

Over 100 UHS Students Switch Learning Models For Second Semester

Substantial shift in on-campus class sizes necessitates schedule changes for some students



Students cited multiple reasons for switching between Irvine Virtual Academy (IVA) and the in-person hybrid model, with greater learning opportunities, a heavier workload, and the desire to build face-to-face relationships among the most common.

By
HEIDI JIN
Staff Writer

Over 100 students switched learning models at the beginning of the second semester, with 32 students returning to UHS, and 105 students transferring to the Irvine Virtual Academy (IVA). This change in the UHS student population caused many scheduling changes for students. “In order to accommodate the academic model change requests, staffing had to change, so that there are enough teachers to support students in each academic model (hybrid and virtual),” counselor **Ms. Hanna Adnessi** said. “This required some class sections at UHS to close. If a stu-

dent was in a class that closed, they had to be moved to another section.” However, despite scheduling changes, students’ class switches did not have a significant impact on class distributions. “I have about eight new kids and lost about four,” English teacher **Ms. Susanne Fitzpatrick** said. “My class sizes remained basically the same, with one class getting a little larger and one class getting a little smaller. This is typical with seniors every year because of the single semester class requirements that seniors have.” Although IVA operates independently of IUSD schedules, students were able to transfer to and from IVA before the start of a semester through a form available on a student’s Aeries Portal page. “Requesting the transfer was easy because I requested it early,” senior **Vicky Doe**, a student who

transferred from IVA to UHS, said. Students provided various reasons to support their transfer requests. According to Assistant Principal **Mr. Kris Kough**, the main reasons given for students coming back to the hybrid model of learning were that students did not like remote learning, needed in-person instruction groups learning, felt isolated at home, and wanted to be with their friends. For students going to IVA, students and families cited concerns about the increase in COVID-19 cases and the increased risk of exposure to vulnerable family members at home. Some students switched from virtual learning to in-person hybrid classes to fulfill their need for more direct communication with teachers. “I think I can have a more intimate connection with hybrid teachers since I can meet them in-person,” Doe said. Other students switched from

the hybrid model to virtual learning as the former couldn’t fully satisfy their academic needs. “While attending school on campus, there were many days where I felt like I could have just stayed at home... the class wasn’t as interesting or engaging as before so there was just no point going to school,” senior **Jane Koudsi**, a student transferred from UHS to IVA, said. “I was also feeling a bit stressed out because I didn’t have enough time to study for my tests and quizzes...almost half of the days that I attended school in person I had to take more than one test in a day.” Many students in the hybrid model have expressed that they enjoy in-person interactions with their teachers and peers. “If the number of COVID cases on-campus gets extremely high then I might consider transferring to IVA, but now it’s fine,” UHS junior **Angel Tian** said. “I want to see my friends in the hybrid model and I like UNI teachers. I like how I can actually be able to be in school.” One commonly cited deficit of hybrid learning has been the lack of study time. Some students are struggling to adapt to the heavy workload in the hybrid model and fear that the stress they experience in demanding courses will affect their mental health. “I think the school says they care about us and will always be there for us, but the truth is that giving us more work and less time to study than before really isn’t helping,” Koudsi said. “It’s not just the fact that we are in a pandemic or the number of [coronavirus] cases are increasing, it’s more about our mental health.” In virtual learning, many students feel that they can allocate their study

time with great flexibility, and communicate with their teachers as needed. “I favor having my own space when working in class and doing homework. Of the eight period schedule, I don’t have a second, third, or seventh period, which allows me to relax and time to catch up on work,” IVA senior **Momoe Ando** said. “The assignments and exams are relatively independent, which grants students a college-like experience.” Despite this flexibility, students acknowledge that the virtual learning model requires students to be highly self-disciplined and to master most of the class materials through independent work and self-studying. “I think the biggest difference of being in IVA is that you actually have to learn the entire unit on your own,” Koudsi said. “It is harder to understand the materials that we are supposed to learn through Zoom. It is also harder to stay concentrated in class.” Teachers hope students have smoothly transitioned to their new academic model. “I believe I had one student transfer to IVA,” Fitzpatrick said. “I’m hopeful they find the switch an easy transition.” Students who have applied to colleges this school year and have transferred from UHS to IVA for the second semester need to inform colleges regarding their transfers. “Seniors who transferred from UHS to IVA should be notifying colleges they applied to that they made a model change, and indicate any new IVA spring semester courses they are taking,” Adnessi said. “However, students’ home school is still University High School, and they will still graduate and receive a diploma from University High School.”

SAT Subject Tests and Essay Portion Canceled

Reception to College Board’s latest changes among student body ranges from disappointment to relief

By
CHAITANYA KOTRA
Staff Writer

The College Board is discontinuing their series of specialized SAT Subject Tests, along with the Essay portion of the SAT. This decision was announced on January 19. While the 20 SAT Subject Tests, or SAT II’s, were discontinued immediately following the announcement, the essay portion of the SAT will disappear after the administration of the June 2021 SAT. The College Board reportedly made this decision in order to facilitate many colleges’ and students’ shift in focus and opportunities as a result of the ongoing pandemic and how it has prevented many students from being able to take these standardized tests. The College Board Blog stated, “We’re reducing demands on students. The expanded reach of AP and its widespread availability means the Subject Tests are no longer necessary for students to show what they know.” The College Board justified



The decision to discontinue the SAT Subject Test, or SAT II, as well as the SAT Essay Portion will be implemented after the administration of the June 2021 SAT.

their decision to terminate the SAT Essay because they believe that there are other methods for students to display their writing skills. “Writing remains essential to college readiness and the SAT will continue to measure writing and editing skills, but there are other ways for students to demonstrate their mastery of essay writing, and the SAT will continue to measure writing throughout the test,” The College Board

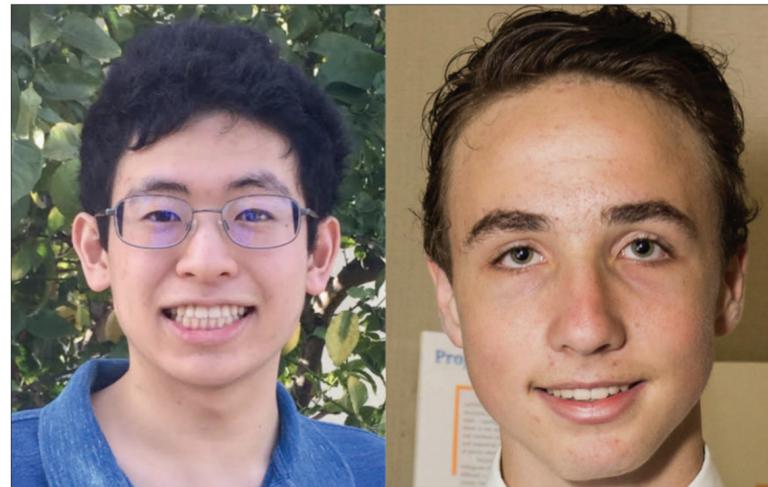
Blog stated. “The tasks on the SAT Reading and Writing and Language sections are among the most effective and predictive parts of the SAT.” In response to these cancellations, students such as junior **Eric Chen** feel that they don’t have as many options to demonstrate their academic caliber to prospective colleges anymore, as many opportunities for the SAT, ACT, and other competitive exams have constantly been postponed

or canceled due to the pandemic. “I think that eliminating the SAT Subject Tests and the essay portion just further limits our ability to show our academic [potential]. This is worse for students, especially in college apps, because it puts even more weight on things like GPA and AP tests. It’s already hard in quarantine. With these even more limited options, it really doesn’t help,” Chen said. Junior **Rohan Nambimadam** also worries about how this will affect his college application process and questions the fairness of these test cancellations. “I’m sort of...worried about college apps now, considering that some students in other schools may have already taken [several] SAT Subject Tests, so they could be ahead of the curve in some regards,” Nambimadam said, having taken one of the tests himself. Other students, such as junior **Jasmine Nourisamie** believe that the SAT Essay and Subject Tests being permanently canceled is good because it reduces students’ workloads. “There are topics covered on the

SAT Subject Tests that students have to study on their own, which can be time-consuming. Along with the essay, getting rid of these two things allows students to have less things to worry about,” Nourisamie said. Some students, including junior **Haedam Im**, suggest that the College Board should have kept the tests, but modified them to fit a digitized platform, effectively facilitating testing for more students everywhere. “It is not a bad choice, but I believe there could have been better solutions such as just eliminating the SAT scores for this year,” Im said. “There are students who don’t even have an opportunity to take the test, while others had. Therefore, I think colleges and the College Board should [have come up with] a better, more equal way to provide testing, [such as] testing all online similar to the AP tests [last year].” “While I like the fact that students have less things to study for and worry about during the pandemic, I can’t help but feel like we are going to miss out on an opportunity to show colleges what we know,” Nourisamie said.

Two UHS Seniors Recognized as Regeneron Science Talent Search Scholars

Daniel Feng and Andrei Mandelshtam nationally recognized alongside 300 high school researchers



Seniors **Daniel Feng** and **Andrei Mandelshtam** were chosen as Scholars in the Regeneron Science Talent Search (STS), a prestigious pre-collegiate science and mathematics competition run on a nationwide level.

By
CARLY ZHOU
Staff Writer

Seniors **Andrei Mandelshtam** and **Daniel Feng** were selected as Regeneron Science Talent Search (STS) Scholars, repre-

sented 300 high school researchers selected out of an international pool of 1,760. Mandelshtam was also named a Regeneron STS Finalist, an even more select honor, representing the top 40. Feng’s research, “Discovering Antibiotic Molecules in *Ceanothus leucodermis* and Enhancing and Quantifying Their Efficacy with a Novel Simulation-Aided Method”, spanned multiple years and focused on applications in antibiotics. “I started in freshman year [when] I was able to identify the Native American herbs that had antibacterial properties,” said Feng. “The second year, I found the antibiotic molecules in this plant using mass spectrometry and column chromatography.” Feng

also developed a computer simulation to aid in his research efforts. Mandelshtam’s project, titled “The Structure of the Positive Monoid of Integer-Valued Polynomials Evaluated at α in \mathbb{Q} ”, answered a question in category theory, a subtopic in mathematics that has applications in quantum mechanics. “I was investigating this algebraic structure and proved that it’s a ring,” said Mandelshtam. “And then I found some explicit structure, which may aid in further computation.” In mathematics, a ring is a set of numbers that you can multiply, add and subtract from. “I knew that I might not ever solve the problem,” said Mandelshtam. “Some problems

ended up being unsolvable, especially in math, but I just kept working on it and never quit.” Both students had received support from UHS staff, their mentors, and research institutions. “I took Andrei to the state science fair two years ago, where I met him, and I could tell right away that he was something special,” UHS teacher **Mr. Timothy Smay** said. “I met Daniel this year and, similar to Andrei, I could tell early on that he had a gift for science...hearing that he has gone so far in Regeneron is no surprise.” Feng had reached out to Professor Nancy Silva, and was able to use UCI facilities to conduct his research. “While we provided a lab to perform the experimental aspects of his research, he chose his project and the strategies to pursue,” Silva said. “Daniel would meet with me periodically to present his current results and thoughts on future directions.” Mandelshtam attended the Research Summer Institute (RSI), a summer research program hosted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and had been paired with graduate student mentor Daniil Kalinov, who initially introduced him to the problem that he later explored in the project. “Andrei continued to show his exceptional aptitude for research through the whole time we worked on the problem...[and] I’m also very pleased with the results that we were able to obtain since Andrei was able to fully solve the problem I’ve posed [to] him,” Kalinov said. “The fact that he used both analytic and al-

gebraic techniques in his proofs made it even more satisfying.” Each student was awarded \$2,000 for being named Scholars, and Mandelshtam an additional sum for being a Finalist. In recognition of their work, UHS also received \$4,000, funds which are typically allocated towards buying science supplies. In terms of future directions, both awardees plan to pursue research in their respective areas of expertise. “Basically, you could consider [my project] case closed, but I actually got much nicer expressions for specific numbers,” said Mandelshtam. “[What] could be interesting to consider, for example, other specific numbers alpha and see how a simplified form can be found.” Mandelshtam expressed interest in continuing inquiry in the mathematics field, and is currently looking at more problems to research. Feng is currently working on writing and submitting a manuscript for publication in an academic paper. “I am interested in the applications of computer science,” said Feng. “I would like to pursue some more experimental fields, like biology or chemistry, whether it’s using artificial intelligence or computer modeling.” Feng believes that the achievement will also reward him with a platform to showcase his talents, in addition to the grant money. “I’m really honored to get this award... and hopefully I can use any publicity from this to tell more people about my work,” Feng said.

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District-Wide Student Strike Canceled

Pressure from Portola administration allegedly factor in abandoning strike



The IUSD Student Strike team announced via Instagram story that their main goal was to make online school more accessible to students who needed it most.

By
MOHIT KOSURU
Staff Writer

In response to IUSD’s decision to resume in-person school after a surge in cases over the holiday season, a student-led organization called ‘IUSD Student Strike’ emerged to plan a district-wide strike. The strike was supposed to occur during the week of January 26th, but according to the strike organizers, the Portola administration

encouraged them to call off the strike. The administration told their students that zeroes on tests and assignments would be given out if students were absent. “Many people have assumed that because the strike was canceled, the plan failed, but that is not the case,” the IUSD Student Strike team said. “We understand that an academic model shift is extremely unlikely, but our goal would be to either modify the current hybrid model to improve student mental health and safety or establish better means of enforcing COVID guidelines on campus.”

Other than the strike, the organization has been in contact with some site representatives of the Irvine Teachers Association for their advice on attendance policies, and have talked to several anonymous teachers for tips. They have been drafting multiple formal policies regarding school closures, the “O” attendance policy, and mental health absences. They have also released a survey on student mental health and safety on campus, and these results were sent out to IUSD counseling departments at each high school as well as to the IUSD Board of Education. “Behind the scenes, one of our members, Anne, has made phone calls to three of the five members of the board of education (Sharon Wallin, Ira Glasky, and Cyril Yu),” IUSD Student Strike said. “As a team, we [had a Zoom call] with Cyril Yu last night. Students recognize that shutting down school completely would be highly unlikely, but they hoped that campuses would close for two weeks after winter break. “I don’t think there’s any need

to officially shut down, but we should have spent the first two weeks after winter break quarantining,” junior **Charlotte Ying** said. “After two weeks, I think returning to campus with our usual hybrid model would be fine.” Some students believe that stricter safety protocols should be in place to make staff and students feel safer while on campus. “I think temperatures of every student should be at least taken during each school day, and that the number of people in each cohort should be more limited,” sophomore **Katherine Yu** said. School nurse **Ms. Azita Ghaferifard** reported that as of January 16th, Uni has had a total of 31 reported and 2 unreported cases among the student population. The staff has had a total of 14 cases reported. “We want to emphasize that the goal is not to close schools down long-term... our end goal is to make online school more accessible to students while leaving safer in-person instruction available for people who need it,” IUSD Student Strike said in an Instagram story.

What We Can Take Away from Distance Learning

How the pandemic shed light on ways our educational system can improve

By **EVAN CHOE**
Staff Writer

Online learning has been a source of boredom and even frustration for every UHS student since it began in March of 2020. When IUSD announced that schools would resume hybrid learning after winter break, their post was met with an overwhelming 2,500 comments from students and parents voicing their concern, dismay, and even disappointment in the way the school district was handling the situation amid ballooning virus cases and incapacitated hospitals across Orange County. Returning to confined classrooms and crowded spaces following the busiest holiday break of the year was not an ideal option for many UHS students, who made clear their various worries. Some typed eloquent and concerned paragraphs while others simply jested “nah”. Either way, the thousands of troubling statements and protests made it clear that even hybrid learning has its issues. Therefore, UHS and IUSD schools in general should not continue in-person learning during the pandemic if the safety of students and staff comes first and foremost to the district. Once a return is made to a COVID-19 free, in-person UHS, some major lessons from online learning should be implemented to make sure that the mistakes made during this pandemic under online/hybrid learning may not repeat themselves again.

A question many of us might not be asking, though, is how will UHS make its return to in-person learning once everyone has been vaccinated?

There are many potential answers to this question, and in many ways, the feedback of students and parents will most certainly shape how the school will look on its return. So it is important to understand what went well and what went poorly this past school year to form a successful game plan moving forwards.

Let’s start with the negatives. For one, online learning is widely seen as unsustainable for high school students. In Suddenly Online, a national survey of college undergraduates participating in online learning due to COVID-19, 42% of students said staying motivated online posed major problems. Additionally, 35% of undergraduates experience depressive disorders nationwide and anxiety disorder levels have increased by over 50% since Spring of 2019 in a study conducted in August by UC Berkeley. In addition, McKinsey & Company quotes various disparities produced by online learning. For instance, students have lost over the equivalent of 12-16 months of mathematics learning.

Black and Hispanic students have been hit especially hard, as they are two times as likely to have no live access to teachers. Therefore, it is clear that both losses in learning and negative psychological impacts have had a drastic effect on students’ knowledge and growth. Fresh air has suddenly become a rare commodity, and online learning has left many crammed in their rooms with no hopes of true educational and personal freedom until vaccines are distributed and the quarantine has been lifted.

Likewise, teachers and staff have been hit especially hard by the global pandemic and many of

these individuals are unsung heroes. Without them, none of the progress that has been made this year would have been remotely possible and UHS staff and teachers have done an admirable job at adapting despite the circumstances. However, the College Board and IUSD have not made it any easier for teachers and staff, pushing many classes to maintain the same curriculum despite having a fraction of the time to do so. This is especially true for AP courses in which teachers are asked to do the near impossible: teaching the whole curriculum under a far tighter time frame while also maintaining the same quality lessons and not rushing through the material.

“...online learning may have been the test run for a far greater educational revolution.”

Nearly every AP class at UHS is behind by one or several units and teachers find themselves having to either cut information out or rush through units. Neither is beneficial to teachers or students, and multiple AP classes have seen several weeks of their end-of-semester review time for the actual test relocated towards catching up. Additionally, other staff members have to work late into the night sanitizing the school on a daily basis in order to keep students and teachers safe. Everyone has been affected by the pandemic and hybrid/online learning in some way whether it be students, teachers, or staff.

However, not all is doom and gloom. For one, online learning may have been the test run for a far greater educational revolution. It has not been perfect, but it has brought an unprecedented change in learning, one which may open our eyes to possible reforms in education.

School has proven to be a system that teaches young children and teenagers to become better thinkers, problem solvers, and future adults. Similar to other systems, public education in the U.S also has its many pitfalls. School has historically been a limiting system. It restricts personal freedom, teaches passivity in one’s personal education, and limits the creative license of individuals. It is a process that prepares and gears students to become future employees and industrious workers. Students are taught to meet quotas and deadlines in order to be able to “survive in the real world.” In many ways, school has refused to reform, to change, to listen. This is reflected by IUSD’s lack of response to the thousands of disgruntled comments from students and parents. The way various public school districts have often failed to keep students in a productive learning situation, maintain a safe environment, and listen to those students is a testament to the immense rigidity and myopia that school administrations tend to follow. It has glaringly proved that schools are unprepared for change. Teachers are stretched thin, students are unmotivated, and despite schools’ best attempts to alleviate the situation, the result has been far from perfect. Even at the beginning of the school year in August, nearly 30% of teachers said the pandemic made them more

likely to leave teaching, as cited by the National Education Association. If IUSD had kept up with the times and taught students and teachers how to work online and be more independent, they would have been better equipped to face a nationwide pandemic under online learning. Of course, this is not all the fault of schools alone. Some of the effects of the virus are unavoidable, and budgets are often out of IUSD schools’ hands.

In contrast, online learning has offered an avenue for academic independence. Students are given more options to learn in a way that best fits them, and many students have far more time on their hands to self-study and catch up. For these individuals, technology is the mascot of freedom. It represents the highest order of modernization, adaptability, and self-sufficiency. It is a route for individually tailored self-learning. Students can pause videos online and gather their thoughts. They can make Google docs, slides, even mind maps. The avenues of active online learning are far more extensive than that of simply joining and leaving Zoom calls every day, as there are a many online resources at our disposal. The only problem is, students are not taking advantage of such opportunities. Statistics show that student populations have reached record low rates of motivation and involvement. However, it may just be that students are failing in online learning because they have never been taught how to be independent. The rigidity of schooling has taught students to listen, to learn, to work under a teacher, a principal, a supervisor, but rarely are students entrusted to be independent and self-sufficient in their education. In many ways, online learning represents another approach, and there are lessons to be learned from its own faults and virtues. Not every student is thriving under online learning. In fact, a majority have probably suffered in many ways and others have had to put school on hold for sick fam-

ily members or due to anxiety and stress under the new system. Regardless, school has to stop thinking in terms of a system of passivity; it rarely teaches individuals to be self-sufficient leaders and thinkers.

So, what is to be done? Moving forward, schools should keep the learning but lose the distance in distance learning. Once we return to in-person learning, every student should be asked to continue to bring a device or be offered a Chromebook as usual. UHS needs to give students more options for how they want to go about taking notes or writing essays. Many classes require students to handwrite essays or make bulleted notes on lined paper and for some students this works perfectly. For others though, it may be more productive and liberating to have the option to type essays or notes in a format that works for them. In math and science, where essays and paragraphs are not so common, teachers should start recording lessons or recording themselves teaching in-class so that students can go home and review videos as a supplement. This of course should happen after COVID-19 has passed due to current teacher stress, but once back, having that extra resource for every lesson would go a long way towards providing students with the tools they need to succeed.

That also transitions into the next step. All homework should be accessible online. That way, students will have dual access to the homework as well as the supplementary recordings and videos if they need. Too often (before the pandemic) teachers would do a lesson, hand out homework, and let students out of the classroom to do that work without a calendar of reference, resource videos to help, or a copy of the homework online.

Lastly, schools should continue policies of cleanliness and safety near the extent that it has been for the past year. Students should still be offered wipes and hand sanitizer at the start of every

class to clean their desks or their hands if they want, even if there is not a lingering virus in the air. In fact, the CDC cites that increased safety measures taken against the global pandemic have led to a 98% decrease in flu positivity rates when recorded in March of 2020 in comparison to that of September, 2019. Once COVID-19 is no longer deemed a threat to American residents, it might be worth maintaining even a fraction of that cleanliness we hold ourselves to today in order to drive the previous headlining diseases such as the flu to extinction.

Perhaps one final change could be to keep Monday as an office hours day and stick to the same block schedule as hybrid learning, just simply all in-person. This also means continuing the eight-period schedule. Not only will students have more time on the weekend to prepare for the next schoolweek, but they will then have an opportunity to ask questions or get clarification on Mondays before getting into the bulk of the work ahead of them. For many classes at UHS during hybrid learning, teachers will give a full lesson in-person but will often only have students at home check in for a short interval. This effectively leaves teachers with only one day of actual class time, so by implementing an in-person block schedule post-pandemic, this would double class time comparative to hybrid learning. Additionally, students can only have a maximum of four tests a day under this schedule rather than the potential seven that could take place on Fridays in a pre-pandemic schedule. Ultimately, such changes would not make any radically drastic changes to learning, but they would simply implement some of what worked online to in-person learning. Promoting bringing personal laptops to school every day, recording lessons for students, and keeping Mondays as an office hours day would give more time and freedom for students to learn flexibly, happily, and engagingly at UHS.



In-Person Learning As students return from winter break, they are expected to wear a mask, sanitize their desk, and sit at least six feet apart from one another, in accordance with state and school guidelines.

LUCA S. LAW

A Love Letter to Artists During the Pandemic

The unique experiences of artists during the coronavirus pandemic

By **NIKKI GHAEMI**
Staff Writer

If you know someone who has participated in one of UHS’s spring musicals, then you also might be familiar with the major commitments it demands: long hours, grueling rehearsals, and constant advertising of the show in the weeks leading up to opening night.

It’s something I am deeply familiar with. For the past three years, I have been a performer in the spring musicals. I’ve gotten to see the best parts of theater, like the nerves the performers feel while waiting

backstage and hearing audience members trickle into the theater.

You could imagine my disappointment when our last musical, “Pippin”, was canceled on that notorious March 13 morning.

When the opportunity to perform was taken away from me, I forgot all about the stress I had been dealing with during weeks prior. All I could think about was what I loved about being in the show--and everything I was about to miss out on. It was a moment that made me seriously consider what art means to me.

Quarantine was difficult for the

creative part of me. Playing guitar alone in my bedroom got old after a while. I began aching for the camaraderie that comes with creating art at school with fellow theater enthusiasts. I missed learning choreography and practicing harmonies with my friends. The most difficult part was not being able to see when it all would go back to “normal.”

I am not alone in this. Now more than ever, the arts are proving to be vital in students’ mental health and well-being.

This past fall, UHS hosted its first virtual theater production: a show called “All in the Timing”. Due to COVID-19, we used Zoom to record the scenes. The show’s virtual nature posed a challenge for us; this was the first non-live fall play UHS has ever put on.

By the end of the experience, however, I felt so proud of what we had accomplished. The show was not perfect by any means, but I was content knowing that I was able to channel my creativity and collaborate, especially after spending many months in quarantine.

Junior **Scott Burke**, an actor in

Uni theatre productions, details what motivates him to continue fostering creativity.

“I think it is important that we continue creating art because art reflects the context in which it was created,” Burke said. “What art the pandemic produces will reflect [are] the deeply emotional challenges, we, as humans, faced together during the most bizarre time period in recent memory.”

From a mental health standpoint, art is also incredibly beneficial to teenagers, especially during times of crisis.

Senior **Hiromi Nishida**, an actor in Uni theatre productions, says, “I feel centered and purposeful when I create. In a quarantine life that can admittedly feel a little claustrophobic and small, so having something to bring you purpose is important.”

This challenge is not exclusive to theatre. Many arts, including music programs, have had to find ways to adapt to this new environment.

Junior **Sol Choi** describes ways he has participated in orchestra: “We were able to record ourselves individually playing our orchestral

parts. Mrs. Lee would stitch everything into an online performance...I also performed in a virtual performance of Mendelssohn’s string octet by individually recording each part and it was very worthwhile.”

These innovative ways in which artists continue their craft despite troubling circumstances is inspiring.

The pandemic has not been easy. It has been a real test of creativity and has challenged all artists to find ways to collaborate and maintain skills. Considering the significant global impact of COVID-19, art will be used as documentation of what it was like to live during a modern pandemic. It will be a testament to how artists were able to play with the cards they were dealt.

One day, the world will reach a point where it is safe to put on live performances again. Years will pass and the memories of lonely days in quarantine will grow dimmer and dimmer. But having art representative of this time will remind us that no matter the circumstances, we can persevere.



Determined to Create Artists are finding new ways to express themselves in spite of the pandemic

DANIEL WEAVER

Social Media: Society’s Scary Addiction

An analysis of how social media platforms shape the way we think and feel



Scrolling for More Social media’s emphasis on keeping our attention is not a bug, it’s a feature.

By **JULIE SAKAMOTO**
Staff Writer

Nearly all of us grew up alongside the development of social media, and it is worth remembering that we are still susceptible to the largely unprecedented effects that it may have. As another generation is set to be raised in the age of the Internet, and as we begin to enter adulthood, social media platforms and their addictive nature are falling under greater scrutiny.

One of the features that has been investigated is the “endless scroll”. It has been an integral part of social media platforms since the heyday of Myspace and Friendster. The endless scroll is a built-in function located in the “feed”, where the center of interaction and content can be found. The purpose of the endless scroll is to create a never-ending stream of content based on who you follow or interact with. Algorithms gauge your interest and deliver similar posts related to your interests, keeping you engaged and offering a truly infinite scroll.

The convenient accessibility of billions of bits of information and data at the literal touch of a finger has posed notable consequences for its users, and lead to a ripple effect within the social media industry. This may bode well for social media companies, but it certainly does not for users.

The Media’s Shortening Posts on the very first social

media platforms bore a closer

resemblance to blog posts than today’s limited character tweets.

As the Internet grew in usage and numbers, engagement began to be judged by different parameters. The number of people visiting and the time they spent on the site became a form of currency to the then-fledgling social media platforms. Character limits began to shorten and became a key aspect of the social stratosphere as sites tried to condense more interesting content in the same amount of space.

Endless scroll moved on from the longer in-depth pieces of the past to posts that would rarely exceed four lines of text. New photo and video sharing features coupled with sites such as LinkedIn, Spotify, and Pinterest, which filled in specific niches; these developments only continue the rapid-fire nature of social media.

Today, the future of social media seems to be shorter-time limits to videos and “stories”, with many sites adopting Snapchat’s core feature of sharable, expiring snapshots. However, social media posts are not the only thing shortening.

A survey of Canadian media consumption by Microsoft concluded that the average attention span had fallen to eight seconds, down from 12 in the year 2000. That means we now have a shorter attention span than goldfish.

Companies know that social media is altering the way we consume and process information as we grow more accustomed to using fewer words in our content. In fact, they take advantage of it.

You see it in the press, the obsession with Buzzfeed’s mindless listicles that are provocative and tempting enough to click. You see it in our politics, with fear-mongering slogans replacing anything that requires sustained thought. You see it in the collapse of a fact-based democracy. For example, according to Climate Chat, a website dedicated to conversations about climate change, 30% of Americans do not believe climate change is happening.

Social media is clearly hurting us.

The New News Cycle

The sensational nature of news and reporting has roots dating back to the invention of the printing press in 1456 when mass dispersion of information and news became available. Fast forward to the mid-1600s, printing became available in America, and the country set up its first printing press at Harvard University. During this period, writers were free to accept, refuse, and print whatever their whims dictated. As a result, the government needed to censor writers and printers until the freedom of the press was later established.

In the 1920s, we started to see some of the early developments in professional journalism. Throughout the years, this style has been echoed in the gripping front-page headlines of print media and the “in-the-moment” news reporting of cable television today.

Exaggeration and possible misrepresentation is not a new concept when it comes to our access to information, but social media catapults it to an entirely different scale. With platforms that actively invite and encourage user input, news moves faster than a feed can refresh. As millions of voices clamor to be heard, misinforming or manipulating the masses is easier than ever.

In a seemingly infinite stream of information, “clickbait” articles or titles that draw attention with

dramatics are easily distributed to millions of people regardless of their validity or biases. This becomes even more concerning in light of a recently published study from the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan American-based research group, which reported that 55% of adults now receive their news from social media either “often” or “sometimes.”

The ease with which a publisher can create and spread falsehoods has led to a marketplace of misinformation unprecedented in size and power. This type of click-driven journalism has recently created controversy over “fake news”, forcing social media platforms to crack down information with fact-checking initiatives and place greater emphasis on taking greater personal responsibility.

Firstly, social media companies are not liable for user-generated content. The First Amendment protects free speech, including hate speech and false speech, but Section 230 shields social media platforms and websites from liability for content created by their users. This means Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, for instance, can certainly moderate and screen Facebook’s posts for false information, without being legally accountable for infringing on people’s First Amendment rights.

Secondly, allowing false speech ultimately presents a threat to our democratic institutions. People’s vulnerability to fake news means that they are far more likely to believe inaccurate political information, and are therefore unable to make informed decisions when voting, making it harder to see the truth. Because a democratic system relies on an informed populace to determine how it should act through votes, fake news presents a unique threat to U.S. democracy.

Having an endless stream of social media posts encourages users to deceive, mislead, and entice other users through false

speech just to gain more clicks. This is a common problem in American media, and it is only getting worse.

So, What Now?

Now, some people may say that we, the rising Generation Z, have it “easier” than previous generations due to technology and social media. To an extent, that is true. Social media is a powerful resource with an outreach that spans the globe. You can reach out to an old friend, network, and gain more inspiration from others faster and efficiently. In the face of what is going on, it is imperative that we stay informed. Social media has been ingrained into us, it has encouraged us to stay informed, and given us easier access to news. However, while it may seem like the whole world is within our grasp, it is not all rainbows and butterflies.

Social media is a different world than it is for many adults, especially those who did not grow up with it. We are faced with the constant and seemingly endless pressure of social media.

The pressure to be perfect on social media, especially the more visual-based platforms like Instagram, and the pressure to learn and keep up with the constantly evolving technology, connecting with influencers and bloggers, and the constant struggle to gain more followers is exhausting.

Although social media has brought many negatives, it is not budging from its cultural and global significance any time soon. For the foreseeable future, endless scroll will continue to be a part of our lives and the “new normal” that awaits us. In the right hands, social media can be used powerfully and drive you towards the successful path. In the wrong hands...you already know about its consequences. What we should not forget moving forward is that we have control over our social media usage and how actively we rely on it as a source of information.

IUSD Student Strike

Students protest the reopening of IUSD schools over COVID-19 safety concerns

By
SYDNEY GAW
Staff Writer

After IUSD released a statement on January 6, 2021 voicing the district's intention to continue in-person instruction following the end of winter break, concerned community members were quick to protest, fearing that a return to hybrid learning immediately after the break would lead to a spike in COVID-19 cases. Despite thousands of requests to reconsider the decision, IUSD did not release further information on the subject. IUSD's disregard for community concerns catalyzed a series of district-wide efforts to prioritize student and staff safety, including a student strike campaign.

The main group behind this movement is IUSD Student Strike, which was formed by a group of students from Portola High School shortly after the district released its statement. IUSD Student Strike has been operating solely through an Instagram account run by Portola juniors Chris Stocks and Anne Wu. The account provided information about a district-wide strike the students were organizing along with email templates and Google Forms to submit to the IUSD Board of Education.

"Our group was created with the sole intention of achieving the safest possible way to learn during this time of crisis," IUSD Student Strike said when messaged on Instagram. "Our main goal is to convince IUSD to completely move over the high school curriculum to distance learning until it is safe enough to return to

to school in-person."

According to members, quality of education—in addition to health—is at stake, and students should not be forced to put their education over health. This concern resonates with many students who chose hybrid learning despite the discernible health risks.

"No one should be held accountable for choosing hybrid learning over IVA because many students didn't believe that the situation would get so intense," IUSD Student Strike said. "IVA doesn't provide the same quality curriculum that IUSD does, [and] we've received comments from teachers saying that the curriculum limits teacher freedom."

This concern, among others, is why IUSD Student Strike believes they must confront the district's negligence to student and staff safety by protesting a return to hybrid learning. While the group acknowledged that striking is a last resort to getting the board's attention, they will not hesitate to go through with it.

The district-wide strike, which was scheduled to take place from January 26 to January 29, advised participants to refrain from attending in-person learning as well as other social gatherings. Although IUSD Student Strike did not have an exact number of expected participants, some IUSD students had already begun staying at home during in-person days in protest of IUSD's return to hybrid learning.

"I think it's very irresponsible for IUSD to continue with in-person learning after winter break due to the rise in COVID cases and the lack of available resources at the local hospitals," Northwood High School

sophomore Anna Lieggi said. "I've actually been staying home since we've returned to in-person learning even though it has led to quite a few absences."

However, some believe that a strike against IUSD is not the right way to bring about change.

"For a mass group of high school students to just stay home in defiance to IUSD format and rules is extremely irresponsible and disrespectful, [and] any student strike would be illegitimate and ineffective," a UHS student said, who chose to remain anonymous for personal reasons. "I am sure that the IUSD board is trying their hardest to keep students safe while still providing us with quality education, and students going on 'strikes' will definitely not help with the current situation."

The strike might also be counter-productive in achieving the movement's demands, as participants will have to miss out on valuable learning time. Students would miss the only lesson they have face-to-face with their teacher for the week and possibly even tests.

This concern poses another challenge to the strike's effectiveness. IUSD Student Strike stated that the strike's success will rely heavily on numbers and that "hundreds, if not thousands, of students will need to participate" to get the IUSD Board of Education's attention.

While IUSD Student Strike has a clear idea of what success means for their campaign and is aware of the obstacles they face in getting IUSD to acknowledge their demands, one unforeseen challenge may not be finding participants who agree with their demands, but rather the group's

much of her high school career, Kim, and other mentors, were unaccustomed to the disconnect facilitated by their screens.

"When I first joined, we were still somewhat disorganized and clueless as to how to operate through Zoom," explained Kim. "Expanding the organization, creating events for students, and even setting up the weekly mentoring sessions were all very difficult."

Nonetheless, Kim continued to put in her effort to continue building up her branch and getting more of her peers involved. Along the way, she continued to recruit new members, including junior **Joyce Shi**.

"I learned about LUC when one of my friends introduced it to me," Shi said. "I joined because I felt it was important for students to get the extra help they need, and I wanted to be a part of that."

Along the way, Shi had gotten more out of this organization than simply mentoring experience. Through LUC, she had found a community of UHS students who share her passion for mentoring. In meeting with her peers via Zoom every Saturday for their mentoring sessions, Shi has had the opportunity to spend time with her fellow mentor and mentees and has gotten to know them better.

"In my experience at LUC, I've made friends along the way and have gained lots of experience working with kids and my peers in a spontaneous environment," said

professionalism.

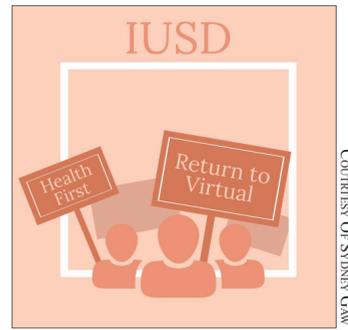
IUSD Student Strike reached out to UHS junior and ASB Vice President **Jean Meyer** to join their group as a student representative. Meyer is no longer a part of the group because she did not agree with many of the group's methods and felt that their actions would be detrimental to the movement.

"When I got into a Zoom call with the group, they wanted the school representatives to help plan it," Meyer said. "They had a five page 'demand' document written and planned to go to the [school] board with it. When I presented my concerns about not being able to go in-person to the board because of COVID restrictions and how asking students to skip school appeared contradictory to their message, they got mad that the other representatives and I were 'messing up' their plans."

Although Meyer was not fully involved with the group, she agreed to help publicize their plans. This, however, led to further disagreement among members of the group, ultimately resulting in several students leaving the campaign.

"They asked if I could share a post made by them, and before seeing it, I said yes, which was my mistake. After reading through it, I didn't fully agree with the post and couldn't put it out on my personal account. I told them that I admire what they are doing, but I ultimately couldn't post it for them," Meyer said. "The other representatives from Irvine, Woodbridge, and Northwood agreed, and the group organizers got upset—insulting and cussing at us, and mocking the message I sent them."

Despite leaving the campaign along with several other school representatives, Meyer, like many students, still acknowledges the importance of student safety and the need for change in the community. "While I agree that everyone is entitled to feel safe and receive the best education possible, I also understand that the district is working very hard to answer to the needs of students, families, and teachers," Meyer said. "I completely encourage conversation with teachers, other students, administrators, parents, and staff, who can offer different perspectives on virtual or in-person learning. Talking about why we are in-person at the moment is an important conversation to have."



The strike was organized through Instagram and has since sparked dialogue on safety.

COURTESY OF SYDNEY GAW

ASB-19

Student Activities Coordinator and Spirit and Rally Commissioner adapt to a COVID-19 school year

By
YASNA RAHMANI
Staff Writer

Behind nearly every school activity and the cheering crowds at football games is the Associated Student Body (ASB). For years, ASB has served to build school spirit and provide UHS students with the opportunity to have a fulfilling high school experience. However, the restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic severely limit the ways in which ASB can work this school year. Planning school-wide activities such as football games, pep rallies, and Spirit Week is a routine ASB duty that has taken



Senior Gavin Krishnam, Spirit and Rally Commissioner

COURTESY OF KAVIN KRISHNAM

the biggest hit during the pandemic. Two ASB positions, the Student Activities Coordinator (SAC) and the Spirit and Rally Commissioner, have previously been heavily involved in coordinating and hosting these events. With a significant portion of their duties restricted, these ASB members have taken new approaches to their position this year.

Because school did not go online until after the ASB primaries last school year, both members signed up as candidates for their positions under the impression that they would be able to conduct the positions' routine tasks. However, they were faced with unprecedented challenges. UHS' SAC, senior **Aren Apelian**, chose to approach these challenges with a positive attitude.

"Although I can't really do the normal pep rally and football game shenanigans, I still have a lot of other ways I can help out," said Apelian. "For instance, I've become more involved with Univision and helping them deliver all the morning announcements through that medium."

The Spirit and Rally Commissioner is well known for boosting school spirit at events alongside the SAC. Because of the absence of social events, UHS' Spirit and Rally Commissioner, senior **Kavin**

Krishnam, expressed his frustration with the limitations he has to work within.

"I would say the appeal of my position has lowered a lot with the current situation," Krishnam said. "The position of Spirit and Rally relies a lot on school events, sporting games, crowds, and people in general, something this pandemic has taken from us."

The SAC and Spirit and Rally Commissioner have branched out into different projects to help bring a sense of community back to the UHS campus. The SAC has increased his involvement in Univision by introducing a new segment where he uses skits to inform, entertain, and unify the student body. On the other hand, the Spirit and Rally Commissioner has chosen to foster school spirit through student art.

"My hope this year as Spirit and Rally Commissioner is to help beautify the school through different long-lasting art projects," Krishnam said. "With Spirit Week and other art-related events that make the school look great, they only last a week or so.... I pushed for the Vans art competition."

The Vans art competition encourages students to express their creativity on a pair of Vans shoes, and the winners will have their



Senior Aren Apelian, Student Activities Coordinator

COURTESY OF AREN APELIAN

project was envisioned by Krishnam, Technology Commissioner senior **Arush Mehrotra**, and the librarian **Mr. Dominic Fratantoro**, and it has recently been approved by the rest of ASB.

Along with the lack of school events, strict safety guidelines led to many gray areas when it came to proposing new projects.

"The approval from the district and the ever-changing state guidelines have played a major role in preventing our ability to do anything," Apelian said.

Apelian and Krishnam discussed having to put many of their ambitions on hold when faced with the increasing number of Orange County COVID-19 cases. However, the pandemic's conditions are gradually improving with the introduction of vaccines.

"We're starting to be able to do

more and more slowly. I'll keep some of the specifics under wraps as we still have to get some of these projects approved by the district," Apelian said. "But we should see more and more events with the goal of helping bring the Uni community back together."

The pandemic has brought about many changes in students' school lives, from shortened instruction time to the two-person lunch tables, but it has presented additional challenges to the students whose ASB campaign promises were to deliver their peers a great year. The SAC and Spirit and Rally chose to respond to this time of strife by adjusting and doing what they can to live up to the sense of community within our school.

"You just have to be willing to adapt and put in the work," Apelian said.

Clubs Adapting to COVID-19

How students have implemented socially-distanced volunteer events

By
MEERA HATANGADI
Staff Writer

Volunteer clubs have long been an integral aspect of University High School's culture. They have allowed for numerous opportunities, not only for individuals to give back to the community but also for them to build their own community in the process.

However, with restrictions in place due to the pandemic, the traditional paths that these clubs have usually adhered to have been obstructed. Now, many clubs face daunting hurdles and challenges that they must overcome to carry on their volunteer events. This is undoubtedly the case for StempowerHer, a service club at UHS working towards empowering women in STEM.

Senior **Susanna Mathew**, the president of StempowerHer, has especially felt the effects of these barriers on the club's functionality.

Traditionally, StempowerHer would have volunteer events at the local library where elementary school students would perform science experiments under the supervision of high school volunteers. However, these volunteer events were "contingent on multiple participants being together in a small space, discussing things, and working through problems with physical materials that were often shared,"

according to Mathew, and this was strictly prohibited as per state regulations.

Furthermore, this was not the only club with which she faced this problem. Mathew had to deal with the same problem as the president of another UHS club: Code Red, a service club working towards ending period poverty and stigma.

"In Code Red, traditional volunteer events would feature a lot of passing things around between multiple people due to the assembly line structure of the event," said Mathew. "We would always have a bustling room of volunteers trying to help out between packing stations and restocking."

With the new restrictions that the pandemic has brought around, passing around objects without precautions and holding events in libraries was not possible. Mathew and her fellow club members had to adapt. They had to redefine what their volunteer events entailed, and this proved to be complicated.

"Since we no longer had a space to conduct physical volunteer events for StempowerHer, we ended up revamping our concept entirely," Mathew explained. "We ended up deciding to make videos demoing the science experiments that we would normally conduct in-person and sending them to our students."

Although this did not have the same effect that traditional events had, these videos served as a more COVID-friendly outlet for these volunteer events to continue.

Moreover, by modifying the packing part events of Code Red to include safety precautions such as limiting the number of people in each event and using gloves, Mathew and her board members managed to remedy the complications surrounding their volunteer events.

Furthermore, another club that had to go through a similar process is Access to Art, a service club aiming to increase student exposure to the visual arts through free art and art history lessons. Junior **Sol Choi**, one of the Presidents of Access to Art, described the initial issues that he and the board faced.

"We used to go directly to local libraries, schools, and outdoor areas and we would teach kids how to draw according to a specific lesson we planned out," Choi said.

However, with all the COVID-19 precautions, they had to put a halt to all their volunteer events. They had to get creative to adapt.

Choi and his fellow board members had some trouble configuring how they would adjust, and this took them some time. In his own words, they had to "completely redesign and revamp Access to Art's volunteer events." They even went to the lengths of establishing a new board, after which they started brainstorming on what they might be able to do as alternative volunteer events.

"It was really hard coming up with ideas and also trying to think creatively about how to make kids'



StempowerHer, Code Red, and Access to Art are just a few clubs that have had to modify their volunteer events this year.

COURTESY OF PARYAV

lives just a little bit better during these times," said Choi. "We started talking about how we could modify our events and still make the same impact."

Eventually, they partnered with Girl Up, another service club, and held a gender violence-themed art exhibition. They also ended up adding a new element to their volunteer events: art booklets, or as they call it 'zines'.

"So I thought of those little Olive Garden activity coloring books the waiters would give you before the breadsticks came, and I was just thinking 'Maybe we can do that with art education and art activities for children!'," said Choi. "So Access to Art now publishes our very own zine (magazine) that contains coloring books, art history lessons, drawing exercises, and other fun cut-out activities."

In the case of Access to Art, these modified events have provided a whole new dimension of possibilities for student volunteers, despite not being at the same caliber as traditional events.

They have allowed Access to Art to broaden the scope and the reach of their volunteer events. As stated by Choi, Access to Art has "been able to reach a lot more people through our new volunteer events: especially our online zines since once it's published on library sites and parents can print them for their children anywhere."

COVID has fundamentally changed nearly every aspect of the lives of individuals all over the world, and just as these individuals have all had to adapt, so have the service clubs at UHS. In some cases, these adaptations may have been successful. In others, they may not have. Either way, clubs have had to reevaluate their traditional volunteer events and use their creativity and imagination to produce new ideas: in some cases, ideas that may never have been implemented otherwise.

"Honestly, I'm really excited about how things are going right now," said Choi, "and I am hoping to implement even more new and innovative ideas in the future."

Online Mentoring

Fostering a community around remote learning

By
MEERA HATANGADI
Staff Writer

It all started when senior **Jieon Kim** decided to spend her summer doing volunteer work. Kim discovered an organization called Leaders United for Change (LUC), a non-profit organization that currently provides free mentoring services to over 250 elementary and middle school students all over the world. The organization consists of qualified high school mentors who tutor student mentees primarily in math and English.

While the organization provides its services internationally, consisting of 10 branches serving students all over the US, and even foreign countries such as Colombia and Korea, Kim decided to start a branch in Irvine and extend these opportunities to its residents.

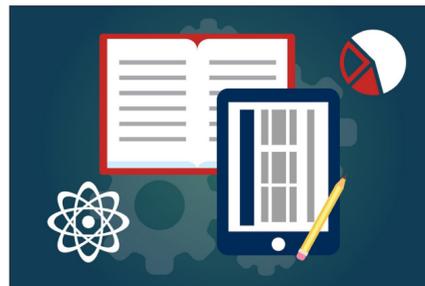
"I've always enjoyed volunteer services, especially mentoring-related services," said Kim. "During quarantine, when not many opportunities were available anymore, LUC seemed like a place to continue

making an impact."

Kim was especially interested in starting a chapter in Irvine as she saw the immense help that these mentoring services were providing to English learners in their international branches. In the city of Irvine, where diversity is abundant and there is a vast number of English-learning immigrants, Kim wished for a safe space for young students to hone their scholarly skills and seek any additional help they may need. She wanted to help reach students in need in Irvine; especially English learners.

"I truly believe that organizations like LUC are of high value to the community," Kim said. "Many passionate students are often placed at disadvantages due to their inability to access personal academic help, and several language barriers, and LUC gives a chance for such students to interact with equally-passionate mentors to gain not only academic but also emotional aid."

However, as Kim slowly built up her branch, she faced obstacles along the way, one of which was adapting to mentoring through an online format. As a student who participated in peer mentoring for



Leaders United for Change (LUC) provides mentoring for over 250 students.

COURTESY OF PARYAV

Shi.

Similarly, Kim has also been motivated by creating this sense of community; and has taken actions to further build it.

"To further create a sense of community, LUC would hold holiday bonding events, during which mentors and mentees would get together on Zoom, get to know each other, play games, and celebrate the holiday season," said Kim.

These events allowed mentors and mentees to further bond and familiarize themselves with each other, fostering the creation of friendships and new connections. Furthermore, by working with her club members to mentor students and plan events, Kim herself has become much more familiar with many of her peers.

Kim explained that she prefers to

call her members "mentors" rather than "tutors," as she hopes that they gain a higher sense of community with those in her branch. She wants them to truly understand the students who they mentor and create real connections with the other students in the organization.

Under her leadership, Kim has managed to grow the Irvine branch of LUC to over 30 mentors who attend mentoring sessions nearly every Saturday to assist students with school and language-learning, as well as provide general advice.

"Hopefully, LUC is of use to students eager to learn. Our organization has recently completed 7000 hours of mentoring," Kim said. "It's a joyful feeling to know that there are mentors and students around the world that await for the Saturday mentoring sessions to come."

UHS Students Stay Creative During COVID-19

Student artists find productive use of their time at home as they work on their skills

By
SYDNEY GAW
Staff Writer



COURTESY OF SABA NABAEIGHARROUDI



COURTESY OF EMILY SUN



COURTESY OF VIBHAS IPPILI

Left: Saba Nabaeigharroudi's YAI's 2021 Art Exchange submission. Center: A family portrait by Emily Sun. Right: A self-portrait by Vibhas Ippili.

Since the beginning of quarantine last April, it has become increasingly difficult for artists to showcase their work. The cancellation of art exhibits, concerts, performances, and live showcases has meant that artists have fewer opportunities to share projects and have to find other ways to retain their creativity. While the past year has been very limiting for artists across the country, many students have been using their time at home to focus on their artistic skills.

At the start of the school year, several UHS students formed an online group via Discord as an outlet for students to discuss art techniques, share their artwork, and receive feedback from fellow artists. Throughout distance learning, members of the group have been participating in various challenges, contests, and art exchanges.

"The one positive change that I doubt would've been able to occur without [COVID-19] is meeting a ton of other artists my age online," junior and co-organizer of the server **Quinlan Tobin** said. "Forming an online Discord-based art challenge allowed me to socialize with other artists, and it was awesome being able to participate in it alongside 30+ highschoolers that share the same passion for art."

The group has since expanded to include artists throughout USD and is known collectively as the Youth Artists of Irvine (YAI). The group most recently hosted an "art exchange" challenge where students agreed to draw portraits of each other based on a randomized Google form. The challenge, which involved over 50 artists, allowed students to showcase their unique artistic styles and communicate with other artists about their work.

"The thing I enjoyed most about the art exchange was seeing the large

variety of art that everyone made," YAI member and Northwood High School sophomore **Saba Nabaeigharroudi** said. "From unique subject matter to interesting color palettes, all the artworks were truly inspiring."

In addition to the formation of online artistic communities, many students are using their time at home to refine their skills individually.

"As someone who never really had much time to draw, the pandemic really pushed me to be more creative," sophomore **Emily Sun** said. "I have been working on many pieces for my family, friends, and my social media account, which I recently created to share my artwork."

Individual practice has also become a habitual exercise among young musicians who, in the absence of fellow musicians, section leaders, conductors, and private instructors, have had to find other ways to stay connected to their music.

"Quarantine has made me a lot more independent in practicing and has also taught me a lot about perseverance and taking initiative to practice," sophomore and flutist

in the UHS Wind Symphony **Alysa Feng** said. "Even though I wasn't able to participate in the school arts programs and play with other people, continuing to practice brought me a lot of joy, and I was able to learn a lot of new pieces and really improve on areas I was struggling with. I also entered a few [online] competitions and even won prizes for a few of them."

However, Feng also shared that she "anticipate[s] the day where [she] can go back to in-person recitals and competitions."

Although limited access to the outside world may seem unmotivating for people who rely on an outside environment for inspiration, others are using their extended time inside to fuel their creativity.

"[COVID]-19 actually allowed me to use all my free time to draw. I [drew] constantly over the summer and [was] able to crank out a piece of art without any interruptions," junior and co-founder of YAI **Linnea Jerkovich** said. "I made so much improvement this year because of all the practice I was able to get over quarantine."

In other cases, some students have instead used quarantine as an opportunity to experiment with different art forms.

"Since I haven't been able to go to an art studio and learn from an instructor, I have been trying to experiment my style around. My main goal over quarantine has been to sharpen my painting skills, but I also did some realism work [and] pencil art, which I have never done before," sophomore **Vibhas Ippili** said. "I think just working/starting/finishing a piece is something enjoyable, but trying something new and excelling in that is just another level of satisfaction. I am proud to say that I have nailed observational/realism pencil drawing."

Sophomore and member of UHS Philharmonic Orchestra **Miyako Kato** has also taken up several new artistic projects in lieu of the concerts she would be preparing for during a regular school year.

"I'm still trying to practice violin, but COVID-19 has definitely impacted my motivation to practice," Kato said. "I've actually gotten into embroidering and doing other artistic

projects at home to keep creative."

Tobin has also used quarantine to channel his creativity into learning new skills. "I'm mostly into drawing, but over quarantine I've actually been putting much more of my time into music," Tobin said. "I've known guitar and ukulele basics for about a year and a half now, and now it feels great to have all this free time to just mess around with it, slowly getting better while having fun. I've always approached drawing in a very technical way, so music feels much more expressive and is my preferred form of 'vent art.'"

Although many artists cannot wait to return to live concerts, performances, workshops, and showcases, it is important that students continue to exercise their creative skills. Art, in whatever form it may be, has always provided an outlet for students to express themselves and display their talents. More than ever, exercising artistic skills has become a way in which students can maintain their mental health and emotional wellbeing.

UHS Theatre Arts Wins Awards at CETA High School Theatre Festival

UHS student cast and crew put on virtual performances with the help of Univision

By **FARAAZ AZIZ**
Staff Writer

The California Educational Theatre Association (CETA) High School Theatre Festival took place on January 16, in which UHS Theatre Arts participated with a one-act play called "Philip Glass Buys a Loaf of Bread." In the festival, multiple UHS artists won awards, and the cast and crew from "Philip Glass" won third place in the state.

This was UHS's first time participating in the CETA awards as UHS could not participate in previous years due to conflict with other events and difficulties with a long commute. In place of CETA, UHS Theatre Arts usually participates in the RoleAbout Theatre Festival and the Fullerton College High School Festival. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, CETA held the festival and awards ceremony virtually on Zoom, and UHS was able to make a debut at the CETA awards. The festival began with a short watch party in which casts from different

schools wished each other good luck, proceeded to view the pre-recorded plays from different schools, and finally ended with an award ceremony.

UHS Theatre Arts students were able to put together a virtual performance of the play, "Philip Glass Buys a Loaf of Bread." The play compares the story of a man's desire for love to his actions of making a loaf of bread. Cast members filmed their own individual parts and worked with Univision to create the performance that won multiple awards.

"[the experience had] a rough start but ultimately came down to a wonderful product," junior **Owen Stapp** said.

With this year's online version of CETA, a new aspect of theatre was introduced: video production. The online submission of "Philip Glass" did not require a live performance, so video production was a key factor in the success of the play. Senior and Univision member **Alice Chiang** was the main contributor for editing the play, helping UHS place third nationally for the virtual category.

"In this edit I had a lot of symmetry, kaleidoscope, and reverse effects. The edit was a lot of fun to make because I got to play around with the effects," Chiang said.

In addition to Chiang's video editing, senior **Sydney Spencer** also helped with the production of the play.

"There were no lines, but instead vocal parts that I mixed and added original composition to," Spencer said.

There were thirteen UHS students involved in "Philip Glass," and five separate UHS student members won other awards. Junior **Scott Burke** won an award for his performance as Chuck I, II, and III in "Art of the Fugue," a short play in the collection of plays, "All in the Timing." Burke's online performance, which took place earlier this school year, was about a man who went on virtual dates with three women at the same time.

"Each adjudicator nominated a student they felt deserved to be recognized for their achievement," Burke said, after receiving the Adju-

dicator's Award for his performance. Burke was the only UHS junior to win the Adjudicator's Award for his acting. Others who won awards

include senior **Olivia Biase** for the Senior Scholarship, and seniors **Audrey Moore** and **Zaman Merchant** for Adjudicator Awards.



COURTESY OF UNI THEATRE ARTS

UHS participated in the CETA Theatre Festival for the first time.

Eight UHS Students Selected for 2021 California High School All-State Orchestra

The All-State Orchestra becomes virtual as students prepare for the performances ahead



COURTESY OF KIRBY HONG, CALIFORNIA ORCHESTRA DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

Unlike rehearsals and performances in previous years, this year's All-State Orchestra students have only played with and seen their orchestra members through a virtual platform.

By
JULIET CURTIS
Staff Writer

Eight UHS students were accepted as California All-State Orchestra Honorees this past January, joining either the Symphony Orchestra or the String Orchestra. Organized by the California Orchestra Directors Association (CODA), an invitation to join either group is considered a prestigious achievement for high school musicians.

The complete list of UHS All-State Orchestra Honorees includes freshmen **Nathan Dishon** and **Jocelyn Tsai**, sophomores **Jaemin Song** and **Katherine Wu**, and juniors **Faraaz Aziz**, **Sol Choi**, **Ethan Lai**, and **Allison Yue**.

"Being able to play together with other musicians in orchestras or symphonies has always been one of my favorite things in music, so I auditioned for All-State, as it is one of the more popular orchestras in California," Yue said.

This year, with the pandemic, students' additional free time has increased the accessibility of the All-State Orchestra for many musicians.

"I chose to try out because it was something I could practice during quarantine when I had more free time, and I thought it would be a fun experience since the rehearsals and performance would be almost

completely different than before, due to COVID-19," Tsai said.

Rather than attend live auditions in front of a panel, students submitted recordings directly through CODA's website of the designated excerpts released several months previously.

"I think the online format had definitely made me less nervous during auditions, since I'm just by myself recording my laptop instead of someone watching me live, but because I'm recording it definitely takes a lot more time than just a ten minute live audition," Tsai said. "There were many do overs to get the best possible take, but all the practicing was worth it in the end."

"While this might not be the optimal situation, it's still great to have some form of orchestra going on."

As COVID-19 has limited many students' chances to participate in extracurricular activities, the UHS orchestra program has served as a form of some students' preparation for All-State as they settle back into music in the absence of other outside orchestras.

"I think it's really fortunate that orchestra and (strings especially) doesn't involve any blowing of air, so I'm really glad our UNI orchestra

can meet up and rehearse in person," Choi said.

Students have also found the lifted restrictions on in-person UHS rehearsals as an opportunity to reflect on their time in orchestra.

"The UHS orchestra program has impacted my preparation by reminding me how it feels to play with other people and a conductor to make music as an orchestra," Tsai said. "It reminded me of the important aspects of playing with other people, such as being aware of everyone's part and how it fits together, since it had been a long time since I was able to play in an orchestra because of COVID-19."

CODA has replaced its prior in-person practices at various California high schools with an online course of two rehearsal blocks over January 23 and February 13.

"Rehearsals are over Zoom which is frankly quite strange, as we're all playing individually, muted, along to a clicking background track," Yue said. "While this might not be the optimal situation, it's still great to have some form of orchestra going on."

Students have had to adapt to the loss of communication and connection that they would otherwise have in-person with their orchestra members. Yet, the challenges of the pandemic have not overshadowed the program.

"While the online format does

have some limitations, such as the difficulty of connecting with fellow ensemble members and the conductor, it was a new and enjoyable experience to play in a virtual orchestra," Lai said.

Additionally, some students have remained optimistic throughout the new version of the program.

"This whole experience is something different than the normal orchestral experience, which is what makes it valuable and memorable to me."

Although the circumstances have not been ideal, the program provides a glimpse into normalcy as students return to playing music with their friends.

"All State orchestra was virtual this year, but I really enjoyed it because all my friends were online during our zoom rehearsals," Choi said.

Since the conductors and master class clinicians cannot hear and correspondingly comment on the orchestra's performance, they teach mainly through lectures about the musical piece and the specific technique that members should be following on their own.

"I think the new format still allows a high level of learning from the conductor, but we definitely are

not able to interact with and possibly learn from each other anymore, which is one of the best parts of being in an orchestra," Tsai said. "It is also disappointing that I am unable to experience the full experience of getting to go to a hotel and live with others for a weekend, but it is also nice to be able to be in a virtual orchestra from the comfort of my own room."

Despite the large adjustment to a virtual setting, the program has been able to keep a platform for students to engage with fellow musicians across California.

"I appreciate the effort of the organizers and everyone involved to adapt to the unexpected circumstances and continue to provide us with these opportunities," Lai said.

In past times, the orchestra gathered musicians in Fresno for a finishing weekend-long rehearsal program and the ultimate performance. Though it is unable to hold the physical event this year, the orchestra still is able to provide an ending performance by combining each individual member's taped parts and creating a final, complete recording.

"Overall, even though a lot of the best parts are missing, I still think this whole experience is something different than the normal orchestral experience, which is what makes it valuable and memorable to me," Tsai said.

An Overview of Reopening Cross Country Meets

By **MICHAEL CHEN**
Staff Writer

To combine all three sports seasons for the 2020-2021 school year, the California Interscholastic Federation-Southern Section (CIF-SS) decided to condense the Fall, Winter, and Spring activities into two sports seasons. This meant that for sports like Cross Country, which coaches Eric Davies and Courtney Mosey led, the contests would begin as early as January 25 and end on March 27 with restrictive guidelines.

Additionally, CIF greenlighted cross country competitions to occur as long as schools comply with IUSD's COVID-19 modifications, which outlined changes to group size, exercise routines, and face mask etiquette during every meeting. The first meet for our UHS team under CIF regulations would occur on Saturday, February 6. Unfortunately for the runners, there is also another caveat:

"Because of this change [in meet-up dates from January 1st to January 25th], we have started holding practices five days a week as opposed to two days a week," said Davies and Mosey. "When athletes are running only two days a week,

it is simply not enough to prepare for a three-mile cross country race."

Without consistent practices, running only twice a week would increase the chance of injury and leave the UHS runners inadequately trained for future competitions. These new exercise schedules promote measures that will help alleviate this issue of meeting up to competition standards.

However, since the schedule also increases exposure opportunities, runners would be allowed to voice their concerns about the change in practices by contacting their respective coaches online.

"I just hope our meet-up follows the COVID-19 guidelines and lives up to the feeling of a real season," senior and Varsity Cross Country runner **John Melcher** said. "I thought our team was going to be deprived of this season so obviously, I am pleased about that but at the same time, the team is still restricted in many ways."

Following Melcher's sentiments about restrictions, CIF has specifically mandated that groups of at most 10 runners must be maintained per "pod". The runners will be advised to remain six feet apart, run in single file lines, and avoid grouping at the start and finish lines to help bolster contact tracing efforts. For intense

aerobic exercises or strenuous cardiovascular activities, athletes may also be allowed to loop (cut and modify) masks for breathability and maintain at least 10 feet of physical distance between themselves.

While these guidelines are meant to preserve physical safety within cross country competitions, it also means that not all runners will be able to participate. For the Saturday meet against Beckman High School, only one of these pods is allowed to race from both schools' divisions. Because of the short notice of the meets as well, some members of the cross country team have expressed other worries about returning to the run:

"All of us on the team were expecting our season to be canceled so a lot of us got out of shape during the off-season grace period," Melcher said. "Our team needs to get back into it as soon as our season progresses, even if that means exercising more frequently and adhering to safety rules."

For one previous runner who did not rejoin his cross country team this year, his story poses another considerable insight regarding personal safety and inter-school difficulties. It reflects the mindset of some formerly involved athletes who felt that their presence on the field would disturb their own well-being and

learning abilities because of the current unprecedented circumstances.

"Initially, I joined the sport last year before COVID-19 was prevalent and dropped it in the second semester when the teachers switched to an online format," senior and former UHS Junior Varsity Cross Country runner **Chami Sagara** said. "What ultimately ended up making me drop was my concerns because COVID-19 cases were rising, and making it to practice every day would be difficult as I am in Irvine Virtual Academy (IVA)."

Regarding these difficulties, no singular cause determined whether or not runners have dropped the sport. Rather, it was the combina-

tion of factors involving viral protection, academic stresses, as well as personal reasons that have led athletes like Sagara to stay aside from the sport. Even with the decline in Cross Country participation because of the aforementioned factors, this Fall Season can only improve for the Trojan runners. They begin their journey to take the lead in future competitions.

"I do not know any people who dropped the sport purely because of the pandemic or for IVA reasons, but I remain confident that we would return once things start settling down," said Sagara. "Going forward, I just hope that the team can stay safe and win for our school."



2019 Cross Country Meet

Kunal Amin

UHS eSports Wins Overwatch Grand Championship

By **MICHAEL CHEN**
Staff Writer

While schools typically compete in sports ranging from football to lacrosse, UHS became part of competing in eSports brackets with other schools. As a participant in the North America Scholastic Esports Foundation (NASEF), UHS eSports won a double-elimination bracket in an Overwatch North America Scholastic Esports Foundation (NASEF) Grand Championship.

This most recent Grand Championship tournament was against both scholastic teams as well as Tier 4 semi-professional teams. To date in the Fall season, UHS eSports has played 14 games with a record of 11-3, placing the team third in the conference. UHS eSports has advanced across the upper-division bracket with near-perfect gameplay and will continue to hone its skills through practice sessions.

"Despite losing the very first round of the tournament, we [managed] to win six straight matches in a row to reach the grand finals," senior and Team Captain **Anthony Bonfa** said.

"Our best play through out the finals was on the map Eichwald--over four of our games held a perfect defense every time and never gave up a single point."

"The grand championship was 100% the best our team has ever done."

The Trojan eSports strategy has always been to play smart and support their strongest pieces-- a strategy that paid off in the end.

The team was able to pull through with a final 3-2 victory on the map Junkertown, securing the championship position. Because of this, UHS eSports became the successful underdogs in the lower division bracket.

"The grand championship was 100% the best our team has ever done. Once we won our first game, we were able to push past our limits and have impeccable communication," junior team veteran **Ashley Srun** said. "As for the future, we plan on entering more tournaments just for fun."

The Overwatch team plans to stick with their original strategy and progress naturally in the upper-division by supporting their best players and keeping tight communications.

While the team trains for their next tournament, they acknowledge the challenges of their future endeavors as higher competition levels bring greater pressure. However, the Trojans aim to simply go as far as possible in future tournaments regardless of prestige.

"I plan to keep leading Uni eSports to see just how high of a level we can reach in whatever matches we play. Not to mention, playing Overwatch is joyful in and of itself," Bonfa said. "Learning all mechanics, characters, and adjusting to each update keeps me interested in improving myself."

Srun also expressed what she cherished the most as a support player within the team and her motivations to continue playing every season.

"My teammates make the experience super fun, as we build on each other's energy and always encourage each other with the occasional playful banter. My coach also has been so encouraging and helpful since day one and he has always brought the best out of the team throughout the years," Srun said.

Boys Water Polo Gears Up For an Irregular Spring Season

By **AMITIS TAJALLAEI**
Staff Writer

As Orange County has continued to remain in the purple tier, which has the most severe COVID restrictions, the chances of a season have seemed grim for many high-contact sports. However, with the distribution of vaccines and declining cases, the Boys Water Polo team is starting to prepare for the possibility of a season after a long year of uncertainty.

Throughout the year, the team has continued to stay in shape with off-season practices. These practices follow strict guidelines such as staggering pool lanes, implementing no contact drills, and requiring students to wear masks while using the weight room. While these guidelines help ensure the players' safety, they also pose a significant challenge to carrying out effective practices.

"The toughest setback of this season has been not being able to have full contact in practice," senior **Stewart Campbell** said. "The practices have been less productive than previous years because we are not able to practice in-game scenarios or have scrimmages."

Although the restrictions on practices have limited the types of drills that can be used to hone the players' skills, the team has taken a new approach this offseason by modifying old exercises to comply with the guidelines.

"We have reworked the Shots on Movement drills to eliminate passing, so we can still work on fast-paced shooting," junior **Jaden Chen** said. "We've also heavily focused the Six-on-Five drills, which allows us to work out game scenarios while still keeping our space."

"Shots on Movement" is a drill where a player transitions between the five water polo positions, taking

a shot at each post. The player has the ball passed to them when they arrive at their new position, and the balls are shagged (or retrieved) by teammates. With this year's restrictions, players are responsible for shagging their balls, dribbling between positions, and shooting. The second drill mentioned is "Six-on-Five", which occurs when one player is ejected on defense.

This drill improves defensive skill and can be done from a distance.

In addition to off-season practices provided by Girls and Boys Water Polo coach **Jesse Briggs**, many players in more advanced levels have taken the initiative to refine their skills outside of the UHS team.

"On top of the high school practice, a few of my teammates and I have been playing club water polo to get prepared for our season," Campbell said

"The toughest setback of the off-season was watching Liam [Horan] let himself go."

Although the team has been rapidly adapting to the new conditions and limits they have to work within, these challenges have served as a source of discouragement for many players who were under the impression that they would perform routine practices. Senior and Water Polo captain **Matt Wallin** expressed his frustration with the loss of motivation that has occurred as a result.

"The toughest setback of the off-season was watching Liam [Horan] let himself go," Wallin said.

Many aspects contributed to the players' discouraging outlook on this season. Some mentioned the disappointment of not being able to advance to CIFs, while others highlighted the impact of the con-

stant postponements on team spirit.

"Practices have been a pretty big waste of time due to not being able to do anything Water Polo-related... Not being able to have defense makes it hard for the goalies to do anything."

While most players felt that the practices effectively kept them in shape, Wallin offered a different perspective.

"Practices have been a pretty big waste of time due to not being able to do anything Water Polo-related," Wallin said. "Not being able to have defense makes it hard for the goalies to do anything."

Though there is some disagreement on how worthwhile practices have been during the pandemic, the team collectively expressed their readiness for the upcoming season. Players applauded Coach Briggs for his efforts to provide them with the best possible instruction, considering this season's circumstances.

"I feel like our coach has prepared us super well for the upcoming season. We all have been super supportive of one another. Each of us has been super hard-working during practice as well," freshman **Oleg Shatskikh** said.

On top of feeling prepared, the players look forward to a possible season after many months of unpredictability, giving seniors in particular hope for the chance to play with their teammates again. "It has been almost a year since I've last played a real game," Campbell said. "I am also looking forward to being able to finish off my water polo career at UNI on a positive note."