

Students Testify About Negative Consequences of Budget Cuts at DC Council Hearing



Students gathered to testify at the Council of the District of Columbia Building / Via @sww_hsa

By Carlotta Rother ('25)
Staff Writer

Two key components of Walls are set to be cut: a yet-to-be determined language teacher, and the entire theater department. On February 29, the students at School Without Walls got the news that DCPS would cut the Walls budget by \$235,210. Many students at SWW decided to fight against the budget cuts coming to the school, and so on April 4 around 25 student from Walls testified at the DC budget hearing.

Mayor Muriel Bowser announced that while the DCPS budget would be bigger than last year, many schools will still lose hundreds of thousands of dollars as a result of inflation and the end of federal pandemic funds.

To adjust to the smaller budget, Walls will be forced to cut its theater department and one language teacher. While these two departments have the least enrollment, they have a huge impact on students and the Walls community.

Students attended the council's budget

hearing in an attempt to save the two departments. Over 40 total students from schools around DC testified both in person and virtually. School president Hugo Rosen ('24) said that, "I initially heard about parents going to the budget meeting from the Local School Advisory Team [and] they recommended that some students should attend. From there, I found out the Sunrise Hub was also going to attend."

Rosen worked with the Sunrise Hub, specifically Anna Mayer ('25), to gather as many students as possible to testify. Rosen said, "Mayer was the one who was in direct communication with Chairman Phil Mendelson, she got all the students to go after one another and helped tie the Walls community together."

Everyone had a different story to tell about how they would be impacted by the DCPS budget cuts. "There was a pretty diverse range in what people were talking about in their testimonies," Mayer recalled. As the first speaker, she "gave a brief overview of why we

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Drama Department's Electric Rendition of "Rent"

By Astrid Leppig ('27) and Anna Wood ('27)
Staff Writers

Lights dimmed and curtains rose at the UDC Theater of the Arts, where the School Without Walls theater department performed their adaptation of one of the longest running Broadway musicals, "Rent." Originally written by Jonathan Larson, the musical highlights the lives of many young adult artists living in New York City during the AIDS epidemic in the 1990s.

The process of creating Rent was difficult, yet rewarding. Many different people around the Walls community contributed to its production. For the staff leading the production of "Rent," drama teacher Lea Zaslavsky and music teachers Christopher Alberts and Malcolm Willoughby, it was important to listen to the music and fully appreciate the score. After the lengthy casting process, the actors worked one-on-one with Mr. Willoughby for about 3 weeks. They practiced their singing and vocals, while learning and memorizing the lyrics.

Once they had mastered lines and lyrics, they started full-cast rehearsals, figuring out blocking and choreography. Key for the cast was learning their cues, while being accompanied by the music. Two weeks before showtime, the cast focused on tech work. During this time, they prioritized costumes and technical factors.

Finally, the cast was able to spend a week rehearsing at the UDC Theater of the Arts, where the musical was ultimately performed. Ms. Z, the director of "Rent," described the overall time spent preparing as "a strong two months."

Behind the scenes, art teacher Jason Bulluck and the set design crew worked on making Ms. Z's artistic vision a reality. Mr. Bulluck

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Penguins Return From "Once in a Lifetime" Trip to India

By David Sipos ('24) and Sara Weinrod ('24)
Editors-in-Chief

Walls students recently returned from the trip of a lifetime to India. The group left DC on April 4 to embark on their 12-day-long trip. Following a layover at JFK Airport in New York City, a 14-hour non-stop flight landed the group in New Delhi, the capital of India. Gabriel Webster and Carole Phillip chaperoned the group of nine students as they traveled to four different cities, visited architectural and historical heritage sites, and concluded their expedition with a relaxing stay at the Ellora Heritage Resort in southern India.

The Penguins began their expedition in Delhi, traveling around the capital via bus. There, they visited the Red Fort, a relic of the



Penguins pose in front of the Red Fort / Via @swwadventure

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Students Fear Loss of Community With Impending Budget Cuts

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were there and why it was important to us.”

Similarly, Rosen spoke last, “to wrap up what everyone had said into a clear message that the Council would listen to.”

Rosen made sure to use strong rhetoric to truly get the clear message across, “I called the new proposal an ‘injustice’... not just for Walls but for all of the DCPS schools.” Rosen said. He argued that “there is funding available elsewhere [in the DC budget], they just don’t believe [school funding] is important... We proved it was very, very critical to have these teachers in DCPS.”

Students shared personal anecdotes about their experiences in the theater and the Chinese department, rumored to be the most likely to be cut. Claire Campbell (‘25), who is currently taking Chinese IV, said “I talked about how the Chinese department at Walls has had a significant impact on who I am as a person, Ms. Song helped guide me to apply for a CIEE program in Taiwan which was an eye-opening experience and helped me realize that I definitely want to continue Chinese in college, but if the Chinese department gets cut my plans to continue Chinese next year and in college will be taken away.”

Speaking on behalf of many members of the drama department, Addis Getachew (‘27) testified that, “the drama club gave me one of my favorite communities, and my friend group in the drama club gives me a sense of belonging.”

Other members of drama club including Jett Morad-McCoy (‘26) furthered this argu-

ment in their testimony, saying that “the theater gives the students a chance to truly express their creativity, and if they are not participating in the production, support their classmates and have a fun break from their rigorous coursework.”

She also focused on the impact of teachers “time and time again it is the teachers who take initiative and influence their students’ learning.” The teachers at DCPS have had a profound impact on their students at Walls, as Maia Riggs (‘25) stated, because they build relationships with students, know what matters to students, and take initiative to help students.

While the department cuts were the main focus of this budget hearing for School Without Walls, students also talked about other budget-related issues. The Sunrise Movement at Walls had already been planning to attend the budget hearing prior to the Mayor’s new proposed budget. Thus, when attending the budget hearing a lot of the members touched on the issues that the budget cut would have in regards to sustainability in schools. Maia Riggs (‘25) stated in her testimony that “these budget cuts have implications for our ability to pass legislation surrounding the Green New Deal for Schools, such as sustainable curriculum.”

The Sunrise Hub continues to advocate for more sustainability throughout DCPS and Mayer said that, “we need to do anything we can do to show the city how much we care about schools and how unwilling we are to sacrifice our education because of money problems.”

Evie Corr (‘25), vice president of the Health Justice Club, focused on how Walls does not have a full-time nurse. She said that “nurses are

crucial for the support of students with chronic illnesses, but aside from that nurses can help students with their physical and emotional well being, offer guidance on healthy habits and be a trusted adult to turn to in times of need.” As of now, Walls only has a nurse three days a week, and most DCPS schools only have a nurse at school once a week. This is because of a “cluster” system that DCPS has implemented, and this means that nurses float throughout multiple schools in a week, making it much harder to build connections.

Campbell further mentioned the nurse shortage in her testimony, saying “one of my close friends got sick at school, and when there was no one to turn to she ended up staying in class. Later that night she ended up in the ER which could have been prevented had there been a full-time nurse in her school.” Both Corr and Campbell made clear to the council that this is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed.

Despite the overwhelming support for the teacher and programs at risk, an alternative budget has yet to materialize. Rosen and the LSAT met with an advisor for Ward 2 Councilmember Brooke Pinto, who said that a change might be possible through a budget amendment in June.

The budget hearing proved the overwhelming strength of the School Without Walls community as students from all grade levels students presented their arguments as a united front. Education is not just about the numbers on a budget sheet, it is about investing in the students’ futures, and cutting the school’ budget by 9.41% is something the students will not stand for. ●

Walls Students Visit Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, and More

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powerful Mughal Empire, which oversaw much of the construction of India’s architectural achievements such as the Taj Mahal. They also visited many religious sites, including Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist temples.

They also got the chance to explore the city itself. They visited a crowded Delhi spice market, navigating through roadways packed with people. Gabe Garcia (‘24) said, “I knew that India was just going to be huge, obviously. But it was still a little shocking in person.” With a city proper population of more than 11 million, Delhi was unlike any other visit for the students. “It was a little hectic and it was a little confusing, but we all kind of knew the plan and learned the city together,” said Mr. Webster.

Next, the group drove around three hours to Agra, a city best known as the site of the Taj Mahal. They stayed for one night, and woke up at 4:30am to view the monument at sunrise. “Seeing the Taj Mahal was probably the highlight,” said Mia Turcotte-Keen (‘24), “It was beautiful.” From Agra, the travelers headed to Jaipur, which was filled with more history, architectural marvels, and, notably, shopping. During their three nights in the city, the Penguins spent time exploring the bazaars and collecting souvenirs.

Jaipur is “a big textile city historically,” according to Garcia. They saw “cool handmade scarfs [and] shirts,” he said, which many people bought to take home. Garcia didn’t spend much time on the textiles, but bought a “handmade chess set” for his dad and “earrings” and “some silver stuff” for his mom and his sister. “The nice thing about India is that a lot of stuff was not crazy expensive,” Garcia said.

That said, few of the prices are fixed and students enjoyed learning how to haggle.



Travelers woke up early to see the sun rise over the Taj Mahal / Via @swwadventure

“You get really used to this is the price and either I’d take it or leave it. But in India, all the prices were up for debate,” said Mr. Webster. Turcotte-Keen explained how to haggle: “You just are like, ‘oh, 500? No, I only have 200.’ I was bad at it, but it was fun.”

At first, “some people fell for some prices that were just ridiculous.” But they soon learned that, “the second you started trying to get the [price] down, they would just shoot all the way down,” explained Garcia.

Haggling was facilitated by the fact that many people in India speak English. Garcia remarked that, “there was a lot of English speakers, who spoke at least rudimentary English.” He found this surprising given that India’s current government “has pretty widespread campaigns that aren’t particularly favorable of English

speaking in general” because of the prominence of Hindu nationalism.

Also in Jaipur, the group visited the Amber Fort, a magnificent palace located at the top of a mountain and beside a large lake.

Their time in Jaipur was marked by the “split between ancient cultural sites and then a lot of slightly more modern shopping stuff,” Garcia said, and he learned travel skills like “looking around, not falling for tourist traps, [and] not falling for scams, for prices that are crazy inflated.”

As the trip progressed, students became more comfortable maneuvering their way through India. Mr. Webster explained that the teacher chaperones shifted toward giving stu-

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Food Poisoning Hits All But Two Returning From India

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dents more independence, “eventually transitioning to the students ordering all the food for the group,” and being open to changing itineraries if students wanted to visit certain site. “We wanted to do what they wanted to do,” explained Mr. Webster, and “it transitioned [away] from a very teacher-led trip, and, by the end, we were really looking for the students to guide us in a lot of ways.”

To conclude the trip, the nine students and their accompanying staff members boarded a flight south, to the Ellora Heritage Resort. Here, the Penguins experienced a smaller village which gave them a chance to reflect on their trip.

“We had gone everywhere and been busy every single day, but [the last day] was just a nice day to chill, but then also enjoy the scenery, the country, and spend time just reflecting,” Turcotte-Keen said.

The resort seemed to be a favorite destination among the travelers. “The resort was amazing,” said Nadim Franzese (‘24).

Garcia really enjoyed getting to know “all the people [they] interacted with at the resort.” Finally, while most of the group stayed at the resort to relax or shop, a few students went on one last excursion to the Ajanta Caves, a two-hour

drive from Ellora in “kind of the middle of nowhere,” according to Mr. Webster.

“It was these crazy 2,000-year-old caves that were just hand-carved out of the mountain by Buddhist monks. And they would use them as monasteries during the wet season. And then they were just massive. They had these super intricate paintings and carvings on the Walls. And there were 25 - 28 - of them,” said Garcia.

“Not many humans have seen it,” said Mr. Webster, “So its kind of cool to get off the beaten track a little bit.”

By the end of the trip, the group found that they had learned a lot about India.

“I was surprised about the density of the population,” said Franzese, “I obviously knew it as a statistic, but actually seeing it was very... I don’t know. It put things into perspective. It’s very packed in there.”

Students also enjoyed various foods, including “paneer,” a cheese dish found in a lot of vegetarian dishes and “butter naans,” which “were so rich ... not like anything you can find here,” according to Franzese.

Despite the overall success of the trip, the group left India in a bad state. All but one student and one chaperone came down with food poisoning, which happened to hit at the beginning of their three-layover, four-flight voyage home.

Over the course of the trip, the group had been careful of what they drank due to concerns about water quality in India, but “at the end we let down our guard a teeny bit, we had this like really amazing feast the last day and had some really good sugarcane juice that was made fresh in a market,” Mr. Webster explained. “One of those things had some water that was contaminated or something.” Turcotte-Keen theorizes that it was the sugarcane juice “because they were washing it in water.”

“It was rough . . . Everyone was just feeling really bad on the plane and feeling bad at the airports,” said Garcia.

“Some of us could barely walk. One of us was in a wheelchair,” added Franzese. “The first leg of the trip [home] was extremely difficult for me, personally. I was very dizzy, dehydrated, and I couldn’t drink anything because I’d just throw it up immediately.”

On a more positive note, Garcia did say he was glad that they had gotten sick upon returning home, rather than during the trip itself. And despite this complication, most of the trip went very smoothly.

“We [visited] four different cities and it felt like we did a lot of really cool exploring,” said Mr. Webster, “and I feel like in my trip I learned like there’s 70 other places that we should have gotten to, so I really hope I get to go back someday.” ●

“Rent” Dazzles Audiences, Highlights Value of Theater Dept

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expressed, “I look forward to working on the play each year, I love seeing the community come together.”

Though some aspects of the production came easier than others, casting was one of the hardest parts of the play. Finding people for different roles was difficult, and many parts were recast multiple times. For example, Avajane Lei (‘24) was recast twice before landing the role of Maureen. Although she initially was initially least interested in playing that role, she ended up loving Maureen and described her as “the perfect role” for her.

Another difficulty the production faced was learning to do “Rent” as an opera, a musical where every single line is sung. Ms. Z expressed the difficulty of having high schoolers sing a two-hour show saying, “it was hard to find how we were going to approach rehearsal in a way that we could keep the show the way it is” Through practice, the cast was eventually able to learn how to overcome this challenge.

Unlike many other musicals, “Rent” is a “plot-less play,” according to Lei. Instead of having a structured plotline, “Rent” showcases the year in the life of a group of friends.

The play opens in a warehouse loft apartment, in the Alphabet City neighborhood. As the musical progresses, the lives of the friends unfold, tackling themes of love, loss, and community.

Through these themes, the play promotes the messages of having deep love and care for the people around you, while appreciating the time you have with them. Addis Getachew (‘27), a member of the ensemble, described the message as “living in the moment and enjoying what you have.” Ms. Z further described the message of the play. “Friendship can be difficult, it can make you face truths but it also helps you be better and grow together.”

Not only does the play promote the ideas of community and love, it also addresses some very serious issues, namely the AIDS crisis. Alex Benach (‘24) who played Angel in cast B, believes it is important to talk about the lives lost during this time. He stated, “Rent high-



Image of Closing Night, full cast, Ensemble, and Stage Band (top) and image of Cast A performing (bottom) / Via Avajane Lei

lights those stories and to say there is still joy to be found in those stories is really important.”

This production of Rent was especially impactful because it may be the last play put on by School Without Walls for some time. With the impending budget cuts, Walls could lose funding for crucial programs, such as the theater department. Lei (‘24) said, “the possibility of the performing arts department being completely demolished is really scary and honestly really sad.”

The theater department is not just a way to put on amazing shows, it is also a place where many find community. Jett Morad-McCoy (‘26)

who is part of the ensemble, said, “theater has given me a place where I can just forget about all this stress from schoolwork and have this community.” Another actor, Rowan King (‘25), said, “it’s honestly been one of the most enjoyable experiences of my time at Walls.”

Theater provides a way for students to express and enjoy themselves, and some students fear that it could be very hard without Ms. Z. Benach said, “the abilities she has are not replicable and cannot be taught in other classes.” When talking about Ms. Z, Morad-McCoy said, “she really helped me find my voice at this school.” ●

As APs Approach, Walls Counselor and Psychologist Give Advice

By Eve Rebora ('25)
Staff Writer

One-third of high school students face mental health challenges, a percentage that has only increased in recent years, according to CDC data. Walls students are no exception to this trend, and with APs, college decisions, and final report cards right around the corner, mental health has become especially pertinent. Thankfully, SWW is equipped with a team of mental health staff to help support students: school psychologist Dr. Lori McDowell and social worker Elizabeth Kosin. Here are just a few of their tips for getting through the stress and mental drain of the school year.

Recognize the Signs

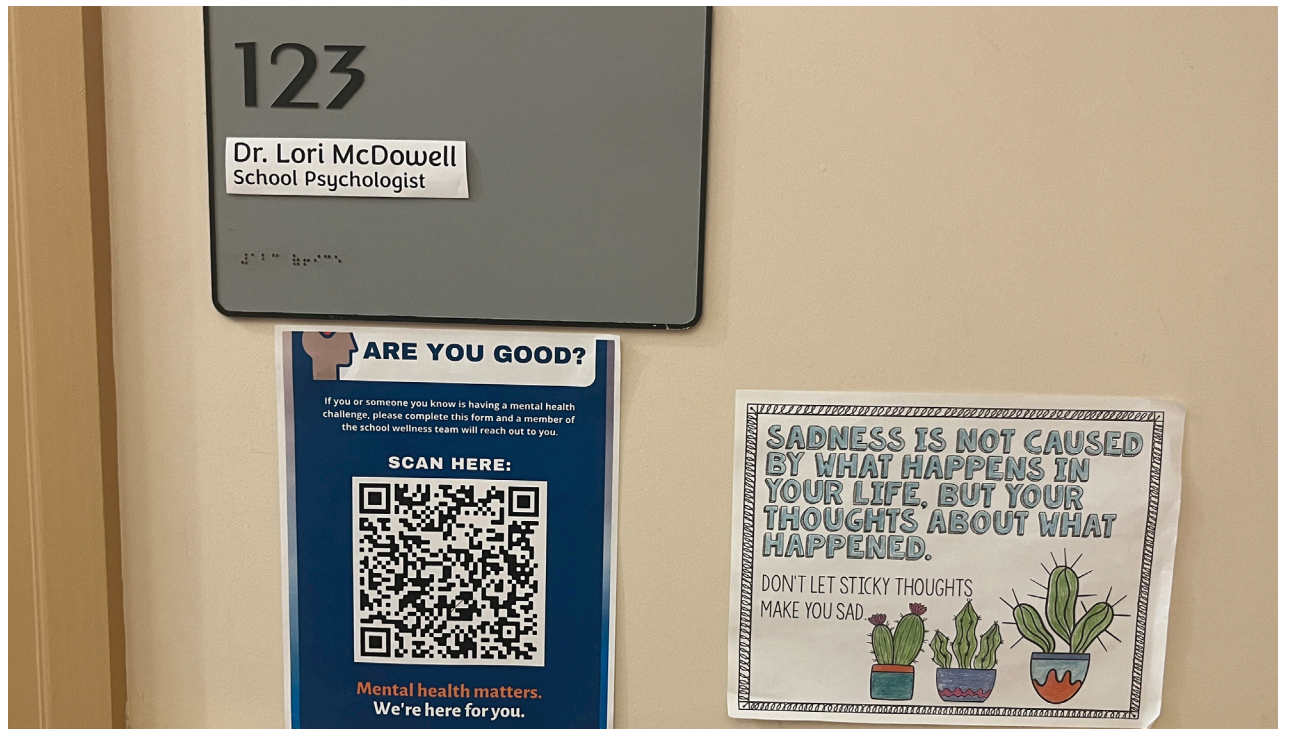
Ms. Kosin stressed that students consistently don't extend themselves "enough compassion and grace to rest," as many prioritize their grades and activities over their own needs. To combat this, students must try to be cognizant of when they need extra support and rest.

Although Ms. Kosin notes that everyone's body responds in different ways, physical symptoms are a red flag that should signal to students that they need to take a break. These symptoms can include low energy levels, stomach pain, and trouble sleeping, among others.

Signals in the form of physical symptoms are the body's way of saying "hey, pay attention," explained Ms. Kosin, and students should respond to those signs by setting down the textbooks and getting some rest. "A car going 100 miles an hour is gonna crash," analogized Dr. McDowell.

Be Honest with Yourself and Others

Upon recognizing the signs of mental health strain, students should address it



Dr. McDowell's room is on the first floor, in room 123 / Credits: David Sipos

with themselves and others. Ms. Kosin said one of the biggest problems with mental health at SWW is the issue of "masking." Students feel ashamed about struggling mentally, making it hard to solve the issue. Students can't give themselves support or receive support from others if they're unable to honestly assess their mental state.

Prioritize Mood Boosters

Students can often get wrapped up in what they need to do for school rather than for themselves. A healthy mental state requires balancing between the two. Ms. Kosin recommends asking "what are those things that give you joy?" And making it a priority to implement them in a daily routine. She suggests that students should implement mood boosters "not just in the short term to get out of negative feelings" but in more consistent, long-term habits. These can be

fun activities like hanging out with friends or practicing hobbies.

But Dr. McDowell emphasizes that these habits can be as simple as eating a well-balanced breakfast and getting a good night's sleep, simple steps that can promote joy and even help students to perform better in school. Students should focus on doing the tasks that make them feel good on a consistent basis to consistently see results.

Give Yourself Enough Time

For students anxious about tests, Ms. Kosin stressed the idea that students should give themselves enough time in advance to study. Students should be "able to rest and restore and study over a period of time versus cramming in one moment or not doing

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Wizards and Caps to Stay in DC, Despite Budget Shortfall

By Mitchell Kasdan ('27)
Staff Writer

In the early months of 2024, a proposed deal to move the Washington Wizards and Capitals across the Potomac River seemed almost inevitable. Key word: almost. On March 27, Ted Leonsis, owner of the Monumental Sports group that owns both the Wizards and Capitals, came to an agreement with the city of DC to cancel the move to Virginia.

The agreement will have DC contribute \$550 million towards renovations to the teams' Capital One Arena. In return, Leonsis will sign a 25-year lease to keep both teams in the District until 2050.

This is good news for almost every sports fan. While a new arena would have nicer amenities, the downtown Capital One Arena is much better at harnessing the energy of a city in any potential playoff runs.

For some DC residents, however, the news comes at an inopportune time. The announcement of the deal came only one week from the budget hearing where Mayor Muriel Bowser proposed a budget that would result in painful staffing cuts for the large



DC has had to balance funding Capital One Arena renovations and other priorities, like funding WMATA / Credits: Mitchell Kasdan

majority of DCPS schools, including Walls losing nearly \$250,000. The mayor's budget would result in more crowded classes and limit students' choices in taking classes.

This begs the question, what was the best choice for DC in this scenario? Was it a wise investment decision for the future of the city to spend so much money to keep two sports teams in the face of budget problems?

Or would the money have had a greater impact on the daily life of a DCPS student if it was spent elsewhere?

"Realistically, I probably could have benefited more directly if the money was used for better transit or being put into

DCPS," said Travis Tiller ('24), a Washington Wizards fan who featured in a previous Rookery article on this topic. However, he added "I think that saying money shouldn't be used for one thing because other things need money is not a great way to look at things."

Alex Benach ('24), an occasional Capitals fan, disagreed, saying "to me it's so ironic to have a discussion about school budget cuts while giving 500 million to sports teams."

He described the cost to DC as "a ridiculous amount of money."

Tiller claimed that, "sports teams are in

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PERSPECTIVES

Senioritis: Good or Bad?

As seniors enter the last few months before graduation, many come down with a bug known as “senioritis.” Symptoms include getting to school late, skipping class, forgetting to turn in assignments, and an overall marked decrease in motivation. But is this disease as bad as it seems?

Relax, It’s Senior Year

By David Sipos ('24)
Editor-in-Chief

“I have never let my schooling interfere with my education”
- Mark Twain

I have received many dire warnings from family, friends, and teachers about senioritis. This so-called affliction is supposedly ruinous for our senior year. A sort of apathy settles in, with little desire or motivation to complete our schoolwork. We’re told this is impermissible, that we must maintain the highest standard of work all the way through June.

But senioritis is not an affliction. It is an opportunity.

For four years, students have been under immense pressure - from ourselves, from parents, from teachers - with the expectation that our lives must revolve around school.

We must commit hours each night to homework, we must have the highest quality work all the time.

This hasn’t been without its costs. Every student has made sacrifices in their attempts to excel academically. We’ve sacrificed time with friends, time to pursue our passions, and healthy sleep schedules.

For ambitious students like those at Walls, these sacrifices are understandable, to a degree. But in these last few months, with seniors’ paths in Fall pretty much set, Senioritis simply proposes that we let up on the sacrifice, even just a little. For some, this means shooting for an A- instead of an A. For others, it means worrying less about missing the occasional deadline.

I don’t suggest that anyone completely disregard academic responsibility. But by carefully and choicefully redistributing some of our effort on academics towards ourselves, we can see meaningful benefits before we graduate in June.

A little less focus can mean fewer late worknights. It can mean fewer lost lunches. It can mean less rushing home to complete work. With all this reclaimed time, we can pursue the opportunities we’ve missed out on for years.

In senior year, I’ve relaxed my commitment to waking up early to have an hour to work before class. Instead, I’ve slept in more, and taken the slower transport option - a calming bike ride through Rock Creek - to school, feeling better mentally and physically. In senior year, I’ve spent fewer weekends hunched over my desk to perfect every assignment. Instead, I’ve spent more time with friends. In senior year, less of my evenings have been consumed by homework. Instead, I’ve taken up an instrument and had more time to read.

I could not have accomplished these things in my earlier high school years. The price of this was, yes, slightly lower quality work. I’ve missed some deadlines. For this, I am “suffering” from senioritis.

Some may decry this view as neglecting my education. But my education is not confined to the hours I sit in a classroom. My education is the books I read, the museums I visit, and the invaluable conversations I have with peers who I will rarely see after graduation. Is that education worth giving up to fill out a tedious analysis of a Ted Talk? No, it is not. As a victim of senioritis, I believe in education; I don’t believe in sacrificing it for my work. ●

Don’t Wish Away High School

By Sara Weinrod ('24)
Editor-in-Chief

“The trouble is, you think you have time.” - Jack Kornfield

When I say senioritis is bad, I’m not talking about slacking off a little bit in school. I’m not talking about staying up a little too late or cutting a couple of classes. And I’m not talking about allowing the security of a college acceptance to give you the freedom to let loose a bit and have fun with your friends in your last semester as a high schooler.

I take issue with senioritis because I see it as a symptom of a deadlier disease — delayed happiness syndrome. Delayed happiness syndrome is the habit of postponing enjoyment of life until after the completion of a daunting task, whether that be an assignment, test, or college application.

This affliction is not to be confused with positive traits like

disciplined habits and the ability to delay gratification, both of which are necessary to lead a productive and fulfilling life. Delayed gratification is good, and involves putting aside momentary whims and sacrificing immediate desires in pursuit of a larger, and ultimately more satisfactory, goal.

On the contrary, delayed happiness involves an endless cycle of postponement and is characterized by the inability to enjoy meaningful activities while a task or deadline looms above. For some of us, Walls students in particular, delayed gratification turns into this vicious pattern of deferral.

Over my four years at Walls, I can’t count the number of times I’ve had friends say things like “I’ll go out with my friends once I get an A on so-and-so test” or “Once I’ve finished this essay then I can

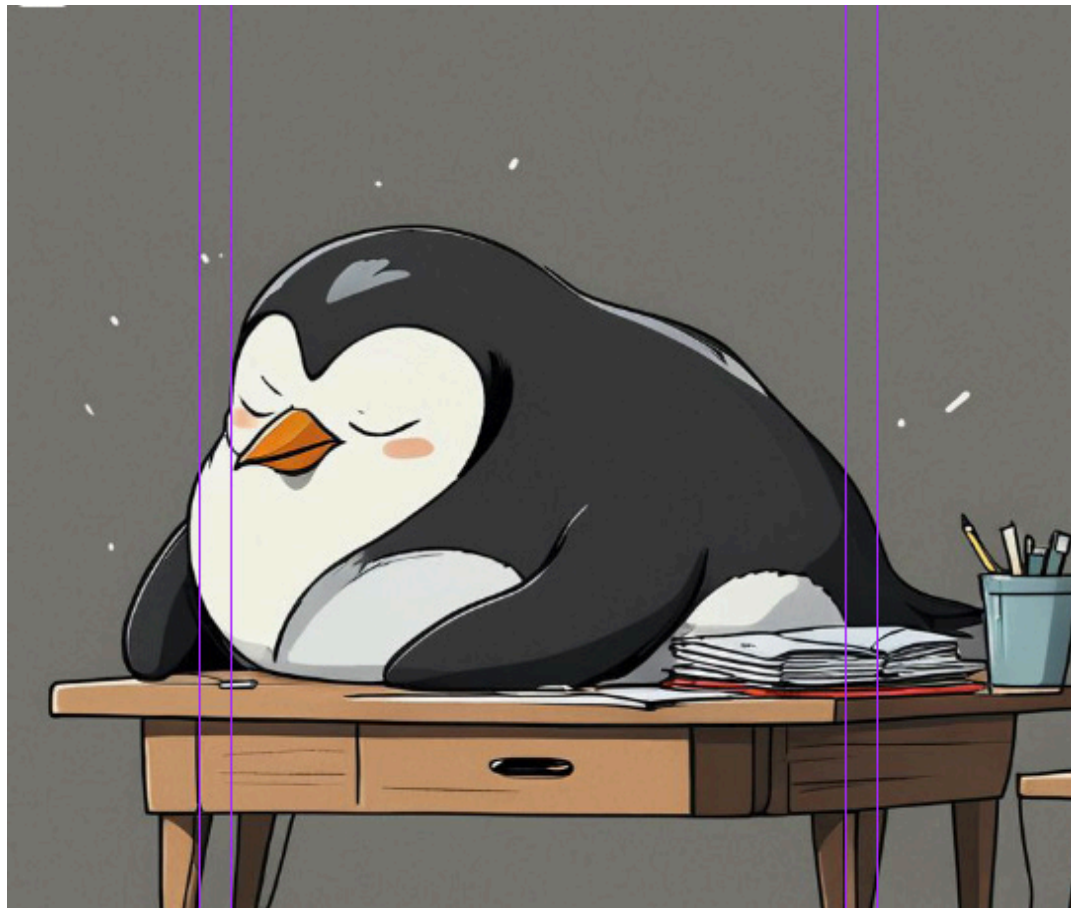
relax.” I’ve been guilty of such sentiments myself, always waiting for that time when there’s nothing left to do. But before we know it, years have passed and we’ve wished away our adolescence.

If you, like me, tend to think this way, let me give you some hard-earned advice. There will always be tasks left on your to-do list. There will always be another test, another essay, another assignment.

The pursuit of an empty agenda is futile, especially as we transition to the workforce. At school, we over 100 days off, the combined result of summer vacation, winter break, spring break, and numerous other breaks. Jobs in the U.S. have, on average, 11-20 days of paid vacation, allowing much less time for rest and recuperation.

I will readily admit that not all students fall into the trap of “delaying happiness,” nor have a problem with enjoying their lives while working hard. This article is not for you guys — keep doing what you’re doing. But I know that myself, and many people I know, postponed a lot of their enjoyment of high school until senior year, resulting in severe cases of senioritis. If we hadn’t caught a case of delayed happiness syndrome early on in our high school careers, the senioritis bug may not have hit us so hard.

Going forward, the key is to find a balance between planning for the future and living in the moment. Because just like you shouldn’t live your life waiting for the weekend, you shouldn’t spend high school waiting for the second semester of your senior year. But since I’m here, and there’s no going back, I will certainly take David’s words to heart and focus on enjoying the time we have left. ●



Generated by NightCafe Creator in response to the prompt “Penguin sleeps at school desk”

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Electing to Go the Extra Mile: Gabri Kurtzer-Ellenbogen Stands Out Among Young Political Organizers

By Zoe Becker ('26)
News Editor

Gabri Kurtzer-Ellenbogen ('24) lives a double life. The Walls senior, a self-described “shy introvert” around those who know her best, spends nearly forty hours per week on what she refers to as her “campaign alter ego.” This more outgoing, talkative version of herself is the deputy field director for Maryland state delegate Joe Vogel’s bid for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

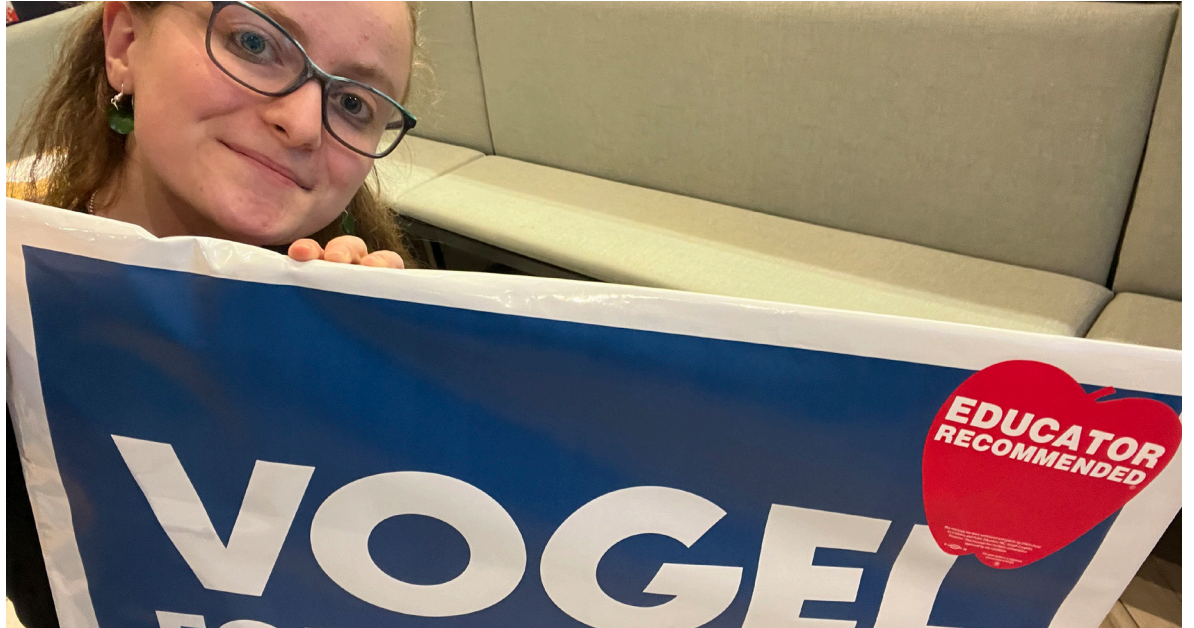
Kurtzer-Ellenbogen’s path to a full-time job with the Vogel campaign was a nontraditional one. In the summer of 2020, stuck at home with her usual summer camp plans having been canceled due to Covid, a family friend referred Kurtzer-Ellenbogen to a program called Teens for Biden.

In the months leading up to the 2020 election, program participants spent three hours a week together on Zoom; one hour of training to make campaign-related calls and another two hours phonebanking - calling voters in Pennsylvania to support the Biden campaign..

When she started, Kurtzer-Ellenbogen knew little about policy or campaigning. “I remember being really nervous ahead of making calls,” she said. Still, over the course of several weeks, Kurtzer-Ellenbogen overcame her nerves and came to love campaign fieldwork. “I felt like I was making a difference,” she said.

During the program, Kurtzer-Ellenbogen connected with her now mentor and Democratic organizer, Eva Wyner, who was then working in Delaware County, Pennsylvania. Wyner, who now serves as the Deputy Director of Jewish Affairs for New York Governor Kathy Hochul, encouraged Kurtzer-Ellenbogen to continue campaign work and referred her to others who could help her do more organizing. “I credit her with getting me to stay involved,” Kurtzer-Ellenbogen said.

And stay involved she did. Within a few months, Kurtzer-Ellenbogen wasn’t just participating in phonebanks, but regularly attending and occasionally running them as she



Kurtzer-Ellenbogen holds a sign up for Joe Vogel / Credits: Gabri Kurtzer-Ellenbogen

felt a growing connection to the campaign.

Immediately after the 2020 presidential campaign, Kurtzer-Ellenbogen shifted her focus from Pennsylvania to the Georgia Senate runoff race, working significantly on phonebanking for then-candidate Jon Ossoff. By then, Kurtzer-Ellenbogen was part of the campaign world to stay. She described feeling a “campaign high” at the end of elections.

After the Ossoff race, she returned her attention to Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Bucks County has been at the center of national controversies surrounding school boards and book banning.

“With each new campaign,” she said, “I was earning more responsibility and learning more about the voter file system.” She was an invested part of field teams in Bucks County, regularly making the three-hour trip to Pennsylvania from DC to knock on voters’ doors.

Last fall, she worked on local school board elections in Bucks County, helping to win five seats and successfully flip the board.

While in the Bucks County Democratic office this summer, she received shocking news. Joe Vogel, who she described as a celebrity in the young Jewish Democratic world, had followed her on Twitter.

As she would later find out, her mentor Wyner was friends with Vogel and had referred Kurtzer-Ellenbogen to him as a way of supporting his efforts to build up field initiatives in his congressional campaign.

In January, Kurtzer-Ellenbogen officially

signed on as the Deputy Field Director for the Vogel campaign, a full-time position which entails connecting volunteers with appropriate fieldwork, managing other field organizers and fellows, and of course, volunteering. “We’re a small team, I need to be doing that as well,” she said.

Kurtzer-Ellenbogen, too, continually works on updating the Vogel campaign’s field plan for how to best reach voters, and which voters to reach, via text, call, and door knocking.

A full time job while a full time student, in the GW Early College Program no less, is not without its challenges. “It’s not good for my grades,” Kurtzer-Ellenbogen joked. Add senioritis on top of that, “somehow the hours will go by and by the end of the day I’ve done nothing,” she said.

Despite the challenges, Kurtzer-Ellenbogen keeps coming back to campaign work. “It’s exhilarating,” she said, “I love the energy and I’m working for a candidate I believe in so it’s fulfilling.”

Looking forward, Kurtzer-Ellenbogen plans on taking a gap year to work more on the Vogel campaign as well as Joe Biden’s 2024 election campaign before attending the University of Pennsylvania (conveniently located near both Bucks and Delaware County).

Campaign work, though, is exhausting, and Kurtzer-Ellenbogen doesn’t see herself

Kurtzer-Ellenbogen continued on page 8

DC Sports Teams

Wizards and Caps continued from page 4

credibly important to a city, so keeping them here can be part of a multi-step and multi-approach plan to address other problems in the city, like DCPS shortcomings, or anything else really.” Benach saw it differently. “There are thousands of things that should happen before” funding the stadium deal, he said. “I’m not anti- the teams being in DC... I just feel like there are bigger fish to fry with that money.”

Beyond DCPS, Mayor Bowser has said that many other government agencies will face budget cuts this year. At the same time, she has attempted to attract the Washington Commanders back to RFK stadium, which would likely require even more city funding for renovations.

While it might seem like an extravagant expense to keep the teams in the city, the teams also produce economically for DC. Every single ticket sale, food and drink purchase, and jersey sale benefits the city in the form of tax revenues. Tiller said “while we are facing a lot of issues with the budget... if the Wizards and/or Caps can be successful in the city, it will bring a lot of attention and money.” The stadium increases foot traffic to restaurants and other businesses in the area, and visits from away fans increase tourism revenue for the city. Playoff appearances, which are common in the NBA and NHL, can give a big boost economically to the city. “Sports teams bring in a ton of money, and if the city can capitalize on the money coming in, they could end up profiting from this move,” Tiller said. ●

Tackling AP Stress

Mental health continued from page 4

at all.” Not only does this provide more time to study, but the balanced approach also benefits students’ wellness. In fact, studies find that rest is beneficial to memorization and therefore is key to allowing enough chances to rest during testing season rather than pulling a late night cram session. As Dr. McDowell added, “your brain is processing all the information you’ve gotten all day and it needs a little downtime overnight with sleeping.”

Discover Your Coping Methods

There are so many different coping skills for testing anxiety and it can be very helpful to test out which skill works best before testing day. Determining what works best to give “yourself that miniature rest or break during the test, or when you’re studying” is essential. This could be taking deep

breaths, noticing three things you can touch, feel, and smell, or even taking a bathroom break for a change of scenery. There are so many different coping skills out there and what works is “individually specific” which is why it can be helpful to try out multiple and stick to whatever works best for you.

Seek out Further Help

Even after seeking out all the quick coping skills and strategies many students may feel that they are still experiencing poor mental health. “I want young people to know that if that is happening, it’s not a moral failure,” Ms. Kosin says. This often means a student needs more support and should seek help from parents, guardians, or mental health staff. Both Dr. McDowell and Ms. Kosin are more than happy to provide support to students who feel they need it.

●



Crino qualified for the Junior World Championship for K1 and Kayak Cross / Via @LucyCrino

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Lucy Crino to the Canoe Slalom Junior World Championship

By Brady Woodhouse '25)
Staff Writer

Lucy Crino ('25) is making waves in the white water world of canoe slalom. Overcoming a broken ankle, Crino has made her way into the Junior World Championship for K1 this summer in Liptoský, Slovakia.

Crino's journey into canoe slalom was the result of COVID-19 pandemic boredom.

Initially unfamiliar with the sport, Crino's introduction came when her mother sought an outlet to keep her active during the months at home. "She needed to get me out of the house and I was like 'alright,'" Crino recalled. Despite her initial

indifference, signing up for a canoe slalom summer camp was a decision that would change Crino's life trajectory.

Canoe slalom is a competitive sport where racers navigate white water courses in three different disciplines, C1, K1, and Kayak Cross. C1 and K1 are time trials, the former in a canoe and the latter in a kayak, while Kayak Cross is a two-person kayak race. Since Crino has started Canoe Slalom, she has engaged in all three disciplines.

Crino was drawn to the adrenaline and challenge of canoe slalom, especially being surrounded by skilled peers at the camp. Crino has joined the Potomac White Water Racing Center, and has made Walls proud with her achievements in the sport. She has been incredibly dedicated to the

sport, but broke her ankle in winter of 2023, preventing her from participating in C1 competitions this year. "It was very sad that I couldn't participate in C1 during Team Trials this year," Crino said. "I was out of the boat from January until March which was really stressful," Crino explained. With her broken ankle, she wasn't cleared to get in the boat for the winter months, when she had intended to attend an intensive white water training camp in preparation for Team Trials.

Despite this, she has made the most out of participating in only K1 and Kayak Cross. Crino reached out to her coach and followed a gym exercise plan that was compliant with doctor's orders, ensuring she was prepared once cleared to practice.

On April 13 and 14, Crino attended Team Trials in Alabama, which decided the three participants on each section of the World Championship. "There's a junior team, senior team, U23 team, Olympic team and more," she said. Facing an uphill battle with her injury, Crino vied for the junior team for canoe slalom racers under 18.

She was finally cleared in the weeks before the competition and got some practice on the Feeder Canal, but she knew that its tame waters wouldn't prepare her for Team Trials. She finally went out to Alabama in preparation and "practiced more in those seven days than what I had in the prior three months combined which was intense," Crino said.

The work Crino put in paid off, and she qualified for the Junior World Championship for K1 and Kayak Cross. Crino enjoyed the journey with her peers in the sport and was ecstatic to see her hard work pay off.

Crino showcased remarkable determination and resilience in pursuit of her passion that should inspire the Walls community. ●

CONNECTIONS WITHOUT WALLS

By Max Goldberg ('24)
Puzzle Editor

Find nine groups of four SWW-related items that share something in common. While some words may fit into multiple categories, there is only one solution for the entire puzzle.

Category Examples:

Trig Functions: Sine, Cosine, Tangent, Secant

Standardized Tests: PARCC, SAT, NMSQT, Anet

BULL	GELMAN	HUB	MODULES	TEAM	KNIGHT
ASSESSMENTS	WILKINS	WEB	MARVIN	PRACTICE	YEAR
SAQ	PERIOD	ENGAGEMENT	HARDGE	DASHBOARD	CAT
KOGAN	ASSOCIATION	SEMESTER	MCQ	APPLICATION	TORNADO
LOCKDOWN	DBQ	COURSES	ABBAS	VROOM	LISNER
DISCUSSIONS	FIRE	UNION	EARTHQUAKE	TERM	LEQ

COMICS

"Oh No"

By Derek Emons ('24)
Resident Artist



Campaigning is Tiring

Kurtzer-Ellenbogen continued from page 6

doing it forever. Following college and a few more years campaigning, "I'd love to be a high school civics teacher," she said, adding that "I'm also really interested in field organizing outside of the campaign world, maybe in the non-profit sector."

Regardless of which path she follows, options abound for Kurtzer-Ellenbogen, so clearly her campaign alter ego is doing something right. ●

CROSSWORD

Big Decisions

By Max Goldberg ('24)
Puzzle Editor

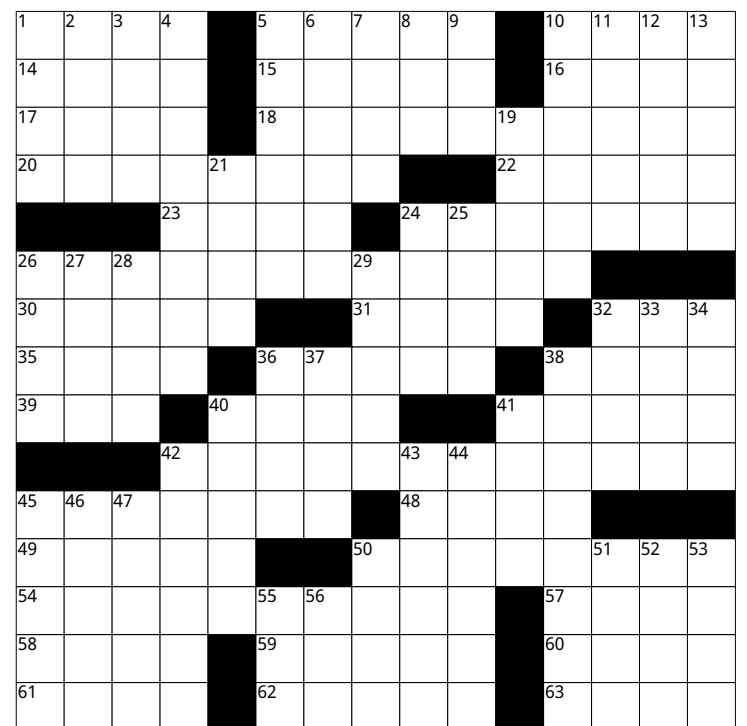
ACROSS

- 1 Sushi base
5 Replaceable lamp parts
10 ___ Ellington
14 Absolute legend
15 Poppy drug
16 Humerus neighbor
17 Out of juice
18 Protestor's medium
20 Held in high regard
22 Ambulance noise
23 Maintain
24 Opens, as documents
26 Places for our senior citizens... or what 1A, 10A, 41A, 45A, and 50A all are
30 Diner strips
31 Ruckuses
32 Feeling blue
35 Penultimate word in a fairytale
36 Spoiled bread?
38 Tidal Basin Drive
39 "The Catcher in the ___"
40 Star Wars villains
41 Toast
42 Buffet style
45 Humanities I note format
48 Tea with tapioca
49 Modify, as the Constitution
50 C in DC
54 Comes to terms
57 Messes up

- 58 South Korea's first president
59 Prefix with grade or meter
60 Swoosh company
61 Cheering words
62 Command-Z, on paper
63 Something to study for

DOWN

- 1 Astronaut Sally
2 Clinches
3 ___ of arms
4 Undertaking
5 Person born in the 50s
6 Some teeth
7 Stretched the truth
8 Ponytail alternative
9 T-shirt sizes, abbr.
10 Obligations
11 Michelob ___
12 Get down to earth?
13 Merits
19 Twists and turns
21 Neck and neck
24 Elec., e.g.
25 Supreme Court count
26 Rideshare giant
27 Color at sea?
28 Slurpie alternative
29 Boise state
32 Foot apparel
33 Bygone audio brand
34 Word of warning
36 Window base
37 Texting farewell
38 Christmas hanging
40 They go downhill
41 Hindu "sir"
42 Years, in Mr. Mifdal's class
43 WW2 subs
44 Border ___
45 Top-selling Toyota
46 Largest city in Nebraska
47 Enter again, as a password
50 Wrestler John
51 French cheese
52 Bugs
53 Play ___ (with the band)
55 King topper?
56 Austrian article



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Find us on Mondays at 8:30 a.m. in room 127 to contribute to the paper!