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Clare's Corner

Spreading, maintaining and having hope

STORY, PHOTOS AND GRAPHICS: CLARE JONES, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

As the world begins to ring in the new year and look ahead, I believe it is essential to look back on the monumental events that shaped the year 2020 to be a dishearteningly memorable one. The year began with a pandemic along with growing social and political unrest. Through it all, it is important to maintain hope for a better future.

Fortunately, these obstreperous events of 2020 were somewhat offset by some positive historic accomplishments. Scientists discovered two vaccines to stop the transmission of COVID-19, Space X resparked space exploration, carbon emissions fell and the country elected its first female vice president.

Like many of you, I was compelled to be at home more during the holiday break due to COVID-19. However, during this time off I began to reflect on the simple activities that give me a sense of optimism. Some of those things include sleeping late in the mornings, strolling through my neighborhood, motioning a friendly “hello” to my neighbors, reading a good book and completing complex jigsaw puzzles. But, the favorite of all my activities was the several visits to the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Often, I have found myself taking trips downtown where I roamed freely through both the rotating and permanent galleries of fine art exhibits. My first trip to the museum during the break eventually turned into multiple visits which, led to the realization of my newfound appreciation of art. While staring at the portraits and murals that tell stories of oppression, the development of Christianity, Detroit’s unique architecture, and the earth’s beauty, I discovered that these historic images demonstrate how people overcame moments of despair. In a very poignant way, the art displayed examples of individuals finding hope to have the outcomes of their lives be better.

Art has allowed people all over the world to connect regardless of gender, race, age, social class,

language, philosophies, etc. Art styles such as Abstract and Cubism force viewers to observe and interpret what the artist is trying to portray while other art genres such as Impressionism and Contemporary styles allow patrons to more clearly understand the imagery that is on the canvas.

For example, historic artwork like Diego Rivera’s “Detroit Industry Mural,” located on the second floor of the DIA, illustrates a culturally diverse group of Ford Motor Company employees working on, what was then considered modern technology, an assembly line to manufacture automobiles. Furthermore, Rivera intended to create a mural that celebrates the automobile industry that is indigenous to Detroit’s culture and to provide a symbol of hope during a time when the country was in the Great Depression where the U.S. was challenged with providing jobs for millions struggling financially. At the time, Diego’s mural provided a common thread of hope that the community could wrap their arms around. This encouragement is relevant today as many people are unemployed due to the negative impact the pandemic has had on the economy.

Also, art can be nostalgic for some, evoking memories of better times filled with enjoyable celebrations with friends and family. Similarly, George Wesley Bellow’s 1913 “A Day in June” shows a crowd of people impeccably dressed in New York City’s Central Park, with their faces illuminated with joy. The piece’s simplicity of the earthly green tones that elegantly balance with multiple shades of white immediately reminded me of being outside during summer parties. Unlike our current circumstances, the painting’s depiction of a large group participating in a festive event during a summer day gave me hope that we will soon return to socializing in person with one another and enjoy an event outside like a concert or a ball game.

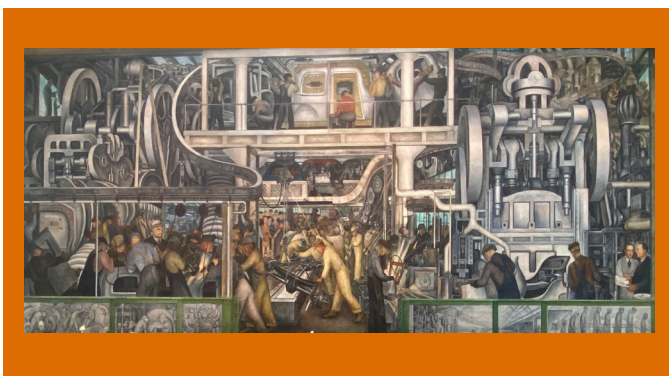
The depiction of our everyday lives or current events

in art allows us to see ourselves in the image that is being portrayed. Pablo Picasso’s 1938 ‘Girl Reading’ simply depicts a young girl engaging deeply with a book in hand. Despite the art’s straightforward appearance, Picasso is able to highlight the girl to be at peace doing a simple activity like reading. This painting is one that I particularly like as I am an avid reader. But more importantly, reading a book provides an opportunity to experience several entertaining activities through your imagination and reminds us to be patient during these trying times of restrictions and illness.

Looking forward to when we can go out to dinner at a restaurant, John Sloan’s 1912 “McSorely’s Bar” shows two bartenders serving beer to a group of working men after a long day’s work. The gloomy atmosphere of grays, browns, and blacks resonated with me as I immediately thought of the Michigan restaurant owners’ inability to re-open during a pandemic, which has significantly impacted their financial growth and some face the prospect of having to close the businesses “for good.” But more importantly, it shows the group talking peacefully in a calm atmosphere and listening to each another.

Through art’s universal relatability to make individuals feel a variety of emotions, it has given me confidence the future will be brighter. Whether through works of art, theatre, dance, or poetry, creative outlets exercise our minds to explore artistic concepts that influence us to think. Whether you create it or view it, through art, people can find optimism and joy in the most trying times.

The year 2020 may be over, however, the importance of learning ways to incorporate a positive attitude during times of hardships remains an important goal. I encourage you to practice spreading, maintaining and being full of hope. And...while you’re at it, possibly exploring art!



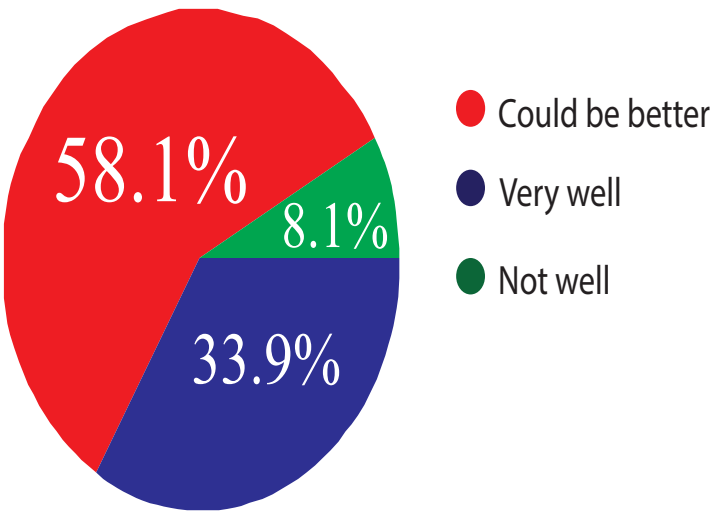
Swingin' into second semester

STORY AND GRAPHICS: GRACE O'DEA

New year, new me, new semester. While some schools' first semester carries on through mid-January, Mercy's second semester starts when students return from Christmas break. The beginning of the second semester comes with new opportunities and plenty of change: students get new classes, new teachers, and new people to sit next to (or sit six feet away from). Some change is good, some may be complicated, like figuring out a new route around the school for one's schedule, and some change is flat out hard. Many joys came along with the more than two-week long Christmas break, most of which have made returning for second semester that much harder for students.

It is safe to say Christmas break was long-awaited and met with plenty of excitement from students. "This year was probably the most excited I have been for Christmas break in my entire life," said junior Francesca Petrucci. She looked forward to the more than two weeks of relaxation break had to offer and the time spent away from her iPad that came with it.

In a Newsprint poll with 62 responses, Mercy staff and students rated how well they have handled the return to school.



The chance to decrease screen time was a bonus to Christmas break this year. Having gone to school completely virtual for more than a month leading up to the two-week break, many students were officially ready to turn off their iPad screens for some time.

"I definitely was not on my iPad at all," said senior Olive Rentz. "It was really nice to have that break."

Focusing on a screen for nearly seven whole hours, five days a week is much harder to do after barely looking at a screen at all for an extended period of time. Along with the time away from the iPad, the absence of school work also brought more joy and relief as they left for Christmas break. With less of their time spent on school and homework, students could spend more time engaging in activities that fit their personal interests.

"I felt more relaxed," said Petrucci, "and I had more time to focus on myself instead of putting myself last."

While Christmas break offered students plenty of time to enjoy themselves, it also brought the opportunity

for a change in a regular schedule. The thrill of students not having to wake up as early and having more free time in the day allowed for more flexibility and adjustment in how their time was spent.

"[My morning routine] before [the] break was very structured," said Rentz, who woke up at a specific time every morning and made sure to incorporate breakfast into her routine. During the break, Rentz's days looked very different from her regular 7:50 a.m. alarm and Zooming from her couch.

"Over break I had no routine, I was just doing whatever came up," said Rentz. Petrucci, too, said she did not stick to the same morning routine over her break that she had prior to it.

The lack of routine and freedom to spend one's day doing whatever they pleased, which came to an abrupt halt with the end of break, is yet another reason students have struggled to return to school. Although Christmas break brought Mercy students (and staff, too) some much-needed time off and perhaps a refreshing change to their everyday lives, returning from break has been no easy task for many.

According to Rentz, "It's tough . . . It's difficult for me to get back into routine . . . because it's just so different." Rentz also mentioned returning to the building added to the oddness of physically having to go back to school.

Petrucci shared similar thoughts to Rentz regarding being back in the building at the beginning of the second semester.

"Returning to school has been hard, especially since we are now back to the hybrid model," said Petrucci.

Because students like Rentz and Petrucci became so acquainted with the completely online model for school and the greater flexibility it offered to their daily routines, returning to school physically has so far been considered a tougher change. Starting this second semester may come as a challenge, but readjustment takes time and practice.

"The couple days before coming back from break, there were some things that I needed to get up early for, so I think that helped me get back into [a schedule]," said Rentz. By getting up at a regular time and having a consistent



Senior Olive Rentz tries to get back into a school routine by eating breakfast at a consistent time each day. Photo used with permission by Rentz.

routine in her days leading up to the break, Rentz made the transition into the second semester a little easier.

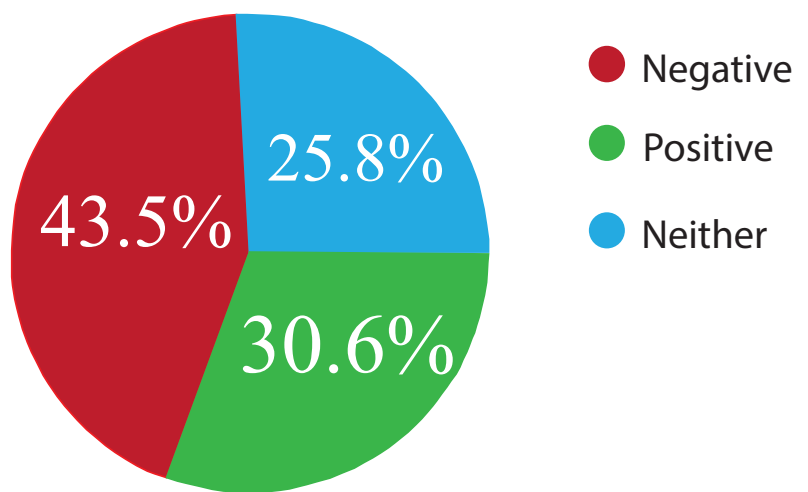
Being back in school has not only affected Mercy girls' day-to-day schedule and how they manage their time, but also their mental health.

"I can feel more worry and stress," said Petrucci, who said her mental health is not doing as well now that school is back in session. "Now that we're in the hybrid model, the school environment doesn't feel as normal or as fun as it used to be pre COVID-19."

Learning in the hybrid model has contributed to how students feel about being back in school.

"Being in the hybrid model as a senior is just really difficult since you don't get to see everybody," said Rentz. "So it's just really hard."

Returning to school after a long break is tough for just about everyone, and while excitement can be found in the newness and change the second semester brings, getting back into the groove of school will undoubtedly take time.



In a Newsprint poll with 62 responses, Mercy staff and students rated the effect returning to school has had on their mental health.

Mercy's latest entrepreneurs

STORY AND GRAPHICS: CAITLYN BEGOSA

The majority of Mercy students use social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to connect with others and entertain themselves. On the other hand, the following students utilize social media to promote their small businesses.

Searching for a new hobby during quarantine, junior Claire Kurpinski decided to channel her skills into a new creative outlet.

"Making earrings was a hobby I picked up during the summer while we were quarantined," said Kurpinski. "A bunch of people told me they loved the earrings I made and asked for some, so I started selling them."

To start her business, Kurpinski bought the materials including charms, wires and beads. Her earrings come in a multitude of designs ranging from charms of red peppers to crystal hearts with golden star wiring. Each pair of Kurpinski's earrings are available for \$5.

"I mostly sell silly earrings with fun charms, like there are some with chicken and fish charms," said Kurpinski. "Basically, [I sell] earrings that I think are fun."

After receiving an order, Kurpinski makes her earrings for the customer. She carefully packages them in bubble wrap and writes a thank-you note to show her gratitude for those who support her small business. Then, Kurpinski prints off the shipping label and puts the earrings in a bubble mailer.

CecesMarket, Kurpinski's small business, is currently on Etsy, an e-commerce website centered on handmade products. In addition to Etsy, she uses many other social media platforms to promote her business.

"I made a few videos to promote my Etsy on TikTok, and at least 60% of my orders came from there," said Kurpinski. "At one point, some TikToker with 300k [followers] bought my earrings and promoted them in one of her videos."

Starting as a summer project, Kurpinski's hobby has evolved into a small business with many sales and much support from TikTok.

With her initials on cups, bags, clothes and more, junior Gracie Grady's passion for monogramming ignited the idea of starting a small business.

"Monogramming and personalizing items with vinyls is fun," said Grady. "I enjoy creating things, and I enjoyed what I was making, so why not make it for other people?"

The launch of Grady's business, Gracie Marie Monograms, began at the Mercy Makers Market during her sophomore year.

The first steps Grady took in creating her business was setting a budget and getting the supplies she needed.

"The first thing I had to do was put a budget towards how much I was willing to spend to

get started," said Grady. "Then, I had to make sure I had enough supplies in my inventory that were within the budget. This was to make sure I wasn't going to overspend and still make a profit."

Currently, Grady sells customized mugs, cups, stickers and ornaments around the Christmas season.

To create a specialized item, Grady will first measure the amount of space on the item where the customized vinyl will be placed. She creates the design on Cricut Design Space, which allows her to choose the font and color the vinyl will be. Grady prints out the design and places it on her product. She is then ready to carefully pack her item and ship it to the customer.

Currently, Grady does not sell her products on any platforms. She accepts orders from her email, gradyg@mhsmi.org, and her friends spread the word about her small business to others.

"I've started an Etsy, but I haven't opened it yet. In the future, I'm planning on starting an Instagram page for my business and launching my Etsy to sell that way. Right now, I pretty much just talk to people about [my business], and it travels by people talking."

Senior Mackenzie Sullivan's small business sparked after she took the fibers class offered at Mercy High School and discovered her love for crocheting.

"I use crochet as a stress reliever," said Sullivan. "It turned into something I really enjoyed, and once I started getting better, my family told me I should consider selling the things I make."

The process of making her products usually takes a couple of days. Sullivan works on crocheting her items during her free time.

Currently, Sullivan sells hats and plush characters from the popular online video game "Among Us" ranging from \$15 to \$20. She plans to create new accessories and more plush characters in the future.

Crochet by Kenzie, Sullivan's small business, is located on Depop, a marketplace app specializing in fashion. Due to social media influencers like Emma Chamberlain, Depop recently gained popularity with many teenagers selling and buying clothes and jewelry off of the app.

In addition, Sullivan also uses Instagram and TikTok to bring attention to her business.

"I also occasionally post about my crochet projects on my TikTok account, which has been helpful," said Sullivan. "The TikTok algorithm allows people that are interested in crochet to see the products I'm selling."



Junior Claire Kurpinski's earrings are currently available on her Etsy shop, CecesMarket. Photo by Caitlyn Begosa



Junior Gracie Grady's monogram creations can be requested through her email, gradyg@mhsmi.org. Photo by Caitlyn Begosa



Senior Mackenzie Sullivan's crochet designs can be found on her Depop and Instagram at [crochetbykenzie](https://www.instagram.com/crochetbykenzie). Photo used with permission from Mackenzie Sullivan

STORY AND GRAPHICS: MEGAN MALLIE, ASSOCIATE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF AND RACHAEL SALAH, DESIGN EDITOR

Photos: Fair use

Palestine



The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been going on since 1948. Palestine is located in Israel beginning at parts of the Gaza Strip along the Mediterranean Sea and the West Bank. Arab people refer to this territory as Palestine, however, more than 135 United Nations (UN) member countries, including America, and Israeli citizens call it Israel.

Recently, American media has reported the bond the U.S. has with Palestine's prime minister and the proposed annexation of Palestine.

Currently, Palestinians are facing a medical apartheid due to the Israeli government restricting access to the COVID-19 vaccine for the 4.5 million Palestinian habitants, according to reports by the The Guardian. Medical apartheid is defined as the segregation for something other than race, making it applicable to Israel. Jewish settlers and prison guards are getting vaccinated, however most Palestinians are not.

According to a January 15 article from The Times, "75% of citizens over the age of 60 have been inoculated so far, including Palestinian citizens of Israel and occupied East Jerusalem." While Palestinians residents of Israel are getting vaccinated, over 4.5 million of Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip have yet to receive the vaccine. The United Nations has called on Israel to vaccinate these residents however, Israel's vaccine program does not include the Palestinians.

Israel has argued it does not have the obligation to vaccinate the Palestinians. According to the UN, it is Israel's duty, however Israeli commentators argued in the Times article, "Israel is not responsible for the health of Palestinians because the Oslo Accords...give the Palestinian Authority oversight of public health under the principles of self-determination." The Oslo Accords are agreements signed by Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Authority in the early 1990s. What history do the two countries have to create this animosity? Let's get educated!

From 1918-1947, Palestine was run by the British. During the British rule, hundreds of thousands of Jews resettled to the ancient homeland, including those fleeing the Nazis. Disagreements between Israelis and Palestinians led to the United Nations proposing the territory to be split into a Jewish state and an Arab state. Both Palestinians and Israelis claimed Jerusalem as their holy city. Therefore Muslims, Christians and Jews claim Jerusalem as their capital, rooting the division between the Palestinians and Israelis. The Israelis accepted the plan, however Palestinians revolted since they had a larger population and saw this as an attempt to push them out of the land.

This conflict over land soon led to the Arab-Israeli War in 1948. The war was fought over territory including Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Lebanon. Armies from these countries joined Palestinian forces in the war against Israel. More than 750,000 Palestinians became refugees, fleeing to avoid the fighting or were forced out by individuals or groups fighting for Israel. As many as 800,000 Jews were expelled from their homes in Arab nations or fled because of sanctioned violence. In 1949, under the armistice agreement, Israel gained control of over two-thirds of Palestinian territory.

In 1967, The Six Day War occurred involving Israel and Palestinian allies Jordan, Syria and Egypt. This war resulted in Israel gaining more land and occupancy, including the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula and the West Bank.

These two wars and the long history of the Palestinan-Israeli conflict are just a brief overview of the continued conflict and animosity existing between the two territories.

India is facing a strenuous and long-term health care crisis. Since a large amount of the country is rural, there are not enough hospitals or people willing to become doctors to combat this

India



amount of the country is rural, there are not enough hospitals or people willing to become doctors to combat this

India is one of the countries with the lowest public health spending, averaging 2.5% whereas America's average spending is 8.5% as of 2015. However, India is not blind to this issue. They recognize that the crisis has arisen due to its fast growing population and disorganization.

A large amount of India's population is poverty-stricken, making healthcare beyond their reach. According to Ward Health, 40 million Indians go into poverty every year, trying to pay out of pocket for healthcare annually. A substantial portion of the population works in rural areas and must go into the city for medical needs, costing them more than the typical Indian resident is financially able to pay. This crisis has ultimately led to a worsening economy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shrunk India's economy even more due to lack of space to social distance and lack of PPE. From September 2020-November 2020, India's economy has shrunk by 7.5%, making the year 2020 their most severe recession since 1996. To help slow this recession, the Indian government has committed to using 2% of their annual economic output toward helping the country's small businesses, according to Ward Health.

However, this still does not change the physical hardships that sick Indians are facing every day, especially with their growing rates of tuberculosis and now COVID-19. The coverage in the media about this worsening crisis is incredibly slim. Sharing the information mentioned here and researching on your own using the links on our website can help bring awareness to India.

South Africa



South Africa's ongoing education crisis is a real threat to the future of its children, who are missing out on a proper education.

With a compromised learning environment, persisting inequality and overcrowding in classrooms, it comes as a surprise that the media is not reporting more heavily on this issue. What are the current

issues that students in South Africa face as they attempt to further their education? Let's get educated!

The Executive Director of Amnesty International South Africa, Shenilla Mohamed, is calling for direct and immediate action to be taken. She is pleading for South Africa to comply with its constitutional human rights obligations, including responsibility to the education system.

The Amnesty International report, Broken and Unequal: The State of Education in South Africa, details the infrastructure in public schools including poor sanitation and, inequality that still stems from apartheid, a period of racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa. Unfortunately, much of the educational divide is between communities based on location, skin color and financial status. Geographic region determines how close a higher quality school building is and therefore decides which students have access to that advantage. Lasting effects of apartheid are evidenced by the fact that more white students have access to a properly resourced school community.

Although access to education has been broadened to more communities, education, in general, is continually poor, with university rates remaining low as well.

Although the 2013 government enactment of the Minimum Norms and Standards for educational facilities—intended to give schools access to sanitation and electricity by Nov. 2016, those targets are not yet met. Schools have pit latrines instead of restrooms and the buildings themselves are made out of mud and asbestos. The safety of students is jeopardized in these unhygienic and hazardous conditions. The Department of Transport is also failing, causing students who have about a 1.9 mile trek to school to be without the transportation that they are entitled to in order to further their education.

Other issues that South African students face include lack of classroom furniture, a low teacher-to-student ratio, little to no classroom resources such as textbooks or technology, and extreme overcrowding. Amnesty International compiled a report about issues concerning education in South Africa titled "Broken and Unequal: The State of Education in South Africa", and highlights various points that bar students from receiving an education that they deserve. In the report, many classrooms exceeded the 1:35 ratio of teacher to student, doubling in one case. The report states that almost 1,000 schools have no sports facilities, 239 have no electricity (16,897 without internet) and 37 do not have any kind of sanitation facilities.

The persistence of these issues need to be properly addressed and one of the biggest issues surrounding this crisis is the lack of media coverage. People need to become aware and informed on these issues in order to make lasting change.

Britain has officially withdrawn from the European Union. The move, which took effect on December 31 2020, had been in the works since 2016, under former Prime Minister Theresa May when it was first voted on. And after working out new negotiations about world trade, the United Kingdom (U.K) separated from the European Union (EU). The term Brexit is a combination of "Britain" and "exit", referring to Britain's desire to leave the EU's single market system and shared customs union, allowing for it to work out separate trade deals with other nations independent of the EU.

While the U.K. was a part of the European Union, companies could buy and sell goods across country borders tax-free without laws dictating quantities. According to The New York Times, the U.K. is now free to create its own trade policy and independently negotiate with other countries for free trade deals.

Although the U.K. and EU are mostly in agreement about the exit, terms of the deal are still being arranged and rules are subject to change. In the future, there may be potential disagreements between the U.K. and the EU. According to the BBC website, terms they have agreed on included the 11-month transition period during which the U.K. followed the EU's rules. This transition period ended in Dec. 2020. This time frame allowed leaders to negotiate a deal. Free trade was also agreed on, meaning between the U.K. and the EU, there were no taxes on goods that crossed the borders. Finally, they agreed upon a 'level playing field', meaning that they would keep the rules regarding workers' rights and environmental standards in place.

The Brexit deal between the EU and U.K. is over 1,200 pages long. One key point is new safety checks at the borders. Some interesting facts are that EU pet passports are no longer valid, and owners will need to have an animal health certificate for every trip.

The most difficult and last issue to be worked out in the deal was fishing. Over the next five and a half years, the U.K. will gradually acquire some fish from its own waters, and regular discussion on fishing access will begin between the U.K. and EU in 2026. Both countries also agreed that access to security laws and data should be granted upon request. Additionally, effective this year, United Kingdom citizens will need to have a visa to stay in the EU for more than 90 days in a 180-day period.

Britain



“Splitting” the time

Life as a student and competitive gymnast

STORY AND GRAPHICS: MADDIE SULLIVAN, COPY EDITOR

The piercing sound of the alarm rings through her ears. After she jumps out of bed, she dresses and heads to school. Seven hours later, the school bell rings and she beelines to her car, racing to get to 3:30 practice on time. Once in her leotard, she hits the mats and after four hours of intense practicing and conditioning, she heads home, fatigued and sore. By 9 p.m., she starts her school work, eats dinner, showers, and does more studying until about 1 a.m. Then she wakes up and does it all again the next day. This is a typical day in the life of senior Izzy Smith.

Smith’s mother enrolled her in gymnastics lessons at the Sports Club of Novi because she needed a way to keep a four-year-old Smith occupied while she was working out. Smith fell in love with the sport, and by the age of seven, she started competing.

Smith realized she needed to devote all of her free time to gymnastics if she wanted to reach her full potential. So in middle school, she chose to quit playing soccer and cross country, and dedicated herself entirely to gymnastics.

“It was not hard quitting other sports,” said Smith. “Gymnastics has always been my main focus. It required the most dedication, but it was also the most enjoyable, so the decision was easy.”

Having advanced through the first eight levels, Smith is currently competing as a level nine gymnast. Competing at such a high level requires Smith to practice at least five days per week, four hours daily.

Just like every other aspect of life, Smith’s gymnastics was affected by the pandemic. Back in March, her season was cancelled and her gym was shut down for four months.

“Before the shutdown, the longest period of time that I had been out of the gym for was one week in the time frame of 15 years, so it was a big adjustment,” said Smith.

While the coronavirus definitely took a toll on Smith’s gymnastics, she continued practicing over Zoom with her coaches and teammates. She also went on daily runs to maintain her strength and endurance, and recorded herself doing a backflip every day in order to keep her air awareness and skills. Competitions resumed earlier this month, and although the meets are small and masks are required, Smith is excited to be competing again.

“I enjoy competing, but it is very stressful,” said Smith. “There are only about five [competitions] each season, and you have to do well at all of them to qualify for the next level.”

To become a level nine gymnast, one must enter the Junior Olympic Program, which is divided into three main segments: developmental (levels one through three), compulsory (levels four and five), and optional (levels six through ten). A level nine gymnast has progressed through the developmental and compulsory levels by scoring a

her coach of four years, Kayla Spicher.

Considering the amount of time Smith spends with her coaches and other gymnasts, she sees them more as friends than coaches or competitors.

“I love the bond the [gymnastics] community has,” said Smith. “Every time I meet a new gymnast, I can easily connect. We both understand the difficulty of the sport, yet we show up every day and stay committed.”

Training roughly 22 to 23 hours per week, Smith sometimes finds it challenging to manage her rigorous class schedule, which includes her four AP courses (AP Biology, AP Calculus, AP Computer Science, and AP French). To manage her school work, Smith uses her free time between classes to get as much of her work done as possible. She also tries to accomplish whatever she can on the weekend.

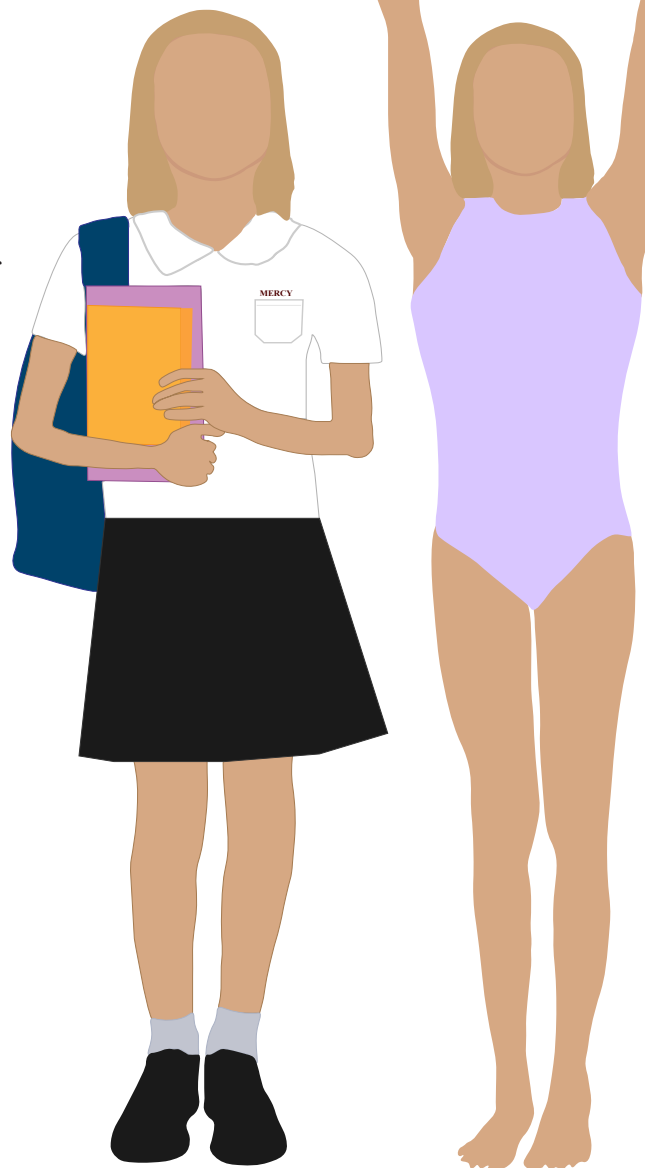
“She is driven, dedicated, very analytical, and she understands her strengths and weaknesses,” said English teacher, Mrs. Angela Harris-Schultheis, who has taught Smith for three semesters. “I think a lot of that comes from gymnastics, where you have to understand your weaknesses and how to compensate for them.”

Just like in many sports, sometimes the mental aspect of competing is more challenging than the physical for Smith.

“It’s really easy to get mental blocks,” said Smith. “[Two summers ago], I got a really bad one and started wondering why I’m not doing something that is a little bit easier, mentally. But then you get back to normal, and you never really want to stop.”

During her rare free time, Smith coaches the younger athletes at her gym. She also enjoys watching movies with her two older brothers.

Looking forward, Smith has decided not to participate in gymnastics at the collegiate level; however, she would like to use her athletic talents by becoming a member of a college cheer or crew team. Smith is still awaiting responses from her list of colleges, including two Ivy Leagues, the University of Michigan, Stanford University, and several other elite schools. Smith has an interest in becoming an orthopedic surgeon, and she hopes to double major in chemistry and biology. Wherever Smith goes to school, it is evident that her dedication and commitment to excellence will set her up for a very successful future.



minimum mobility score at any USA Gymnastics-sanctioned competition for advancement out of each level.

Although competitions are high-pressure situations for Smith, before the pandemic she always had a large support group of friends and family at every meet to cheer her on and encourage her.

Smith practices at Splits Gymnastics Academy in Canton with her coaches of six years, Guy Sawka and Eileen Spicher, and

Enticing the swipe: TikTok the social media phenomenon

STORY AND GRAPHICS: DELILAH COE, WEB EDITOR

Do you ever find yourself spending hours in a rabbit hole of YouTube videos or Instagram posts and not realize that time went by? Perhaps you have a hobby or a passion that transports you into another world. This concept of losing time often happens to users of the current fastest-growing social media application, TikTok. TikTok allows its users to post and view videos spanning from three seconds to one minute.

Previously called Music.ly, TikTok was purchased by ByteDance, a Chinese company in 2016 and since then, its popularity has skyrocketed. It attracts users with a wide variety of short entertaining videos that include dancing, lip syncing, fun facts, life hacks, and DIYs.

TikTok has become so addictive because of the algorithms that have successfully catered to each users' interests. The more time spent watching these videos, the more closely the algorithms narrow your preferences to entice users to continue to utilize the app for longer periods of time.

This social media platform explains why the average user spends about 52 minutes on the app daily according to reports by Oberlo. TikTok appeals to people because the maximum

time for each video is 60 seconds, making the videos easy and accessible in many situations. The app also has more of a casual vibe than most social media apps. Therefore, users are more likely to not only post videos but also feel comfortable expressing themselves in a more down-to-earth atmosphere. TikTok's largest audience is people ages 16 to 24, which is the audience the app is marketed towards.

Although TikTok has been a popular app for some time, the number of users has increased since the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced much of the world to quarantine. During the beginning of the pandemic, as many individuals explored having lots of spare time, users made fun dances, shared unique recipes, and made what seemed like the world ending just a bit more positive with all of the time on hand. These silly trends drew many bored people to this social media app, but it also was used for more serious matters this past year. TikTok was used during the Black Lives Matter movement, as a way for people to show their support and bring awareness to the subject. Due to all of this, TikTok has gained 800 million users since 2016, making it the most downloaded app on the Apple App Store.

TikTok is also an easy place for its users to attempt to go viral and gain a significant following. Due to the immense

amount of users and the large amount of time spent on the app, people who post videos are more likely to be noticed quicker. Creators such as 16-year-old Charli D'Amelio, who has over a 100 million followers for her dancing videos, is one of many who has gained fame because of the platform. This quality of TikTok makes it appealing to users, and encourages them to share their own talents and interests.

TikTok not only appeals to younger users, but also people like Ms. Cook, a teacher at Mercy. With about 62,000 followers, Ms. Cook downloaded the app during quarantine and started to make videos geared towards fellow teachers. But over time as her following grew she started to direct her videos towards not only teachers, but also students, and other areas of interests she has.

"My platform is used to discuss teacher life, deaf dog experiences, book content, and a bunch of other random things that I enjoy," said Ms. Cook. Like Ms. Cook, there are millions of other users that share content that is informative and fun for people of all ages. Just try not to spend too much time on it!



Mercy alumnae take the White House

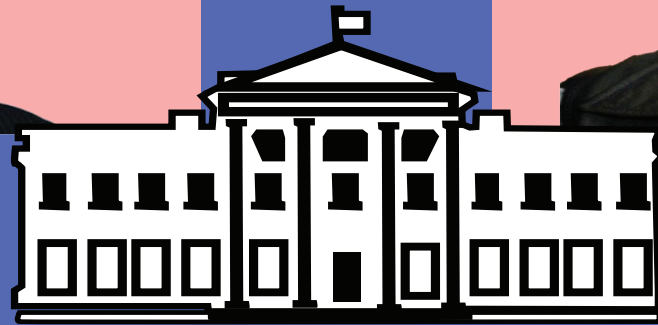
STORY AND GRAPHICS: CLARE JONES, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Photo: Fair use Clairmount Mckenna College



Photo by Cornell Belcher, Getty Images



THE WHITE HOUSE

Symone Sanders

Hartina Flournoy

As a new presidential administration moves into 1600 Pennsylvania Ave; not only is President Joe Biden making history by being the highest-voted presidential candidate, having a female vice president, and being the oldest president to take office, but there will also be two Mercy alumnae filling critical roles within this administration. The alumnae are Symone Sanders and Hartina Flournoy.

Sanders will be a senior advisor to President Biden and chief spokesperson to Vice President Kamala Harris. During her time at Mercy, Sanders, at 16, introduced former President Bill Clinton at an Omaha fundraiser for Girls Incorporated.

“Mercy High School in Omaha, Neb. is extremely proud of Symone Sanders ’08, a 2008 graduate of our school and the role she is playing as chief spokesperson for the office of the vice president, Kamala Harris. She is a savvy communicator and influencer who is making an impact on the world,” said Kristi Walters Wessling ’88, principal.

In 2016 Sanders became the youngest person ever to hold the position of presidential press secretary, working on Senator Bernie Sanders’s then presidential campaign. That same year she became a regular commentator on CNN, analyzing the country’s political climate and policies. By the age of 26, Sanders was elected as a member-at-large of the Democratic National Convention (DNC). And in 2019, she released a book entitled *No, You Shut Up: Speaking Truth to Power and Reclaiming America*.

In 2018-2019, Sanders was a fellow at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government. While there, she led discussions and seminars about millennials, progressiveness, and the future of the Democratic Party at its Institute of

Politics. She also was a fellow at the University of Southern California’s Center for the Political Future.

Furthermore, Sanders was an advocate for the juvenile justice system where she promoted young adults to call for reform politics and enact new policy.

In addition to working for the Biden administration, Sanders is a longtime member and chair of the community campaign for the Girls Incorporated of Omaha, which according to its mission statement, inspires all girls to be “strong, smart and bold” through health and educational programs.

Another Mercy community alumna who will be joining the Biden administration will be Hartina (Tina) Flournoy. Flournoy’s new role in the Biden administration will be chief of staff to Vice President Harris. She will manage, advise and oversee the vice president’s staffers, policy development, and structure of all functions.

Before joining the new president, she served as chief of staff to former President Bill Clinton. She has also held various positions within the Democratic Party for over 30 years.

Flournoy was also the assistant to the president for public policy at the American Federation of Teachers, an international union that represents over 1.4 million individuals. Similar to Sanders, Flournoy was also a Harvard University Kennedy School Institute of Politics fellow in 2009.

She is a 1974 graduate of St. Vincent’s Academy in Savannah, GA. This school is an all-girls school founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1845 and is affiliated with the Diocese of Savannah.

“We are so proud!” said St. Vincent Academy President Mary Anne Hogan. “Hartina has been

a huge supporter of Saint Vincent’s since she graduated. And she truly, since the time she was here, she has been one of these women who views St. Vincent’s as a platform and her Mercy education as a platform to springboard her into success in every area of her life.”

Flournoy was awarded the Catherine McAuley Award from her alma mater in 2010. This award is meant to reward individuals who have sustained service to others, practice leadership within their daily lives, and exemplify Sister Catherine McAuley’s ideals.

“We always say that at St. Vincent’s Academy we train our young women to go out and change the world and whatever that means, whether that means in your family, in your church, in your community,” said President Hogan. “And [Flournoy] is going out to change the world in a big way and we could not be more delighted and proud that she is representing us and taking her Mercy education and using it in a big way,” said President Hogan.

To continue to support children from St. Vincent’s, Flournoy has established the Leila Flournoy memorial scholarship which assists students who are also parishioners at St. Benedict the Moor Catholic Church. The scholarship is named after Flournoy’s mother.

After attending St. Vincent’s Academy, Flournoy continued her academic career at Georgetown University in Washington D.C. She also studied at Oxford University in England. She eventually earned her law degree from Georgetown University Law Center in 1984. After law school, Flournoy worked as a law clerk for the District of Columbia Court of Appeals.

SOUL : Finding your spark

STORY AND GRAPHICS: FATIMA SIDDIQUE

Disney Pixar's new film *Soul* follows the story of an aspiring jazz musician thrown into the realm of souls right before his big break. Joe Gardner, a school band teacher, gets the chance of a lifetime to play at a trendy jazz club in the city. Right when things seem to finally be going his way, one misstep and he finds himself in "The Great Before," a place where souls gain personalities before going to Earth. Struggling to get back to his life in time for the gig, Joe teams up with 22, a stubborn soul who has no interest in life on Earth. Together, they discover that there's more to life than meets the eye. Directed by Academy Award winner Pete Docter and produced by Academy Award nominee Dana Murray, the film is streaming exclusively on Disney+. Since its release, viewers have had a lot to say. So what exactly is the hype with *Soul*?

Despite being a Pixar animated film, it's clear that *Soul* isn't solely intended to be viewed by a younger audience. *Soul* is a movie about jazz, about chasing dreams and life and death. But most importantly, the movie ventures into deep and touchy subjects as it tackles some of life's biggest questions: What am I doing in life? What is my purpose?

"I'm just afraid that if I died today, my life would have amounted to nothing," Joe says to his mother during a conversation about pursuing his dreams even if they fail. Throughout the film, Joe bases his self worth on his achievements and gets so caught up in his ambitions that he forgets how beautiful and meaningful his life is. He spends his whole life living for his dream instead of living for himself. It isn't until he shows 22 all the amazing things about living that he finally discovers what it truly means to have a soul.

In addition, *Soul* does an amazing job of addressing these weighty and mature themes in a colorful and humorous way. Despite the deep moral lesson behind the plot, the film has a rather comical twist as Joe sneaks his way back into Earth only to be stuck in the body of a cat, while 22 is put into his body. They both struggle through New York City as 22 adapts to a human body and Joe must fight his new feline instincts. The movie is also filled with witty metaphors, blobby souls and squiggly "counselors" named Jerry that

keep the movie from being solely about Joe's existential midlife crisis. There's also "The Great Before" which is a bright, minimalist world with funny characters and vivid landscapes that bring a much lighter tone to the otherwise heavy plot.

From the beautiful New York City skyline to the colorful world of souls, the film is also gorgeously animated. A scene where Joe is found in "The Zone" when playing the piano accurately depicts the passion of an artist who, quite literally, "loses himself" in the music. This moment where everything fades away and you're completely caught up in your passion is captured beautifully with glowing hues of blues, purples and pinks. As Joe and 22 venture through New York City, beeping traffic, angry pedestrians, dirty subways and greasy pizza bring the movie alive in a way that puts the audience right in the center of the bustling city.

However, although the movie is meant to assure viewers of growing up and finding their "purpose," it might send a completely different message, leaving a younger audience worrying about life and death and what their "spark" in life is. The movie throws into their face a dilemma of whether or not they should pursue their dreams, which at a young age, isn't what you should be worrying about. *Soul* should have a better way of showing how it's okay to have dreams and ambitions, instead of sending a message that it's destructive to dream big.

In regards to the hype surrounding this film, *Soul* is definitely worthy of the watch. The movie is a beautifully animated comedy that simultaneously tackles one of the touchiest subjects known to man, the point of life.

To put it simply, the message *Soul* delivers is this: everyone is born with a purpose, but one that is ever-changing. No person is born with one particular passion or function; you're born to live life to the fullest. The best thing you can do with your life is just live it, and when Joe is given a second chance at life, that's exactly what he plans to do.

"I'm going to live every minute of it," Joe says towards the end of the film, when he realizes that life isn't about catching onto his fleeting dream; it is simply about living.



2021 PREDICTIONS

STORY AND GRAPHICS: MADDIE SULLIVAN, COPY EDITOR

From the pandemic to the presidential election, it is safe to say that 2020 was a year full of unprecedented events. And while last year taught us just how unpredictable life can be, many of us have ideas and expectations for the new year ahead. In a *Newsprint* poll, we have gathered some predictions of Mercy students and staff for what they believe 2021 has in store. Some of these predictions may seem a little unordinary, but if 2020 has taught us anything, it is that we can never rule out the craziest possibilities.

