

LIFE IS A HIGHWAY

*Taking the
scenic route*

AVA STARK
Editor-In-Chief

When I came into my freshman year, all I could think about was getting above average grades, eventually applying to college and getting out of the high school I just started calling my own.

After spending my final middle school years in Zoom "classrooms", I didn't really care about having the famous "high school experience", it just didn't seem important anymore. All that mattered was excelling independently. I told myself that I would never get anything lower than an A, never prioritize anything over school

Destinations

Source: College and Career Specialist **Chen Liu**
Compiled by **Anabelle Walker**

CALIFORNIA

Did you know: California has more national parks than any other state. With nine national parks, California is the hotspot for roadtrips!

TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

De Anza College

Daniel Avella
Kaden Boehner
Jacob Bloom
Zachary Clark
Dan Dagne
Ema Dedic
Alec Dubobyk
Kyle Gutierrez
Miguel Hernandez
Froy Iturbe Guadarrama
Jlo Kim
John Lane
Azucena Alondra Lepe Valle
Chloe Ngo
Jamison Nguyen
Thomas Nguyen
Lucy Nunn
Reese Verhines
Kaiden Vo
Alexander Wares
Ethan Wright

Diablo Valley College

Zayne St. Laurent

Evergreen Valley College

Jocelyn Lohse
Jaeden Madrigal

Foothill College

Nubia Arreola
Abigail Chavez
Natalie Chicas
Liliana Federico
Kayla Gundersen
Breanna Jacobo
Neil Karote
Ayssa Martinez
Giselle Montoya
Joel Ruiz-Pineda
Cole Taylor

Mission College

Colby Danley
Martin Janich
Francisco Jimenez
Ajay Vujjeni

San Jose City College

Ray Garcia
Dylan Rodriguez
Aaron Solis Tellez
Halen Yanez

San Joaquin DELTA College

Jakob Castanon-Krall

Santa Barbara City College

Coleman Decker
Andre Santos
Caddidy Stuckey

West Valley College

Fernando Alifardo
Zutir Bailon
Bliss Elizabeth
Zoe Diaz
Rocco Dressler
Lily DuBridge
Nicole Eby
Joel Everidge
Augrey Fu
Arisa Gustafson
Kate Jacoby
Siena Magalhaes
Carlos Muniz
Santiago Patino
Seyed Farbod Razavi Ghahfarokhi
Jacob Riedell
Ava Stark
Tyler Strong
Alexis Tea
Brianna Lea
Harrison Truitt
Joshua Weisshahn

FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES

Cal Poly - San Luis Obispo

Jasmine Higgins
Toma li
Savannah Merrick
Marta Movsesyan

California State University - Chico

Ana Paula Jauregui
Miltiadis Pagonis
Lucas Setser
Niko Vathis

California State University - Fullerton

Juliette Bonacum

Connor Tomita

Anthony Tsuji

California State University - Long Beach

Maya Fishkov
Camryn Kubota
Daniel Yarbrough

California State University - Monterey Bay

Eadan Caulfield
Indira Gorman
Addison McIntyre
Adrina St. John-Claire

California State University - Sacramento

Tiago Almeida
Christopher Tea

San Diego State University

Lilia Chatfield
Michaela Grimsrud
Tamara Restrepo
Ginevra Rossi
Nikhil Roy
Romy Schoenberg
Megan Tolerba

San Francisco State University

Jaxson Kirk
Elizabeth Rodriguez
Amaria Spikes

San Jose State University

William Bahou
Andrew Chung
Jack Ingraffia
Jacob Lee

Stanford University

Nolan Mastroicasa
Madison Nottingham
Dominic Puebla

Jessup University

Marlena Montoya
Gina Shim

Pepperdine University

Benjamin Lee
Melina Sobic

University of San Francisco

Heyomin Seo
Zoya Brahamzadeh
Dao Do

UC Berkeley

Cassia Huang
Mohammed Jasim
Lauren Kim
Sungmin Lee

UC Davis

Aon Huang
Angelinee Lombra
Mila Windell

UC Irvine

Lisa Kanda
Rami Naji
Milana Sargsyan

UCLA

Naomi Bergman
Shruti Jadhav
Tyler Ko

UC Riverside

Elizabeth Mach
Jason Park

UC San Diego

Macy Collier
Lily Ha
Sarah Joe

UC Santa Barbara

Anthony Nguyen
Hasan Ahmad

Juia Karas

Gautum Khajuria
Matthew Nelson
Adam Orenstein
Hari Srivatsan

UC Santa Cruz

Ava Abendroth
Brooke Buckman
Owen Jordan-Sparks

Arizona State University

Taehyun Kang
Melinda Kenney
Seojun Oh

University of Colorado Boulder

Vivek Smith
Tibault Thoen

Northern Arizona University

Aidan Weiler
James Scibetta

University of Arizona

Maylia White

FLORIDA

Emory-Riddle Aeronautical University – Daytona Beach

Amanda Rialy Andrews

Georgia Institute of Technology

Yoonjo Yoo

Idaho State University

Leilani Romero Davila
Manami Sakoda

Illinois Institute of Technology

Katelyn Ford
Joaquin Glover

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Rebecca Borison

Wheaton College

Yaxin Yan
Ryan Kang

Indiana University Bloomington

SaiSahasra Makamchenna

Purdue University

Justin Lee
Elizabeth Zakharov

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Jameson Settles
Sarah Scott

Brown University

Erynn Wolfe
Ujjin Cho

Harvard University

Emma Zhang

Northeastern University

Amanda Day
Hillary Mai

Alexander Miura

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Meena Gupta

Michigan State University

Montana Grant

Rutgers University – New Brunswick

Olivia Clima

Long Island University

Francisco Pham

New York University

Yejun Shin

Parsons School of Design

Esme Aburabi

Pratt Institute

Saria Rosintoski

St. John's University

Victor Albaran

University of Rochester

Paxton Burke

The Ohio State University

Yidam Park

Case Western Reserve University

Ellie Kim

The Ohio State University

Grant Reilly

Oregon State University

Dylan Lear

Reed College

Shelby Irwin

University of Oregon

Layla Dublin-King

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Jacob Berkey

McGill University

Gabriella Wong

Universidad Panamericana De Guadalajara

Juan Ibarra

UNDECIDED OR GAP YEAR

Thomas Rasmussen

Jeffry Ruiz

Simon Tadeo

Brayden Tehrani

VOCATIONAL OR TRADE SCHOOL

Nolan Dahl

Isaac Aguilar Olivares

Corine Guizar

Nikolas Hitchcock

Darius Manalastas Johnson

Noah Beltran Solano

Wyatt Lin

Andrew Wells

Alexis Topete Barragan

Emily Trowbridge

David Jaehning

Aaron Solis Tellez

Jordan Perez Sandoval

Seth Sandoval

Lehigh University

Sofia Diaz

Pennsylvania State University

Lily Goodrich

University of Pennsylvania

Eulina Ji

Rhode Island School of Design

Josiah Kim

70%

of students are going to a four-year college

30%

of students are going to a two-year college

76%

Department Awards

Counseling NEVAEH MCGEE Counseling ISAAC AGUILAR OLIVARES



English EMMA ZHANG



English ZOIE GOLDWASSER

CTE JIN CHO



Math DYLAN LEAR

CTE IAN ANGELOPOULOS



Math HASAN AHMAD

ELD CARLOS MUNIZ



Science DAO DO

ELD FERNANDO ALFARO AYALA Social Science LILY DUBRIDGE



Social Science NOLAN MASCARENHAS



Korean DAVID TRAN



Dance OLIVIA CLIMA



Instrumental NATHANIEL BRIGHAM



Theater ZACHARY REINIE



Vocal CRISTIAN VENTURA-JUAREZ



Visual Arts DEANNA JONES



Visual Arts MONTANA GRANT



French RYAN PASKETT



Journalism AVA STARK



Spanish AVISHAWD YARISAIED

ZOYA BRAHIMZADEH | SENIOR OF THE YEAR

A standout student

YUJIN CHO
News Editor

Reflecting her years of dedication, leadership and hard work, senior Zoya Brahimzadeh received the Senior of the Year Award.

Brahimzadeh was nominated by computer science teacher Steven Turner, who taught her for three years. Having extensive knowledge in software and coding, Brahimzadeh has always helped others in robotics, engineering and computer science. Her willingness to put others first and offer a helping hand to peers made her stand out as a positive presence in the classroom.

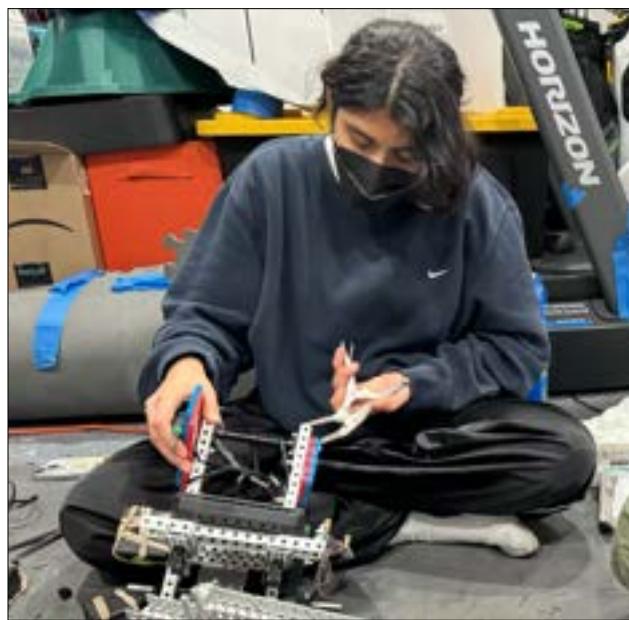
"She's gone above and beyond in so many of her classes — academically or not academically. To that extent, few students do that," Turner said. "There are students that help each other, but there are a few that go that far to set aside what they're doing to help other people."

Brahimzadeh has engaged in various STEM communities at Branham by being involved in the Bionic Bruins and Girls Who Code clubs in addition to being enrolled in engineering courses. Engineering teacher and Bionic Bruins adviser Barbara Schremp, who first met Brahimzadeh as a freshman in robotics and taught her in engineering for two years, has been able to see her character in and out of the classroom.

"I got to know her as a robotics club member first, and that's where I started to see her leadership and her empathy, which really stood out to me as two qualities that set her apart," Schremp said. "She was very interested in different styles of leadership and represented that there's more than one way to be successful as a leader."

From independently taking on intense responsibilities for robotics to exploring new concepts and stepping into leadership positions, Schremp has observed Brahimzadeh's growth as a student and leader over the course of her four years at Branham.

"She did a really good job of showing what grace under pressure looks like, but then she branched out a little bit more," Schremp



Alan Schaeffer/Bear Witness Archives

Senior Zoya Brahimzadeh works on a robot for Bionic Bruins and talks to students at the Girls Who Code stand during club rush.

said. "She started to push herself in the areas of hardware [and] in leadership [by] taking on and creating the girls team, giving quieter voices a space to contribute and recognizing everybody in her group in terms of what their capabilities are."

Brahimzadeh's positive attitude and leadership is recognized by students and staff across departments, reaching the broader Branham community.

"There aren't many times we have students like Zoya come through," Schremp said. "We have students who have aspects of the different things that she has brought to Branham, but so many in one person, and the maturity and humility that she has and just the genuine humanity she approaches everyone with [is] a good representation of Branham for the rest of the community."

HIGHLIGHTS OF AWARD RECIPIENTS AT SENIOR AWARDS NIGHT	Athletes of the Year	Cully R Plant Scholarship	PTSA Scholarship	Sports Booster Scholarship	Robbie Deauville Bruin Pride	Citizenship Award
Valedictorian Kelley Zhang	Gina Shim Chris Von Barloewen	Zoe Johnson Claralee Lozano	Avishawd Yarisaied Cassia Huang Tamara Restrepo	Layla Dublin-King Zoe Johnson Brooke Buckman	Jacqueline Connolly Hojas Tiago Almeida	Aldo Garcia Tovar, Avishawd Yarisaied, Fernando Alfaro Ayala, Owen Jordan-Sparks, Giselle Paedon, James Scibetta
Salutatorian Lauren Kim	Scholar-Athletes of the Year Kelley Zhang Anthony Nguyen	CWCC Scholarship Azucena Lepe Valle	West San Jose Lions Club Scholarship Tamara Restrepo	Chris von Barloewen Hailey Schlosser		

Naomi Bergman and David Tran/Bear Witness



*It's never too
late to begin*

TIBAULT THOEN
STAFF WRITER

Many have the mentality that it is too late in their lives to try new things, fearing they will be forever behind. This mentality stops many from trying new things, however I have always strived to try new things regardless of how late in life.

In freshman year, I played no sports and never

participated in school activities. After seeing everyone else participate in extracurriculars, sophomore year I was determined to try out for a sport and succeed at it.

After growing up always exposed to soccer, I decided to take it up, having never touched a ball in my life.

That summer I trained every single day, biking to the nearest field and learning how to kick a ball properly. At the end of the summer, I started playing nearby pickup soccer, involving myself in the local soccer community. By the time JV tryouts rolled around, I had been playing for around three months and was determined to make the team.

Fortunately, I was not cut and made the team, signaling the start of my high school soccer career. Over the course of the season, I kept training and improving by staying after practice each day.

By the end, I was gaining regular minutes and helping our team to a third place finish. That offseason I was determined to outwork my peers and make the varsity team. I joined my first club team, far later than the rest of my teammates who had been playing club since they were five years old. I continued to work hard each day,

impressing coaches with my work ethic, but still feeling very far behind compared to the rest.

Yet I trusted the process, and that summer it finally clicked. I was able to finally get down basic technical skills and more or less be on par with the rest of my teammates.

That fall, I prepared for tryouts through waking up before school and training at the Branham field.

At times, I was there before the janitors and the maintenance staff even arrived at the school. I maintained this routine up until the tryouts for varsity.

I attended all three days of tryouts, impressing the coaches with my improvement from the year before, but I was still worried about not making it. At the end of the tryouts, I was informed I made the team but as a practice player, which felt devastating due to the effort I put in.

Throughout the season, I continued to persevere and even earned minutes here and there. At the end of the season, I felt proud that I made varsity with so little experience but not fully happy due to my limited play time. Like the previous summer, I put my full effort into improving and outworking my teammates.

Countless summer nights playing pickup or

training at the field.

I was determined to be a senior starter. I made the team unsurprisingly but I was determined to show the coaches I had what it took to be a starter.

After a couple of weeks of preseason, I finally got my chance and played my best game to date, completely isolating their attacker and taking him out of the game. My coaches sang their praises about my performance and this was the moment I solidified myself as a starter.

Someone who had never touched a soccer ball in their life until sophomore year of high school had competed successfully with other athletes that had been playing the sport their entire lives. What might be a small achievement to others is a big one for me as it showed me that it is never too late to start something in life and be successful at it.

This experience has taught me to never use age as an excuse for not trying something new and to not let the opinions of others deter me. In the future, I think this will serve as an important groundwork for how I get involved in college and in my post graduate career.

She has been a constant companion, offering solace and healing throughout my life.



Naomi Bergman and David Tran/Bear Witness

Cinematic conversations

Aidan Weiler

Arts & Culture Editor

As of writing, I have watched 835 movies during my time in high school. My schedule has been trying to watch one movie a day, everyday, for the last two years. Over this time, my taste has dramatically changed, and I thought it would be interesting to look back on some of the most important movies to me personally by reflecting on what they mean to me and what they say about my journey through high school.

Goodfellas (1990, Dir. Martin Scorsese)

When my love for film was still in its adolescent stages, my consumption was largely restricted to my dad's favorite movies: "The Shawshank Redemption", "Pulp Fiction", "Unforgiven" — the usual dad movie staples.

When kids grow up, they inevitably rebel against their parents, try to undo pretty much all the traits their dreadful parents had cursed them with. For me, this took the form of casting aside all the classics that my dad attempted to impart upon me, attempting to forge my own taste. Now, I look back, and acknowledge that I was largely just being a contrarian, and that these films are actually pretty great (except for "The Usual Suspects", that one still sucks).

However, through all this, one film always stayed with me, regardless of what I said — "Goodfellas," directed by Martin Scorese, which tells a classic rise and fall gangster story. The film has all the usual aspects to engage a teen boy — violence, drugs, swearing. But what has really cemented the film in my mind is the craft behind it — it was perhaps one of the first movies that made me sit up and notice film techniques. It's nearly impossible to point out the film that first made me want to become a filmmaker, but if I had to guess, it would probably be this one.

Rushmore (1998, Dir. Wes Anderson)

I used to think about movies not being recommended by my parents as "not allowed." Not that they were inappropriate, but that they were not artistically worthy. In my mind, my parents would judge me if I watched movies that they themselves did not enjoy, and I was embarrassed by the mere idea of having a different taste than my parents. Of course, this was nonsense, but for years, I refused to watch anything alone.

I still remember the first movie I ever sought out and watched on my own — "The Royal Tenenbaums," which started my early obsession with Wes Anderson (a phase I have largely moved on from). This immediately led to me watching every one of his films, largely through DVDs checked out from the library. It may sound ridiculous, but watching the films of Anderson were some of my first steps of independence, forming my own taste in art. I realized I could have my own opinions, instead of parroting those of my elders.

After watching through all of Anderson's films, I eventually landed on Rushmore as my favorite. I could not be less like the main character, high schooler Max Fischer — he's confident, outgoing and bad at school. Yet I still find myself fascinated by his struggles. Films allow one to live vicariously through those who are nothing like oneself, a valuable aspect of the artform.

Persona (1966 Dir. Ingmar Bergman)

Like many, my first exposure to the sphere of world cinema was Bong Joon-Ho's film "Parasite," which was the first foreign film to ever win the Oscar for Best Picture. Before that, I had always been wary of foreign films — in my mind, why would I want to read a movie? But after first watching Parasite, my mind was completely changed.

Looking back, I am so happy I got used to watching foreign films. Some of the greatest films, and my favorites, are in languages other than English. Previously, I had been shut off from the world, my view restricted to that of American culture. But through the lens of cinema, I have been able to learn about and discover societies other than my own. I know it sounds a little pretentious, but I honestly believe that through movies, I have become more connected with the broader world as a whole.

Not only is Persona my favorite foreign film, it is perhaps the single film that lodged itself into my brain the most, influencing my taste for the surreal. Once you have seen this film it is impossible to forget.

Those were just three of the many, many films that have had a profound impact on me — I could probably fill an entire book with my own reflections on my favorite movies. No one would want to read it but I could do it!

In the end, I am very glad that watching films became my hobby of choice. Through the world of the silver screen I have been able to explore cultures from around the world, while also reflecting on my own experiences in the process.

Also, movies are just really, really entertaining.

Senior Survey

PHONE OF CHOICE?



85% of seniors prefer the blue text bubble. According to Apple, there are over one billion iPhones in use around the world.

EVER GAMBLED?



44.3% of seniors have gambled. Amongst the class of 2025, poker seems to be the top choice when it comes to losing money. 36.2% have lost between \$10 and \$50, while 4.3% have lost over \$1,000!

EVER SLEPT DURING CLASS?



79.5% of seniors admitted to catching up on sleep in class. Even the strongest caffeinated drinks couldn't keep the class of 2025 awake during those endless lectures.

EVER GOTTEN DRUNK?



For 43.7% of seniors, yes. According to the 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, about 33% of people aged 12-20 admitted to drinking.

EVER USED MARIJUANA?



34.5% of seniors have gotten high. Surveys suggest that about 27.8% of high schoolers nationwide use the drug. This number is significantly down from previous years. Perhaps legalization took away the appeal for Branham seniors.

CAFFEINE ADDICTION?



34.1% depend on that extra energy boost to get them through the day. Yet seniors still seem to struggle to stay awake in their classes.

CONTRACTED AN STD?



3.4% of the seniors admitted to contracting an STD. They should probably get that checked out.

FAVORITE YEAR?



52.9% of the class of 2025 liked senior year the best. Unsurprisingly, not many were fans of freshman year. In fact, 31% said that freshman year was their least favorite.

MOST DIFFICULT SUBJECT?



Thankfully Google Forms calculated this percentage for us because 29.4% of seniors said their hardest subject was math.

BEEN IN A RELATIONSHIP FOR 2+ MONTHS?



55.2% have been in a long-term relationship (by high school standards). Sorry guys, but only about 2% of high-school couples get married.

LIED TO A TEACHER?



78.2% of seniors said that they might not have been entirely truthful with their teachers. Nearly the whole class's pants are on fire.

BEEN IN A CAR ACCIDENT?



42.5% of seniors have had their insurance rates go up. Maybe some of the senior class should have their licenses revoked.

HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU SPEND ON YOUR PHONE?



The senior class is full of screenagers. 54% spend 5-7 hours on their phones each day.

Source: Bear Witness survey of 88 seniors Compiled by Aidan Weiler, Tamara Restrepo and Tibault Thoen

From goals to growth

LUCAS SETSER
Staff Writer

When students first step onto the Branham campus as a freshman, they bring with them their own personal life goals, interests and for some, friends. As the years go by, those goals, interests and friendships go through some sort of change.

Change is one of those things that no matter how hard you try you can't control or stop. Many factors play into why we change — experiences, struggles and success. Also, the introduction of new people, ideas and opportunities compel students to grow. Growth is a good thing especially when it helps you zone in on your goals.

As a freshman, my goal was to become a police officer. As I matured, I began asking more questions and learned more about the world, and talked to more people. I realized

that I wanted to be a fighter pilot like my father. Hearing more stories from my dad about his experiences and researching aviation on my own, the more my goal changed. I wanted to do what he did and I was going to do anything to get there. Every day I imagined myself ripping through the clouds at supersonic speeds and being thousands of feet off the ground.

Just like our goals, friendships evolve over time. The people we start with may not always be the ones we end up with. Some grow alongside us, while others head in different directions as we each begin to figure out who we are — what we like, what we value and how we see the world. These shifting relationships teach us about loyalty, trust and the importance of surrounding ourselves with people who genuinely support our growth.

Another part of this change is our evolving interests. Over the years, many students



Naomi Bergman and David Tran/Bear Witness

discover new passions, maybe by joining a club they never expected to enjoy, picking up a hobby in an elective class or simply finding joy in something that once seemed boring. What interested us as freshmen often changes as we grow and experience more.

I've realized that high school is about more than academics — it's been a journey of personal growth that helped me figure out who I am and who I want to become. Through new friendships, changing interests and unexpected experiences, I've learned what I value and what kind of person I want to be moving forward.

USED CHATGPT?



58% of seniors admit that they've used AI on their homework. ChatGPT is very good at writing essays, emails, and senior survey results descriptions.

INTROVERT OR EXTROVERT?



The senior class was evenly split between extroverts and introverts, with exactly **50%** identifying as each kind.

JOINED CLUBS AND EXTRACURRICULARS?



90.9% of seniors put themselves out there and joined a club or sport. Branham's website lists registered clubs and the school has 22 sport teams across the three seasons.

LGBTQ+?



27.3% of Branham seniors are LGBTQ+. In a recent Gallup survey, 7.6% of U.S. adults identified as LGBTQ+.

ADDICTED TO YOUR VAPE?



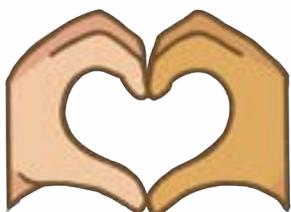
9.1% are addicted, while **80.7%** have never touched the stuff. The 2024 National Youth Tobacco Survey by the CDC found that 7.8% of high school students currently use e-cigarettes.

A TEST OF INNOCENCE



The 55 Branham seniors who responded to this question have an average Rice Purity Score of **65.07**. Hopefully no one checked the last two options.

ARE WE STILL FRIENDS?



70.5% of seniors say they are still friends with the same people as when they entered high school. There's no falling-out worse than a friend-group fallout! (except maybe nuclear)

Anchored in art

NAOMI BERGMAN
Staff Writer

Throughout the many changes in my life, art has remained the one true constant. From my first class in elementary school, through the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic and now through high school, art has always been there. No matter where I am in life, I always find myself turning to art — whether it's doodling on the corner of my assignment, working on my portfolio or creating art for the Bear Witness.

I first discovered my love for art in elementary school. My 2nd-grade art teacher, Ms. Schultz, was the first to inspire me.

She saw that I loved to draw figures of people instead of the still lives we were practicing, so she gave me my first sketchbook, a 2B

pencil and all the books she had on portraits and figure drawing.

Art provided a consistent place to express myself while other aspects of my life, like friendships, interests and confidence, were still forming.

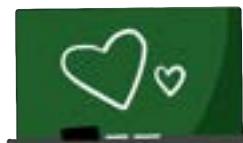
Then came middle school and the pandemic. Suddenly, everything was changing around me, like school, seeing friends and even the ability to go outside.

The isolation led me to feel disconnected and disengaged from the rest of the world. During the long months at home, art became my escape. I had more time to draw, and I even purchased an iPad so I could experiment with digital tools.

Art helped me process my feelings and the chaos around me. Even when my daily life slowed down, my passion for art picked up speed.

Now that I'm in high school, life is fast-

DID YOU ENJOY HIGH SCHOOL?



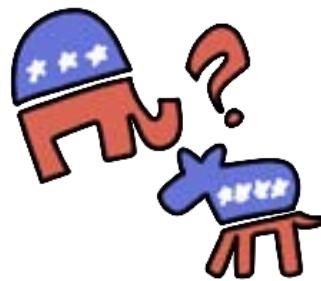
Against all odds, **85.2%** of seniors enjoyed their high school experience. For them, maybe high school was a movie.

ARE YOU SEXUALLY ACTIVE?



30.7% of Branham seniors are. National data shows that about 35% of high schoolers have had sex. **57.9%** of sexually active seniors paid attention in freshman year P.E. and practice safe sex.

WHAT IS YOUR POLITICAL PARTY AFFILIATION?



64.8% of seniors are feeling blue, while **9.1%** are red. For some seniors, 2024 was their first election that they could vote in. Some were so excited they even voted twice!

HAVE YOU EVER CHEATED ON A TEST?



75% of seniors couldn't keep their eyes on their own papers. Punishments for cheating on a College Board exam include reporting the incident to colleges and prohibiting students from taking other related tests.

EVER BEEN CHEATED ON?



For **20.5%** of seniors, it's sadly a yes. Maybe that's why so few high school couples get married.

PULLED AN ALL-NIGHTER



43.2% of seniors have pulled an all-nighter studying. Results are inconclusive on if this actually helped their test scores.

CRUSHED ON A TEACHER



21.6% of seniors were drooling in their seats. These were probably the only people that actually paid attention to lectures.



Naomi Bergman and David Tran/Bear Witness

paced again, but art is still a constant. Whether it's in classes like AP Studio Art or just sketches in class, it helps to ground me.

One new, but exciting experience has been contributing art to the Bear Witness. It has been a new way to practice my skills, whether through creating art for the front page, the spread or even trying photography.

Looking back, I can see that art has evolved with me. Art has always been a personal outlet and a way to reflect different stages of my life. Even if the reason I create it changes, it will always be a constant that I can lean on.



Naomi Bergman and David Tran/Bear Witness

The end of one chapter, beginning of another

TAMARA RESTREPO
Staff Writer

I cannot believe our senior year is about to come to an end. Even just thinking about it makes me start to spiral.

After roaming the same halls together, eight hours a day, five days a week, for four years, we are now parting ways.

"Class of 2025", something we have been hearing for the past 12 years of our lives and always felt like a lifetime away, has now become the present.

This is it. As we walk the stage we will close a chapter of our lives, leave behind the places and faces we have become familiar with and open the door to new beginnings.

I am proud to say I am the first person in my family to graduate high school in the United States. Graduating will not only mark a big achievement for me, but for my parents as well.

I am pioneering a new pathway for future generations to come.

I feel immense pride of having the honor to carry out the dream my parents had when they moved to this country. Both stepped foot in the United States with nothing but a small suitcase in hand, not even able to speak English.

They came to the United States with the dream of having a brighter future and more opportunities.

Here I am now just a month away from walking the stage, an accumulation of all my parents' hard work and their dream.

As we approach graduation, I think more and more about my younger self and everything I have lived through. The feeling of nostalgia overwhelms me. I think back to the little parades at my daycare, the easter egg hunts, the art projects. I think about my halloween costumes from when I was little. I remember dressing up as a pilot, a fairy, Cinderella and a witch.

I often reminisce about the things we used to celebrate that we no longer get a chance to because we are "too old" and "too mature."

I remember field days where the entire school would go outside and we would have water balloon fights and eat watermelon and popsicles. I remember the day we finished reading "Charlotte's Web" in third grade and we had a party to celebrate as we watched the movie.

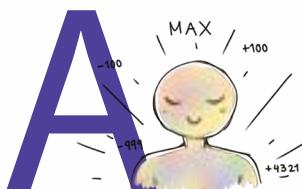
Many of us remember those Christmas parties we would have on the last day of school before the holiday break. Watching movies like the "Polar Express" and "Rudolph the Rednosed Reindeer", and participating in a gift exchange.

This was our time of innocence, the whole class got along and life was simple.

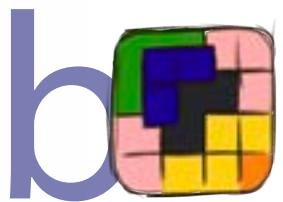
Now we are preparing to walk the stage and embark our journey into adulthood.

Many of us grew up together and have gone to the same schools since we were five years old. Some of us walked around and celebrated with each other at our kindergarten graduation as we transitioned into first grade, then again at our fifth grade graduation, and our eighth grade promotion.

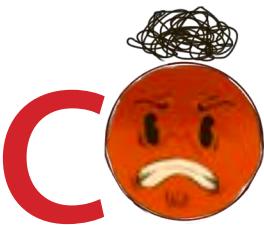
This year we will walk the stage together for the last time, each of us grieving the end of an era and celebrating the start of a new one. There is no better word to describe this feeling other than bittersweet.



Aura: Aura refers to the overall coolness and attractiveness of a person. If a senior were to lose a fight to a freshman, we would say, "That's a decrease in aura."

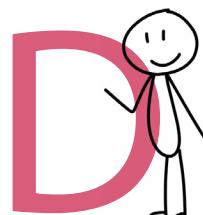


Block Blast: Our game of choice when it comes to burning time or a distraction from lectures.



Crashout: What do you mean I'm crashing out??? I'm not being dramatic, you're being dramatic

— A Crashout



Divas: Branham's entire male population.



Energy Drinks: Redbull, Celsius, Alani, Monster—the list goes on. Our class runs on quick caffeine to stay awake and alert at school.

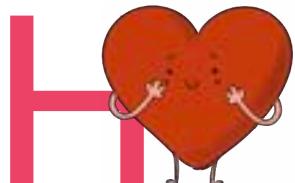


Seniors' four years at Branham summarized by alphabet

Compiled by Mila Windell and Francisco Pham
Illustrations by David Tran



Gamblin': Poker, sports betting, coin flips – the senior population will put money on literally anything.



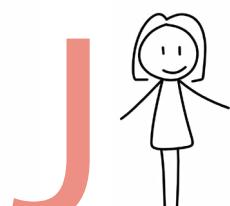
Hallway Crush: Essentially, someone that you pass by in the hallway that you find attractive.



Ice Bucket Challenge: That one week when everyone dumped water on themselves and nominated their friends to do the same.
#speakyourmindchallenge



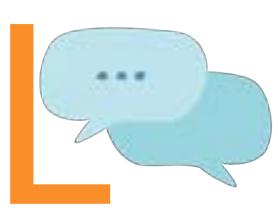
Failed Backflip: Remember that time when a certain student chipped his tooth while failing a backflip at this year's Love Ball.



Just a Girl: Got into a car crash and almost set a building on fire. But hey, it's all good, you're just a girl, right?



King LeBron: The G.O.A.T. My glorious king. My sunshine. (Please never retire).



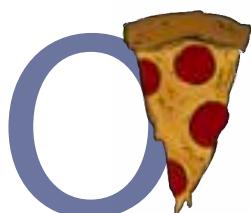
Lore: "Drop the lore"
— A nosy student.



Matcha: From strawberry to banana cream, Branham students love their matcha (hopefully the shortage doesn't last forever).



No Consistency: A new schedule every year, three principals, almost twenty new teachers every year.



Old Lunch Line: Before the cafeteria was reopened, we had to get our lunch in front of the ASB room in two long lines.



Posture: You better hope you don't start slouching in class, or else you might be posted on Branham Bad Posture.



Quotes: Our senior quotes were nearly banned for good. But, after some campaigning (and a little begging), our class managed to convince Yearbook to give us one more shot.



Red Flags: Attitude, follower ratio, hair color. Honestly, anything is a red flag at this point.



Sophomore Sweep: When the class of '25 won every Battle of the Classes event in their sophomore year. Two what? Two five!



Taco Bell: Whether it be after football games, dances, or simply a random Saturday, this is Branham go to late night food spot.



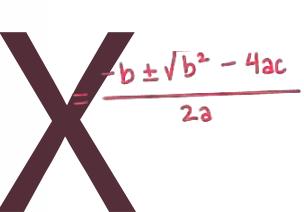
Uggs: Branham's class of '25 default choice of footwear. The go-to shoe for those freezing mornings, when you're rushing out the door, or simply when you just gave up trying to dress nice.



Very Truant: Something that 99.9% of us are. The student population has a knack for never arriving to things on time.



Warriors: Branham's favorite basketball team. Luckily, we were all able to see them win a championship in our freshman year. #GoDubs!



X = (-b ± √(b² - 4ac)) / 2a: The quadratic formula. From IM1 to AP Calculus BC this formula haunted us forever (probably will continue to haunt us in college too).



Yllaregui: We'll never forget to reject the Ho when the p-value is low. Thank you, Dr. Y



Zero Spirit: What encapsulates the essence of the class of '25', sayings like "I'm too cool for themed dress days" and "Why would I go to the football game??" being the most common excuses.



FRANCISCO PHAM
Sports Editor

Naomi Bergman and David Tran/
Bear Witness

The pursuit of happiness

One of the most common pitfalls of life, to me, is the inability to take a step back and enjoy life.

In a constantly evolving world, it feels like there's always an end goal, a place to go, and things to get done.

It's almost like people feel as if they have to get (insert goal) done, or hell might freeze over and the world will turn into a post-apocalyptic wasteland where zombies will eat all of us alive. Although having a loose plan is great, I like to think there is a fine line between that and detailing every single aspect of one's life.

For example, having the idea to book a trip with your friends is a good idea, but having an exhaustive hourly itinerary is going too far. There's no joy in already knowing what is going to happen (despite how cool a 6-hour double-decker bus ride can be to some people). Up until a few months ago, I modeled this kind of over-controlling behavior. The notion that everything had to be meticulously planned out or the world would crumble drove my thoughts.

But through some trials and tribulations that included a few too many crashouts and calls complaining to my brother, my thinking began to shift. I understood that controlling or knowing everything wasn't exactly a formula for happiness. There was bliss in being oblivious. Life kind of had to take its course.

Happiness as a whole is hard to define. The Oxford dictionary says it is "the state of being happy," which I find super unhelpful in trying to quantify it. The beauty that I find in happiness is the looseness of the definition (or lack thereof).

No one thing or goal can guarantee happiness all the time. I love the fact that it's not some sort of solid emotion — it fluctuates. Happiness isn't something that lasts forever. If it did, there would be no purpose in seeking it.

While there's nothing wrong with wanting more or trying to achieve a difficult milestone, I feel that for most people, it comes to a point where the goals become unrealistic. It's that perpetual quest to reach the mountaintop that drives people to insanity. It's their constant pursuit of more, the lack of content, and the idea that nothing is ever enough that breeds unhappiness.

True happiness, I believe, comes from the simplicities of life. The small kind of unspoken parts of a person's day that provide small amounts of comfort. For example, my morning coffee, seeing my friends in school, playing poker till 3 a.m. every night, may seem small parts of a daily routine, yet they provide those jolts of happiness day in and day out. It's enjoying even these minute parts of life that propagate happiness. This is not to say that having goals or dreams is bad, because they aren't. All that I'm saying is that unrealistic expectations are not exactly the greatest. People always speak of goals like "I'm going to become a millionaire" or "I'm going to be President" as a benchmark for happiness. But what I question is what happens when that goal is achieved. Does life stay a consistent stream of happiness? Do unicorns appear in my yard? Does everything simply become better? Of course not. There is no real end goal.

There's a reason why the happiest people aren't billionaires. Instead, it's the overworked journalist who finds passion in overanalyzing sports statistics. It's the student who enjoys coming to school because he gets to see his friends and favorite teachers. It's the kid being okay with not having it all figured out. I believe there is something noble in being content.

This all funnels into the question of why I wrote this column: Is it better to never experience happiness so you won't miss the joy and exhilaration of the emotion, or is it better to experience happiness and retain those memories and be glad that it happened? I would like to think that most people would choose the former, yet realistically, I think that the opposite is true.

For me, I would choose the latter 100 times out of 100. Let me paint a picture as to why I would make that choice: imagine you have this euphoric feeling where everything that could ever trouble you dissipates. The world around you kind of stops in a sense.

All that's racing through your mind is "Man, I'm glad to be in this moment right now" — it's this self-actualization that I believe is the pinnacle of humanity. Sure, some might say being a trillionaire or inventing the second wheel could bring more joy, but that's false.

Happiness isn't bought or made; it's a feeling that just happens. It's not necessarily something that you can control. And that's okay.

It's the spontaneity of happiness that makes it worth feeling.



Naomi Bergman and David Tran/Bear Witness

Not just one thing

TOMER VARDI
Staff writer

When I first walked through the halls as a freshman, wide-eyed and anxious, the advice I received was simple yet overwhelming — “Find your passion.”

As if passion was something hidden, waiting under the bleachers or in the back of a locker to be stumbled upon like lost homework.

Four years later, I realize that passion wasn’t something I found by focusing narrowly, but by enthusiastically trying everything that came my way.

In freshman year, I ventured into gaming, building my first custom personal computer and losing (far too much) sleep enjoying Minecraft with friends. At the time, it seemed like mere fun, but gaming taught me creativity, collaboration and patience.

Late-night sessions were filled with laughter, strategic plotting and heartfelt conversations about life. Little did I know, those pixelated worlds were laying the foundations for friendships that would carry me throughout high school.

Then, sophomore year rolled around, and suddenly I was out on the sports fields. I participated in activities I had no experience in. Track and field, basketball — though injuries prevented me from actually trying out — and I even practiced tennis with some members of the team.

Although I didn’t become a star athlete overnight (or ever), sports taught me resilience. It showed me how to celebrate small victories, like finally beating my personal record in the mile and gracefully handle setbacks, from tough losses to sprained ankles.

Junior year was my culinary awakening. Inspired by countless Tiktoks of cooking recipes, I decided to explore the kitchen. Baking became my escape, a way to relieve stress after a tough day of classes.

Every batch of cookies or pan of “brookies,” a term I coined for my famed “Brownie Cookies,” felt like a small miracle with science and magic combined. Sharing my creations brought unexpected joy, connecting me with classmates I hadn’t spoken to before and making long study sessions sweeter.

Somewhere between cookies and track practices, I discovered the art of conversation and connection. Socializing became not just casual chit-chat, but a conscious effort to understand and learn from others.

I reached out, joined clubs, talked to strangers at lunch and embraced the beautiful messiness of human interaction. Socializing taught me empathy and opened doors to friendships and perspectives that textbooks could never offer.

Finally, senior year arrived and with it, journalism. Writing for this newspaper became my latest adventure. It allowed me to share stories — mine and others’.

Journalism forced me to listen deeply, ask meaningful questions and write authentically. The process taught me humility, accuracy and the power that words hold in bringing people together.

Looking back at these seemingly unrelated experiences, I realize that my high school journey was defined not by a single, clear passion, but by a vibrant mosaic of adventures. Each activity I tried contributed something unique, molding me into someone adaptable, curious and profoundly grateful.

To those still searching, my advice is simple: don’t limit yourself. Embrace randomness. Bake cookies, run laps, chat with someone new at lunch, write an article or two.

In trying everything, I began to uncover what truly excites me — what I might even call passion. I haven’t fully figured it out yet, but each new experience brings me closer. High school is richer, brighter, and infinitely more charming when you treat it as a space for exploration, a chance to stumble into what might one day become the thing you love most.



The road ahead

ANABELLE WALKER
Managing Editor

The newsroom buzzed with energy — except for me. I sat at the edge of the chaos, a reluctant participant in a class I hadn’t planned to join. Just months earlier, I had transferred schools, leaving behind a prestigious but rigid journalism program where I felt like a small cog in a well-oiled machine. I had no intention of reliving that experience. Yet here I was, newly enrolled in an introduction to journalism class, because my counselor needed to fill my schedule.

On my first day, the teacher approached me with an unexpected invitation: “Stay for the advanced class after lunch. Let’s see what you think.” His enthusiasm caught me off guard, but I agreed, curious to see if this newsroom might be different.

And it was.

Gone was the strict hierarchy where only editors mattered. Here, collaboration was the norm, and everyone’s voice carried weight. My new advisor introduced me to a dynamic I

hadn’t seen before — a newsroom that thrived on mutual respect and shared purpose. For the first time, I saw what journalism could be; a platform for storytelling that connected people, not just to news but to one another.

Under his mentorship, I began to rediscover my passion for writing. He pushed me to refine my skills, from crafting sharper leads to capturing human emotion in my stories. By the end of sophomore year, I had grown from a disengaged student into an active member of the newsroom.

Then he left.

Our advisor’s departure at the end of the year left a void we weren’t sure we could fill. As an upperclassman, I stepped into an editor role, not because I felt ready, but because the newsroom needed leaders. The responsibility was overwhelming at first — I wasn’t just editing articles; I was mentoring younger writers, planning content and ensuring we met deadlines without the same level of guidance.

But I wasn’t alone. I drew strength from the lessons my advisor had imparted, especially the importance of creating an environment



Naomi Bergman and David Tran/Bear Witness

where everyone felt valued. I made it my mission to cultivate the same sense of community he had built.

I worked closely with hesitant writers, encouraging them to take risks and develop their voices. I mediated conflicts during late-night layout sessions, ensuring our team could collaborate effectively even under pressure.

By senior year, as Managing Editor, I found myself reflecting on how much I had grown since that reluctant first day. Journalism became more than just a class or a publication; it became a space where I learned to lead with empathy and adapt to challenges. It taught me that leadership isn’t about control but about empowering others to succeed.

Today, I look at our newsroom with pride — not just for the stories we’ve told but for the community we’ve built. It’s a legacy I hope to carry forward, no matter where life takes me.



Naomi Bergman
and David Tran/Bear Witness

Endless possibilities, one me

DAVID TRAN
Art Director

Endless possibilities. Whether or not I should have made a different choice in every situation ever kept me up at night, believing that perhaps a left turn instead of a right would have changed the trajectory of who I am now. Coming into high school, I was naive to the realities I'd be faced with, and all the decisions that would be thrust upon me.

"In Another Life" was one of the first official poems I wrote in my sophomore year, arguably one of my better poems. It reflected on my flaws and all the different versions of myself that I wish I could've lived as, because then I truly believed I was living the worst version of myself.

It was a recollection of how every choice I've made has amounted to who I am, making me think that I could only lead a good and true life in another universe where I made better decisions.

I wrote about the struggle with my experiences growing up, along with identity, especially my sexuality, and my family dynamics. All subjects were out of my control, but something I blamed myself for and burdened myself with. A kind of chaos erupted within me, where the thought of where, what and how all forces of life were happening within the world stirred in a whirlwind of anxiety. Everything mattered so much that it collapsed into nothingness and a mere belief of "nothing matters." It felt like every new discovery was a reminder of how small we are in the universe, where the possibilities were endless.

The idea nothing mattered was definitely an unhealthy approach to life, but unexpectedly, it became a catalyst for growth, leaving it up to me to decide whether to embrace it.

I joined an egregious number of clubs and, on top of it, chose to do color guard. A part of me felt like I mainly did so much to distract myself from the life I was supposed to be dealing with, and it worked for a while, I suppose. But there was a lack of meaning in whatever I did. It was my way of attempting to explore all these other dimensions of myself, but never committing to just one or a couple and fulfilling their potential.

However, through these activities, the kinds of people I met changed drastically, and that diversity gave me something I didn't know I needed. Perspective.

From the overly enthusiastic debate kids who lived for spirited arguments to the artists in the creative writing club who poured their souls into watercolor and verse, I started to see that everyone had their version of chaos. Observing from afar, this passion and ambition stemmed from their sense of identity and acceptance of who they were, even through all the troubles and trials they've been through.

It was up to me to realize that each person carried their cracks, their silent storms, and that realization gave me a strange sense of comfort. Maybe my brokenness wasn't a flaw, but simply a part of being human. And being human was the most permissible thing in this world, at the very least.

Color guard, weirdly, became my anchor. There was something meditative about learning how to spin, about feeling the fabric of the flag whip through the air in rhythm with music and breath. It required precision, timing and teamwork, which was a sense of orderliness and focus that lacked in my personal life. I began to have a new spark, where nothing mattered, in the singular instance of performance, I mattered.

I strived to get better and continue to work towards those moments where it felt like, internally, the spotlight was on me. And I was contributing to a work of creativity and fun, which painted the greys in my singular life, with color.

Somewhere along the way, I stopped living just to survive and began noticing that I was reflecting all different aspects of myself. Not just the pain, but the growth, the subtle triumphs, the laughter I hadn't noticed creeping its way back into my mind.

I began to acknowledge myself, not the "could've been" versions, but the one who was still here, still trying. While I may have still believed that I was living the worst versions of myself and I had made all the wrong choices in the past, I had freed myself from the unearthly chains of meaninglessness.

There was no secret recipe or magical transformation to healing, there never is. I still had those nights staring at the ceiling, wondering if I'd ever be enough. Even those mornings when the mirror felt like a stranger. But just because things could've been different doesn't mean it would've been better. The pondering of a "what-if" in the past bloomed into a reminder of the beauty of the purpose of the present. There's no telling what kind of life I'll live, and it's up to me to decide. And messy and cracked, or whatever path I'm set on, is entirely my own.



Naomi Bergman and David Tran/Bear Witness

CHANGES | Learning to take risks

From
PAGE 1

and I absolutely wouldn't let myself go to a "bad" college.

I had made a plan for myself and nothing was going to make me change or let go of it, because I thought that if I steered away from it or took any risks, the opportunities I wanted would never come to me.

I got involved with things such as journalism as a freshman just to put them on my college applications, not considering what actual benefits the class could have for me as a person.

But along the way, I realized that I couldn't just have one plan that I stuck to for four years, because things change. And I couldn't just grudgingly force my way through school because then what's even the point? You're supposed to make mistakes, meet new people, learn new lessons and have new experiences that may or may not change your path.

So I ended up making a lot of mistakes. I met

a lot of different people, and all of these people gave me new experiences that significantly influenced my life. Since being a freshman, my values, personality and morals have changed so much in so many ways because I allowed myself to make mistakes and learn from them.

Not only did my goals in life and after high school change, but how I approached high school changed too. I started prioritizing making valuable experiences and enriching the parts of my life that I thought would help me grow, more than just stressing over busy work for a class just to get an A. Not only did this give me a greater sense of fulfillment, but I started bringing actual enthusiasm into my extracurriculars, friendships and classes.

When college application season came around, I still applied to the school freshman year me wanted to go to, and got in. But instead of going, I decided to go to community college first

because going now wouldn't be the right decision for me.

If the past four years have taught me anything, it's that no matter what you choose to do, opportunities will still come to you. It's better to take the risk, mess up and learn from it than to stay where you are and regret it later.

Following society's formula to success makes a lot of sense and seems so easy. But it's not what people are designed to do. We're supposed to take the wrong turn, drive the scenic route and go places spontaneously.

Now I've done that. Now, I really don't have a solid plan and I have no idea what I'm doing. As a freshman, or even a sophomore or junior, this would have terrified or even disappointed me. And while I am very nervous about what's coming next, I feel ready, because this is the best time in my life to go on new adventures, explore and see what the world has to offer.

Shifting Gears

BEAR WITNESS
MAY 2025

Compiled by Ava Stark and Nevaeh Gutierrez

We asked students from the Class of 2025 how their dreams as freshmen have changed throughout their years of high school and how they compare to their goals now.



Courtesy of Lucy Nunn

"As a freshman, I really wanted to make new friends, because all my friends went to private schools, and to find out the kind of person I was because I was very unsure of myself. The more I met people, the more I learned about myself, which made me more confident. Now

I'm really content with where I'm at in life and hope to find a good career in addition to maintaining a good community for myself with people who uplift me."

—Lucy Nunn



"My goals as a freshman were mainly academic, just to get good grades and honestly to make my parents proud. I wanted to do what they wanted me to do and follow their guidance in terms of what classes and extracurriculars I should take and how well I should do in those. As I was getting older though I was thinking more about my future. My mom wanted me to be an engineer but after taking engineering my freshman year, I realized it wasn't for me and I realized I wanted to spend my life doing what I enjoy since I only have one life. Now my priorities have definitely shifted. Rather than pursuing what my parents want me to do, I started following my own interests, such as by taking more classes that maybe my parents haven't heard of that align more with what makes me happy."

—Adam Orenstein



Courtesy of Adam Orenstein



Courtesy of Lily Ha

"[My Goals were to] graduate, and I wanted to get a 4.0 all throughout high school. In the future, I'm looking at trying to become a primary physician. I decided to be a doctor or nurse once I took AP Bio in my junior year, since I really liked my teacher, Mr Kalman and the subject interested me. So now I am majoring in Human Biology."

—Lily Ha

"As a freshman, I was a lot less musically inclined and a lot more focused on computer science. But doing band and a lot of other projects, such as honor bands, taking lessons or solo performances, it made me a lot more excited for music. Taking computer science courses and an internship over summer also made me appreciate computer science more and understand what it could do for the world, in addition to where I can take it in the future. Now, I have more of an idea of what I want to do with both computer science and music."

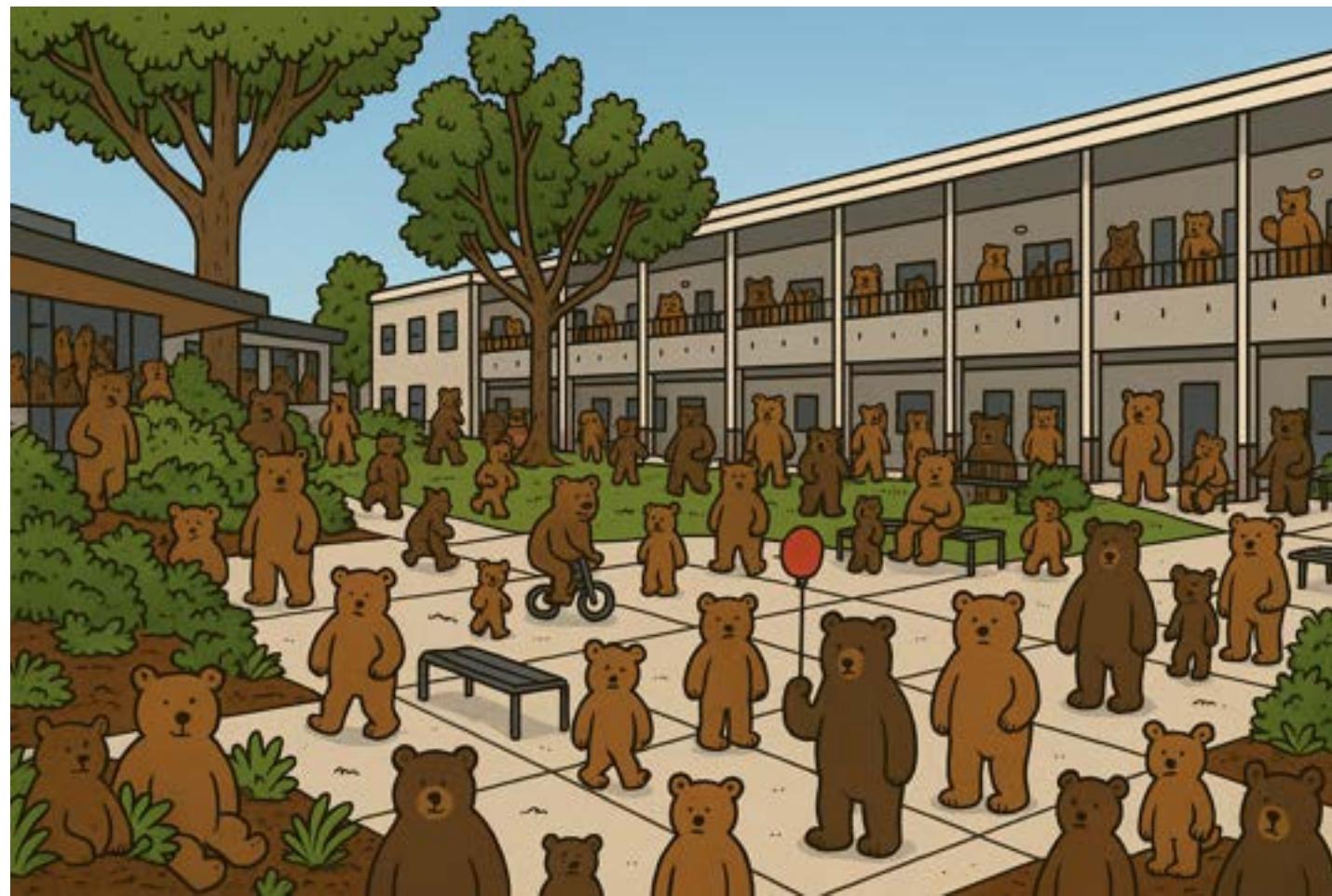
—Gautam Khajuria



Courtesy of Gautam Khajuria

Donde Esta?

Among all these Bruins milling around at school, there's one imposter hiding in plain sight. Where's Waldo?



Generated with AI



Compiled by Tomer Vardi and Lucas Setser

WORD BANK	Navigation	Airplane	Terminal	Highway	Compass	Ticket	Route
Destination	Itinerary	Passport	Platform	Journey	Arrival	Cruise	Road
Interstate	Departure	Boarding	Suitcase	Luggage	Vehicle	Train	Map

From Wildcat to Bruin

NEVAEH GUTIERREZ
Staff Writer

Freshman year is often seen as the worst part of high school, and in some ways, it is. You're thrown into a new place with new people, being forced to find your place among thousands of students. But as soon as you find your place, your people, your niche — you usually stick with it.

Obviously, people and friendships change, but after your first year, you generally know almost everyone in your class. That was my experience at Woodside High School.

At the end of my sophomore year, I already had my entire junior year planned out. I already had my group of friends, my schedule, etc., but my entire plan got uprooted when I moved away. Granted, San Jose is only 30 minutes away from Redwood City, but 30 minutes feels like much longer when you can't drive.

I tried to keep in touch with friends, but we rarely ever saw

each other. Eventually, I had to learn to move on and get comfortable at Branham. I had to learn to open up all over again.

Branham seemed really intimidating at first. Everyone already knew each other and had their groups. I had no idea where I would fit in the grand scheme of things. It was awkward to talk to people at first. Things at Branham worked differently than they did at Woodside. Branham has more clubs, better APs and requires more courses than I had to take previously. It was overwhelming.

I grounded myself by pursuing interests that I had already been familiar with at Woodside. I joined journalism and theater. I made friends, went to events and was an absolute try-hard the entire first semester of junior year.

But by second semester, things had slowed down. Once I found

my people — my community — I ended up closing myself off to new experiences. I had grown comfortable and I felt that there was no need to get to know anyone outside of my circle.

That has been my biggest mistake throughout high school. High school should be about new experiences and finding yourself. I know people say that's what college is for, but how are you supposed to decide what to do for the rest of your life if you don't know yourself?

You're expected to know what school you want to go to, what major you're going to commit to and these decisions essentially dictate the rest of your life. While you can change your major or your school, that process is so complicated that it's much more convenient to know what you want straight out of high school, which is why it is important to open yourself up to new experiences.

That's why I am ending my time at Branham going to events and clubs that I had never participated in previously. While it may not help me decide on my future, it will hopefully help me leave with a better understanding of myself.



Naomi Bergman and David Tran/Bear Witness



Naomi Bergman and David Tran/Bear Witness

Embracing the unknown

MILA WINDELL
Student Life Editor

As I sit here and write my column the Knight before it's due, like most of my assignments in high school, I can't help but reminisce about my four years.

The person I am, who's about to walk across the stage, is completely different from the person who first trudged on campus.

Looking back at my freshman year self, I can picture a girl who was nervous, afraid, insecure and, in a way, resentful. My mom had just uprooted my brothers and I from our comfortable private-school bubble and dropped us into our local public school with so many unfamiliar faces.

My first few months at Branham were anything but cinematic. I remember anxiously calling my older brother, between every single break and lunch, begging him to meet up so I did not look like some lonely kid wandering the quad. I found the wrong classrooms more than I found the right ones.

My mind was solely focused on how much I didn't want to be there: I missed my old school, old friends and my old routines.

Clinging onto my past and the false comfort of standing still was holding me back from embracing my present and stepping into the life right in front of me.

If I'm being honest, I only started joining certain extracurriculars because I felt pressured to build my "college application," just like most of my friends back at my old school.

I joined Bear Witness during my freshman year, volunteered for National Honor Society (NHS) and California Scholastic Federation (CSF), joined French Honors Society, got a job, joined soccer and badminton.

Slowly, coming to school became a little less daunting.

Yet it wasn't the resume checklist that had the biggest impact on me. It was the in-between memories: laughing until curfew at the soccer lock-in, cramming layout pages during last minute crunch and the ritual late night Taco Bell runs with my friends.

Those snapshots stitched together a version of Branham I never expected to love, and somewhere along the way the campus that felt foreign started to feel like mine.

Now that my younger brother has started at Branham, I feel responsible to give back and help him navigate the challenges I once faced alone.

Looking back, the person who walked into high school freshman year and the person leaving now are worlds apart. No matter the environment, I've learned that I can thrive, if I embrace the challenges ahead.

Self-doubt and questioning never truly disappear in times of uncertainty. The hurdles will always appear. But little by little, those hurdles become easier to jump over.

And, as I prepare to leave high school behind and enter a new chapter of my life in college, I'm confident in my ability to face challenges head-on. Now, I embrace the obstacles with excitement instead of fear, because I now know that with patience and effort, things will pay off in ways I never imagined.

SPORTS

Students reflect on the effects of off-season training for sports in their school and athletic lives.

PAGE 13**ONLINE DATING**

Students suffer from communication setbacks as they attempt to pursue romantic relationships in the digital world.

PAGE 12**SCIENCE&HEALTH**

What role will commercial space flight play in space exploration?

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BEAR WITNESS

**MAY 2025****BRANHAM HIGH SCHOOL****BHSBEARWITNESS.ORG****ETHNIC LITERATURE****BOBA PUB**

Bye bye Boba Pub

Community impacted following the closure of Boba Pub

ALYX YOON
Staff Writer

On Sept. 1, 2024, Boba Pub went out of business due to a decline in customers. It was bought by Desi India Bazaar, the Indian grocery store occupying the nextdoor building, and is currently undergoing a transformation into an expansion of the grocery store.



Alyx Yoon/Bear Witness

Desi India Bazaar is expanding into Boba Pub's former location on Branham Lane.

The owner of Desi India Bazaar did not respond to Bear Witness's request for comment.

Boba Pub was owned by Jason and Thuy Le from 2016 to 2024. Their son, freshman **Jayden Le**, said he felt sad when the store closed down due to its nostalgic value.

"It was a place where everyone was welcome and friends would stay, eat and do their homework," Le said.

Since Boba Pub was a popular spot for students to hang out after school, losing this location impacted the Branham community. For students like junior **Marisol Colin Sanchez**, who worked there for approximately a year and a half before its closure, it meant returning to the job market.

"[It was] somewhere everyone would go to for fun after a football game or just after school to hang out," Sanchez said. "It impacted me personally by [losing] my job, but I really enjoyed and loved working."

For students who frequent establishments close to the school, Boba Pub closing means one less location to hang out at. Junior **Maria Luisa Tarriela** visited Boba Pub nearly everyday and enjoyed it for its affordability. Customers would be given a free boba if they completed a stamp sheet, awarding them with a stamp with every purchase.

Additionally, with Boba Pub gone, certain drinks and food options are no longer as accessible to students. Junior **Dristi Roy**, whose favorite flavor is wintermelon, liked Boba Pub because of their wide assortment of flavors.

"It is not a flavor that gets offered in most places, [and Boba Pub] made it really well," Roy said.

Another thing Roy will miss is her tradition of visiting Boba Pub with friends after finishing tests or finding out important results to academic programs.

"We would always go to Boba Pub, and since their boba is cheap and the vibe is cozy, we would stay there and talk," Roy said. "Now it's gone so we go to Milk Tea Lab instead, but it is not the same."

During these hangouts, Roy and her friends now have to customize orders in order to stay on budget.

"We cannot always afford the expensive drinks and snacks that are offered at Vons and Milk Tea Lab, so we get these cups of egg pudding topped with mango stars and vanilla ice cream," Roy said.

However, there is a possibility Boba Pub will reopen over the next year near Meridian Square on Meridian Avenue.

"The store will be smaller and I think we will have a limited amount of items," Le said.

CLASSROOM CONTROVERSY

Various groups respond to the California Department of Education ruling against CUHSD of discrimination in Ethnic Literature Classes | See **page 11**

“Anti-bias education is an ongoing need. We all need to be constantly examining our own biases. That's the only way that we're going to be able to navigate around or through those biases.”

Campbell High School Teachers Association President **Kim McCarthy**

Grace Ngo/Bear Witness Archives

ETHNIC LITERATURE | Class found to be discriminatory

From PAGE 10

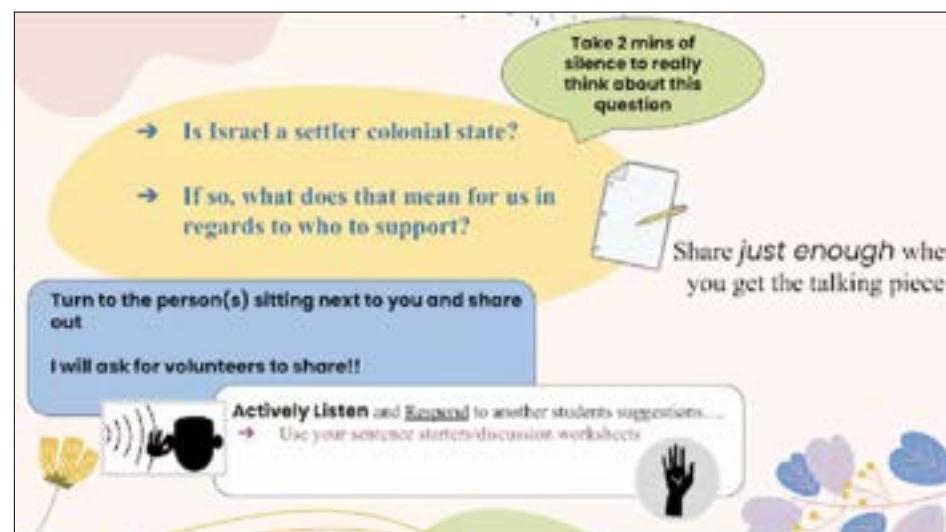
ABIGAIL MEDEIROS
Staff Writer

The California Department of Education (CDE) determined that the Branham Ethnic Literature curriculum had been teaching lessons that were discriminatory and biased against Jewish students.

The CDE accepted a complaint for investigation at the beginning of this calendar year on the basis that the Campbell Union High School District (CUHSD) was allegedly teaching an Ethnic Literature curriculum that is "discriminatory on the basis of race and ethnicity," specifically to Jewish students.

The CUHSD Investigation Report listed the complaint referencing two teachers, named Teachers A and B in the report, who were "biased" in the way they presented the Israel-Hamas war in the classroom and on the class Instagram account. The complaints listed that "1. Teacher A taught a lesson that included biased content and facilitated a discussion around settler colonialism suggesting that Israel is a settler colonial state; 2. A student project on genocide that included content on 'The Genocide of Palestinians' posted on Teacher B's school-based social media account; and 3. The Ethnic Literature curriculum calls for students to study groups such as Students for justice in Palestine." The CDE found merit for allegations No. 1 and No. 2.

The ruling indicates that the ELA and social studies teachers must have a minimum of one hour of anti-bias training before the start of next school year in order to ensure that the curriculum and teaching styles within the Ethnic Literature are unbiased and purely educational. According to the CUHSD Investigation Report, the anti-bias training also must include "discussion of presenting instruction on contro-



Slide posted to Ethnic Studies Instagram depicting material deemed biased by CDE investigation in which students discussed whether Israel was a "settler colonial state" in a talking circle.

versial topics in a balanced and non-discriminatory manner" as well as "discussion of the concerns raised in this case."

Education Director **Maya Bronicki** spoke on behalf of the Bay Area Jewish Coalition Education & Advocacy Team, the group that raised concerns with their initial complaint about the discrimination, and said the parent of a student within the class originally filed the complaint. Jada Chiu, a Coordinator of Community Engagement and Communications from CUHSD, declined to confirm the original source of the initial complaints.

Bronicki raised questions about the effectiveness and the consequences of the ruling.

"The ruling validates the concern," Bronicki wrote in an email. "It did not facilitate a real solution."

Kim McCarthy, Prospect High School history teacher and Campbell High School Teachers Association (CHSTA) President, has worked with the teachers involved to ensure that "contract language" is being upheld as well as to support the association members involved. According to McCarthy, CHSTA is involved in order to ensure that the teachers involved are defend-

ed and supported in their education decisions with their students.

"My role as Union President is finding ways to make sure our members feel supported in their teaching of ethnic studies and academic freedom," McCarthy said.

CUHSD parent **Danah Din**, who attended the CUHSD Board meeting about the alleged discrimination, expressed disagreement with the final ruling after publicly commenting on the origin of the allegations and her opinion on the topic.

"In reading the investigative report, it was clear that the teachers made a lot of effort to give space for discussion in a respectful manner," Din said.

Bronicki says that parents are looking to work with the district to foster a safe environment free of discrimination for students, and they "seek collaboration with the staff to explore ways our diverse communities can be respected and appreciated equally."

Despite disagreements regarding the terms of the ruling, both parties concur that discrimination is not acceptable in any educational environment.

"Anti-bias education is an ongoing need," McCarthy said. "We all need to be constantly examining our own biases. That's the only way that we're going to be able to navigate around or through those biases."

Bronicki described how this situation can be used to inform and educate all teachers, students and community members on proper anti-bias behavior and draw attention to inclusivity.

"It is important to understand that this work is not to uplift a specific group of students," Bronicki said. "It is to heighten the awareness of the concerns and trigger points to make classrooms inclusive for the entire student body."

News highlights

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Branham Karaoke Club holds district-wide contest

15 competitors from four different schools within the district participated in Branham Karaoke Club's first-ever karaoke contest in partnership with the district's Mandarin classes on April 26.

The contest was in tournament-style featuring a panel of judges and a prize for the top three performers. Prospect juniors **Robyn Liang** and **Thien An Tran** took first place. Branham junior **Grace Ngo** took second place, and Branham freshman **Summer Wang** took third place.

Karaoke Club president **Grace Ngo** wanted to spread her enjoyment for performance with the community.

"Even though I'm really nervous before I perform, I just love that rush I get," Ngo said. "I love hearing people cheer, and then I was able to perform in front of such a big crowd."

—David Tran

District board approves purchase of SchoolAI license

During a board meeting on May 1, the district Board of Trustees approved a \$47,950 purchase of a SchoolAI license and two training sessions.

SchoolAI uses generative AI tools that allow students to interact with personalized AI tutors and provide teachers with summaries about individual students' activity and learning. The AI is built to guide students rather than provide immediate answers.

According to Director of Technology **John Keating**, students will not have access to secure AI tools without SchoolAI or an equivalent, stressing the importance of keeping students' data private.

"If you log in [to OpenAI] and start dumping your data in [ChatGPT], they have access to your data," Keating said during the board meeting. "With our agreement with SchoolAI, we're restricting the use of our students' data [from being used] to build models and potentially be sold for other purposes."

—Elliott Yau

Bionic Bruins attend World Championships

The Bionic Bruins B team attended the VEX Robotics World Championships in Dallas from May 6 to May 8, placing first in the "science" division qualifiers and proceeding to quarterfinals.

According to junior B team member and club treasurer **Adelle Kang**, the team had to work through many spatial constraints and busy schedules.

"We had to spend a lot of time working through different iterations of the robot because we're a school club that is more limited to resources compared to private schools," Kang said.

The team won eight out of 10 qualification matches to rank first.

"We're still not that well known of a team, but we were able to show our name as a robotics team as well as a club to a lot of different countries," Kang said.

—Yujin Cho

LIBRARY

A home for Branham's books

New campus library will open next school year

ENOCH SHIN
Staff Writer

Branham will introduce a new library on campus in the 2025-2026 school year. The new library will be installed in Room 11, where they are currently repurposing it.

By proposing the project to the school board, helping fund the library through the school board's budget and leading the Library Committee, Principal **Beth Silbergeld** has been heavily involved with the establishment of the library.

"The new library project at Branham [will] bring back the spirit of reading, the spirit and culture of reading independently," Silbergeld said. "It's not intended to be a research library, but to be a place where students can readily access books, as well as request books to read. The library will also be a space that's open during tutorials to a limited number of students to go to work quietly or to read."

Silbergeld has been working on the project since the summer of this school year, when she became the new principal at Branham.

"I learned about the space and the needs of the school last July, so I became really excited to know that this was a project that had funding that was already set aside and had the backing of the school district," Silbergeld said. "The goal for every school in Campbell Union [High School District] to have a library in addition to, or in place of, classroom libraries has always been really important to me as an educator."

Other staff have also supported and are ready to help organize the new library, which will be called "The Den." According to Silbergeld, Principal's Secretary **Cecilia Sedano** has helped manage the project behind the scenes by helping bring up the idea to the school board and file the paperwork to establish it. Bookkeeper **Angelica Arruda** will supervise the library before school and during tutorials.

English teacher **Lauren Cellini** is excited about the prospect of a new library. Reminiscing about her time at high school and her experiences with her high school library, she believes this change will help her students become interested in reading independently and improve comprehension skills.

"I remember in high school, even people who didn't like reading would have projects where we'd have to go to the library and check out books for



either research or because we were each reading our literary text," Cellini said. "Having those options can pique interest for more students than we're reaching with just giving them the set text that we read together."

The Student Library Committee, a volunteer group on campus that provides logistical support and student input for The Den, has helped Silbergeld plan The Den.

Charlotte Homer, a sophomore and member of the Library Committee, feels passionate about the new library and the planning process for The Den. Homer shared her vision of the benefits and the impact that the library will have on students at Branham.

"People should be able to go to a place where you can read, that's not just relying on what books your teachers have," Homer said. "A library is a great place to be with people, connect with people, but also do your own thing in a safe space."

Silbergeld also envisions The Den as a safe space and also a place for students to read more at school.

"I hope that it creates new readers for students who don't see themselves yet as readers [and] haven't read a book that has been of their choice or that's engaged them," Silbergeld said. "I think it'll give all of us another way to connect and share great books that we're reading or things that we're learning about from reading."

Enoch Shin/Bear Witness
The new library is decorated and stocked with books in preparation for its upcoming opening.



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Mission Statement:

The Bear Witness is committed to providing accurate, timely coverage of local and world news while connecting these events to the lives of our diverse student body.

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ARTS & CULTURE + STUDENT LIFE

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

TUNED OUT

Musicians explore the challenge of continuing to learn instruments during college and beyond

MISSY KERALAPURA

Staff Writer

On graduation day, high school seniors throw their caps up in the air, excited with the prospect of moving on to the next stage of their lives. However for most seniors, this involves leaving their musical instrument behind.

Learning a musical instrument while growing up is a rite of passage for many students. Almost 10% of the Branham student body is currently involved in school bands and ensembles, and many pursue solo instruments as well.

Yet a large majority of high school students countrywide do not pursue their musical passions in college through a degree or ensembles. This results in students quitting the instruments they have spent years dedicated to, mainly because they are not sure how to fit instrument learning into the next stage of their life.

According to junior **Cassie Baker**, a trombone player for Branham bands and ensembles, many students quit playing their instruments after high school.

"I would say approximately 85% of people completely drop their instruments," Baker said. "95% of student musicians don't major in music."

Band teacher **Christopher Nalls** also agrees with the drop rates, and adds the rarity of continuing music as a career.

"It is only about 1% of student players that continue it as a career," Nalls said.

Junior **Camille Quinard**, a competitive solo pianist, thinks that students view music as a fun pastime rather than a serious career, which leads students to drop their instruments to focus on their major studies.

"Most people do not do music as a college major because [they see] music as just a hobby," Quinard said. "We think that whatever we do as a major, we are going to do for the rest of our lives. Because of this, music learning goes away."

However, studying music in college doesn't require pursuing the path of a professional musician. Baker believes that studying

music is worth it for those passionate about music, regardless of their career goals.

"In a trip to San Jose State University called 'Be a Music Major For a Day,' I got to meet these trombone players and I even got to play music with them, which has made me really consider majoring in music," Baker said.

The hesitance to pursue creative passions stems from a mindset adopted by Generation Z, where students from this generation choose to follow a safe path that involves only getting "necessary" degrees to pursue stable, well paying jobs.

Nalls acknowledges this shift in mindset from his generation, saying that students are now less likely to pursue their passions and what makes them happy in favor of financial stability.

"As you start looking at your generations and beyond, you start to see some differences in thinking because of major events like COVID," Nalls said. "With creative endeavors, you often have to create your own path, and that scares a lot of people. I've noticed more and more reluctance to do so as we've gone through the years."

Baker has also witnessed many instances of this Generation Z mindset impacting the continuation of students' musical pursuits, including that of a fellow trombone player.

"Our lead trombone player, though extremely talented, is not pursuing music in college as a major," Baker said. "He is going to major in computer science because, like a lot of people, he believes technology is going to make you money."

Nalls emphasizes that people don't realize that there is so much one can do with a music degree, without actually being a professional musician. Students can pursue stable music related jobs in the entertainment or teaching industry, or jobs in another different field entirely.

"The sheer breadth of what you can do with a music degree is not very known. I got a degree in music and I got hired in Apple because I was a musician," Nalls said. "The person that hired me was like, 'I used to play trumpet. I know you know how to be part of a team.'"

However, completing a degree in music can be too time-consuming for students who simply want to continue their musical instruments. While this can be true, there are other more time-efficient alternatives to stay involved with music, like putting together garage bands or joining music clubs.

"A lot of people are discouraged from pursuing music, but people forget that it doesn't have to be as time consuming as a high school band," Baker said. "There are a ton of opportunities for your instrument, so leaving high school doesn't mean that you need to leave your instrument."

Additionally, most colleges have ensembles and bands that students can participate in, and many colleges do not restrict people who are not music majors from joining.

With solo instruments, continuing music throughout college can be difficult without pursuing a degree, but private lessons with campus instructors offer a viable option.

"You have to find a place to practice on your own because you don't have a whole group of people backing you up," Quinard said. "It requires a lot of motivation, but if you really want it, you can always find it."

Nalls believes that pursuing music as a degree or a hobby through college can help keep music as a lifelong commitment, all while benefiting mental health, strengthening the brain and creating healthy habits and skills.

"Not only do I think staying involved in music is a good thing, [but] the science shows that people in music are smarter," Nalls said. "Our goal at Branham is to create lifelong learners. People who want to know more about music keep music in their lives."

Nalls also concludes how learning a musical instrument is skill based, and requires a lot of time commitment and dedication — skills that will help students no matter what career they pursue.

"If you're going to be any good at anything skill based, it takes hours," Nalls said. "There is the idea of the 10,000 hour rule to be a master. Because that can feel so daunting, I tend to teach that a journey starts with a single step."

ONLINE DATING

Romance or reboot?

Students discuss the communication barriers affecting their digital relationships

DYLAN COLLISON

Staff Writer

Falling in love, making a best friend or sharing a deep secret: all of this can be done with a person one has never actually met.

With the rise of social media apps like Instagram and Snapchat, teenagers are navigating the ups and downs of digital communication. According to a study conducted by Our World in Data, the daily average hours spent on electronic devices increased from 2.7 to 6.3 hours from 2008 to 2018. With many students' conversations being moved online, a shift has occurred — a shift that places less value on real interaction, but instead focuses on the presentation of a person's social media account.

The talking stage was born as a result of this digital back and forth. Known as the period of mutual digital contact between two people in the pursuit of romantic interests, Branham students are familiar with the impulsive nature of receiving a direct message or a photo on Snapchat in the name of love.

Senior **Sage Oblander** met a romantic interest online who lived in Massachusetts. The entire relationship took place on Instagram. However, Oblander's participation in the digital age of romance should not be interpreted as personal preference.

"As much as I would like to say that online relationships are good, I prefer to get to know people in person, even if they go to a different school," Oblander said. "It doesn't feel the same if you cannot meet up with them."

Oblander said one of the main downsides of online text is how it can lead to misinterpreting messages. With the lack of face-to-face communication, it can be impossible for people to pick up on the tonal cues present in a person's expression or words.

"I find it hard to talk with people who do not know how to text, especially if they cannot determine tone," Oblander said. "Sometimes, people are not media literate, and they will get mad at other people for taking things the wrong way."

A part of the reduction of face-to-face communication also alters the value of messages, such as during serious conversations.

"I have gotten broken up with over text twice," Oblander said. "It is so insensitive."

In addition to the confusion and ambiguity online texts can create, Oblander points out how digital communication has set expectations for how people should text. Today, many consider responding fast during a talking stage to be breaking one of the many unspoken rules, but Oblander disagrees.

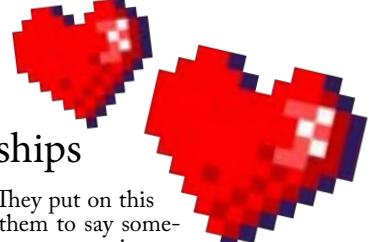
"There is a reason why we text people. It is to get quick responses," Oblander said. "If I wanted to wait for a response, I would send a pigeon."

Another unspoken rule that muddies modern day love is the concept of ghosting, which refers to the act of leaving someone without a response for an extended period of time or with the intent of not responding. A once promising connection for junior **Hamsini Iyer** ended with silence as he stopped responding for extended periods of time.

"There was no communication and I would have preferred he had conveyed his feelings before he eventually ended things," Iyer said. "If you just ghost and stop talking to them completely, I feel like you are leading them on."

As made apparent by Iyer, there are key differences between digital and physical interaction. Oblander believes the environment of modern day text culture makes it easy for people to act in bolder, harsher ways.

"The way people text is different than the way they would talk in



person," Oblander said. "They put on this fake persona that allows them to say something bold without direct repercussions as they are not seeing the other person's reaction."

Specifically, Iyer points out how Snapchat, a platform centered around sending selfies back and forth, contributes to this problem. Becoming the forefront of digital romance networking, Snapchat can distort the true nature of relationships.

"A lot of people use Snapchat right now and that does not feel like real romance," Iyer said. "When you meet someone in person, it feels more focused on personality, whereas on Snapchat, it is more about the way you look."

Substitute teacher **Carlos Reyes**, reflecting on the patterns he sees reflected in his students, recognizes the impact social media standards, such as those set on Snapchat, can have on social interactions and online love interest.

"It is very hard nowadays to be able to develop socially and emotionally because a lot of how we communicate with others is directly impacted by social media," Reyes said. "Our behaviors, our tendencies — they can all be dictated by what we see online."

However, Reyes feels the need to make an important distinction. He believes that while online interactions have changed the foundation friendships and relationships are built on, it has not changed the fundamental strength of physical affinities.

"It is not that connections are no longer genuine, especially within schools, the friends that you make in sports, and things like that," Reyes said. "What really matters is the ability to spend less time on [phones] and be able to have those true emotional connections in person."

ACADEMIC OPTIONS

An emerging alternative

Rising seniors enroll at West Valley, join College Advantage

COLIN KALANGES

Staff Writer

A new opportunity has opened for a select number of students at Branham as College Advantage processed admission for the upcoming school year.

The program opens the doors for high-achieving juniors to enroll in classes at West Valley College. Since its introduction, it has become a popular choice for students who want an alternative to the traditional high school experience.

College Advantage is offered to only upcoming seniors with a minimum 3.8 GPA. Through the program, students can explore a wide array of classes and work towards a college degree ahead of their peers.

Junior **Rino Moriyama** will take College Advantage for her senior year. Since she is undecided on what major she wants to pursue in the future, the greater range of classes offered through the program will allow her to explore a variety of courses. Additionally, College Advantage provides a more flexible schedule.

"My first three years at Branham were really good. I loved all my teachers and my classes were okay, but I had trouble getting up [for school] because I slept late," Moriyama said.

Moriyama's new schedule accommodates her lifestyle much

better. Her earliest class at West Valley starts at 10:05 a.m., and she will take classes three days a week instead of five.

Junior **Christopher King** is also planning on taking College Advantage next year. King, who is leaning towards an engineering-related major, finds that the program allows him to explore a wide variety of subjects not available at Branham.

"I was wanting to just take five periods and slack off senior year, and then I looked at the options and [College Advantage] just made more sense," King said. "You have more freedom on what you want to do if you know your future career. That's a very good place to go if you know what to do."

At West Valley, King's schedule is less demanding and provides more flexibility compared to Branham's classes. He takes classes four days a week instead of five. His schedule also changes per semester, providing more opportunities to explore what classes he is most interested in.

College Advantage also benefits students who have already decided on their major. Junior **James Vu**, another student enrolled in College Advantage next year, says the program gives him an advantage by allowing him to work towards his major a year ahead of his peers.

"I'm trying to do something in the engineering or computer science field, so I'm already taking the classes that are going towards

it, which makes it a lot easier because I'm not taking the extra classes [at Branham]," Vu said. "Instead, I can be more flexible on what to take and be able to focus on my career."

The flexibility the program provides was a major benefit for King and Vu. Both will still participate in sports and clubs at Branham even though they will not be on Branham campus most of the time.

However, the advantages that the program holds for these students come with the downside of losing some aspects of the high school experience.

"You go to dances and play sports, but you do lose a lot of social connection," King said. "With a lot of college professors, sometimes you're in these lecture halls [with] 50 to 60 people where you're not communicating with the teacher."

Even though students may lose a part of their experience in high school, King believes having the opportunity of College Advantage will prove to be worthwhile for him.

"[College Advantage] gives me the opportunity to explore," King said. "I don't really enjoy it here [at Branham], and I think it's gonna give me more freedom to do what I want to do and pursue other hobbies even though there are harder classes."

COLLEGE COMMITMENTS

TAKING THE NEXT STEP

Branham athletes commit to continue their athletic career at the collegiate level



Courtesy of Giselle Paedon

YUJIN CHO
News Editor

Team cheers, referee whistles, clattering gear — these are the sounds that senior **Giselle Paedon** grew up around. Despite her extensive background in sports, Paedon has chosen to pursue volleyball competitively.

After joining the school team in middle school, Paedon continued to play volleyball and further immerse herself in the sport by joining a club team in eighth grade. Eventually, she joined the varsity team at Branham her freshman year, which shaped her passion for volleyball.

"I was around so many seniors, [and] there was this super deep connection that these girls and this school's program built, and it was just an amazing culture," Paedon said.

Volleyball has been more than just a sport for Paedon as it has taught her important lessons that she can implement in all aspects of her life on and off the court. A particular conversation with former varsity assistant coach Tyler Rigg, where he questioned if she committed all her effort to her first starting game as a freshman, left a lasting impact on her.

"The principle of that [experience] was never leave the court knowing that you could have given more," Paedon said. "Never leave an experience or an event knowing that you could have given more. This is something that I've thought about in sports, but also outside of sports too. It applies to everything."

After officially beginning the recruitment process and receiving multiple offers from coaches, she ultimately committed to Boise State University.

"I really love the coaches, [and] the players are amazing," she said. "Immediately, when I went to the campus, it felt like home, and it really felt like a place where I could do great things at."



Aryella Finkel-Hozer/Bear Witness

YUJIN CHO
News Editor

For senior **Ryan Field**, baseball has always been a large part of childhood. At the age of five, Field began his baseball journey in a Little League team. Eventually, he continued his athletic career by joining the high school team.

Baseball plays an important role in Field's life. Beyond being a form of exercise, it allows him to stay focused on a goal and motivates him to be a good role model for his team.

"It takes my mind off of everything and puts me in a state where I don't really think about much," Field said.

Field, who transferred from the Harker School after his freshman year, was inspired by teammates to continue playing.

"My freshman year, I had three seniors on the team, and they [were] my role models," Field said. "Going into sophomore year, I knew that I could play beyond."

After experiencing a wrist fracture during his sophomore season, Field was unable to play the following summer and fall. Still, he returned during his junior year season and made efforts for recruitment during the summer preceding senior year.

"I did camps and showcases, and emailed a bunch of schools," Field said. "Five or six of them had seen me playing [and] offered me to their school."

Field, who is open to playing baseball professionally after college, was drawn to Haverford College for its connections to Major League Baseball (MLB) and ultimately committed to the school.

Leaving high school, Field has goals for playing baseball in college and aspirations for the future.

"I want to play my freshman year, not just sitting the bench full time, and then I want to see if I could play beyond college," Field said.



Courtesy of Jacqueline Connolly Hojas

ARYELLA FINKEL-HOZER
Opinion Editor

With assistance and guidance from her sister, senior **Jacqueline Connolly Hojas** went from playing for a recreational softball league to committing to Division One softball at Austin Peay State University.

Connolly Hojas found her passion for the sport due to the intensity and toughness surrounding the athletes who play.

"There's so much energy [at the games], and there's so much that we put into it," she said. "It just feels electric."

When she began watching college softball frequently at the age of 10, her dream of playing at the collegiate level intensified.

"I want to be on TV and be the person a little girl looks up to and says, 'Oh, she can do this too,'" Connolly Hojas said.

After deciding that she wanted to pursue the sport in college, the recruiting process began.

"When I first made the trip [to Austin Peay], the culture, the coaches and the girls absolutely wowed me. It was insane how together they were," Connolly Hojas said.

Her sister, Maddy Connolly Hojas, currently plays for Austin Peay softball, so the two will be able to play on the same team. To Jacqueline, Maddy has been a continuous motivation.

"The nights where I don't want to do softball or I want to take this day off, she's like, 'No, we have to do this,'" Jacqueline said. "She knows exactly what to say to me to get me going, so she's definitely my role model. She's the person that has helped me the most with softball."

Although the commitment process was difficult for her, Jacqueline encourages students who want to play at the collegiate level to persevere.

"To anybody that wants to play sports in college, don't let one obstacle stop you from your dream," she said. "Don't let people that say no to you stop you from chasing your dream because eventually you're going to get a yes."

OFF-SEASON PRACTICE

Off-season training: a game changer

Sports practices during the off-season can both benefit and inconvenience student athletes

NITHYA KARAMBAKKAM
Staff Writer

Off-season practice during time off from school can serve as both a burden and a valuable opportunity for student athletes. Off-season practices provide dedicated time for students to work on their technique and improve before the regular season, and they are typically less structured, as coaches step back and allow students to improve specific skills.

Since preparing for the upcoming season with the program is not mandatory, students face the difficulty of deciding whether to attend. Practices can begin long before the actual season — for example, track and field, a spring sport, begins preseason practice in early winter.

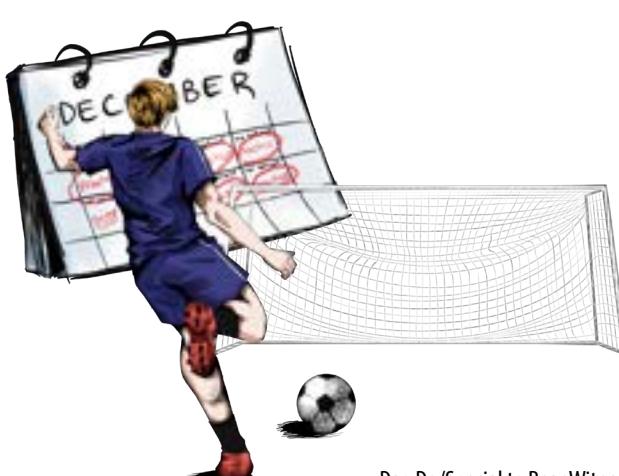
On the other hand, training in the off-season can lead to burnout and fatigue. For off-season practices that take place during the school year, students must juggle busy school lives with training.

Senior varsity tennis player **Hari Srivatsan** makes strong efforts to attend off-season practices whenever possible, contending with the difficulties of scheduling practice around his seventh period.

"I personally always want to show up because I love playing," Srivatsan said. "I know from experiences in my freshman and sophomore year that when I don't keep on playing throughout the year, I lose a lot of my skills. Those opportunities and practices are my way of staying in touch when making sure I'm ready for the season."

Badminton coach **Gumaro Díaz** agreed that off-season practices are a valuable way to strengthen student athletes' skills. He believes that students' motivation must come from within, not from coaches or parents.

"Even if [practices] could be mandatory, I wouldn't mandate them. If they don't have the drive to get better themselves, I'm not going to force them," Díaz said. "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. I can have the practices available for those that wish to improve and get better during the off season, but if people are not interested in that, I don't want them



Dao Do/Special to Bear Witness

there anyway."

Sophomore badminton player **Annika Jain** echoed Díaz's thoughts — off-season practice is useful to motivated players.

"If you don't like the sport, then you're not going to want to even try to balance it [with other activities]," Jain said. "You're just going to be like, 'Oh, I don't even care as long as I just get the credits.' But if it's something that you care about, I think it'll be working out."

While Srivatsan recognizes the value of off-season practices, he also tries not to get burned out. Burnout is one of the reasons that students can view extra practices unfavorably.

"It definitely is important to not overdo it," Srivatsan said. "Even now, I'm slowly getting burned out from the season. It's important to not do more than three or four days a week when it's not season time."

Concern for potential burnout varies from sport to sport as each has their own unique scheduling and frequency of practices. For

badminton, Díaz thinks that burnout in the off-season should not be a concern for student athletes due to the sparse scheduling of regular season practices. Practices are short and happen only once or twice a week. Likewise, matches are also twice a week.

"As long as practice times and the amount of practice is reasonable, I push them as hard as I can during practices so that they can rest [later]," Díaz said. "Considering that we don't have that much time to practice, I don't really consider whether or not I'm pushing them too hard because it's a limited time."

Aside from burnout, another concern for student athletes regarding off-season practices is disruptive scheduling. It can cut into free time during breaks and conflict with travel. Due to these factors, attendance decreases. Srivatsan said that a very limited number of people attended tennis practices.

"Versus 98% of the team showing up every day in normal practice, it's 10 to 12 people who show up for these kinds of off-season practices," Srivatsan said.

Despite the low attendance, Jain finds value in training during breaks and the off-season.

"I did go to a few this year, and it was more empty, because a lot of people didn't want to come," Jain said. "It was more focused on the people that were there, so I definitely got a little more attention to help improve."

Many sports institute a reward process for student athletes who attend practice in the off-season.

"The issue is a lot of people are also traveling during those times," Srivatsan said. "It's a double-edged sword. You're rewarding people who are coming, but then you can't look at people who are going away on breaks and say, 'How can you not come to off-season practice?'

Despite the challenges of attending off-season practices, Srivatsan says that they are rewarding, provided certain measures are taken.

"It's a great concept that keeps people not rusty throughout the year and ready for the season," Srivatsan said. "Having practice on breaks as well as school days is definitely positive, as long as there's no strings attached."

SCIENCE & HEALTH

ENGINEERING

PRACTICAL PROBLEM-SOLVING

Seniors in engineering create solutions to real-world problems through capstone projects

EMMETT SPEAR

Staff Writer

The Engineering Design and Development class, the final course of the four-year engineering pathway at Branham, applies the various concepts and skills that seniors have acquired throughout their enrollment in engineering and prepares students for their future engineering careers.

The class "capstone project" stretches throughout the entire second semester and encourages students to engineer a product or solution to a problem or minor inconvenience they have encountered in the world.

For their project, senior **Daniel Avella**'s group designed modular headphones featuring various functions and adjustments, such as adjustable ear muff sizes and the ability to alternate between open and closed back headphones. By 3D printing parts such as the headband, hand-stitching earmuffs with foam and inserting electronics and wiring, the team was able to create a working prototype.

"Everybody in our group and a lot of other people in our class use headphones, and me and a few other people found that we own different headphones for different things," Avella said. "We wanted to be able to design a pair that we could squish everything into with all the different features."

The process for each group started with conducting market research and surveying numerous students in order to ensure the demand of the product. It then moved onto the design phase, involving attempts by the group to design a solution to the problem, later culminating in the identification of one major solution. The last stage of the process involved an engineering fair on May 19 and the presentation of the finished project to a panel of judges.

Senior **Jacob Berkey**'s group created an attachment to the standard umbrella that would prevent it from turning inside-out in high winds. By attaching a 3D printed apparatus to the shaft of the umbrella and connecting it to the outside ribs with string, they reinforced the umbrella to counter high winds.

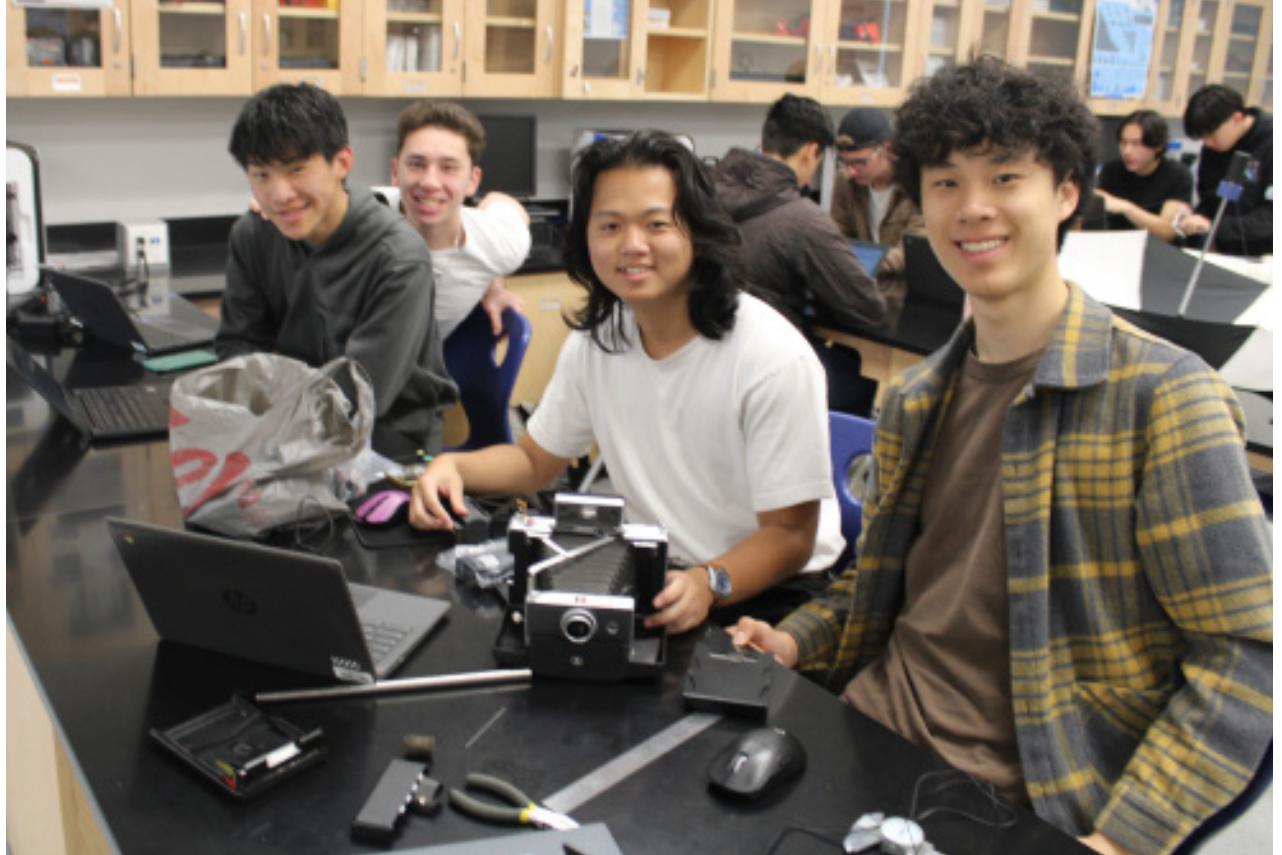
According to Berkey, the process of working through this project and designing it has required multiple trials.

"We had several ideas, including poking holes into an umbrella to see if it would reduce the effect," Berkey said. "That obviously wouldn't work, but [it would] reduce the effect of the wind. After that, we funneled our ideas down into one main one that we wanted to focus on."

Engineering teacher **Barbara Schremp**, who is the project manager for each of the groups within the class, finds that the engineering class allows students to experiment with their projects without the rigorous structure of many other classes.

"Things don't work in the real world the way that you think that they should, and everything could be a problem," Schremp said. "That sense of [the class being] not as structured and controlled is important because as a design engineer there [are] a lot of different ways things can go wrong. Just because you have an idea and you're really smart and you can create something to solve that problem, you might not have thought of everything."

In its glimpse into the real-world engineering and design process, the project can be a useful tool for students who seek to



Emmett Spear/Bear Witness

Kaiden Vo, Richie Chen, Bill Nguyen and Justin Lee (12) retrofit an old camera, enabling it to use modern film.

pursue engineering careers in the future. Schremp estimates that about 90% of her engineering students desire to pursue a career in the STEM field, and that many graduates have spoken to her about participating in similar projects at the university level.

"They become the leaders of their groups in college because they're like, 'Oh, I know how to do patent search to determine if this problem has been solved, and they bring skills into that,'" Schremp said. "The other thing is they get a taste of that hands-on [experience] because sometimes engineering is all done on a computer. Physically building something is what they all imagine they're going to be doing as engineers."

Schremp says that she always believes the students will be able to solve the problem they've come up with, no matter how challenging she finds it, partly because they have completed these tasks and demonstrate great capability in their skills throughout their time in engineering.

"We've built all kinds of different things over the years, and it's

exciting every time," Schremp said. "We've made drones. We've made a motorized skateboard. They made a refillable water bottle. They've done new designs on refrigerators — just a whole gamut of different solutions."

For Avella, the project provided an opportunity to apply the multiple years of engineering experience he has built up over his time at Branham and utilize skills he hopes will aid him in mechanical engineering. His favorite part of the project was the opportunity to produce something with tangible and observable results.

"Working with other people and figuring out how you're going to bracket your time to do a specific thing and make sure you're on time [and] on task, you get everything done properly — that's the most beneficial part of this project," Avella said. "Learning that not everything goes to plan the first time, and you got to redo it hundreds of times, will apply for my future life."

SPACE

Shooting like the stars

Space traveling and exploration changes as celebrities are given the opportunity to go on missions

ARYELLA FINKEL-HOZER

Opinion Editor

In late March, Blue Origin, an American space technology company, launched its 11th passenger flight titled NS-31. Six public figures participated in the launch, including Katy Perry, Aisha Bowe, Gayle King, Amanda Nguyen, Kieran Flynn and Lauren Sanchez.

The introduction to commercial space flight has sparked conversations about what the future holds for space exploration.

After traveling to the Kennedy Space Center at a young age, junior **Gabe Minzer** became quite fascinated with space exploration. He views commercial space travel as an ultimate benefit as it boosts the economy.

"The biggest benefit is the tourism that comes from [commercial space travel], especially since it's going to be such a big industry in the future," he said. "It'll really boost a lot of nations' economies if they start developing the space industries."

With the rise of space tourism, some companies are prioritizing money over scientific inquiry. Junior **Avery Cummings**, who is taking Astronomy, fears for what will happen as private companies obtain more power.

"It might cloud the intent that most private space organizations use it as a way of profit rather than to help understanding space," Cummings said. "So it might hurt the astronomical science field, but it will help the commercial profiting field."

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has been a large part of the United States' ability to further their knowledge in space. In 1969, NASA facilitated the first program to send a person to the moon. As private companies come into the field, more missions and experiments can be done since the government can award contracts instead of doing all the work themselves.

According to investment company EquityZen, "The recent NASA Artemis program, for example, aims to return humans to

the Moon by 2025. This program has progressed through significant contributions from private companies such as Blue Origin and SpaceX."

NASA says it has generated over \$75 billion in funds, helping them continue testing and research. Compared to private companies such as Blue Origin, NASA still prioritizes science rather than space tourism.

AP Physics teacher and Aerospace Science club adviser **Ioanna Theodosopoulou** identifies the differences between private and government companies.

"Commercial companies are speeding up progress by reducing launch costs, developing reusable rockets and creating competition that drives innovation," Theodosopoulou said. "This shift could make space travel routine and more widely available in the future."

Many people who saw the launch "thought it was so cool that Katy Perry was in space," according to BBC, while others believe that bringing celebrities to space is unfair as they may be less qualified than those who are actually astronauts.

"It plays down the prestigiousness of going to space since many of the astronauts that went to space were people that trained for many years and had to climb their way up the ranks in the U.S. military," Minzer said. "But now celebrities who go to space have very little qualifications. It makes it seem much more achievable to the common person."

Celebrities can create a new role for future generations that showcases what the future holds as they bring awareness for space travel and exploration.

"It makes space travel seem more approachable and exciting. Seeing familiar faces in space helps people imagine themselves there too, which can boost public engagement and curiosity," Theodosopoulou said.

As flights to space continue, many people can look to this moment to dream about following in the footsteps of their favorite celebrity.



Dao Do/Special to Bear Witness

58

people have flown to space in Blue Origin's New Shepard rockets.

Source: Blue Origin

"When young people see someone they admire go to space, it can spark interest in science, technology and exploration," Theodosopoulou said. "It adds a sense of possibility to what once felt unreachable."

OPINION

NEW LIBRARY

Too little, too late

Editorial

The opinion of the Bear Witness editors

Yet, this addition is too little and too late. Students looking to dive into reading or find a new study place need more than what one tiny room can offer, especially since the room's small size will make it difficult to fit enough books and tables for students to

use. This plan is neither cost effective nor a real solution. Students tend to study and read in the College and Career Center, an existing quiet space with plenty of room, and they check out books for class from the book room. Why would an entirely new room be necessary if it doesn't offer anything additional?

The time and money dedicated to transforming Room 11 should be saved and go towards a new building and a larger library in the future, which could be customized to truly provide a comfortable space that meets the needs of all Branham students.

Instead of investing in a quick fix, efforts should be focused on taking advantage of existing facilities and planning something bigger for the future.

MUSIC FESTIVALS

FESTIVAL FAKERS

Influencers set unrealistic standards in music festivals

NOA MUYAL
Staff Writer

While some people attend music festivals for the music itself, many influencers only show up for money's sake rather than personal enjoyment. These unrealistic standards, shared widely on social media, ruin the authentic nature of music festivals. Regardless of whether brands send influencers or content creators pay for the expenses themselves, they are still promoting this fake experience.

With the rise of social media platforms and engagement over the past decade, music festivals have become a place for influencers to share content about their experiences and festival fashion, mainly for profit. Additionally, brands often sponsor mainstream influencers to promote their products in exchange for housing festival passes and other benefits.

Even though most big influencers don't have to worry about lodging, attendees who aren't influencers have to take hotel or Airbnb costs into account. Once festival dates are announced, many Airbnb owners increase their prices as a way to profit off of those attending the festivals.

Festivals, like Coachella in the Coachella Valley in Indio, California, are considered a popular influencer "hub." According to BBC, Coachella attracts over 650,000 people across both weekends and is considered the biggest music festival in the United States.

In Indio, the average price for an Airbnb is \$250 per night. During Coachella season, however, prices rise to roughly \$500 to \$1000 per night, with the biggest and most famous Airbnb, the Big Boy, listed at \$22,500 per night, according to SFGATE.

While this can be quite expensive for the typ-

ical person, influencers who have housing and other costs of the festival covered by sponsorships don't have to worry about finding and accommodating these additional financial burdens. Others have to either pay the overpriced hotel costs or purchase a Coachella Camping Pass, which can cost anywhere from \$160 to \$10,000.

Furthermore, camping and festival passes are sold separately. Coachella's website lists their festival passes from \$599 to \$1,399, depending on the weekend and add-ons like shuttles and VIP. These prices can be out of budget for someone who just wants to enjoy the festival. Meanwhile, influencers receive expensive passes with extras from the companies that sponsor them and flaunt them in their content, falsely standardizing a glamorous and costly trip as an ordinary experience rather than something that is essentially an advertisement.

Since popular influencers are often required to make festival content featuring various luxuries covered by brands, they can set an unrealistic expectation of the music festival experience.

This contradicts the "advertised" experience of events like Coachella, where the typical musical festival attendees have to camp in their cars, wait hours for a five-minute shower due to long lines and stand in the hot sun all day to see their favorite headlining artists like Lady Gaga, Charli XCX and JENNIE.

People should separate the music festival from the false narrative influencers create because it can lead to disappointment when faced with the reality of the music festival experience.

Music festivals are meant to be a fun weekend excursion, but influencers and the unrealistic experiences they promote at these festivals can dampen the mood.



Grace Ngo/Special to Bear Witness

ANIMAL BREEDING

Paws for profit

Puppy mills and backyard breeders prioritize profit over dogs' welfare

KIANNIA SANCHEZ
Staff Writer

Puppy mills breed their dogs for personal benefit, harming the dogs and puppies in the long run.

According to Progressive Animal Welfare Society (PAWS), around 90% of puppies in pet stores originate from puppy mills, which are establishments that breed puppies to later sell very frequently and in inhumane conditions. They prioritize profit by using unsafe breeding practices and selling the dogs at high prices without disclosing important information.

Puppy mills breed large numbers of dogs in short periods of time in order to increase their profit, typically without the well-being of the dogs being kept in mind. According to Last Chance for Animals (LCA), there are an estimated 10,000 puppy mills in the United States. Furthermore, there are around 2 million puppies being produced in puppy mills per year.

It is unhealthy to produce so many dogs in such short periods of time. The number of puppy mills in the United States needs to be lowered and a safer way of breeding dogs needs to be utilized. Because the establishments are profit motivated, slowing the profit that they gain is a potential solution.

Puppy mills often sell their puppies and dogs to pet stores. However, consumers should only purchase from sellers who treat their dogs properly, and pet stores that purchase dogs from puppy mills should not be shopped at. Instead, shoppers should research the location they are purchasing their dog from and consider the ethics behind

living and breeding conditions and previous to doing so. Many commercial breeding kennels are legally allowed to keep hundreds of dogs in cages for the entirety of their lives, according to PAWS. They do this to produce a higher amount of dogs that they can then sell at a profit.

According to the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA), there is mass overpopulation and overbreeding of dogs. Female dogs are bred every cycle no matter their health or condition. The continuous act of breeding typically leads to smaller size litters prompting the breeders to be discarded.

The cages are not sanitary and a risk to the dogs' health, according to HSVMA. Because breeders want to get as many dogs as quickly as possible, it leads to diseases and health complications. Due to the material of the cages, feces can get stuck, and when not properly cleaned, it attracts all kinds of insects. The insects can pose a threat to the dogs' health by biting and wounding them and facilitating the transmission of diseases.

According to PAWS, most breeders don't receive proper vet care as a way to save money and further profit from the animals. Later down the line, some dogs can receive diseases like parvovirus, canine brucellosis and canine distemper virus caused by a lack of sanitation and hygiene.

Breeders who crave money take advantage of animals that don't have the ability to defend themselves. This causes further health issues with the dogs, who will later cause heartache for someone else. The breeders don't consider the well-being of the dogs and fail to prioritize sanitation and genetic issues. The benefit of money outshines what the real goal should be: helping dogs and puppies.



Dao Do/Special to Bear Witness

10,000

puppy mills are currently active in the United States.

Source: Last Chance for Animals

THE BACKPAGE



Marks the Spot

From hidden gems to community favorites,
Bruins share about the best locations in San Jose.

—Compiled and illustrated by Hailey Steed and Elliott Yau

"I went with my friend to go try Paleta Planeta out, and she's like, 'Oh my gosh, this is the best thing I've ever had.' So she eats mine and then eats hers too."

Adriana Aguilar (9)



150 E Santa Clara St

Willow Glen



Communications Hill

5679 Snell Ave

"Great food, and I always love to take my friends there."

Stella Kokologiannakis (10)

Cambridge

"They have every single topping you can imagine, and the workers know what's good. 10 out of 10 best place I've ever been to."

Reese Hickey (11)



6081 Meridian Ave No. 20

