing at Choate, where the feeling of "bloody hands shifted the framework" for his medical work. His speech resonated with students, clearly demonstrating his passion and determination. "After hearing Dr. Levy, I gained a new sense of motivation and passion to make a change in the world," Jayden Huh '27 said.

ARTS HIGHLIGHTS

Constructed Family Portraits

October 3, 2025

On October 3, world-renowned photographer Jamie Diamond's portfolio, "Constructed Family Portraits," was displayed at the Paul Mellon Arts Center (PMAC). "Constructed Family Portraits" flipped the traditional family portrait on its head. The twist? The people in the photographs were not related. "I'm interested in both the performance of the portrait and our innate fluency in its codes and gestures, as well as the shifting paradigm of the traditional family structure," Diamond said in her artist's statement. With Diamond's help, Arts Concentration students staged their own constructed family portraits, with members of the Choate community acting as models. Later, their photos were displayed in PMAC alongside Diamond's work. "We learned a lot about camerawork, scouting locations, and how to direct models," Nila Rajan '26 said. Overall, Diamond's visit informed and inspired Choate's artists to dive deeper into the intricacies of photography.



Have You Seen The Moon?

October 30–November 1, 2025

A nameless old man journeys across time and space in search of his wife, learning important lessons about life and love along the way. From October 30–November 1, the Gelb Theater hosted Choate's production of *The Old Man and The Old Moon (TOMATOM)*. An unconventional but poignant piece of theatre, *TOMATOM* featured puppetry, mask work, special lighting, vibrant costumes, and of course, singing and acting. "The dedication that [the cast] brought to every single rehearsal, the seriousness with which [they] took the comedy ... was really inspiring to me as a director," Director and Theater teacher Mr. Bari Robinson said. Matthew Choi '26 portrayed the title character of The Old Man, and described the role as "everything I had wanted in my Choate theater career." Choi also emphasized the ensemble as an important part of his acting journey: "It's such a special show to me because I was able to interact with basically every cast member ... and interacting with every single person and playing off everybody's unique and different acting styles just felt very invigorating." Choate's performance and design for *TOMATOM* eventually won several awards at the Stephen Sondheim Awards.



Grammy-Winning Music Engineer

February 16–17, 2026

On February 16–17, Grammy Award-winning audio engineer Mr. Brian Vibberts visited Choate to participate in the School's "Choate In Session" series, where students had the opportunity to learn from industry professionals. Mr. Vibberts engaged with the Choate community through multiple workshops, ranging from Music Production to sessions for general music lovers. Mr. Vibberts shared his perspective on techniques in a studio setting, the role of AI in audio production, and navigating the ever-changing music industry. A highlight of his visit was a live recording session of Michael Quintero '27's original song "Fiona," during which Mr. Vibberts produced an instrumental rendition performed by Simon Podos '27, Rachel Fan '27, and Brooks Mort '29, while explaining his creative process in real time. "There's a palpable excitement for students interested in music production ... [when] these students see someone achieving their goals," Head of Arts Department Mr. Matthew McLean said. Mr. Vibberts, who traced his own musical inspiration to a high school recording session, expressed his hope of returning to campus.



Sandbox Percussion

December 11-12, 2025

From December 11–12, the Grammy-winning Sandbox Percussion ensemble — consisting of four members, Mr. Ian Rosenbaum, Mr. Jonny Allen '07, Mr. Terry Sweeny, and Mr. Victor Caccese — visited Choate to work with its ensembles and music students. The group's residency at Choate culminated in a recital featuring Andy Akiko's "Karakurenai" and Arts Concentration (Arts Con) students in Colony Hall. As an alumnus, Mr. Allen emphasized that Choate was integral in fostering his passion for music, which would eventually lead him to form his own percussion ensemble. After graduating from Choate, Mr. Allen and his groupmates met at Yale School of Music in 2011, where they decided to create Sandbox Percussion due to their shared love of chamber music. The group approaches each piece they perform with various musical interpretations, working together to find what works best. Throughout their two days on campus, Sandbox shared their experiences collaborating with soloists, releasing albums, and teaching students.

Symphony Performs in Seoul, Korea

March 7–14, 2026

Choate Symphony Orchestra visited Seoul, South Korea, from March 7–14, experiencing the cultural vibrancy of the city and bonding with peers through music. Over the course of the trip, students participated in a K-pop dance class, made rice cakes, visited the Lotte World amusement park, and watched Nanta, an acrobatic cooking show. A particularly meaningful experience for many was playing with the Yonsei University Orchestra and the Seongbuk Center for the Visually Impaired. "Seeing how hard [visually impaired children] have to work to be able to [play their instruments] ... it really struck a chord," Instrumental Ensembles Director Mr. Gene Wie said. For a week in Seoul, the Symphony Orchestra brought its sound to an international audience. Mrs. Carol Jones, Manager of Arts Center Operations, concluded, "to be able to go somewhere else and experience your passions in other areas and with other cultures ... those opportunities are really special."

Inaugural Film Festival

May 3, 2026

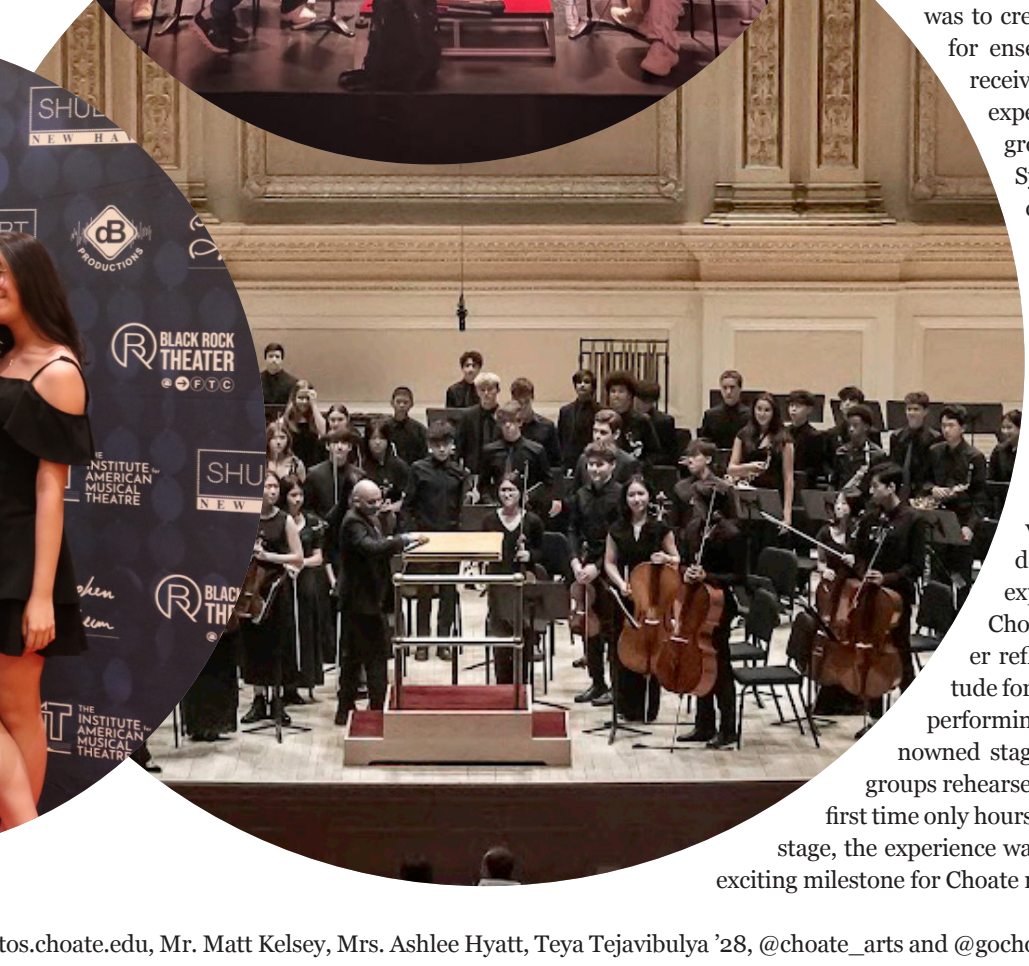
A snack thief runs through the halls of a dorm. A game goes too far. Something spooky is happening in the Chapel. What do all of these stories have in common? All of them feature plots from Choate's student filmmakers. On May 3, 14 student-created films were screened at the inaugural Choate Film Festival, where student creativity and passion converged. The goal of the event, organized by Nila Rajan '26 and Chiamaka Eke '26 with the help of Visual Arts teacher Mr. Matt Kelsey and Arts Department Head Mr. Matthew McLean, was to spotlight student filmmakers across all genres and levels of expertise. "To be able to have a little window into all those parts of the students' lives that we don't always get a chance to see is really, really cool," Mr. Kelsey said. Whether they were involved in a music video, a surrealist exploration of human nature, a crime flick, or a nature documentary, students' dedication and creative vision were on full display on the big screen at the Choate Film Festival.



Choate at Carnegie Hall

April 19, 2026

On April 19, members of Choate's Concert Orchestra and Wind Ensemble stepped into the spotlight on one of the world's most prestigious stages: Carnegie Hall. Alongside musicians from Saint Margaret's Episcopal School in California, they performed a mix of classical and contemporary pieces, including "Golden" from Netflix's *K-Pop Demon Hunters*. Instrumental Ensembles Director Mr. Gene Wie explained that the trip's goal was to create opportunities for ensembles that have received fewer major experiences than groups such as the Symphony Orchestra. "Bringing primarily members of the Concert Orchestra and Wind Ensemble," he said, was his "small effort to start shifting the scales," providing more students with musical exposure beyond Choate. Students later reflected their gratitude for the experience of performing on a world-renowned stage. While the two groups rehearsed together for the first time only hours before taking the stage, the experience was nevertheless an exciting milestone for Choate musicians.



Red Carpet and Sondheim Awards

May 9, 2026

Sometime in the fall of 2025, unbeknownst to the cast and crew, director Mr. Bari Robinson submitted Choate's fall musical, *The Old Man and The Old Moon (TOMATOM)* to the Stephen Sondheim Awards. The Stephen Sondheim Awards are a Tony Awards-style program where Connecticut and Massachusetts high schools submit their theatrical productions for recognition on a regional level for excellence in musical theater. *TOMATOM* received three nominations — Best Lighting for Vera Lampe '27, Best Costuming for Bree Miksovsky '26, and Best Actor for Alexandros Antonopoulos '26. Ultimately, Choate brought home a Sondheim Award for Best Costuming, with Miksovsky giving a speech at the ceremony on behalf of the entire cast and crew. "People will tell me that I'm good at costuming, but it's nice to have external, unbiased proof of that," Miksovsky said. "[The award] definitely further cemented my interest in going into theatre as a career." Antonopoulos also attended the Sondheim Awards actor boot camp with the other nominees for Best Actor and Actress, working on a medley they performed at the award show. "It was a really fun experience, getting to meet all of these incredibly talented people and working with them collaboratively," Antonopoulos said. Mr. Robinson emphasized the value of a small cast production like *TOMATOM*, where students could work so closely together. "In the world, theater is theater, no matter where you do it ... but the thing that makes theater 'go' is the people," Mr. Robinson said.



Visuals by photos.choate.edu, Mr. Matt Kelsey, Mrs. Ashlee Hyatt, Teya Tejavibulya '28, @choate_arts and @gochoate on Instagram

SPORTS HIGHLIGHTS

Preseason to Peak Season

Fall 2025 and Spring 2026

Before the fall term, teams such as football, field hockey, cross country, volleyball, and water polo spent hours practicing through drills, conditioning, and scrimmages to prepare for the season. Athletes described the experience as physically demanding, but also rewarding, as teammates motivated one another through each workout. "Preseason is a top-five thing you can do as an athlete," Boys' Varsity Water Polo Captain Andy Stahlman '26 said. Similarly, during spring preseason, many teams traveled to destinations globally and nationally, balancing practices with team dinners, sightseeing, and bonding activities. Girls' Varsity Crew rowed in DeLand, Florida, while Girls' Varsity Golf immersed themselves in Scottish culture in St. Andrews. Across both seasons, preseason helped the athletes feel "more in tune with the people around [them]," according to Girls' Varsity Crew Team, Co-Captain Saylen Blake '26, and prepared Choate athletes for the challenges of the season ahead.



Photo courtesy of choate.photos.edu

Boys' Varsity Soccer in preseason.

Mr. Groen '15 Returns to Campus

Fall 2025

This fall, Choate welcomed back alumnus Mr. Max Groen '15 as the School's new Mental Performance Coach and Mental Health Counselor. Drawing on his background in sports psychology and counseling, as well as his own experience as a lacrosse athlete at Choate and St. Mary's College of Maryland, Mr. Groen began working with athletic and performing arts teams to support students' mental health and performance. His sessions focus on managing anxiety, building confidence, recovering from mistakes, and balancing pressure with well-being. "There is more pressure now than ever before on immediate results. I think the culture of sport and competing, largely due to social media, is so focused on posting highlights, commitments, and recruiting offers don't allow students ... to just go through the normal process of being a performer," Mr. Groen said. By encouraging open conversations about stress and performance, Mr. Groen hopes to change the script around performance-based results culture and create a healthier, supportive environment for Choate students.



Photo courtesy of Mr. Max Groen '15

Mr. Groen smiles for a photo.

Turf-ening Up On Maher Field

Fall 2025



Photo by Ben Lee '27/ *The Choate News*

Choate athletes on the new Maher Field.

This fall, students returned to campus with a fully renovated hybrid football field, replacing the former Maher Field. The new field features natural grass for consistent traction, an improved drainage system, and serves as a visually striking centerpiece for the School. Boys' Varsity Football Head Coach LJ Spinnato said the upgrade has "totally enhanced" the gameday experience. Players echoed this sentiment, with some noting that the surface makes them feel faster on the new field and others emphasizing the improved atmosphere for spectators. "[I] liked the old fields a lot, but this one is much more even and the stands create a good crowd environment," Boys' Varsity Football Captain Will Tellers '26 said. With a full-screen LED scoreboard and its central location on campus, the field now attracts larger crowds across campus, strengthening school spirit and further integrating football into campus life. The renovated turf has become a hub for Choate athletics and stands as a major upgrade to the School's athletic facilities.

100 Wins for Coach Fuentes

Fall 2025

On October 22, Boys' Varsity Soccer Head Coach Charlie Fuentes celebrated his 100th career victory over the Kingswood-Oxford School. In his tenth year of leading the program, Coach Fuentes has built a culture rooted in discipline, character, and the belief that "little things add up." Co-Captains David Villavicencio '26 and Juan Delgado '26 praised their coach for his intensity and care. "I [appreciate] the time and care he puts into the game," Delgado said. Coach Fuentes also credited Assistant Coach Mr. Zachary Kafoglis's role in the program's continued success. When reflecting on his milestone, Coach Fuentes said he hopes his players "leave [Choate] as better people," reflecting the values of kindness and responsibility that define the team.



Photo courtesy of Mr. Charlie Fuentes

Coach Fuentes offers advice.

Knight '07 Leads USA to Gold

Winter 2026

The Winter Olympics is one of the most anticipated athletic events in the world. Year after year, Choate alumni have appeared on the ice and snow, and the 2026 Winter Olympics hosted at Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo featured many of the School's Olympians. According to the Choate Archives, alumni from Choate's Girls' Ice Hockey program have competed in every Winter Olympics since women's ice hockey was introduced in 1998. Angela Ruggiero '98, Kim Insalaco '99, Julie Chu '01, and Hilary Knight '07 all competed together for the U.S. Women's National Ice Hockey Team, with several of them playing alongside one another during their Olympic careers.



Photo courtesy of @gochoate on Instagram

Hilary Knight '07 in the Winter Olympics and as a Choate student.

This year, in her fifth Olympic appearance at the 2026 Olympic Winter Games at Milano Cortina, Knight captained Team USA to a gold medal. Knight set new records for most Olympic goals (15) and total points (33) by a U.S. Women's player, and also scored a crucial goal leading to a 2-1 gold medal victory over Canada. Knight has earned recognition not only for her accomplishments on the ice, but also for her leadership and sportsmanship, continuing Choate's strong Olympic legacy.

Najda '26 Named NHL Prospect

Winter 2025-26

Senior forward Greg Najda '26 moved closer to his lifelong dream of playing professional hockey last season after being formally recognized as a prospect by the National Hockey League (NHL). Known for his strength, focus, and ability to create space with the puck, Najda has become a standout offensive presence for Boys' Varsity Ice Hockey. Teammates praised his work ethic and leadership, noting how his energy consistently motivates the team. "He's always getting the boys dialed ... he's always bringing energy," Boys' Varsity Ice Hockey teammate Grady Glandorf '27 said. Off the ice, Glandorf added, "He's a super nice, goofy guy, so he's really good to be around." Najda credits his teammates, coaches, family, and mentors for assisting his growth. As he finishes his Choate career, his teammates acknowledge the high standard of hard work and discipline Najda has set for the program.



Photo courtesy of Greg Najda '26

Najda '26 on the ice.

"Team-First": Award to Jiao '26

Winter 2026



Photo courtesy of @choateswimdive on Instagram

Jiao '26 receives the Andy Lowe Memorial Award.

Choate Girls' Varsity Swimming Captain Isabelle Jiao '26 was awarded the Andy Lowe Memorial Award, an honor given to one female and one male athlete at the annual New England Division I Swimming & Diving Championships who exemplify strong character, leadership, and humility. Jiao described the experience as "surreal," and credited the award as both a recognition of her individual accomplishments and the success of the team as a whole. Her teammates and coaches consistently point to her team-first mentality, describing her as welcoming, energetic, and supportive. Jiao dedicated the award to her teammates, reflecting that she found her "own family on the Choate swim team," underscoring the program's emphasis on community, collaboration, and shared success.

Killer KITT Win By Boys' Tennis

Spring 2026

Choate Boys' Varsity Tennis opened its spring season with an impressive performance at the Kingswood-Oxford Invitational Tennis Tournament (KITT), capturing first place by a single point against some of the region's top prep and day school tennis teams. The victory also marked Choate's first KITT title since 2004. Despite having only two days to prepare following tryouts, the team quickly adapted to the tournament's fast-paced indoor matches through focused practices and strategic doubles pairings. In singles matches, all four Choate players finished in the top three of their draws, while the doubles team of Truman Barbie '26 and Reid Bock '27 won a draw championship. Players credited the victory not only to skill, but also to the team's strong support system and energy throughout the tournament. "Everybody was trying to come together and ... [doing] what's best for the team," Co-Captain Johnny Guo '26 said. Coaches and teammates highlighted the humility, teamwork, and determination that went into the training process, qualities that fueled the team's early success. "I'm really proud of the team, and I'm really excited to continue to build on ... the way we're playing," Guo said. The Boys' Varsity Tennis team finished the season with a 9-2 record, demonstrating that the KITT set the tone for a competitive and successful season ahead.



Photo courtesy of @choatetennis on Instagram

Members of the Choate Boys' Varsity Tennis team after the KITT.

Kim '26 Honored for Excellence

Spring 2026

On March 28, Choate Girls' Varsity Basketball Captain Abby Kim '26 received the Bridgeport Jewish Community Center (JCC) Scholar-Athlete of the Year Award. "It was really special, I just don't really have many words to describe it — just grateful," she said in response to receiving the award. Kim credited the close-knit culture of the Choate Girls' Varsity Basketball Team as one of the many contributors to her athletic development. The team's collaborative environment allowed them to prevail over many obstacles, while simultaneously teaching valuable lessons about teamwork and perseverance. Apart from recognition of her hard work and improvement, the award was also a reminder of the importance of self-confidence and a strong support system. Kim will go on to play for Williams College, where she hopes to be the leading three-point scorer, as she said: "My goal is to dream big."



Photo courtesy of @choateathletics on Instagram

Abby Kim '26 receives the JCC Scholar-Athlete of the Year Award.

Boys' Lacrosse Destroys Doors

Spring 2026

A historic and emotional victory took place on April 11, 2026 when the Boys' Varsity Lacrosse Team secured a hard-fought 11-10 win over Deerfield Academy on Senior Day, marking the program's first home win against its rival since 2005. Boys' Varsity Lacrosse Assistant Coach Tom Cottle described the matchup as a fierce and meaningful rivalry, noting the team's relentless hunger and energy from the opening whistle. Captain Joey Swan '26 credited the team's composure and concrete defense as Deerfield narrowed Choate's early 5-1 lead, while goaltender Mac Privateer '28 made several crucial late-game saves to secure the win. "I think our guys came out and battled, never let their foot off the gas, and just for the whole time ... we were ready to go. And at the end of the day, we just battled a little bit harder than Deerfield," Coach Cottle said. Ultimately, teamwork proved more decisive than individual performances in taking the win. The victory offered players a "taste of championship culture," fueling the team goal of securing a Founders League title.



Photo courtesy of choate.photos.edu

The Boys' Varsity Lacrosse Team does a team cheer.

DEPARTING FACULTY

Thank You, JKE: Our Jen-uine, Kar-ing, and Ell-oquent Leader

By **Mary Higashi '29**
Copy Editor

At a School Meeting earlier this year, Head of Student and Academic Life Ms. Jenny Elliott stood before the Choate community and announced her departure from the School. What could have been a simple announcement instead left its mark, as she shared warm, sincere, and memorable words on her time at the school. As she spoke with the wholeheartedness that many students have come to know her for, Colony Hall grew emotional, silently taking in her words of wisdom and feeling the heavy weight of her departure.

Since joining Choate in 2022, after her time as Dean of Students at Phillips Academy Andover, Ms. Elliott has shaped key aspects of student life — ranging from the new advising program and wellness initiatives to conversations and expectations about phones, social media, and artificial intelligence. Her role on campus, however, extends far beyond her title as Head of Student and Academic Life, as she additionally served as a Girls' Varsity Squash coach, history teacher, advisor, and trusted colleague and mentor.

Ms. Elliott described much of her leadership as rooted in service. "I think I tend to aspire to servant leadership," she said. When she first arrived at Choate, she began by paying attention to what made Choate the community it was, and she explained her approach as "most focused on building relationships and learning about what's core to [Choate's] identity," before deciding where change was needed.

Her humility and appreciation for her colleagues was evident in how she spoke about her work. Even when reflecting on her major accomplishments surrounding advising programs, student and faculty well-being, and Choate's new schedule, Ms. Elliott was quick to emphasize that the work was a product of her team's collaboration. "All of these processes have been the work of my colleagues; I just feel like I've been able to be part of those efforts and done my best to support them," she said.

Those who worked closely with Ms. Elliott recognized the dedicated effort behind her leadership. Dean of Students Mr. Will Gilyard '98, who will step into her role as the next Head of Student and Academic Life, described Ms. Elliott's leadership as "a rare combination of steadiness, thoughtfulness, and deep humanity."

"I just feel like I've been able to be part of those efforts and done my best to support them."

Head of School Dr. Alex Curtis echoed admiration for Ms. Elliott: "She is just an incredibly thoughtful and compassionate person who is always thinking of other people first, and she's particularly quick to express gratitude." Her contributions to the school were led by her "student centric approach," and over the four years, the two shared a strong working relationship and solid friendship. "I've enjoyed learning from each other ... I'll miss the conversations we have where we bring out the best in each other," Dr. Curtis reflected.

For students, her joy for connecting with others came through in conversations after squash practice and her presence in the classroom, demonstrating her approachability as someone in one of the school's highest leadership roles. As she said herself, one of her goals was for those around her to have "found [her] to be accessible and approachable."

Andrew Furtado '27, who took Ms. Elliott's Honors U.S. History class last fall, initially found that having the Head of Student and Academic Life as his teacher was intimidating. "I was a little scared," he said, although his initial impression changed quickly as the term continued. "I don't think I've ever had a teacher that was as thoughtful and devoted to her students as she was," he said.

Ms. Elliott left her mark on the squash courts not only as a coach but as someone who deeply cared about the team. Colette Farmer '29, Lauren Kim '29, and Elishka Roux '29, members of the Varsity and JV squash teams, described her as energetic, enthusiastic, and supportive. Kim noted that she frequently encouraged team check-ins, and planned practices that brought the Varsity and JV players together. Roux recalled when Ms. Elliott helped her through experiencing a difficult loss by reminding her that her teammates were watching and supporting her. "You could tell she really cared about us and the sport," Farmer said. "She didn't have to do all that if she didn't want to, but she did."



Photo courtesy of Ms. Jenny Elliott

As Ms. Elliott prepares to leave Choate to serve as the next Principal of Phillips Exeter Academy, her genuine care for the community and the joy she brings to every corner of campus are the things that will be missed most. Mr. Gilyard said he hopes to "continue her commitment to collaboration and care for students." Dr. Curtis similarly said, "I'm incredibly proud of all that she has achieved at Choate, and I know she'll look back on [Choate] with a sense of accomplishment. We're very grateful and obviously extremely lucky."

For Ms. Elliott, leaving Choate is made easier by her confidence in the school's future. She expressed deep respect for Mr. Gilyard and said she feels Choate will be in good hands under his leadership. "I love going to work every day," she said. "I love being at Choate."

Perhaps the clearest sign of her trust in Choate, is that her youngest son, James, will join the Choate community this coming school year. As she prepares to leave, the community will remember her for her immense impact in leaving the school more caring and connected than she found it. Thank you, Ms. Elliott!

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Cheering on from Choate: Ms. Voorhees to DC!



Photo courtesy of Ms. Beatrice Voorhees

By **Dylann Kong '29**
Reporter

After two years of contributions to the Choate community as a teacher, a coach, and an advisor, Ms. Beatrice Voorhees is preparing to say goodbye to campus. Known by students and colleagues for her dedication, warmth, and lasting presence in the community, Ms. Voorhees will leave her impact both inside and outside the classroom.

Students will not only miss her teaching, but also the atmosphere she created in classrooms. Kate Wai '28, a student in Ms. Voorhees's World History class, said "my favorite memory was when we would answer 'questions of the day' every single class, those are a lot of fun because I feel like I've gotten to know her really well." Wai described Ms. Voorhees as "really organized" while being very approachable and supportive, adding that "I feel like I can ask her for advice whenever I want.

"[Ms. Voorhees] is a teacher who's really passionate about the subject she's teaching."

Wai also admired Ms. Voorhees's passion for history, as the two often discussed museums and travel. "She really showed her passion for history through that [conversation], and I feel like that kind of stuck with me, because I like a teacher who's really passionate about the subject she's teaching," Wai said.

While students reflect on Ms. Voorhees's significant impact in the classroom, her colleagues have also spoken highly of her contributions within the HPRSS department.

History teacher Mr. Wes Jenkins described her as someone who "brought great insights to the HPRSS department," and that she was "eagerly engaged with faculty and students." Mr. Jenkins reflected, "She will be sorely missed, and we wish her the best of luck in grad school." As she wraps up her career at Choate, Ms. Voorhees shared that she will attend Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service to pursue a master's degree in Eurasian, Russian, and Eastern European Studies. "I'm very excited about this. In college, I was a double History and Slavic Studies major, so this gives me a chance to explore that further," she said. Along with the memories she leaves behind, Ms. Voorhees also hopes students and colleagues will remember her through the series of colorful JFK paintings she created, which she plans to gift to the school.

While we are excited for her future at graduate school in Washington, D.C., the school will not feel the same without her presence, energy, and passion for the subjects she teaches.

Dylann Kong *may be reached at dkong29@choate.edu*

Goodbye Mr. Baudinet, You Will Be Greatly Missed!

By **Elliot Sun '28**
Copy Editor

After two years, History teacher Mr. Matthias Baudiet's Choate chapter comes to a close. During his time in the HPRSS Department, Mr. Baudinet taught Honors World History and Honors U.S. History, coached Boys' Varsity Soccer and Varsity Track and Field, and served as a house mentor in Bungalow; roles that made him a familiar face and a trusted presence across campus.

Mr. Baudinet's students described his classroom environment as calm, focused, and welcoming. Will Frith '28 said he appreciated how "interactive" and "clear" Mr. Baudinet was in his teaching, noting that his writing has improved significantly due to Mr. Baudinet's consistent, constructive feedback. Arjun Ramnath '28 echoed this sentiment, calling the class a "fun learning environment" where discussions were both thoughtful and engaging. He added that Mr. Baudinet's positive attitude and willingness to "take the time to make jokes with all the students" particularly struck him.

Beyond academics, students remember small moments that demonstrated Mr. Baudinet's attentiveness and care as a mentor. Frith and Ramnath both recalled a similar memory where Mr. Baudinet would occasionally let the class out early on Burger Day – a small gesture that brightened students' days as they neared the end of difficult weeks.

"He's the whole package. We wouldn't work if we didn't have teachers like him."

As he prepares to transition into college counseling in his next chapter, Mr. Baudinet said he looks forward to working one-on-one with students and helping them find the right fit for their futures. He noted that witnessing students' progress in writing has been a particularly fulfilling part of his Choate career. "There's always a major improvement in writing throughout the year, and I've been very proud of that," he said. He admitted that he will miss the people at Choate most, in particular the students, faculty, and strong sense of community define campus life.



Photo courtesy of Mr. Matthias Baudinet

Faculty saw the same warmth in his personality. HPRSS teacher Ms. Courtney DeStefano described him as "calm, funny, and smart," and someone whose quiet sense of humor would surface in the most unexpected moments. "He'll be in the corner reading his book, and every once in a while you'll just hear him giggle," she said. She also appreciated his thoughtfulness in planning lessons, noting that students "learned how to be more disciplined and on top of their work" because of him.

Ms. DeStefano concluded, "he's the whole package ... We wouldn't work if we didn't have teachers like him." Students and faculty at Choate will miss Mr. Baudinet's presence and thoughtful teaching, and the community wishes him the very best in his next chapter.

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FAREWELL TO MR. GOSZTYLA

By **Malaika Fonkem '29**
Reporter

Mr. Gosztyla, fondly known as "Mark," has been a key member of the Choate community for almost ten years. After working as Head of the English Department and an English teacher, Mr. Gosztyla will move on to his next chapter at the end of this year. Throughout Mr. Gosztyla's time at Choate, he has served in various roles, including a coach for Track and Field and a trusted advisor. He has had an undeniable impact on the school community, serving as a supportive mentor, colleague, and teacher.

Beyond academics, Mr. Gozstyla also played a huge role in students' lives as an advisor. Through weekly meetings with students, he helped loosen the pressure of academics as he focused on growth and building connections.

His students emphasized that Mr. Gozstyla brought passion to his classes and gave students a platform to express themselves without fear of judgment. Rafia Pasha '26 said, "Mr. Gozstyla always made advising feel like more than just another meeting during the school day. He genuinely cared about how his students were doing, and it showed through his approach to making a space where students feel comfortable being themselves."

"[He made] a space where students feel comfortable being themselves."

His colleagues have also expressed admiration and respect in a professional setting, as English teacher Ms. Leela Woody said, "As our department head, Mark has led with a clear focus on honoring what is at the heart of our work in the English classroom while also supporting our evolution as the world around us changes." Close friendships shared as colleagues will also be missed by faculty, as Ms. Woody mentions that she will miss their laughs and time in and out of the English department.



Photo courtesy of Mr. Mark Gosztyla

English teacher Mr. John Cobb echoed Ms. Woody's admiration of his humor and lighthearted presence: "I'll miss joking and shooting the breeze with Mr. G in his office," he said.

Malaika Fonkem *may be reached at mfonkem29@choate.edu*

DEPARTING FACULTY

A Sweet Send-Off for Ms. Shea

By **Maya Abeles '28**
Reporter

Ms. Megan Shea – passionate English teacher, dedicated coach, and supportive advisor–is, without a doubt, a beloved and integral member of the Choate community. Having first come to Choate in 1991, Ms. Shea has dedicated her career to teaching and mentoring students for the last 35 years. In the final days of her time at Choate, Ms. Shea reflects on her experience, feeling a mix of joy, sadness, and great love for the Choate community. "I mean, it's exciting to retire, but ... when what you've done every day is this, it's hard," she said, noting the bittersweet nature of her departure.

Ms. Shea noted that what initially drew her to campus 35 years ago was the students, who have made her experience at Choate particularly impactful. She credits her love of teaching English to her students' bright energy, attributing their enthusiasm to her own passion for the material. Collaboration with the students throughout her years has made her classroom a symbiotic environment grounded in a shared love for English.

Recently, a Choate alumnus, Ryan Shepard '14, came to Choate to host a writing workshop. Ms. Shea was one of the teachers to whom Shepard credited his discovery and love of writing. He said Ms. Shea struck him as a teacher who found joy in giving students the tools they needed to develop their own voices in writing. "The reward is in seeing that every single one of my students has made tangible strides as a writer, and I can see it; they're writing more fully, more confidently," Ms. Shea said as she reflected on the rewarding nature of witnessing students' growth as writers. "They're sensing that they can dictate how they want to express themselves, whether that's orally or on paper."

Beyond the classroom, Ms. Shea has been an active contributor to Choate athletics, most notably in her role as Assistant Coach of Girls' Varsity Softball; a team she has dedicated herself to for the last 20 years of her Choate career. In addition to her work in athletics, Ms. Shea also served as a third-form dean for 10 years, during which she enjoyed getting to know the students and helping them adjust to the rigor and challenges of boarding school life. Ms. Shea recalled simultaneous feelings of sadness and pride in seeing the students she coached or advised grow up and pursuenew beginnings. For Ms. Shea, being a dean "was a great way to get to know the '90–'95 kids over the course of their first year, and then I always was sad when I had to hand them off to the sophomore dean who would take them over for the rest of their time at Choate."

"The reward is in seeing that every single one of my students has made tangible strides as a writer, and I can see it; they're writing more fully, more confidently."

For Ms. Shea, the most valuable part of her Choate career has been the joy she has found through forging relationships with both students and faculty. She described Choate as "an incredible space in which to grow as an adult as well as a student," reflecting on her personal growth throughout her time on campus. Ms. Shea will miss rigorous conversations with her colleagues and students, and how each school year has taught her something new about the world around her.

Throughout her time at Choate, Ms. Shea has connected with her colleagues in profound ways, acting as an inspiration for other English faculty members due to her dedication to the school and love she has for the community. As remarked by Ms. Leela Woody, an English teacher, "Ms. Shea's steadiness in her beliefs makes her an invaluable member of the English department and a wonderful teacher; she is deeply thoughtful in all that she does and is generous in all she has to share with her colleagues and students," Ms. Woody added. American Studies teacher Dr. Amber Hodge also said that Ms. Shea's presence inspired them: "Ms. Shea's commitment to always learning and growing as an educator is a model for her peers. I'm very happy for her well-earned retirement, but, selfishly, sorry that I won't get a few more years with her." Dr. Hodge credits much of her growth as a teacher to Ms. Shea's guidance: "Ms. Shea's presence makes me a better teacher," she concluded.

Across many different aspects of campus life, Ms. Shea has connected with her colleagues through her positivity, kindness, and generosity of knowledge, and is sure to leave a lasting impression long after she bids Choate farewell.

While her time at Choate will come to an end, Ms. Shea will remain a proud resident of Wallingford and looks forward to spending her time hiking, reading, and volunteering in the local area. While Ms. Shea will be missed, the Choate community will continue to remember her for her unique sense of humor and dedication to her students. Ms. Shea leaves us with a final reflecrtion on the unique opportunites inherent in being part of such unique commnity like Choate: The idea that you work and live in the same place ... I athink it's an incredible space in which to grow as an adult as well as a student," Ms. Shea said.

Maya Abeles *may be reached at mabeles28@choate.edu*



Photo courtesy of Ms. Megan Shea

THANK YOU, MS. KOOMSON!

By **Will Seery '28**
Reporter

When Ms. Melissa Koomson first arrived at Choate in 2016 as Director of Community Service, she brought with her a vision centered not only on volunteering but also on meaningful human connection. Nearly a decade later, as she prepares to leave Choate, students and faculty say that same vision has transformed both the Community Service Program and the culture surrounding service on campus.

Ms. Koomson first came to Choate after spending years working in various boarding schools and living in Ghana, West Africa. She was drawn to Choate because many aspects of the school's culture aligned with the ones instilled during her upbringing. "There were a lot of similarities with the values that I grew up with around Quaker education," Ms. Koomson said. "I saw it crossing over into Choate culture."

Throughout her time at Choate, Ms. Koomson became known not only for coordinating new service opportunities, but also for building relationships with students rooted in mentorship, empathy, and authenticity. Whether advising students during afternoon activities, helping organize local partnerships, or simply checking in with students around campus, Ms. Koomson established herself as a steady and compassionate presence within the community.

Over time, that philosophy came to shape the broader direction of Choate's service program. During her tenure, Ms. Koomson helped lead major changes to the school's approach to community engagement, including the creation of the Community Service Advisory Committee and shifts toward more intentional, relationship-based service work. "The service work itself that we've been doing has been much more authentic and not solely charity work and philanthropic work," Ms. Koomson explained. "Having face-to-face contact with those whom you are serving and really stretching yourself beyond your comfort zone is important,"she added.

Students involved in community service programs say Ms. Koomson encourages them to approach service not as charity, but as genuine engagement with others and a process of continued reciprocation. Lara Amer '27 reflected that Ms. Koomson helped shape her experience during freshman year by introducing her to service sites such as New Haven Reads, which allowed her to discover what she truly enjoyed about community engagement. Amer added that Ms. Koomson was "fundamental in that process" and later became an important mentor through continued work in Choate's service programs. "One of the values she's really instilled regarding service is that you're not doing things to just help people," Amer said. "You have to look beyond yourself and understand the things that people actually need."

"You can never thank somebody too many times."

Jimmy McCaffery '27 described her as someone who "represents the whole purpose and goals of having an advisor," motioning that she consistently encouraged students to pursue their goals while remaining emotionally supportive and open-minded. "There were a lot of instances where I would be in a moment of hesitation," McCaffery said, "and she would kind of give me a nudge toward being proactive." He added that one lesson from Ms. Koomson that stayed with him was simple: "You can never thank somebody too many times."

Ms. Koomson said some of her proudest moments at Choate came from watching students experience "aha moments" through service work and build connections with communities beyond campuses. Thank you Ms. Koomson!

Will Seery *may be reached at wseery28@choate.edu*

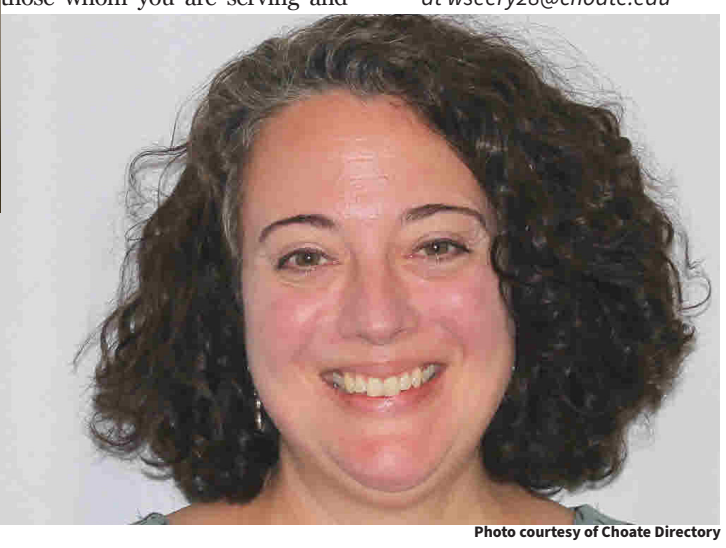

Photo courtesy of Choate Directory

Recognizing Mr. Rodriguez

By **Slater Boms '29**
Reporter

At the end of the spring term, Choate will bid a bittersweet farewell to a beloved member of our community, Assistant Director of Admissions Mr. Michael Rodriguez. As Mr. Rodriguez prepares to leave Choate for a position in the Admissions Office at Hopkins School, his presence over the last five years has left a lasting impact on many aspects of the School.

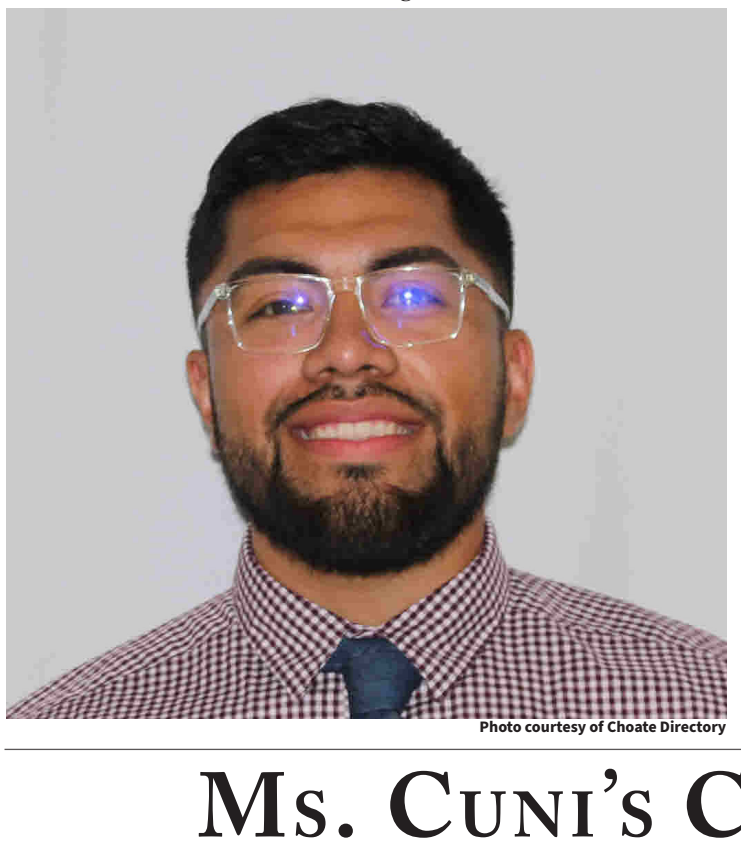

Photo courtesy of Choate Directory

For Bowen Jin '26, seeing his advisor move forward leaves him with mixed feelings. Jin said he is "really happy for [Mr. Rodriguez]" and will continue to stay in touch with him. "I've been with him all my four years ... he's seen me grow a lot ... and I'm definitely going to miss him," Jin added. Some of Jin's most treasured moments in Mr. Rodriguez's close-knit advising group include venturing off campus to places like Sweet Cream's or Starbucks, and celebrating Thursday afternoons with a well-deserved sweet treat.

In addition to his advisees, Mr. Rodriguez's colleagues will remember him fondly for his easy-going nature that made making happy memories an everyday occurrence in the Admissions Office. "[Mr. Rodriguez] definitely will be missed in a lot of different areas," said Assistant Admissions Director Mr. Mike Pereira, referencing Mr. Rodriguez's involvement in a wide variety of activities, such as coaching Boys Varsity Squash and his work as a dorm mentor in East Cottage. "He's a phenomenal community member, and I think everyone knows that," he added.

"He's a phenomenal community member, and I think everyone knows that."

School-related travel created some of Mr. Rodriguez's best memories during his time at Choate, particularly to athletic tournaments for Boys Varsity Soccer and Squash. "Being able to travel with students is something that I've enjoyed a ton, and a pastime that I'll certainly miss," he said. Continuing his work in admissions at The Hopkins School, Mr. Rodriguez is looking forward to many bright opportunities and is most excited about the exploring a new school culture.

While he will be dearly missed in Carr Hall and around campus, the Choate community is excited for Mr. Rodriguez and his next chapter at Hopkins. Good luck, Mr. Rodriguez!

Slater Boms *may be reached at sboms29@choate.edu*

Ms. Cuni's Commendable Contribution

By **Mary Higashi '29**
Copy Editor

Ms. Jessica Cuni's art studio was the kind of place that many students found themselves coming back to, even after class ended. Not only to share their artwork, but also to ask for advice, or just to check in. Whether she was teaching nature photography, checking in with her advisees, or offering a warm presence in the art studio, Director of Faculty Development and Arts Department teacher Ms. Cuni became known for her creativity, warmth and care she brought to the Choate community.

"Ms. Cuni always made advisory feel like the best part of the week," advisee Tristan Sullivan '27 said. "She brought her infectious positive spirit to every meeting." He described her as someone who constantly encouraged students to step outside of their comfort zones, while being honest and supportive every step of the way.

For many advisees, Ms. Cuni became a source of comfort and enthusiasm during their time at Choate. Trish Sriprasert '29 said, "I thought Ms. Cuni was the sweetest person ever when I first met her." She recalled how Ms. Cuni supported her through difficult moments during her first year at Choate. She described Ms. Cuni as a motherly figure away from home.

Fellow Arts Department teacher Mr. Matthew McLean, who worked alongside Ms. Cuni noted that their relationship was built on their shared values in teaching. He said Ms. Cuni brought "a really special combination of artistry, warmth, and compassion" to the department.

He also highlighted her nature photography class, where he emphasized the welcoming environment she created for all her students. "What sticks with me most is just how consistently caring and present she was with students," he said. "Students genuinely loved being in her classes because they felt seen and supported by her." Students frequently dropped by the art studio, demonstrating just how much trust and comfort Ms. Cuni created for the people around her.

As Ms. Cuni prepares to depart Choate, students and colleagues alike say the School will miss not only her artistry, but also for the kindness she brought to the community every day.

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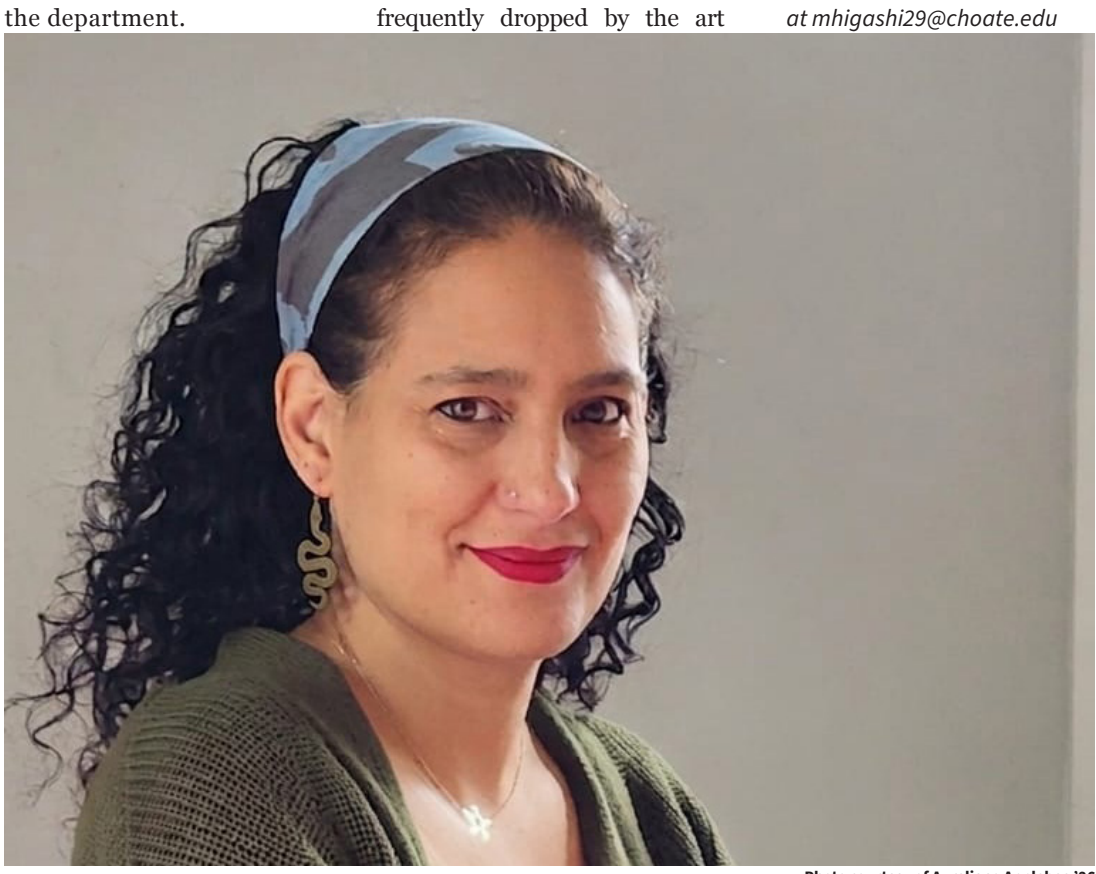


Photo courtesy of Aureliano Applebee '26

SENIOR SPEECHES

Ellie Silva '26

I'm sharing this not because I want pity, but because someone here may need to hear that asking for help is not a weakness.

Picture this. It is 2 a.m., and you're standing outside your adviser's door. You knock, the door opens, and the worried house adviser's eyes scan your body, then fall upon the reason you're there. You get rushed to the health center, escorted by Mr. Gilyard, who you don't really know at this point because you're a brand-new freshman. You get cleaned up, then sit next to the nurse and Mr. Gilyard, realizing the scary call your parents are about to receive, which will make them drive straight to school to see you.

Next, I want you to picture a dark cloud, thick and heavy, weighing above your head. Every step you take, it follows. On the days it decides to grace you with its presence, it descends on you like a weighted blanket. The cloud takes the journey with you from class, to field hockey practice, crew practice, to the dining hall, then back to your dorm at night. You try different tactics to help get a release from this cloud, some healthy, most not. Then eventually the cloud becomes you; it's not hanging over your head anymore. You feel it in your chest, in your gut. This cloud leads you to take a medical leave in the spring term of your freshman year due to fainting spells and continuous acts of unhealthy release. The fainting spells send you to the hospital in an ambulance from campus multiple times and lead you to a couple of days in the hospital trying to figure out what exactly is wrong. Which turns out to be panic attacks, meaning that it was nothing medical, and it is "all in your head." At this point in your life, you are worried about making it to sophomore year, let alone graduation.

Now stop picturing this, because to all of you, that was just a story, a guided experience. But for me, that was my freshman year.

I am from a small town in Massachusetts called Longmeadow, where I live with my two loving parents, my older brother Tucker, and my little brother Tripp. Longmeadow is straight out of any small town Hallmark movie, where there are cute shops and sidewalks and where kids are always riding bikes. It was easy growing up there. So coming to Choate was hard for me because I had never lived anywhere but my sheltered hometown.

I wasn't ready for the vigorous classes, the busy schedule, the intense athletics, the process of making new friends, all to come back at the end of the day and not see my parents. Mentally, Choate swallowed me whole. I felt like I was a broken boat sinking into the rough, dangerous sea of Choate life.

Now I recognize that I was never broken, and I was never sinking or being swallowed by Choate — I just didn't understand how Choate worked. I was just overwhelmed by the challenges Choate presents to students. But after 4 years, I finally grasped the inner workings of this place. I have learned how to embrace these challenges and use them to become hard-working and proactive. Also, more importantly, I learned that what my report card says at the end of the term or the varsity letter I get does not define who I am. The impact on the people around me and the positive impact I have on my community are what matters.

But to get to this point of embracing challenge and finding what's important to me, I had to step back and look at what Choate has to offer, and I am going to share with you all the 2 crucial points you need to understand to start raising the cloud and start feeling the sun.

Part 1: To take advantage of the opportunities at Choate, you need to make them for yourself. You need to be your biggest advocate and reach out to the resources around you. For example, I felt like I was losing control of my recruiting, so I emailed the head football coach to set up a meeting with him, because his players told me he's the best there is. Or how I decided I wanted to pursue rowing, so I asked my crew coaches what they thought was best for me. Then spent the summer alone erging in my garage to commit to Ohio State. Or when I became passionate about creative writing and met with my English teacher, Dr. Hancock, during study hours, just reading stories written for contests or fun. Or lastly, like this fall, when I started to feel my anxiety creeping back in, my dark cloud started to lower, so after practice, I asked Mr. Groen in counseling to start meeting with me so that I won't allow the cloud to control me ever again.



Photo courtesy of photos.choate.edu

Part 2 of understanding Choate is realizing that the people here want you to succeed. Every day, the community at Choate reaches out to you with unconditional support and love that you might not even realize.

Back to my experience at 2 am in the health center with Mr. Gilyard. When I sat there ashamed and embarrassed, Mr. Gilyard didn't judge me or just leave me there in despair. He looked me in the eyes and said, "Ellie, you are really brave." At first, I laughed at him, confused as to how any of this could be brave. But he shook his head and said: "No, I really mean it, you knew something was wrong and you got help."

That right there is the best example of how I would describe Choate: caring. This interaction was just one of many. At night, my sophomore year, my dorm advisor, Ms. Stone, would enthuse over my shrimp aquarium with me, the only person to ever get excited over my secret passion for aquarium ecology. And when my car got snowed in, the boys' hockey coaches dug it out for me while I was in class, cause they said I was part of the family, even though I was just a manager. And all the faculty that came and helped me freshman year, while I was experiencing my fainting spells with care and judgment-free support.

So I'm here today to tell you all this because I want you to take away a few things. One is that I don't want you to feel sorry for my story or any parts of my Choate experience. I don't tell you this for pity or props but for everyone here to know that if you feel a dark cloud, you aren't alone. Freshman year, I let the cloud become me, and to be quite frank, that cloud still pops up sometimes in the day-to-day. But I am here, committed to college for the sport I love, on stage every week with Boarpen, leaving this place with core friends and a support system that I will never forget. I have learned to let the cloud be something allowed and normal, not engulfing and self-defining. So if you feel that cloud start to take control as it did for me, talk to someone and advocate for yourself - you know what you need. When someone asks how you are, be honest! You are allowed to let this place support you. And secondly, take a moment and open your eyes to all the support and love this community has to offer you. When the cloud comes, say something. Let someone in. Choate cares, but care has to be allowed to reach you.

I can promise you that, because Choate cares. Thank you.

Majo Soria '26


Photo courtesy of Majo Soria '26

My first year at Choate as a new sophomore was an ... experience. It wasn't the workload that got me, or even the pressure. My biggest obstacle was, quite literally, my English. My vocabulary consisted of three powerful phrases: What?, Say it again?, and my personal favorite: Just nodding like I completely understood what was going on.

Nodding became my strongest skill. People would be explaining homework, making weekend plans, or probably giving deep life advice, and I would just be there like, yeah, of course. Absolutely. No idea what you just said, but I support it.

The language barrier led to some interesting moments. I still remember, maybe because it was only last term, asking one of my friends if they could pass me a diet "Coke." She never gave it to me. She was too busy making fun of me.

At one point, someone actually asked me if I cheated on my English proficiency test. She said she didn't understand how the heck I got into Choate. And honestly? Looking back, I don't understand either. I still don't know how I managed to make friends when I couldn't even follow a conversation. I would sit in my room and realize that I was surrounded by some of the smartest people in the world, and I couldn't even ask for a drink correctly. I was terrified that because I didn't have the words, I would never truly have a place here.

While I've forgotten a lot from those first confusing months, some memories are permanently stuck. Like the time I got on disciplinary warning for having a hamster in my room. Her name was Chula, or Chulita when she didn't poop in my hand. She was the best thing that ever happened to me. She was Soho's pet, definitely not by choice. Mostly because she had a habit of escaping and visiting other people's rooms uninvited.

I will never forget the day I was panicking because I thought I'd lost her, until Eliana Li screamed: "HELP! THERE IS A RAT IN MY ROOM!" I ran down the hall so fast. I burst into the room and saw Eliana standing on her bed, pointing at this tiny, innocent ball of fluff. That was not a rat. That was my daughter. I really hope Mr. Gilyard is giving her the life I couldn't.

But out of all the chaotic memories, there's one I'll never forget. Sophomore year, I was walking with one of my friends when she suddenly yelled "Don't split the pole, dumbass!". In that moment, I had two thoughts. First: what is wrong with Americans? And second: I have no idea what a pole means but I better start nodding. Without even realizing it, that became our tradition. Every day, it was the same thing: grabbing each other at the last second, almost tripping, definitely embarrassing ourselves in public, all to make sure we stayed on the same side of any pole.

It sounds stupid. It is stupid. But it was ours. We could be laughing, talking, or even fighting, but we knew we could never split the pole. It was this unspoken rule that no matter what was happening in our lives, we stayed connected. It was our way of saying, "I'm by your side" without having to say a single word.

This was the language I was actually learning. It wasn't just English; it was the language of showing up. And I think that's what I'll remember most about my time here. Not only the big moments, but the small, random things that somehow meant everything. The inside jokes that made zero sense to anyone else, like Dominique shouting "Mi gente Latino!" every time she sees me, or Steph's ugly laugh. I'm kidding, Steph; I love your beautiful laugh that sounds exactly like a dolphin.

These moments weren't supposed to be important, but they're the ones I'm carrying with me. My choate experience would have been nothing without the friends I made. I love every single one of you more than I have the English words to describe.

Because the most important things I learned at Choate didn't come from a textbook or a lecture. They came from the people who didn't need me to be perfect. They came from the friends who laughed with me, or maybe at me, and the people who saw me nodding and reached out to pull me onto their side of the path anyway.

When I first got here, I was terrified that if I didn't understand the words, I wouldn't belong. But you all taught me that belonging isn't about having a perfect vocabulary, it's about having people who are willing to wait for you to find the words. You didn't just hear what I was saying, you heard who I was. I came here with three phrases. And I am leaving with a family.

So, to my friends, and everyone who ever patiently repeated a sentence to me: thank you for not letting me walk alone. As we head out into a world that is going to try to pull us in a million different directions, let's make a promise. Keep reaching out. Keep making the jokes that only we understand. Keep fighting for each other.

I spent my first year here nodding because I didn't have the words. Today, I do.

Wherever we go next, let's stay on the same side.

Don't split the pole.

Thank you.

CHRISHON CAPRA-HOBBS '26

Good morning, everyone. I'm Chrishon.

A few years ago, I arrived here as a nervous Canadian kid, not sure if I belonged. Today, I'm standing in Colony Hall knowing that I do. And if you had told junior-year me, that I would be up here giving a senior speech, I probably would have laughed ... or thrown up ... maybe both.

When I first came to Choate, I was terrified. I was leaving my home in Canada; my mom, Bronson, Danny, and everything familiar; and stepping into what I imagined was this polished American boarding school in Connecticut. I felt completely overwhelmed.

Before Choate, I toured Kent (I don't know why) and assumed Choate would be the same: preppy kids from money, all coming from the same background, all fitting into the same mold. And to be honest, I didn't come from that mold ... or even the same factory.

I thought the academics would crush me. That balancing sports, friendships, family, and school would be impossible. And honestly, I didn't know if I would fit in at all.

What I didn't understand yet was that everyone here arrives with a story. Choate isn't one story - it's hundreds. People from different countries, different family structures, different cultures, different expectations. Everyone carries something when they step onto this campus – pressure, hope, fear, drive – something that shaped them long before they got here.

Meeting people whose lives looked nothing like mine changed me. Shout out Dupuis. Living with them, learning with them, competing alongside them changed me. You realize pretty quickly that everyone here is talented in their own way; which is both inspiring and slightly intimidating. And being in a place like this does something to you. It pushes you – without ever having to say a word.

Over time, without even noticing it, I built a community here.

I didn't fully understand how strong that community was until this past fall.

During a football practice, I went into cardiac arrest. I was unconscious for six minutes ... including two minutes in ventricular fibrillation.

There was no warning. And even now, no clear explanation. Just a moment that changed everything.

But what I remember most from those eight days in the hospital recovering wasn't the medical side of it.

It was the Choate side.

It was the community side.

Before my parents could even arrive from Canada, Luke Benanto's mom stayed with me in the hospital until they got there. And that moment is something I will never forget. It meant that in a place far from home, I was not alone. After that, people just kept showing up.

Coaches came. Trainers came. They brought food when my family needed it most. Parents from my team helped support my family and made sure they had what they needed. Dr. Lopez visited. Teachers emailed constantly. Mr. Gilyard called and kept calling. Friends skipped class just to sit in a hospital room. My roommates' parents came. My girlfriend and her mom came too. Even nurses and physicians who graduated from Choate came – people who didn't even know me but showed up anyway.

And it just kept happening. Everyone showed up.

And I remember lying there thinking I had no idea.

I had no idea I built something like this. In one of the scariest moments of my life, what stood out wasn't fear. It was community. People showing up - without hesitation. It was realizing that the relationships you build here are real. That experience changed me. It made me realize that Choate isn't special because of its reputation, or its academics, or its facilities. It's special because of its people because when something actually matters WE show up. And that exists everywhere here.

I came here thinking sports would define my experience in a very specific way. That it was about performance, results, and what comes after. But what I learned is that it's really about people. It's about teammates becoming brothers. It's about coaches caring more about who you become than what you achieve. Coach Spin and the staO weren't focused on building the most decorated team or producing the most Division I, II or III athletes – even though, clearly, they've done a pretty good job at that too. They focused on building strong, confident, likable people who would succeed in life – not just in sports.

And that mindset shows up everywhere here. In classrooms, teachers push you further than you thought you could go. In dorms, late nights turn strangers into family. In form events, small moments turn into memories you never forget - sledding down hills, laughing until you're freezing, walking back with hot chocolate ... probably questionable decisions, but still unforgettable. Those moments matter more than you realize at the time.

And the truth is, every part of Choate works like that. Different people. Different stories. Different backgrounds. But somehow, it all connects. Time here moves faster than you think. It feels like I just arrived as the nervous Canadian kid wondering if he belonged - and now I'm standing here knowing that I did. So if I could leave you with anything – especially the underclassmen – it would be this:

Pay attention to the people around you. Learn their stories. Show up for each other. Don't rush through the small moments -because those are the ones that end up meaning the most.

Because one day, you'll look around and realize – this place was never just about classes, sports, or events.

It was about the community you built... without even realizing it. And when you need it most - it shows up for you.

Thank you.



Photo courtesy of Chrishon Capra-Hobbs '26

SENIOR SPEECHES

Shaun Flannery '26

Sophomore year, I arrived at Choate from a small day school just a few miles down the road. I knew maybe three names, four if you counted Coach Dickson, who recruited me to come here. My only goal was simple: don't embarrass myself and get to the parking lot before anyone could stop me.

I was good at this. I had the post-practice exit down to a science, bag over one shoulder, hood up, weaved through the weight room like a running back, tires out of Gunpowder lot before the echo of my last rep even faded.

Every evening, driving past the lantern-lit paths, I'd catch a glimpse of them. Clusters of kids laughing so hard they doubled over, trading stories like currency. Their joy pressed against my windshield like a second set of headlights. I'd watch, nod to myself like yeah, that's fine, I don't need that, and turn up the music I had been playing.

I told myself the same lie every single night: I don't need anyone. Just get home.

Junior year, the lie cracked open like thin ice under a boot. I still lifted. I still studied alone. I still drove home. But the weight had doubled. The silence had teeth now. I started noticing the small invitations I'd once swat away. The teammate who asked, "You lifting today?" The temporary dining hall tables with one empty chair left, with a bowl of cereal, because I wasn't going to eat medium-rare chicken. I still ignored both, though. I was disciplined like that.

But in reality, I needed them. I needed the nod in the weight room. I needed someone to say "Come sit over here" and mean it. I needed to not be alone.

It didn't happen in one cinematic moment. It happened in fives. Five more minutes in the SAC, trading songs with a friend who'd always argue that he "put me on to that." Five more reps with a teammate spotting me, as his voice motivated me not to give up. Five more texts in a group chat I used to leave on read. I stopped saying "I'm good" and started saying "Yeah, I'll come." I started sliding into packed tables where elbows knocked, and stories overlapped. I started laughing at the dumb jokes, the ones that aren't funny until you're the one telling them. I started staying after lifts, not because I had nowhere to go, but because I finally had somewhere to stay.

I went from being the person who said, "I don't need anyone," to needing the exact people who needed me back. And in that mutual need, I found the truest kind of belonging.

Being a day student can feel like you're hardwired to leave. Here for the classes, gone after dinner. You clock in, you clock out, you keep the engine running. But Choate taught me a fiercer truth: you don't belong by needing less, you belong by needing more, and by letting the people around you fill the gap you were too proud to name.

I didn't change overnight. I just stopped pretending I was fine alone. I stopped sprinting to the car. I started walking slower. I started saying yes to one too many desserts, to the late-night library hangouts where I never actually finished my work, to the "You coming?" that used to feel like an intrusion and now feels like an invitation home.



Photo courtesy of photos.choate.edu

The student who once vanished faster than chicken in the temporary dining hall last year now waits for someone to ask if they're coming or not. He trades dinners at home for dining hall chaos with people he can't imagine life without. He still drives home every night, but now the car is full. Full of conversations that spill across the console. Full of plans that start with "next week" and end with "see you later." Full of only day students … who learned the same lesson: the parking lot isn't an escape hatch. It's a launchpad.

Choate took a kid who thought independence was a virtue and surrounded him with the people he's closest to today. This place didn't make me need people. It made me brave enough to admit it.

If there's one thing I've learned outside the classroom here, it's that growth isn't loud. It doesn't announce itself with trumpets or viral moments. It's the quiet shift from "I don't need anyone" to "I need you, and I'm glad I do." It's the five-minute linger that becomes a lifetime bond. It's the empty chair that becomes your spot. It's the lie you stop telling yourself the moment you realize the truth is better.

Thank you.

SOPHIE LI '26


Photo courtesy of Sophie Li '26

As a Gold Key tour guide for three years, it is literally my job to convince people to come here. Which is a palatable way of saying … increase yield.

So naturally … I've gotten pretty good at curating it.

I walk people past the language building and say with a straight face, "Inside looks exactly like the humanities building, so we don't need to waste time going there."

And then I subtly guide them to the other side of the path … hoping no one catches a glimpse of the musty interior.

I take them to Lanphier, point out the boba, watch their eyes light up (just like mine did when I first toured), and then conveniently leave out the fact that it's just popping boba instead of the authentic ones that you chew.

I point to Colony Hall and proudly say, "John Legend performed here."

Which is true … 7 years ago.

And thankfully, apparently that is legally enough for us to continue advertising it for the next hundred years.

And it works! According to the 70% yield rate, apparently very well. Once again, Mr. Beaton, I am waiting for my Venmo request to be accepted.

People are impressed, kids start imagining themselves here… And somewhere around my third tour, I started buying into my own propaganda too …

Because the version of Choate we advertise is polished. It's rigorous academics, signature programs, nationally ranked athletics … It's perfectly timed tour routes and smiling students walking through the section high-fiving for a promo video. It's also Eloise Streeter on the front page of a brochure looking very studious… when I know for a fact she begged me to go get coffee with her thirty seconds after the photoshoot. But that's not the version of Choate I'm actually going to remember.

Because the beauty of this place has never really been the big prestigious reputable moments.

It's the time in between them.

It's the ten minutes between classes When you stop on the path to talk to a classmate, ask about the test (obviously asking how they felt about it, not what was on it) and somehow that turns into talking about drama, weekend plans, who likes who, and suddenly both of you are late to class.

It's the ten minutes in the dining hall when you swear you're only grabbing a quick bite in between studying, but then someone sits down, and the conversation gets way too interesting, and now you've been there for an hour laughing so hard the whole dining hall feels like they are part of your conversation.

It's the ten minutes after practice, when you are walking back to your dorm exhausted, sweaty, half-dead, and everyone's outside playing spikeball or hacky sacking on Mem Field, and you stop "just for one game."

Suddenly, no one's keeping track of time anymore — just one more game, one more conversation, one more reason to stay.

They're the ten minutes on the bus ride to a game, when half the team is belting out and getting hyped for the game, while the other half is still half-asleep, mouths wide open against the window, which I am definitely guilty of.

You've probably experienced a hundred of these 'ten minutes' here at Choate that don't seem important at all, moments that seem insignificant because they're buried inside long, exhausting days of classes, routine, and everything else that makes one day blur into the next. But sometimes, it's those small, ordinary moments that stay with you long after the "important" ones fade.

I would argue that those mundane, everyday moments are what make this place feel like home.

Because when I think about Choate, I'm not going to remember every detrimental grade I got back or every accomplishment I had. I'm going to remember the nights in Lewis, crammed into the common room with my best friends, laughing over the dumbest debates and oversharing a little too much in front of our dorm advisor, Silbs, who I'm sure doesn't mind it.

I'm going to remember my math classes (shoutout junior year pre-calc), where the conversation at my table gets too interesting, and suddenly I'm literally brain-rotting with my classmates and idly copying down notes off the board.

I'm also going to remember the time when we lost our final soccer game, and everyone was sitting on the bus completely devastated, while Logan somehow made it worse by blasting "Stay" by Rihanna, and the whole bus started trauma-singing together. Somehow, it made losing feel less heavy, all because we were just there together.

The scary thing is – while you're living those moments, they feel infinite. Ten minutes feels easily disposable or unforgettable. Like, there is always going to be another conversation, another game of spike, another ten minutes you assume you'll always experience again.

Until suddenly there isn't.

Because no matter how long we've been here, there was always a limit to the number of 'ten-minute' moments we were going to get. We just never noticed the countdown.

And for seniors… we don't have many left.

We only have a few more dining hall meals that turn into hour-long conversations.

A few more walks back to the dorm with the same people who've become your home.

A few more chances to stay a little longer.

And when graduation comes, I already know what's going to happen.

As already warned, faculty are going to politely tell us to leave campus after the ceremony, and for the first time in four years, every single one of us is going to want to stay just a little longer.

Because after spending years counting down to leave this place, to graduate, I'd give anything for 10 more minutes with my best friends, Chateau, 10 more minutes on the soccer field with girls' soccer, and honestly, even 10 more minutes sitting through a painfully long mandatory meeting with the rest of my grade.

Because in the end, the things we thought mattered most here … weirdly aren't the things that made our time special here.

The special parts are the ordinary moments that made you feel free and alive in between the rigorous classes, practices, and schedules.

So when someone asks you to stay a little longer at the dinner table, stay.

When your friends ask for one more round of spikeball, play it.

Because the assignment can wait ten minutes. The laundry can wait ten minutes.

You'd probably procrastinate those ten minutes anyway.

Years from now, I don't think any of us are going to miss the perfectly curated version of Choate.

We're going to miss each other, and the ten minutes we had in between.

XYLA KIANG '26

The great thing about being a Choate student is that you're always a success.

The terrible thing about being a Choate student is that you're also always a failure.

I go to one of the top boarding schools in the country. Scratch that, top high school in the country. My friends from back home are in awe of the resources and opportunities I have access to. I went to South Africa, I did my own research project, I am impressive. Right?

I'm constantly climbing a ladder. Each rung is another accomplishment. Theoretically, I am supposed to feel better about myself the higher I go. I'm closer to goals I only dreamed of achieving when I was at the bottom rungs. I am better than the person I was yesterday. However, next to me is everyone else on their own ladder, and they all seem higher, and going faster.

The problem with going to one of the top schools in the country is that everyone there is extraordinary. They're all founding nonprofits and getting into Ivy League schools. So what am I doing? How can I call myself impressive when everyone around me is so much better?

It's one of those feelings we all have. "Everyone is better than me, why am I here?" We all have these thoughts of doubt that creep in and suddenly we fall down a few rungs. Not because we stopped achieving, but because the doubt in our minds made the ladder taller. It reset what we thought was good enough because the person next to us is one rung higher. We work ourselves tirelessly, both physically and mentally. We beat ourselves up because we are not the highest in the grand scheme of all the ladder climbers. Our minds are telling us "You need to do more. You need to beat them. You need to climb faster. How dare you not work harder. Look at them. Why aren't you more like them?" Our brains like to shame us for where we are without looking at how far we've come. At some point in my Choate career, I got tired of constantly beating myself up. My brain is one that likes to focus on the negative, as we are all wired to do. Isn't it exhausting? I got exhausted. I wanted to be proud of myself, I had come so far, but instead I couldn't escape the disappointment. I talked to my therapist about this, and he helped me see how ridiculous these thoughts were. There's nothing to be disappointed in if you just look at yourself in the context of who you were. Why are we manufacturing reasons to be upset with ourselves?

I propose we reframe our thinking. Instead of "I'll never be good enough!" Why don't we start learning from each other? Especially those who we compare ourselves to. I want to thank my peers for helping me do just this.

Bree Miksovsky is a better writer than I am. Even when we're writing together, there's a clear aptitude they hold when it comes to the English language and the way they think about their words. They teach me through examples to include more imagery in my writing, so I become a better writer.

Eben Bauman is more dedicated than I am. He works tirelessly at his robot, and even if I don't get it when he talks about it, I am in awe of the way that he holds his head high as he speaks about his work. He teaches me that there is importance in what I do, so I become a more dedicated person.

Akari Kamigaki is a better environmentalist than I am. We once accidentally put a whole load of napkins in the compost while baking. She proceeded to make sure that each napkin was taken out and put in the trash. She never hesitates to tell me where to put waste, and so I become a more environmentally conscious person.

Evelyn Reach is sweeter than I am. Even in my moments where I may be trashtalking or letting out frustrations in unkind ways, she reminds me that talking badly about others doesn't make me feel better about myself. She tells me to be kinder, so I become a sweeter person.

Matthew Choi works harder than I do. Especially at the things he loves. Over the three years I have known him he has grown as an actor, singer, and dancer. He doesn't think he's good at dancing but he's definitely gotten better. I admire his ability to be totally focused, and to practice endlessly to make sure he is at his best. He shows me how to care the most about your passion, so I become a more hardworking person.

Hannah Quan is more understanding than I am. Even when I mention times when people were not the kindest or acted strangely in a way that I personally saw as rude, she questions their intentions. She always lets me know when there may be another side to the story, so I become a more understanding person.

Ari Peres is smarter than I am. He excels in every class he is in. He pays attention, he wants to know things, even when he's tired or the day has been long. But he always encourages me to pay attention in class, even when I am tired or the day has been long, so I become a better student.

Elizabeth Burgstahler, and I truly believe this, is a better person than I am. There's a reason I chose her as my best friend. She is kind, she is responsible, and she does the hard things. She somehow prioritizes me in the midst of all she does. She teaches me the importance of keeping schedules so I don't miss any hangouts. She teaches me to take better care of myself. She teaches me how to properly communicate during a disagreement, so I become a better person.

And here comes the hard part. Honoring yourself. I want to talk about how I have grown, and the rungs I climbed. I used to be more inward looking. I was very self critical and constantly talking to and about myself because I couldn't open my eyes to the world around me. I was so wrapped in my own thoughts, I missed when others were hurting. I missed my chance to support them. And yet, here I am. Making a speech not only for myself, but because this is a message that I know so many people need to hear. A message I wish had been shared when I was younger. I've grown less selfish and less close minded. I've climbed my ladder so high, and even if the people around me are higher, it doesn't take away my progress.

So to anyone in this audience who has ever felt like they are not good enough because someone around them is better, I ask you to take a breath. I ask you to step back and start appreciating that the ladder you have climbed is so tall, and if you look down you can't see the ground. Be proud that you have learned from others. Be proud also that you have most likely taught someone else. Take every moment of weakness to choose reflection. You are neither a success nor a failure, you are a work in progress. You are a human. You deserve pride and strength and love. Please, do not let a competitive school with a large endowment and an overachieving student body get in the way of your happiness. You are on your own ladder. Others are on their own journey. Help each other, and stop hurting yourself.


Photo courtesy of Xyla Kiang '26

SENIOR SURVEY

Best School Spirit

1st Place: Kate Tortorella ’26

2nd Place: Max Weber ’26

3rd Place: Sofia Fronzi ’26


Photo courtesy of @choate_robotics on Instagram

Most Changed Since Freshman Year

1st Place: Tripp Madill ’26

2nd Place: Wayne Wang ’26

3rd Place: Alexandros Antonopoulos ’26



Photo courtesy of photos.choate.edu

SENIOR SUPERLATIVES

Most Likely to Win a Nobel Prize

1st Place: Thandiwe Taylor ’26

2nd Place: Alex Zhao ’26

3rd Place: Isabelle Jiao ’26


Photo courtesy of Ben Grosskopf ’26

Most Likely to Go on America's Got Talent

1st Place: Leanne La ’26

2nd Place: Matthew Choi ’26

3rd Place: Lucy Domingo ’26


Photo courtesy of Thandiwe Taylor ’26

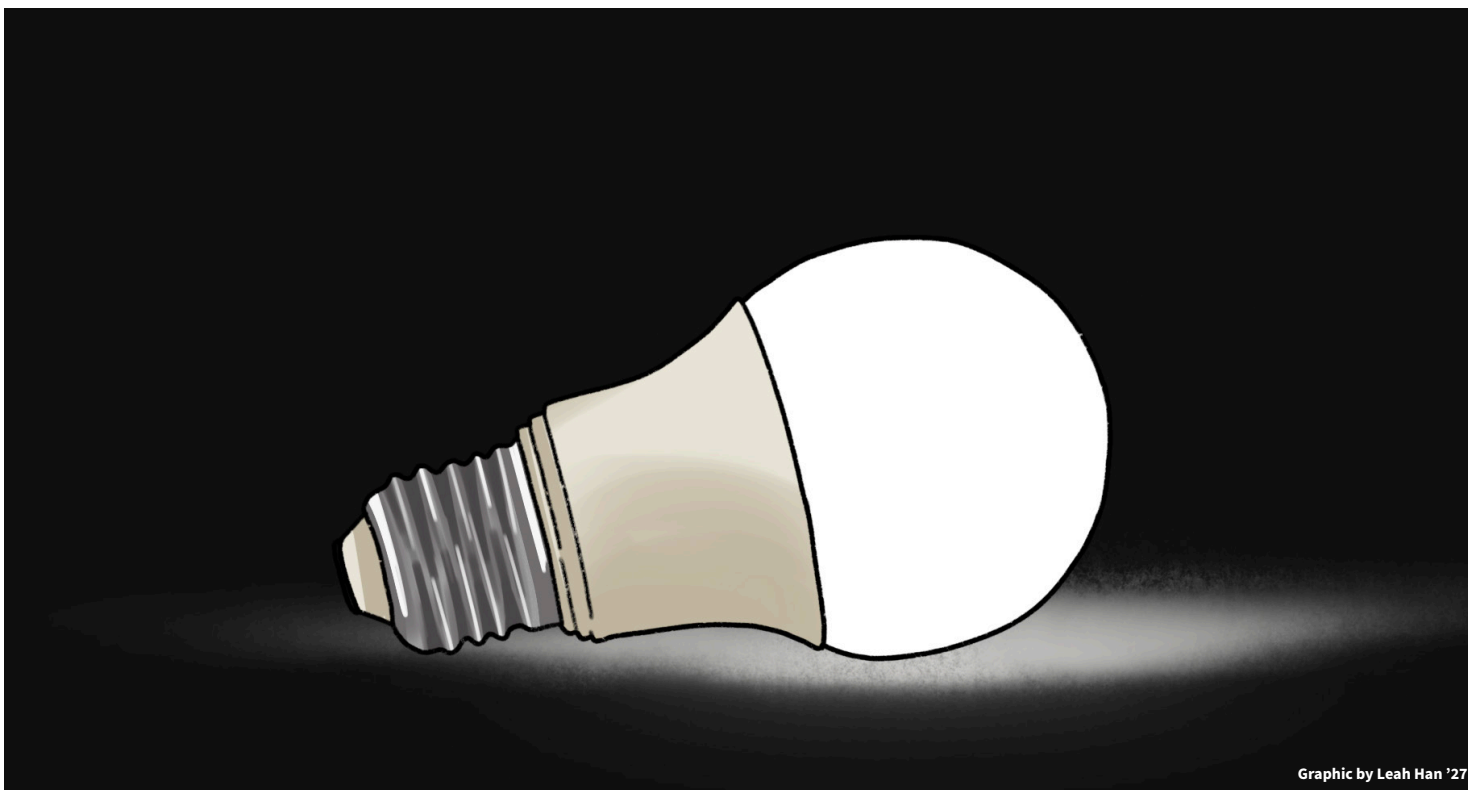
Most Likely to Be a Celebrity

1st Place: Ben Grosskopf ’26

2nd Place: Zach Paul ’26

3rd Place: Henry Gillibrand ’26

15 Tips From the Class of 2026


Graphic by Leah Han ’27

“Surround yourself with people you respect and want to become. Be picky about who you spend time with. Invest in 8 hrs of sleep and have a consistent bedtime. ”
— Lucas Carlson ’26

“Time at Choate goes by really fast, so please cherish the time you spend with your friends. Also don’t waste any time because every minute counts.”
— Ryan Liu ’26

“Try everything, do anything you’ve been to scared to try, when you push yourself out of your comfort zone you learn more about yourself and others than you ever could before.”
— Suleika Sandi ’26

“Have fun while you can.”
— Dylan Kim ’26

“Write for *The Choate News*!”
— Reinah Lee ’26

“Cherish your experience at Choate, because it will go by faster than you think.”
— Leilani Gao ’26

“Do things you enjoy!”
— Eben Bauman ’26

“Everything in life happens for a reason; find reasons to stay positive and to enjoy the small wins.”
— Bowen Jin ’26

“If you’re sleeping late because you had “no time” to finish an assignment, but your screen time is more than 2 hours a day, then you probably had time to do it.”
— Emma Wang ’26

“Do things that actually interest you.”
— Oscar Hyatt ’26

“Try new things, even if they seem scary!”
— Elizabeth Burgstahler ’26

“Put your foot in the door; rejection is redirection!”
— Bella Welch ’26

“Be more grateful for your Choate experience!”
— Amber Yung ’26

“Take everything in. It will go by quick!”
— Chloe Lee ’26

“Don’t take everything in life so seriously.”
— Alex Yuan ’26

FAVORITES OF THE YEAR

Dining Hall Hack of the Year



Graphic by Leah Han '27

Choate News Article of the Year



Graphic by Leah Han '27

Local Cafe of the Year



Graphic by Leah Han '27

Lanphier Drink of the Year



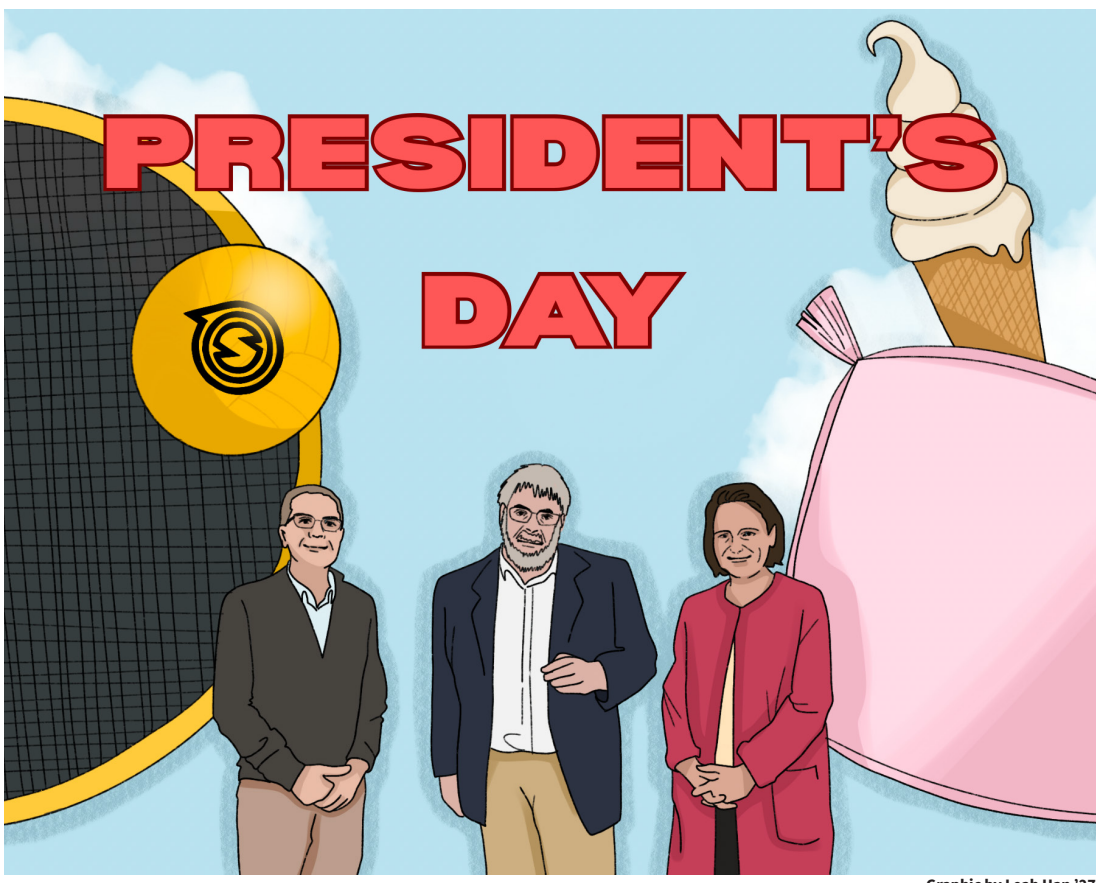
Graphic by Ann Ma '28

Stuco Achievement of the Year



Graphic by Leah Han '27

Day of the Year



Graphic by Leah Han '27

Tuck Shop Order of the Year



Graphic by Kiki Wenren '28

Napping Spot of the Year



Photo by Harry Kim '28

YEAR IN PHOTOS













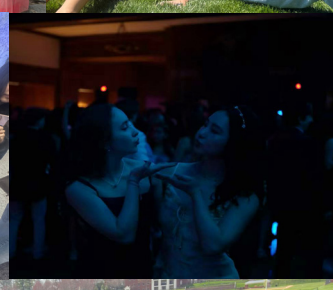
























From the Editor: Pressure is a Privilege

Around this time of year, when everyone seems tired and overextended, I'm reminded of a small moment that I've cherished throughout the school year — one that began as an inside joke between my friend and me and has since turned into a phrase that urges me to consider silver linings and reminds me of the gratitude I owe to a place like Choate.

This fall, during our routine journaling and reflection time at the beginning of American Studies English, my teacher gave us the following optional prompt: "Write about something you're grateful for." As we went around the roundtable and shared about our friends, prefects, athletic teams, and families, a very wise friend next to me shared something unexpected, and in the moment, worthy of an eyeroll. She paused and said with a completely straight face and dead-serious tone, "I am grateful to feel stress. In my opinion, pressure is a privilege." Though it might be because of the admittedly catchy alliteration or my first instinct to giggle at the response, I couldn't help but continue thinking about her assessment.

Though this particular class took place in late September, her reflection has occupied space in my brain ever since. During evening cram sessions in the West-Hall common room, to later nights spent in the newsroom, to stressful moments attempting to memorize Latin vocabulary with my friends, these words have urged me to consider more beyond the stress I feel in the moment. Like any rigorous environment, stress at Choate can sometimes feel constant. It becomes easy to fall into cycles of complaining, procrastinating, or bonding over how overwhelmed everyone feels. It can feel comforting, in particularly busy times, to spend free time commiserating and bonding over shared stress. And yes, we are guilty of all of these reactions — despite being aware that all this instinct serves to do is perpetuate negativity. However, in the spirit of celebrating Ms. Jenny Elliott's legacy and my friend from American Studies, the reframing of pressure and seemingly insurmountable levels of stress as a distinct privilege that we are lucky to be afforded is a small but incredibly meaningful mindset shift.

In the same way that Ms. Elliott's thoughtful and optimistic leadership has urged us to remind ourselves that we *get* to attend School Meetings, that we *get* to foster connection by remaining off of our phones, and that we *get* to walk to our commitments in the slapping wind of a frigid Wallingford winter, my friend's words have reminded me that to feel pressure, stress, and strain is evidence of care, drive, ambition, and a thoughtful ability to push oneself and rise to the inherent challenge that Choate is and strives to be.

It seems almost toxically positive, in a sense, to be grateful for sleepless nights and an overflowing Canvas inbox. However, the point I aim to make is that to feel stressed is to ultimately feel proud. We are lucky to be surrounded by likeminded students, athletes, artists, student journalists, and entrepreneurs who are so dedicated to excelling at their craft that they feel pressure to perform. In the newsroom, I am lucky to be surrounded by a group of students who balance so many activities and difficult coursework but still find the time to remain passionate about ethical reporting and protecting journalistic integrity in a political climate that threatens its very existence.

This letter started out as a reflection on my friend's wise journal entry in which she challenged my perspective on my previous late night of work and little sleep. Though I'm sure she has no idea, her words have struck me deeply and continue to be a reminder of gratitude in times when I feel consumed by a long to-do list and lack of time to complete the tasks which command my attention. However, as I think of an appropriate way to end my reflections, I realize that this advice is eerily reminiscent of the very leadership qualities and words of gentle wisdom that Ms. Elliott has imparted on me during my time at Choate. Rather than ignoring difficulty, Ms. Elliott urges us to look beyond it — so far beyond the difficult act itself that we almost feel grateful for it. She is the ultimate champion in the beauty of silver linings, and for lack of a less cliche description, she has always asserted her belief in viewing the metaphorical Choate glass as perpetually half full. Perhaps that is why I continue to circle back to my friend's words. "Pressure is privilege," while a beautiful alliteration, is also a reminder that the stress we encounter at Choate is the result of our personal ambitions and a byproduct of being surrounded by people who care deeply about what they do. Through her leadership, Ms. Elliott has pushed me to consider this perspective, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

Sincerely,
Maia Shah

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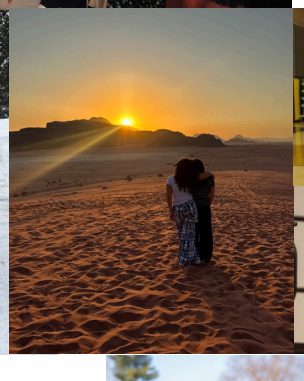






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