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rank&file

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Litz welcomes therapy dogs

by lauren elias

Due to the rewriting of an FCPS regulation, therapy dogs will be available in the coming months to provide stress relief and relaxation.

Principal Jeff Litz has worked for over a school year to rewrite this regulation, which does not allow therapy dogs on school campuses.

"It's a small measure, but I think it's something that when a kid is having a really bad day, they're stressed out and whatnot, they will just come and spend some time with a dog, and there's a lot of research around it that it can help," Litz said.

There have been many obstacles such as potential allergies, but Litz is dedicated to the issue of mental health and hopes this is one step to creating a less stressful environment.

Therapy Dogs International will provide the dogs and a study TDI conducted over a two year period reported that in a sample of 200 respondents, 92 percent experienced positive mood alterations as a result of their therapy dogs.

"I know some of my friends are undergoing a bunch of stress and complaining about the amount of homework and work we have to do, so I feel like it's a great opportunity to relieve stress and enjoy our life," sophomore and SGA member Luka Gaeitsinashville said.

Litz notified the class' SGA officers of his efforts to bring therapy dogs to school during their monthly November meeting.

"[The SGA members] were very supportive," Litz said. "They thought



LAUREN ELIAS/RANK&FILE



LAUREN ELIAS/RANK&FILE

Top: Sophomores Alexis Bacon, Rohan Shah and Luka Garitsinashville watch a slideshow of the dogs on TDI's website.

Bottom: Shah discusses the TDI website with Bacon.

"I think it's just a really great opportunity for everyone to de-stress and see something that makes them happy," Bacon said.

that it was a good idea and they said that they'd be willing to help in any way that they could."

The SGA is already tentatively planning a Stress Less Week as both an overall relaxation initiative and as an opportunity to introduce the dogs.

"There will be a launching event," SGA member and sophomore Alexis Bacon said. "We'll start off with the Stress Less Week to introduce the dogs."

This project is a part of Litz's and the faculty's broader efforts to foster an encouraging learning experience.

"I think that this is just another thing that you do when you're a community," Litz said. "This is one small way that I feel we can help build another aspect to the culture of support that we have here at Marshall."

Expect to see some furry faces around campus in the coming months.

Interim Superintendent Lockard brings experience with minority rights to FCPS

by tenzin tsering

FCPS declared Steven Lockard as the Interim Superintendent following the resignation of Dr. Karen Garza, bringing a person who, according to their website, has worked to reduce the achievement gap among minority, special education and economically disadvantaged students.

"It's good that he fought for minorities and he'd be a good superintendent especially as minority populations are growing," sophomore Matei Constantinescu said.

According to the Washington Post, Garza generated controversy after a string of decisions in the winter of 2015, which resulted in FCPS staying open in conditions that some of the public considered unsuitable.

However, her resignation was not due to these controversies, but rather to take on the position as CEO of Battelle for Kids, a nonprofit group in Ohio.

Lockard served as the Deputy Superintendent under Garza, and prior to that he served as Deputy Superintendent for Frederick County Public Schools in Maryland.

In his tenure as Superintendent Lockard helped lead Frederick County to the highest school performance index rating in Mayland, first out of 24 in 2012.

Lockard's resume consists of being a director, principal, assistant principal and teacher.

"His past experiences as a teacher will be beneficial to all students and teachers, in my opinion," freshman Mayuk Sengupta said.

His experience with working directly in schools will yield him special insight in what policies actually work and what doesn't, thus allowing for more productive decisions in the future.

For example, in 2013, when Lockard wrote a paper on the importance of having strong principals for the University of Maryland.

Additionally, his social media presence is stronger, as he has already obtained more followers on Twitter than Garza.

"His activeness on social media will help with news being easier to access," sophomore Kenny Quach said.

Until FCPS selects a new permanent Superintendent next year, Lockard will hold the mantle.

newsbriefs

BSU continues community outreach with food drive

The Black Student Union held a food drive for the Alternative House in Vienna, from Nov 13 to 30, helping at-risk teenagers remain safe this winter. The BSU collected over two thousand non-perishable goods.

"We chose to donate to the alternative house because it shelters homeless and abused teens," senior and BSU vice president Rahwan Moaz said. "We felt that it was important to reach out to a community that was so similar to ours in age to make it more personal."

This is the second consecutive year of the BSU food drive and Moaz remains hopeful that it will soon become ingrained in the club's roots.

"It would be great if [the food drive] became a BSU tradition," Moaz said. "Since the majority of the executive board is graduating this year, we're hoping that the oncoming leaders continue this drive."

by kate carnol



KATE CARNIOL/RANK&FILE

Senior and vice president of the Black Student Union Rahwan Moaz and Alternative House residential counselor Lauren Witherspoon transfer one of three boxes full of donated non-perishable goods to the drive.

Faculty rewards excelling students with Statesman Star

The Statesmen Star award is a tribute to students and staff members who exemplify the five characteristics of the Statesmen Code of Honor: respect, responsibility, community, honesty and spirit. Students vote for four faculty members, while the faculty members vote for four students per grade.

Principal Jeff Litz invited those selected this semester to attend a breakfast in the culinary room last Friday, which the Culinary Arts class served. Although students are always encouraged to illustrate positive characteristics, some say they don't think of it as a task.

"Being chosen for Statesmen Star doesn't impact my desire to exemplify positive qualities," junior Teddy Daniel said. "It's nice to have them appreciated by teachers, but they are more of a natural part of my personality than something I actively try to express."

by aqsa rashid

All-women Cyber Security team ventures past setbacks

by kate carniol

In the male-dominated world of STEM, six female members of the Cyber Security team are competing for more than trophies; they're standing up for their gender.

The only all-women's cyber security team at Marshall placed in the gold division, the second highest tier, at the Dec. 10 competition. The team attended the state finals this past weekend, competing for a slot at regionals.

Despite their success, sophomore Jennifer Cole said the all-female team is sometimes not taken seriously by other cyber security members.

"A member of the club asked if we were even a serious team despite the fact that we do well in our competitions, attend meetings and two of our members are even officers in the club," Cole said.

Cole said she believes the conflicts can range from belittling the capabilities of the team to disrespecting the members.

"It's pretty subtle," Cole said. "It's not like anyone openly yells sexist remarks at us, but many male members assume they're better than us and are always a bit condescending towards us whenever we work or talk with them."

But other members of the club disagree with Cole.

"In cyber [security] we don't focus

too much on the topic of males versus females," senior Arman Analoeui said. "The environment is a very inclusive one. We try to help people of all levels in the tech [and] cyber world."

Moving beyond the setbacks the team faces, they continue to persevere and view cyber security as an opportunity to digest more information about the world of technology.

"Regardless of who you are [cyber security is] a great opportunity to learn," sophomore Diana Damenova said.

The secret behind their success is no secret at all, Cole said.

"A lot of our success stems from teamwork," she said. "We work together and communicate to solve problems, and while people in the group tend to have specific roles, everyone is happy to fill other roles if necessary and help the people doing other tasks whenever it's needed."

Cole said the team's support for each other proves to be vital not only in practice but also during competitions as well.

"I was new to the team this year and during the competitions I often felt very confused and completely out of my element," Cole said. "My teammates made sure to reassure me that I was doing fine and were always willing to lend a hand when I became stuck or had no idea what to do next."

The presence of women in cyber

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security is limited, with women making up less than 25 percent of the jobs in that field in the United States, yet women as a whole are more than 50 percent of the nation's workforce. This inequality is present in all STEM occupations across the country. Damenova said, occurrences of this imbalance are present in both the academic and professional world of cyber security.

"I've heard and read many awful stories of women and female students receiving prejudice and discrimination in cyber security," Damenova said.

Regardless of the potential hostility,

Cole said she encourages more girls to join cyber security whether or not they want to pursue a career in that realm.

"I knew literally nothing about cyber security when I first joined, and felt terrified because of that I'd fail or feel like an outsider in the club. This was not the case at all," Cole said. "A lot of people were beginners and I'm sure felt the exact same way as me. I know I've learnt so much since then, and even if you don't want to pursue a career that is based on cyber security, it's incredibly helpful to know, and just an incredibly fun club to be a part of."

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Karaoke event raises money

Left: English teacher Lindsay Hardenbergh performs second, singing the song “All I Want for Christmas Is You” and walking into the crowd to let the audience sing along into the microphone.

Top Right: English teacher Matthew Horne performs in a duet with fellow English teacher Jonathon Super, rapping the mix tape “Toast Ghost,” a series of songs written by three teachers in the English department. Horne catapulted into the crowd twice, recieving an eruption of cheers from that section of students. The performance ended with Horne swaying in the bleachers with a group of seniors who sang along.

Bottom Right: Super gives his solo lines of the song to a group of other teachers who already performed, pointing the microphone in their direction to encourage crowd participation.

Registrar is ‘mom’ to new transfers

by chloe pignano

Tucked away in a small office, registrar Suzanna Pangilinan is hard at work talking to parents of new students, approving bus passes, organizing student records and preparing graduation.

The role of a school registrar is to maintain student records. Student records include attendance, schedule, immunization records, grades and transfer information. A registrar is also in charge of other duties such as designing diplomas and pamphlets.

As a woman with a diverse career background, Pangilinan not only fits well with the Marshall community, but she is a driving figure in the community that many students do not know.

Pangilinan started her career at Marshall in 2001. She was the transcript secretary until 2012 when she became the registrar.

Pangilinan’s job consists of meeting new, diverse people and registering their children to attend Marshall.

“You get to meet so many people, you get to hear stories, you get to hear about schools all around the world and different cultures,” said Pangilinan. “And all of that is just wonderful. You

create this kind of friendship with these families.”

Pangilinan thinks that Northern Virginia is a very diverse area of the country. She is able to find people from all over the world and connect them to people of similar backgrounds here in Fiarfax County and at Marshall specifically.

“The cool thing is that with any families that come in they’ll go, ‘Okay I’m from this country you’ve never heard of’ or, ‘I speak another language,’ [...] or, ‘Oh we have another student from there,’ and, ‘We have a student that speaks the same language as you,’” Pangilinan said. “Let’s introduce you [to them].”

Pangilinan was previously a preschool assistant and later a teacher. She started her job at a preschool because the director noticed her knack for interacting with younger children.

“Watching the kids learn from September when they are just learning concepts to the end of the year when they are confidently telling you stories is really amazing,” Panagilian said.

Panigilian’s behind the scenes role is still a very impactful one and groups of students are often found chatting with her in her office.

“If you need anything this is where you come,” Pangilinan said. “We become moms to students too. It’s hard to turn that off.”



CHLOE PIGNANO/RANK&FILE

Abber El-Baz looks to Panagilian for advice in trying to transfer her daughter to Marshall. The school registrar is responsible for transferring students in and out, while keeping track of their records.

“The cool thing is that with any families that come in, they’ll go, ‘Okay I’m from this country you’ve never heard of’ or, ‘I speak another language,’ [...] or, ‘Oh we have another student from there,’ and, ‘We have a student that speaks the same language as you,’” Pangilinan said. “Let’s introduce you [to them].”

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Faculty powerless to control temperatures in classrooms

by ethan zack

During the winter, entering any classroom during the day is a gamble in terms of what temperature to expect. Rooms are either stuffy and overheated or freezing cold, with very few managing to hit a comfortable temperature. There has been a large amount of frustration regarding the air conditioning system from both students and faculty alike.

"I find that the school air conditioning is rather polarized," junior Gannon Palm said. "It's either very hot or very cold."

Rumors that the problems with the system are a result of it malfunctioning have spread throughout the faculty and student body.

"I've heard that the system is kind of broken, that there's a glitch [and] it's never going to work right," science teacher Elizabeth Hurley said.

In reality, the system is relatively modern and recently received an overhaul as a result of the recent building renovations.

"It's new since the school just came out of renovation and it is sufficient," building engineer Jaime Bagtas said.

Where the disconnect lies is not in the functionality of the system itself, but the actual level of power the faculty has to control it. Staff members have very limited direct control over the system in their rooms. They can change the temperature of the room by two degrees in either direction, but any change greater than this is controlled by Energy Management, a department outside of the building.

"I don't know what I thought I was doing when I changed [it] to cool before I set it," Hurley said.

In fact, not even Bagtas is able to directly control it. His job primarily focuses on the physical upkeep of the system and communicating with Energy Management regarding physical parts for the system and work orders.

"I have no general control over it because we have Energy Management that controls the heating and cooling plan," Bagtas said. "I am the one responsible for its operations and [making] sure it's in



ETHAN ZACK/RANK&FILE

Building engineer Jamie Bagtas monitors the heating system for the building. Contrary to popular belief, Bagtas is only responsible for the general upkeep of the system. He and the rest of the faculty cannot control room temperatures.

top operating conditions."

Hurley believes there would be less complaints about the system if the managers implemented better humidity control.

"I think they can save a lot in efficiency if they regulated the humidity levels better," Hurley said. "70 [degrees] when it's dry feels really different from 70 [degrees] when it's humid."

Additionally, Hurley thinks that another effective way to alleviate frustration over the system is by having less dependence on it in general and focusing on alternative ways to regulate temperature.

"There's many times in the year [where] we don't need heating or cooling, we just need to be able to open windows," Hurley said. "The temperature outside is just fine."

Rank & Flurries: Snow day FAQ * compiled by gwyneth murphy & jackson coerr

1

How do mistakes happen?

"Because Fairfax County encompasses approximately 400 square miles, the weather can vary significantly, as can road conditions, in different parts of the county. Often, the school system has to base its decisions on weather forecasts. This sometimes results in schools opening when the conditions are worse than anticipated and in schools closing on days when the weather ends up being not all that bad."

— public information officer John Torre

2

What role does #closeFCPS play?

"I think that with the progression of Ryan McElveen's twitter, and the threats that he'll get to have snow days and to not have snow days, I think that creates a new inhibition on the people [whose] job is to do this, because not only are they dealing with the job of trying to figure out if it's safe for people or not, but also they deal with the fact that if they do or don't have a snow day, you're gonna have like thousands of students publicly harassing you on social media. If it isn't the right decision, you also have parents who are on social media talking about it."

— junior Courtney Johnson

3

What factors impact the decision?

"We have approximately 40,000 children who walk to school each day and thousands more who walk to and from bus stops and, because of parent work schedules, many of those children do not have alternate transportation arrangements available during inclement weather. The decision to open, close or delay school is made on the best information available at the time with student safety always the first priority."

— public information officer John Torre



ANNA ZELENSKI/RANK&FILE

Social studies teacher Ilsa Tinkelman assists sophomore Seyed Houseni with his homework. Her unique teaching techniques have proven to be a success among her students.

Teachers implement new methods

by anna zelenski

Various members of the faculty have adopted a range of teaching styles and techniques that vary in each class and subject. The unique ways that each class is run have met with largely positive feedback from each teacher's respective students.

Social studies teacher Ilsa Tinkelman has developed certain techniques such as a constantly updating podcast system and taking frequent breaks to let her students decompress, that she has employed in her various classes.

"Me and many other teachers in the history department have taken advantage of the podcasting system in our computers," Tinkelman said. "I post them to Blackboard and when a student is absent, either just for one class or multiple classes, they can be easily caught up."

Junior Elysa Warren appreciates the help the podcast brings and wishes other teachers would follow Tinkelman's lead in formulating new methods of communicating information to members of the class.

"It was really nice to go home, listen to

it and study because you don't get everything down that she says in class which was helpful for the tests," Warren said.

French teacher Jacques Nong Bateki uses technology to his advantage and integrates a number of the available digitally-based programs and services into his class curriculum.

"I use a combination of technologies such as Blackboard and Google Classroom to help my students study for tests and also quiz remediations," Nong Bateki said.

The teachers have complete jurisdiction as to how they teach the material they are assigned to teach, whether it's through outside services or in-class techniques. In the end, most of the unique methods of extra help that the teachers provide is completely optional to the students.

"I think as students we are quick to judge our teachers for unfair grading or them being 'mean,'" senior Thando Muchemenyi said. "But they do a lot of extra work for us that really get us to a point where we can succeed. Each teacher has their own way of doing things, but they only do this to benefit me and their students."

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Academy classes break away from IB mold

by chloe pignano

One distinct memory of freshmen orientation was sitting in the auditorium as an eighth grader and hearing the words “IB diploma” and “IB classes” over and over again. Even as a senior, I still hear these phrases all the time. I was never on board to take part in the IB curriculum. As an underclassman I struggled to maintain a B- in the honors classes I was taking, consequently, I decided that honors classes and IB classes were not for me. Instead I opted to take academy classes which is the best decision I’ve made with my time at Marshall.

Academy offers a hands on experience that I have yet to obtain from other classes. The academy teachers are professionals in their field of work. Listening to them speak about post-secondary education and careers is some of the most helpful advice I’ve gotten in high school.

The best thing about academy classes is that part of the course work is learning how to operate machinery and equipment relating to the class field. Tests and quizzes are nonexistent. The only assessments are producing final products such as short films. This unique structure made the class more impactful.

The difficult thing about the academy classes I took were that they were at Fairfax High School. Traveling to another school

everyday is big chunk of time taken out of the day. I’m not at Marshall from the start of Learn to about the end of A Lunch every day.

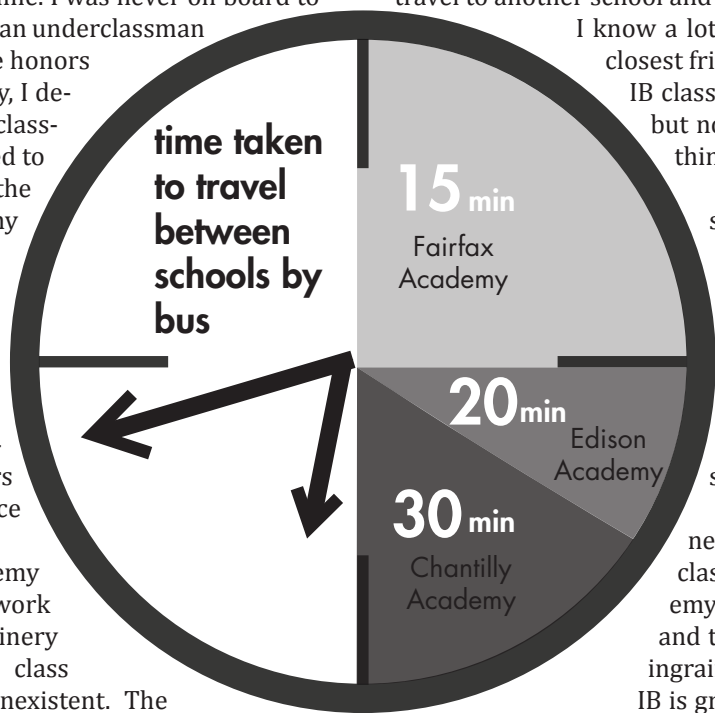
It’s shocking how much of the faculty focuses on IB. The majority of underclassmen are most likely unaware that they can travel to another school and take a specialized class.

I know a lot of people enjoy IB classes. All my closest friends at this school take at least one IB class. It’s great how they can excel at it, but not everyone’s brain is hardwired to think and perform in the IB fashion.

There is a certain stigma towards students like myself that don’t take IB courses. I’ve been told by a handful of classmates that my classes don’t matter. Students don’t seem to understand that Photography at Marshall and Professional Studio Photography at Fairfax are two different courses focussing on separate lessons.

The only way to fix this disconnect is to put a spotlight on academy classes. Many people hear about academy classes through word of mouth and these course alternatives are not as ingrained into our heads as IB.

IB is great for students who are scholastically oriented, but the emphasis placed on these classes is not necessary for everyone. By putting an equal amount of focus on IB and academy classes as respectable options, everyone will be able to find their niche and academically prosper.



Hearing loss issues deserve more recognition

by mia toser

A common misconception many people have is that hearing loss is only prominent in the elderly, but in reality, every age is capable of a lack of hearing. As a person with hearing loss, I strongly believe that everyone should keep in mind and respect that others may not be able to hear at the same level as them.

I was born with a condition called LVAS, large vestibular aqueduct syndrome, where certain structures within my inner ear can become swollen and enlarged. This can result in fluid flowing back into these structures which causes hearing loss. This is typically activated by head injuries, and when I was younger I suffered two concussions. I got my first hearing aid when I was four years old; it

was sparkly pink. Then, when I was eight, I had another episode of hearing loss and got my second hearing aid.

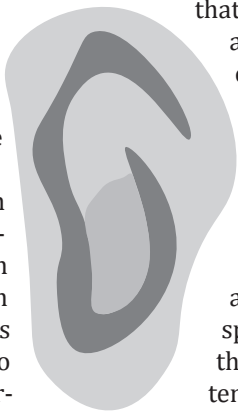
Throughout school, I have always had an IEP, Individual Education Program, that allows me a hearing itinerary and an audiologist that come once a month to check up on me academically, check my hearing aids, and make sure the school and teachers are meeting my needs such as: sitting in the front of the classroom, not near a loud AC, and making sure the teacher is speaking loud enough or using the sound field microphone system.

Most of my friends are not aware of my hearing loss because I wear my hair down where people cannot see my hearing aids. Despite popular belief, I cannot

turn up and down my hearing aids just to tune people out. Dealing with everyday things with my hearing aids could be much easier if teachers and other students were more educated on hearing loss and the needs of hearing aids.

Sometimes, my hearing aids die, and I cannot hear anything and my personal equilibrium is off. Because most people do not know I wear hearing aids, I am stuck waiting for a time and opportunity where I can privately change my hearing aid batteries. Also, due to my wearing of hearing aids, I am unable to hear in headphones, earbuds, and phones in the same way.

It is struggles like these that teachers and peers do not understand. I believe that all it takes is a bit of consideration from others to simply ask if everyone can hear. The simple question does not call anyone out and it gives the opportunity for someone to speak up if they are struggling.



Resolutions aren’t about results

by lauren elias

Every year we search for the perfect response to the dreaded question, “So what are your New Year’s resolutions?” For as long as I can remember, I’ve hopped on the resolution bandwagon of lying to myself and striving for an idealized version of my lifestyle that, in short, is impossible to achieve. Varying from “wear more necklaces” to “work towards self love and acceptance,” I’m no stranger to the hope that a symbolic fresh start gives. I’m not trying to discredit that, but trying to bring to light that the tragic flaw in these resolutions is the inane fact that we are too hard on ourselves when we lose a fight we had little chance of winning.

It’s common knowledge that resolutions aren’t often kept. According to the University of Scranton, 42.4% of people report never succeeding and failing to keep their resolutions each year. It’s no secret that 2016 was a generally difficult year, making musings of drastic changes for the better all the more appealing. But I think the problem with this is that we forget the whole essence of resolutions in the

first place. The Cambridge Dictionary defines a New Year’s resolution as “a promise that you make to yourself to start doing something good or stop doing something bad on the first day of the year.” And that’s the thing. It’s a promise to yourself. We put so much pressure on ourselves to achieve our resolutions that any mistake is incredibly demoralizing and we tend to give up. We forget that it should not be about being perfect, but about trying. For example, if your resolution is to eat better and on Jan. 2 you eat a donut, that doesn’t mean you automatically failed and should just fall back into old habits with the excuse of “already breaking” your resolution. After all, the University College London conducted a study and found that it takes an average time of 66 days for a habit to stick.

Having goals can be a good motivational tool but there is nothing magical about Jan 1. It is a day no different than any other. Instead of burdening ourselves with the pressure of the often unattainable expectations of New Year’s resolutions, we should set our goals at any point during the year and work diligently toward them.

new year’s resolutions

by the numbers



Assassin's Creed film fails to break infamous movie curse

by johann young

Game developer Ubisoft's first Hollywood blockbuster *Assassin's Creed* was released on Dec 23 to excited fans of the popular video game franchise of the same name. The movie follows Cal Lynch (Michael Fassbender), the descendant of the assassin Aguilar, and Dr. Sophia Rikkin (Marion Cotillard), a scientist at Abstergo Industries. The main selling point of this movie was that it would reportedly break the "video game movie curse", which has been blamed for the poor reviews of many films based on video games. Sadly, this was not the case.

The movie opens promisingly by throwing viewers directly into the action of the Spanish Inquisition, setting up the conflict between the Assassins and Templar, a secret order obsessed with controlling the world with magical artifacts, in the present day. Cal is sentenced to death after being charged with murder but wakes up in an Abstergo test facility

and meets Dr. Rikkin. This is where the movie begins to slow down and show the bland nature of the characters through Cal, whose personality never develops more than blunt, angry and crazy'. Fassbender could do very little to save this character and the same can be said with Colitard, who has very little to work with when it comes to character building. However, some of her best scenes were with Jeremy Irons's character Allen Rikkin, Sophia's father, and their push and pull over power of Cal. Sadly, that didn't do much to help the slow present day scenes that took up a majority of the film.

While character development may not be the movie's strongest feature, director Justin Kurzel did an amazing job bringing the game's action into the silver screen. Kurzel made an interesting choice by removing the Animus chair of the game and replaced it for a mechanical arm that allows for Fassbender to perform impressive movements while in the virtual-reality world. The assassin



TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX/REPRODUCED UNDER FAIR USE

Cal Lynch (Michael Fassbender) in the Animus as his assassin ancestor Aguilar uses a bow to fight off incoming Templar in fourteenth century Spain

Aguilar (also played by Fassbender) and his partner Maria (Ariane Labed) fighting through the Spanish Inquisition is what makes the movie watchable and helps salvage the boring present day story, but is then quickly interrupted.

Assassin's Creed is a good movie for

fans of the series to see the Assassins and Templar fight on the big screen but sadly fails to connect viewers with the them. The movie's action and impressive visuals do manage to salvage the film but can't save it enough to reach anything higher than a two out of five.

Year in review

Top three songs of 2016

Music is often used as an outlet for us to escape the stress of our daily lives. Here, we rank the three best songs students were listening to this year.
compiled by aparna mathews

1

Closer by The Chainsmokers

"It's such a jam, it has such a great vibe to it which is kind of inexplicable but just makes you feel great"
- junior Marin Uher

2

Black Beatles by Rae Sremmurd

"It's super catchy and Drake always makes great music, so when you know the artist is good at what he does you are more inclined to listen to other songs by them"
- sophomore Sanya Gulati

3

One Dance by Drake

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Weight-sensitive sport presents challenges

by gwyneth murphy

Wrestling, an athletic practice of physical dominance, requires maintaining peak physical and mental shape both in and out of season. With practices all week and tournaments most weekends, wrestlers meet with a number of health and wellbeing challenges.

"I think the most challenging thing about wrestling is the consistency," senior and varsity wrestler Marco Villarreal said. "You're never not wrestling because you're always watching your weight or always doing things to be on weight no matter where you are."

This focus on weight stems from an incident in 1997, when three wrestlers died of rapid weight loss, causing wrestling standard changes including weight certification, the process by which a player determines their hydration, body fat and the lowest weight that athlete can reach.

"Basically every official weigh in that you have there's a certain limit of how much weight you can lose per week and it's based on that initial weight certification," junior and varsity wrestler Reza Mirzaiee said. "Usually the coach will want you to go the lowest weight you can that way you have an advantage, because the less fat you have the more of an advantage you have."

According to Villarreal, head coach Jason Planakis has the responsibility of encouraging healthy habits for athletes.

"[Our coach] never really wants you to be killing yourself, and I think that's also kind of the purpose of the hydration tests," Villarreal said. "Like that proves how low you can go and there's no real excuse not to go that low. It might be hard, but it's not unhealthy."

Mirzaiee describes the process of staying in shape as a long-term effort, rather than a sudden drop in weight.

"You've been watching your weight all week. It's something you prepare for, it's not something you show up for like 'well, I'm going to lose 10 pounds,'" Mirzaiee said.

Training builds up slowly, leading to the Friday practice before a tournament known as the make weight practice.

"Friday, we're just working at a constant rate [and] not really doing live situations, but we're just working to lose weight, so [we] sweat out all the water that [we] can that way you can make weight for Saturday," Villarreal said.

For junior and varsity wrestler Damian Cabrera, this process allows him to better understand his body's limits.

"I didn't think my body could do the stuff that it could do when I started wrestling," Cabrera said. "There were certain positions I never thought my body was capable of."

A busy schedule generates additional stress for athletes managing school. Mirzaiee attributes his ability to manage his academics to stamina.



GWYNETH MURPHY/RANK&FILE



ALEXANDRA LYALIKOV/COLUMBIAN

Top: Junior and varsity wrestler Damian Cabrera pins a Wakefield wrestler at the Dec. 21 meet.
Bottom: Junior and varsity wrestler Martin Lopez pins a TJ wrestler during the Jan. 4 meet.

"I like to think of it like a grind when I'm in the winter season," Mirzaiee said. "I tend to just focus on improving myself in every way possible and not really making space for other activities that distract me from that. It's about improving my wrestling, it's about keeping up my grades and it's about not dying and keeping myself healthy."

With everything wrestlers combat, Mirzaiee finds comfort in his teammates.

"Wrestling builds really strong friendships," Mirzaiee said. "Everyone on the team is really close, we endure all of this hardship together and we're all a family."

Mirzaiee's endures these challenges by personally deciding to achieve success despite these obstacles.

"It's a commitment you make to yourself, and when you succeed and pull through and subject yourself to all of these negative things and you come out on the other side ready for more, that's the biggest boost I get from wrestling," Mirzaiee said.

With any demanding sport there will be a lot of sacrifice, but Cabrera attributes their success to these obstacles.

"I think we wouldn't be the district champions if we weren't where we are now," Cabrera said.

sports**brief**

Intense athletic schedule prompts time management

The significant time commitment of high school sports can add to the pressure of athletes, who are already managing stressful and rigorous practice schedules. Junior and indoor track athlete Rachel Miller has learned how to work around her packed slate.

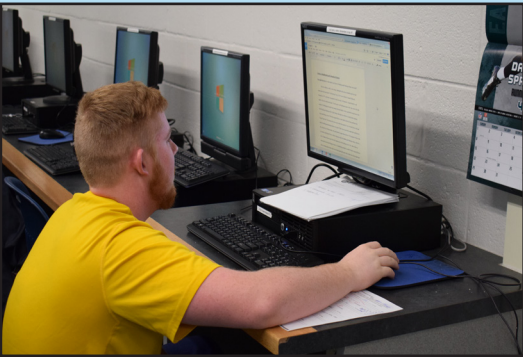
"We usually practice four times a week," Miller said. "It's really hard sometimes, but it's really taught me how to not procrastinate."

Sophomore and JV boys basketball player Coleman Blakeley takes advantage of time given in class to complete homework.

"I use the time I get to do work in class to focus on my work and get it finished," Blakeley said. "If I don't finish then, I finish in the locker room before the games [or] practices."

Because of increased involvement in the school community, time management is key to handling a high school schedule.

by kiley moriarty



KILEY MORIARTY/RANK&FILE

Sophomore and JV basketball player Coleman Blakeley works towards completing his assignments during class.

Varsity boys basketball takes third in tournament

Winter break is a time for academics to hit the brakes, and athletics to take over. The boys varsity basketball team attended The Shootout by the Sea Tournament from Dec. 19 to 21.

"The tournament was a great opportunity for us to improve as a team and increase morale," senior and varsity basketball player Peyton Lanier said.

The team placed third, but beat the South Carolina state champions from Byrnes High School.

They didn't come back as tournament champions, losing to Loudon Valley High school, but the team takes the trip as a learning experience.

"The more important thing was that it showed us the things we needed to work on," boys varsity basketball head coach Dan Hale

by johann young

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