

The Stentorian

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CAMPUS

Why “Locking In” At The Library Is Hard To Accomplish



STUDENT LIFE

NCSSM Hall Theme Rankings



EDUCATION



You Didn’t Really Understand The Assignment

THINK DEEPER. Dr. Jeff Lichtman, Dean of Science at Harvard University, raised five claims, each answering the question, “What is school for?” If you measure the value of school based on test scores and grades, then I suppose you didn’t really understand the assignment.

SEE PAGE 8

SPIKEBALL

Got What It Takes? NCSSM Spikeball Is Not For Faint-Hearted

SETTLING SCORES. At Happy Half, the last 30 minutes of the day turn into a battleground on Watts Lawn to settle spikeball rivalries and bond over excuses, laughter and bruises.

SEE PAGE 8

JTERM

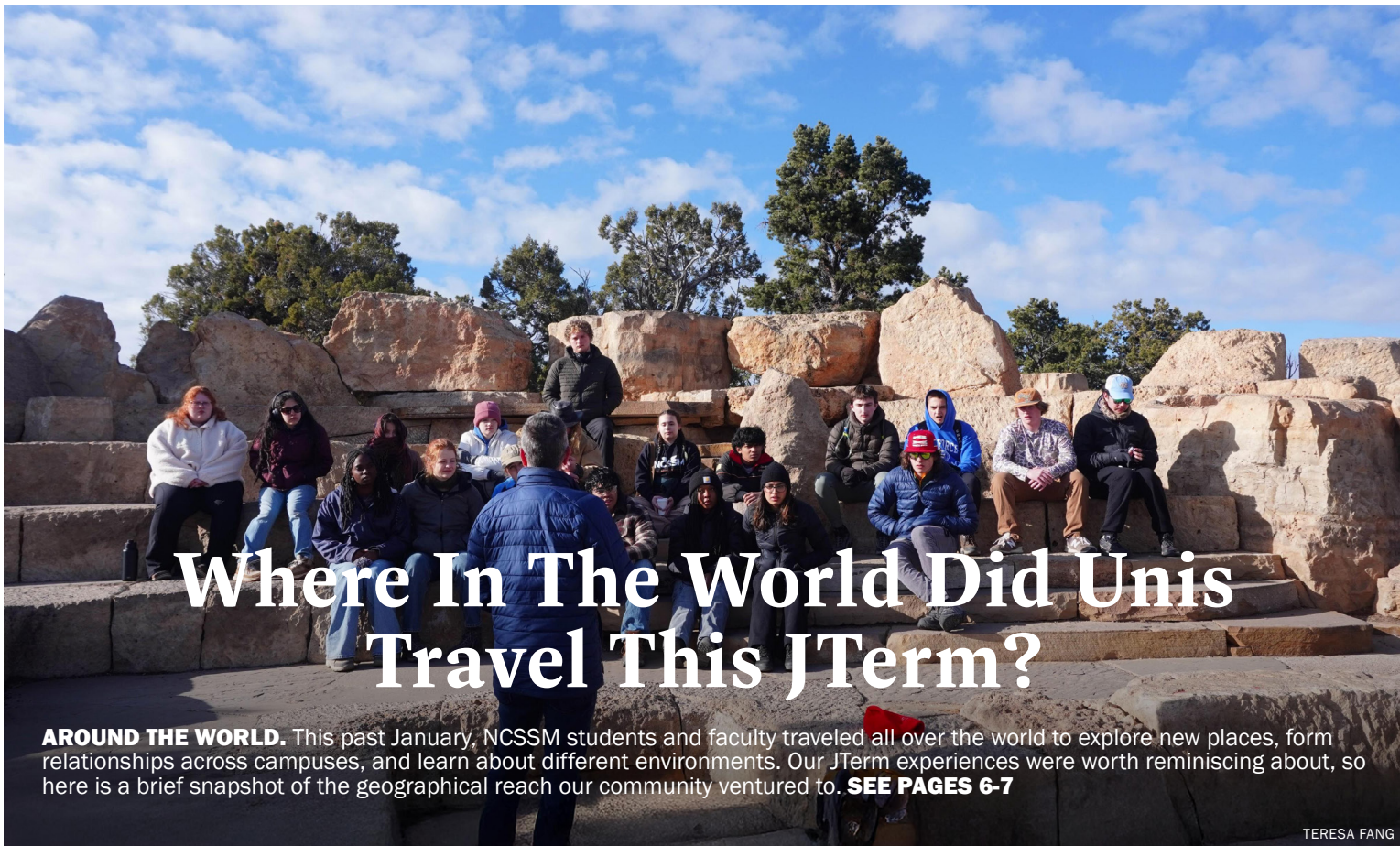


I Love Hopi Hot Beef, and Other Things About My Arizona J-Term

TO THE WEST! In the week traveling from Southern Arizona to the North, I’ve learned so much about the landscapes, but even more about the world.

SEE PAGE 9

JTERM



Where In The World Did Unis Travel This JTerm?

AROUND THE WORLD. This past January, NCSSM students and faculty traveled all over the world to explore new places, form relationships across campuses, and learn about different environments. Our JTerm experiences were worth reminiscing about, so here is a brief snapshot of the geographical reach our community ventured to. **SEE PAGES 6-7**

STUDENT LIFE

Spoons: NCSSM’s Sacred Tradition

BY TEJASVI SHIROLKAR
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

Usually used in a bowl of PFM cereal or soup, spoons are an essential part of the NCSSM dining experience. However, this February marked an annual tradition many chose to partake in: “Spoons.” Holding a wooden spoon to their nose, NCSSM students pass through hallways, go up stairs, and to their dorm halls.

To an outsider, Spoons may seem like a silly pastime. However, any NCSSM community member knows that the tradition is so much more; it celebrates the beginning of the Spring semester and allows both seniors and juniors to connect beyond the classroom.

The Mastermind Behind This Year’s Spoons

Vincent Barboriak ‘25, from 3rd

West, is this year’s supervisor (or “Spoon’s Master,” as he describes it). As last year’s Spoons winner, Barboriak became the overseer for this year. He tracks eliminations, updates charts related to the game, and modifies rules for all participants.

How The Game Works

On February 5th, 205 juniors and seniors each received a spoon with another player’s name on it—the person the player had to eliminate. For any player to be eliminated, they must be tapped on the shoulder with the spoon.

However, there is a catch: if a player has held up a spoon to their nose, that player is protected. Additionally, educational spaces such as classrooms and the library are considered “safe zones” to

SEE PAGE 5

RESEARCH

Students, Teachers Prepare For NCSEF

BY ANNELIESE HEYDER
STENTORIAN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The “Science Season” is upon us: when the summer months start getting closer and science fairs, conferences, and competitions begin popping up like flowers. Throughout the spring semester, students at NCSSM will be presenting their research at school and around the state and country.

The North Carolina Science and Engineering Fair, or NCSEF, kicked off on February 17th at NCSSM as Region 3b, with both juniors and seniors competing by sharing their research with judges, teachers, and students. Some students completed research independently or with a team, while others were part of the RSci or Mentorship programs.

Luke Malta ‘25 was an RChem student who presented at NCSEF. “I spent a lot of time perfecting my poster, sitting down and making

sure I have as much information as possible,” he described his preparation. “I also planned on practicing presenting in front of the current RChem students to get some feedback from them and Dr. Bruno.”

Sawyer Kribbs ‘25 from RBio did the same. “I began to prepare by practicing my speech a couple of nights before presenting it to the judges. I was pretty nervous, but I felt ready,” he said, adding that he enjoyed talking with other students about his research and was impressed with the other projects at the fair.

Some of the students who presented did their research at another university with a mentor and a team of undergraduate or graduate students.

“I would say NCSEF was a great experience! It prepared me for future symposiums I plan to attend

SEE PAGE 4

NOW TAKING

Submit a Guest Piece



YEARLONG. In addition to staff-written content, The Stentorian encourages members of the school community to submit story ideas, letters to the editor and guest pieces to the editorial board.

APRIL

Let’s Celebrate Our Wins



DUE APRIL 7. Send us information about anything you (individual student, club, or team) have won this school year. This issue will be a compilation of great triumphs to lift up our spirits up and celebrate each other.

MAY

Senior Wills 2025



DUE MAY 11. Each year, seniors can publish a senior will in the issue of the Stentorian. These are short statements in which seniors “leave” memories or a legacy to fellow seniors, juniors, & NCSSM community.

A Letter of Action and Relief

BY ELLIE MURPHY
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

Hello, I hope this finds you well. I am writing this to spread information about the vast impacts Hurricane Helene has had on my home community and the surrounding western North Carolina (WNC) region. My family was fortunate enough to be out of town when the hurricane hit and we are safe and physically well. The county I have grown up in almost my entire life, Yancey County, has been virtually destroyed. It has been extremely disheartening to experience this knowing that people in my own state have little to no knowledge about the severity, because of a lack of media and news coverage.

I understand that this does not only apply to my county but the entire WNC region. If you are willing to read the following about the situation, I ask that you do so with care and attention to detail. I hope that people can grasp at least a sliver of what my community is going through and find sympathy to donate and reach out to those in need.

Before Hurricane Helene even swept through, the region was flooded from predecessor rain events (rain that occurs around 36 hours before a storm and can span 600 miles poleward from the storm's center). These rain events brought in about 12 inches of rain-enough to flood interstates, fill the ground, and create a few inches or so of present groundwater. Hurricane Helene brought a total of 30 inches to my town Burnsville in Yancey County, NC.

On Thursday night and Friday into the early afternoon, Hurricane Helene swept through my county. On Friday morning, I was in contact with a friend in my hometown where the conditions of the area where she had already lost power but was able to communicate through her family's solar-powered

satellite wifi.

After 10 a.m., I was no longer able to contact anyone from my county or surrounding counties. No one else could communicate either, not within the area or outside of it. To give context, in many of these rural communities, families have lived here for generations. Grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and other family members (of multiple generations) live in the area and these small towns are all their last names have ever known. This area is also one of the most impoverished areas of the state.

For loved ones who were not directly impacted by the storm but were concerned for their family, no communication meant that they had no one to reach out to. Their entire extended family was at risk and suddenly everyone was isolated from one another. Scrolling on Facebook pages of my town was and is still apocalyptic-like. Hours spent scrolling through family members reporting their loved ones missing and asking for any information on specific roads/areas. This absence of communication is still ongoing but has improved daily and there are wifi centers set up, if people can access them.

My dad is an OB/GYN and travels to regional hospitals for his work. He was working in a hospital just south of Asheville. Even at a hospital, he had no power or service. He reported to us at 4 a.m. on Saturday that he was okay. The hospital had no source of information besides looking out the windows and hearing reports from people stumbling into the building. My dad was also told that he was the only surgeon in the hospital for the day and night he was there.

From a friend with a family member who works at the hospital closest to my house, the hospital was again described as "an apocalypse" after the storm passed. With no running water or service, people were showing up at

the hospital doors with major injuries, severe limb damage, and pleas for help.

The story of a man who was pinned under a tree for three hours is most haunting. A friend shared with my mom the story of a nearby sheriff: how he worked for 72 hours straight rescuing and searching for others; how his team had to leave bodies floating down flood waters; how the death toll is still increasing as more bodies are uncovered.

Access to emergency facilities was incredibly limited because of the destruction of the roads. Major interstates are closed between towns and into towns due to fallen trees, mudslides, bridges collapsed, flooding, powerlines down, or the pavement is literally no longer there and swept away by flood waters. This not only applies to major interstates and highways but to almost every single side road, neighborhood, and driveway.

The damage to these roads is severely isolating. Without access to homes by car, people must walk for miles to reach a main highway or even any sort of public infrastructure. To provide additional context, Yancey County has a population of about 19,000 and has a square mileage of 312.6 miles. Durham County has a population of about 333,000 and has a square mileage of 287.5 miles. I include this to say there is no large neighborhood. There is not a centralized location. People across my county are incredibly spread out. There is no interstate in my county, only 2 major highways that connect the thousands of side roads. Bridges that connect these roads to the highways are washed out completely. Hundreds of trees and powerlines have fallen on singular driveways. Many live on gravel roads, and those are completely impassable. It will take months and years to fix this issue and until then, traveling to or from home will be impossible or

WAYS TO DONATE MONEY AND RESOURCES

VERIFIED LIST OF RESOURCES TO GET AND RECEIVE HELP:
appvoices.org/helene-relief/

NORTH CAROLINA DISASTER RELIEF FUND:
pay.payitgov.com/ncdonations

LIST OF HIGH SCHOOLS
HOSTING DONATION DRIVES:



TO HELP NCSSM'S WNC
EFFORTS OR ANY NCSSM-
SPECIFIC QUESTIONS,
EMAIL SERVICE LEARNING
COORDINATOR
SUE ANNE LEWIS AT
servicelearning@ncssm.edu

extremely difficult.

With this lack of transportation and communication, people are starved of physical resources and resources of knowledge. At this time only a few locations throughout the county have power. Many homes do not have running water, electricity, service, a source of food, or transportation (and for those who do have a way of traveling with their vehicles, there is barely any access to gas). This applies to those fortunate enough to have an intact home. For some, flood waters have destroyed levels of their home, trees have fallen on rooms or entire houses, their houses are completely underwater, mudslides have caused the houses to lose their foundations, or houses near rivers have been swept away entirely.

Damage to this extent has not only impacted homes but also cars and public buildings. The post office closest to my house consists of only the cinder block foundation now. I spent my summers swimming in the South Toe River; the

swimming hole is down about 20 feet in a ravine from where you park your car. The river is now level with the road. The multiple bridges to access my house are completely washed out. Our neighbors hitchhiked into town to send us an email urging us to not return for a while.

I have been fortunate enough to hear from a majority of loved ones, but even 48-72 hours from the storm I worry about friends and valued community members. The majority of people are okay but conditions are terrible. Communities have banded together to make it through this. It will take months and years to reach relative stability.

I write all of this to provide context that hopefully helps you to understand the severity of the situation. I strongly urge you to share this email or by word of mouth with everyone: spouses, parents, friends, colleagues, teachers, neighbors, anyone.

Thank you,
Ellie Murphy ■



HERE ARE SOME BEFORE AND AFTER PHOTOS. I HAVE TRIED TO MATCH THE IMAGE OF DESTRUCTION WITH AN IMAGE FROM GOOGLE EARTH A COUPLE YEARS AGO. WHITE BUILDING IS THE POST OFFICE CLOSEST TO MY HOUSE. IT IS NO LONGER THERE AND THE BUILDING DIRECTLY NEXT TO IT IS MISSING A WALL. ELLIE MURPHY



THIS IS ONLY A MINUSCULE FRACTION OF PHOTOS. THE DAMAGE IS EXTREME EVERYWHERE. ELLIE MURPHY



Western NC Destroyed By Hurricane Helene

BY LAELA CASH
STENTORIAN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Editor's Note: This article was initially planned to be published in October 2024. The full article can be found on our website.

On September 27, 2024, Hurricane Helene hit Western North Carolina only two days after it made landfall in Florida. The result? Record-breaking flooding and destruction that most would have thought impossible for an area roughly 500 miles away from the ocean. While not only the Western part of the state was affected, it was definitely hit the hardest.

In total, 4.5 million people lost power in a week from the hurricane with 1.5 million of those being in North Carolina, according to USA Today. On September 27 alone, there were six confirmed tornadoes across the state with one as far east as Rocky Mount according to the North Carolina State Climate Office.

But that was only the beginning.

The Climate Office also reported that most Western counties got at least a foot of rain, with many reaching over two feet—effectively getting three months' worth of precipitation in three days. Some areas including Busick, located in Yancey County, got almost three feet. Because of this, rivers including the French Broad, Watagua, Swannanoa and Catawba, almost immediately reached major flood levels and above. This nearly-submerged many towns including Asheville, Black Mountain, Boone, Morganton and Swannanoa started to fill with feet of excess water.

The NASA Earth Observatory recorded that the French Broad reached a height of 247 feet which is a foot higher than the previous record while the Swannanoa River reached a height of 26.1 feet breaking the previous record by over six feet.

Asheville flooded rapidly as water flowed down from areas with higher elevation creating landslides along the way. Many areas became completely inaccessible almost immediately, as water breached rooftops.

At the same time, the Broad River basin was flooding, resulting in authorities attempting to evacuate areas downstream if the Lake Lure Dam broke while waves of water and debris hit the towns of Chimney Rock and Lake Lure.

In total, AP News reported that the hurricane brought a total of 40 trillion gallons of water to the Southern United States.

It wasn't only flooding that was breaking records. ECONet weather stations measured wind at a speed of 106 miles per hour on Mount Mitchell, making it the highest recorded since 2011. Similarly at Frying Pan Mountain, winds of 87 miles per hour were the highest recorded since 2004.

Such high winds inevitably led to more dangerous conditions

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and extreme property damage in addition to flooding. Most roads were immediately closed and travel bans were immediately put in place for the entirety of Western North Carolina. Many counties also enacted curfews to limit unnecessary traffic that may impede the travel of emergency vehicles on the remaining roads that were still accessible.

While rescue efforts started immediately, it was a long time before the full extent of the damage was realized and the timeline of recovery is still unsure.

However, in the wake of this deadly storm, there has been a lot of false information spread about the aftermath. In order to understand the impact that this hurricane has had on communities in Western North Carolina and to grasp the magnitude of the crisis, it is necessary to understand the factors at play and the extremity of the events.

Immediate Aftermath

As the rain started to let up, the full implications of the last three days set in. In the coming days and weeks, emergency services and hundreds of volunteers worked tirelessly to rescue people. These efforts were especially difficult in remote areas that were only accessible by roads that were more or less obliterated.

According to The New York Times as of October 22, 2024, across the six states that the hurricane plowed through, more than 200 people have been killed as a direct result of the natural disaster. In North Carolina alone, the death toll is at 96 with 42 of those being from Buncombe County with 26 people who are still reportedly missing.

According to AP News, hospitals almost immediately become overwhelmed. Additionally, many were running on backup generators after the power went out and therefore had limited capabilities while some had to close completely. Mission Hospital in Asheville set up mobile units in the days after the hurricane, offering showers, handwashing stations, and free food, water, and toiletries.

According to WRAL News, these tents were only possible because of federal relief and they also allowed the hospital's staff to treat more people. This was extremely necessary as the hospital was reportedly over 200% capacity on September 27.

While some may regard property loss as more easily replaceable compared to lives, property damage is still life-changing. Governor Roy Cooper's administration released a statement on October 23 estimating 53 billion dollars in damage.

Almost everyone who was lucky enough to still have their homes lost electricity, water, and cell service. Two weeks after the hurricane, roughly 14,000 people still did not have power in the state according to NPR. Many



DRONE FOOTAGE ON SEPT. 28 SHOWING FLOODING AND DAMAGE IN THE ASHEVILLE AREA AFTER HELENE DUMPED RAIN AND DOWNED TREES ACROSS WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA. WLOS 13 NEWS



MELISSA SUE GERRITS/GETTY IMAGES



JACOB BIBA/ASHEVILLE CITIZEN TIMES

people, especially those in the Asheville area, went even longer, according to the city.

However, Citizen Times reported as of October 18 that only 95% of that water is potable and therefore everyone is being told to boil their water. Without the internet, many people turned to Starlink as their only way to communicate with their loved ones.

Even so, many people did not have the option of getting away from these conditions, not only did they not have the resources to do so but also because the roads were destroyed in many cases, according to the Asheville Citizen Times.

Why Was Helene's Impact So Surprising?

According to BBC Weather, one of the reasons that the storm's large impact was unexpected is due to how rapidly it grew. It drew a great deal of its energy and momentum from warm waters in the Gulf of Mexico.

The local News and Observer interviewed head of N.C. State University's Marine, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences department Gary Lackmann in order to answer this question. He stated that these waters were warmer than usual due to global warming saying that the

Why Did Residents Not Evacuate?

One of the largest reasons is that the Western part of the state is rarely majorly affected by hurricanes.

Some people were entirely unaware that the storm was coming because they did not expect it to become so relevant to their safety. Most eyewitness and news sources say that the last time a hurricane substantially hit the Appalachian Mountains was in 2004. So, not only were many new residents unaware of this possibility, but even people who had lived through hurricane

damage in 2004 would've believed that another would be an unlikely occurrence. This was further extenuated by the fact that the hurricane grew very quickly giving residents little time to adequately prepare or make evacuation plans.

Additionally, according to the Washington Post, disaster experts evacuation would have been extremely difficult if not impossible based on the terrain and geography especially because there are often only a few ways to get in and out of remote, mountainous areas.

Also, there are no evacuation routes designated by round, blue signs like there often are in coastal communities. For that matter, there are also no flood sirens due to the general lack of flood prevention infrastructure.

Western North Carolina is known internationally for our beautiful forests and mountains, but Hurricane Helene brought devastation to ways of living and infrastructure on a scale no one could have predicted. The floods washed away not just homes and businesses, but the sense of safety and security that the mountains once offered.

Families are now left piecing together shattered lives in a place that once seemed untouched by such catastrophic storms. The road to recovery will not only be long but also a challenge as they

rebuild what was lost and grapple with speculation of what factors intensified the aftermath in the first place.

Yet, amidst the destruction, there is resilience—in time, the communities of Western North Carolina will rebuild as they already are working with help from the many volunteers who have stepped up to help and donations from across the country.

As someone from Western North Carolina, I urge you to do your research—this is only an overview of the full story. Everyone's experiences are different and important. After understanding that many people lost everything in just a few days, please help in any way that you can. We have linked additional resources on our website to help you do so. ■

VISIT
NCSSM.EDU/HELENE-RELIEF
FOR RESOURCES AND WAYS
TO HELP.



THAT TIME OF YEAR...



CHECK OUT THE SPRING EDITION OF BLUE MIRROR...!

POLITICS

DEI Must Die?

UNDER CRITICISM. On January 20, 2025, President Trump ordered an end to federal DEI programs, sparking debate over their role in addressing systemic inequalities.

BY VIVIANA GARDNER
STENTORIAN STAFF WRITER

On January 20th, 2025, President Donald Trump enacted an executive order that sought to end “radical and wasteful government DEI programs and preferencing.”

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs and policies have existed in many different forms since the mid-1960s when an executive order outlined that government employees were to be hired without bias toward gender, race, or religion. Since then, there have been larger strides to counterbalance the systematic discrimination that exists within our society, such as Executive Order 13985 enacted by President Joe Biden where he claimed in Ex that, “the Federal Government should pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequity.”

On the other hand, the January 20 Executive Order, criticizes DEI programs by claiming that the programs themselves are discriminatory, as the order operates off the idea that DEI’s goal of advancing racial and gender equity was only favoring certain groups of people, ignoring the centuries

of oppression and biases that still remain within societal structures and government organizations.

In implementing this order, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Attorney General, and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) have been tasked with ensuring the end of DEI programs within federal agencies while also reviewing their financial impact. This has affected countless programs and people across the nation—even in our own school, where our DEI-ties program ended and our Student Climate Opportunities, Outreach, and Programming (SCOOP) program began.

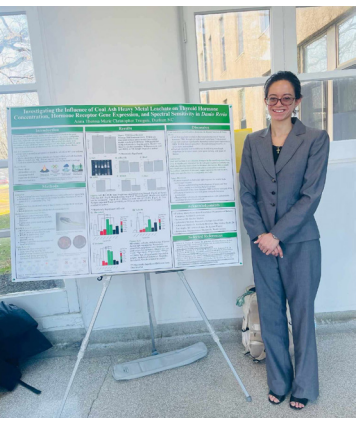
Recently, there has been an uptake in content condemning DEI and celebrating what seems to be the “end” of these programs, with many claiming them to be part of the same “woke liberal agenda” of other policies concerning ethical issues, such as those created by the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG).

Overall, the January 20 Executive Order has sparked debate around the existence of the policies and programs that served to make federal agencies more inclusive. In dismantling DEI programs that have allowed for a more equitable environment and that have addressed the deeply ingrained systemic inequalities, this executive order poses the risk of undoing decades of progress. As the federal government moves forward with these changes, the harm that these changes will and have caused will become a prominent topic and issue within minoritized and disadvantaged communities across the country. ■

RESEARCH FROM PAGE 1



AVA CUMMINGS '25 AND SAACHI ARUN '25 OF RBIO WITH THEIR RESEARCH POSTERS AT NCSEF REGION 3B ON FEBRUARY 17. ANNELIESE HEYDER



DANTE TRINGALE '25 WITH THEIR RESEARCH POSTER. ANNELIESE HEYDER

The “Science Season” Is Here: Students, Teachers Share Preparation and Experiences For NCSEF

since there will be judges who are experts in the topic I’m researching, and how to interact with them,” said Hima Manne ‘25, who was part of the Mentorship program.

Manne also explained how she prepared for NCSEF, stating “Planning included updating my research findings on the poster I previously had and prepping for specific questions about methods and future directions.”

Most of the eight categories advance the three top winners to the state-level North Carolina Science and Engineering Fair. The categories include Biological Science A, Biological Science B, Chemistry, Environmental/Earth

Science, Engineering, Mathematics, Technology, and Physics. There are other special prizes as well, such as the Regeneron Biomedical Science Award, the Stockholm Junior Water Prize, and the NC One Water Award. However, the grand prize is an all-expense paid trip to the International Science and Engineering Fair in May.

Not only must they practice their speaking and speaking skills, but students must also make sure they have all the required documents signed and their posters ready to be presented. Mentors play a significant role in helping their students prepare—printing posters, checking over materials, and

organizing the event.

Both teachers and students dedicate their time to making sure the fair goes smoothly for everyone. NCSEF provides an opportunity for peers to show one another their passions and skills and learn about various research topics.

It is also a great way to make connections and meet professionals in the field—for some students, their research is just the first step in their future careers. ■



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SCIENCE

How T-Cell and B-Cell Epitope Prediction Help You Fight Against Pathogens

BY TERESA FANG
STENTORIAN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

There are always new viruses emerging, and, like SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, they are constantly evolving into different variants or strains. Researchers are racing to find vaccines and therapies that can improve outcomes for patients worldwide, using methods ranging from traditional lab work to computational biology (bioinformatics), and even artificial intelligence (AI). To understand vaccine development, we first need to understand how our immune system fights germs. “The scientific world is constantly on the lookout for potential new pandemics so when there is a new virus, we would be

able to quickly predict and measure the immune response,” said Dr. Alessandro Sette, a professor at the La Jolla Institute for Immunology in San Diego, California, and Director of the Center for Cancer Immunotherapy and Center for Vaccine Innovation. Being able to predict and measure how the body’s immune system will respond to viruses is essential to developing effective vaccines. The immune system recognizes, remembers, and destroys disease-causing organisms, called pathogens, and can provide long-lasting protection from future attacks. Pathogens are made up of antigens, which activate the immune response.

The body’s immune response is mediated by B cells and T cells. They do not recognize pathogens as a whole but

instead recognize epitopes, which are unique markers on the antigens. If you’ve ever seen pictures of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the spikes on the virus’s surface are the antigens that allow researchers to develop COVID-19 vaccines. These are critical for the immune system’s ability to identify and respond to foreign invaders such as viruses and bacteria.

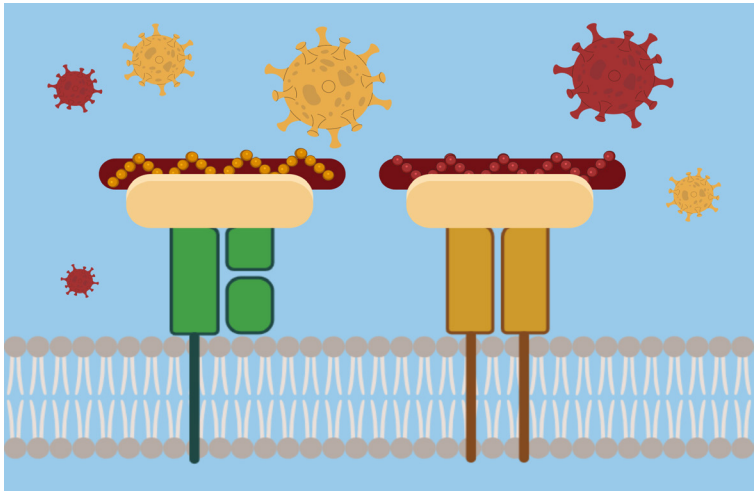
Predicting B-cell vs. T-cell epitopes

The difference between B cells and T cells makes it necessary to have multiple methods for predicting their epitopes. B cells produce antibodies that usually bind to cell-surface epitopes that are folded in a three-dimensional structure. This method used for B-cell epitope prediction is called discontinuous 3D structure-based epitope prediction. “Antibodies recognize things on the outside and often recognize three-dimensional structures that are made out of discontinuous epitopes,” said Dr. Sette. “These are epitopes that are made from parts of a protein that are not necessarily like ducks in a row.” T cells are entirely different: They recognize chopped-up fragments of proteins bound to human leukocyte antigen (HLA) molecules. Also known as major histocompatibility complex (MHC), these are specialized molecules on a cell’s surface for detection, holding important epitopes, for T cells. T-cell epitope prediction, therefore, is not limited to far-apart 3D structures like B cells are. Instead of discontinuous epitopes, T cells recognize linear epitopes. This method is called linear

sequence-based epitope prediction. “If you could see the structure of an HLA molecule with a peptide bound to it, it looks like a hot dog bun with a sausage in the middle,” Dr. Sette explained. “That is the fragment where the peptide is stretched out.” Currently, most vaccines and therapeutics target B cells because antibodies are easier to measure than epitope fragments in T cells, although both are important for vaccine design.

Bioinformatics in advancing epitope prediction

In the past, vaccines were developed by using whole inactivated pathogens (such as in polio), an approach that was not always successful, or by predicting epitopes using traditional lab techniques, which are laborious and time-consuming. Recent advances in computational biology and bioinformatics have significantly improved the ability to predict epitopes for B-cell and T-cell activation in a time-sensitive manner. Dr. Sette is part of a team that develops and oversees the national Immune Epitope Database (IEDB), a free, widely-used bioinformatics resource database for storing epitope structures. It has two purposes: to function as a catalog for epitopes and as a collection of epitope prediction tools for immunology research around the world. The IEDB uses many methods to predict epitopes and is always being updated. Generally, it analyzes patterns in already-known epitope structures to predict the epitope for an unknown one



“IF YOU COULD SEE THE STRUCTURE OF AN HLA MOLECULE WITH A PEPTIDE BOUND TO IT, IT LOOKS LIKE A HOT DOG BUN WITH A SAUSAGE IN THE MIDDLE,” DR. SETTE SAID. TERESA FANG

LOCAL

Top Sports Teams in the Triangle

BY PRESTON MULLINS
STENTORIAN STAFF WRITER

The Triangle region of North Carolina has plenty of exciting options for sports fans to indulge in. Whether you want to watch the tactical showdown of a soccer match or the fast-paced action of a basketball game, a wide variety of major sports are available. This comprehensive guide will detail all of the teams that a fan can see in the Triangle area.

Carolina Hurricanes

The Hurricanes of the National Hockey League (NHL) are the only team in the Triangle from one of the “Big Four” North American sports leagues; the NHL, Major League Baseball (MLB), National Basketball Association (NBA), and National Football League (NFL). The “Canes,” as fans call them, are consistently competitive at North America’s highest level of hockey, winning the Stanley Cup in the 2005-06 NHL season. Head over to the Lenovo Center in Raleigh for some exhilarating professional hockey!

UNC Tar Heels, Duke Blue Devils, and NC State Wolfpack

The Triangle has the unique privilege of being home to three college sports powerhouses, offering fans in the region the opportunity to experience a multitude of National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) Division I athletic events from field hockey to football. All three of these schools compete in the Atlantic



SPECTACULAR MAG

Coast Conference and have plenty of national championships across all of the sports they field, so you are sure to see a high level of play when attending one of these events.

North Carolina FC and North Carolina Courage

North Carolina FC and North Carolina Courage are the Triangle’s respective premier professional men’s and women’s soccer clubs. They compete in The United Soccer League (USL) Championship and the National Women’s Soccer League respectively. The clubs’ home stadium at WakeMed Soccer Park is the epicenter of Triangle soccer and a great place to catch a match. Fans can take a trip over to Cary to see goals galore scored by these two excellent clubs!

Durham Bulls

The Durham Bulls are a minor league

baseball team; the Triple-A affiliate of the Tampa Bay Rays. They play at Durham Bulls Athletic Park, conveniently located in downtown Durham, and games there are always exciting—a great way to see upcoming Major League Talent play before they head up to the big leagues. The Durham Bulls bring the fun of professional baseball to the Triangle!

Carolina Mudcats

The Carolina Mudcats are the other minor league baseball team in the Triangle, but they play three levels below the Bulls as the Milwaukee Brewers’ single-A affiliate. Mudcats games are another great professional baseball option; lower-level minor league games showcase raw talent unlike the developed players of the higher levels who are on the cusp of reaching the major leagues. The Mudcats currently play at Five County Stadium in Zebulon but will be moving to Wilson in 2026. ■

STUDENT LIFE FROM PAGE 1

Spoons: The Sacred Tradition

prevent distractions while learning.

Some NCSSM students go to great lengths when playing Spoons. Antavious Ashe, a Community Coordinator (CC) on 2nd Hill, chimed in regarding some of the Spoons stories he had heard of. A member of 2nd Hill went as far as carrying his spoon in the shower, preventing another roommate from tapping him out.

Chloe Harnphanich ‘26, from 3rd Beall, echoed a similar story. While walking out of the PFM, Harnphanich kept her spoon to her nose. Near her, her eliminator lurked, waiting until the moment Harnphanich took the spoon off her nose.

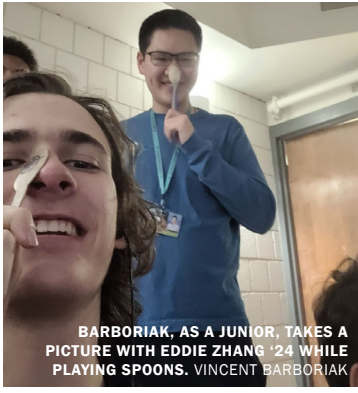
“[I] wanted to collaborate more with the student body [as a Junior Senator],” said Harnphanich. “In general, [this game] is a very fun, engaging way to have a stress relieving aspect in... life, especially with such rigorous coursework at school.”

As a former student and now as a CC, Ashe responded, “At first, I thought [Spoons] was really random, but in a way, it seems to bring the campus together... I think [the competition] can be taken to extremes, but for the most part, [Spoons] is a good thing.”

To Keep or Not to Keep?

While the winner for Spoons this year is yet to be declared, the student body seems to be in consensus: the sense of community, friendly competition, and

camaraderie the game creates is what makes every participant a champion. The annual game is here to stay, and hopefully be embedded into the rich history of NCSSM. ■



BARBORKIA, AS A JUNIOR, TAKES A PICTURE WITH EDDIE ZHANG '24 WHILE PLAYING SPOONS. VINCENT BARBORKIA



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SPIKEBALL



COOPER UHL

Students Press for Return of Happy Half on Hill Street

BY ANNELIESE HEYDER
STENTORIAN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Happy Half has been an NCSSM tradition for years: the last 30 minutes before check is the precious time when students can socialize with friends and take a break from the stress of school.

While participation can vary depending on the day and weather, you can usually find at least 15-20 out on Hill Street enjoying the half an hour before check. However, a new element has been brought into the Happy Half scene: spike ball. Spikeball is a game that involves a ball, a net, and four competitive players. It’s become a popular activity at NCSSM and boasts a club that hosts tournaments and events dedicated to the sport. Recently, however, spike ball has caused Happy Half to move from its famous spot on Hill Street to the Royall Lawn, affecting the Happy Half scene—something many students are indeed not “happy” with.

Cooper Uhl ‘25, a frequent Happy-goer, asked students their opinions one night. “[Spikeball] was cool at first when it was just one or two [nets], but now it’s like five or six,” stated Stevie Richardson ‘25. “I think it has been detrimental to the culture of Happy Half because it’s meant for people to be able to talk about their days,” Lola Larsen ‘25 said. “But when you are playing spike ball, it’s very difficult to have a conversation.”

Not all students are against the new Happy Half addition; many are very supportive and believe it should be here to stay. “It’s a good activity to keep

people moving and it brings the school together. It really builds a community to be able to come out to,” said Hannah Amadi ‘25.

Rishi Jalagam ‘25 believed spike ball was “the greatest thing in the history of the school.” When asked to elaborate, he replied, “Are you gonna do a legislative law? Because I’m all for anarchism.”

There is quite a divide between students when it comes to who should dominate the last 30 minutes before check—some are upset with the addition of spike ball, and others believe it brings something new and exciting to the atmosphere.

Landon Jimenez ‘25 expressed the idea of a compromise. “I don’t think it’s bad, but I also feel that we need normal Happy. Maybe we can make a deal—three days a week, 1-2 nets. But 4-5 nets every single day... it’s just kind of ruining Happy for years to come and the years to follow.”

After a minute, he added, “We’re losing our tradition as the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics!”

Ethan Burkett ‘25 agreed. “You don’t get to hear about the daily shenanigans, and you miss out on the socialization and familial ties of Happy Half.”

What happens if spike ball suddenly dies out? Will Happy Half continue on the Royall Lawn? Traditions are important to students at NCSSM—it’s what makes the two years we spend together memorable. However, who says that traditions can’t change? Maybe it’s time for the classes of 2025 and 2026 to add their own traditions to the mix. ■



**Winter Olympic Experience, Utah**

"Favorite memory was... downhill skiing and spending time on the slopes. - Utah trip Insta



PRESTON MULLINS

**New York City, NY**

Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, Top of the Rock, Empire State Building, 9/11 Memorial, the Summit, Saint Patrick's Cathedral

**Topsail Island****Land of Fire & Ice, Iceland**

Godafoss and Gullfoss Waterfalls, to the hot springs at Blue Lagoon, to the black sands of Reynisfjara Beach

**Cityscapes & Minds: London, Paris, Rome**

"Favorite memories were... exploring historic landmarks during free time and embracing the culture outside of the tour itinerary!" - Hima Manne '25

HIMA MANNE

**Italian Culture & History, Italy**

"We walked to the outskirts of Florence and climbed stories and stories of stairs and angled roads just to visit an old quaint church on top of the largest hill around; the air's never been more crisp and the view had me loving the city." - Jett Mu '25



@NCSSM_ITALY_2025

**Culture in the Imperial Cities, Morocco****The Golden Route, Japan**
Mount Fuji, Arashiyama Bamboo Forest, shrines...**New Zealand to Australia**
Sydney Opera House, Great Barrier Reef, Hobbiton...**The West! Arizona**

"My favorite memory was throwing a rock from the top of the Grand Canyon and watching it fall." - Reid Burgess '25



TERESA FANG

**Baja Marine Science Adventure, California**

"Favorite memories were... snorkeling with sea lions, camping on an island, exploring the beauty of a new country!" - Louisa Weinard '25



LOUISA WEINARD

**Amazon Rainforest Expedition**

"Favorite memories were... the interactions with the people, like the locals that welcomed us with open arms, and the tribes that showed us their ways." - Amazon trip Insta



@NCSSMAMAZON25

**Sail Away, Caribbeans**

"I really love just seeing all the wildlife. The goats were literally my favorite and snorkeling and sailing were so much fun." - Hannah Stevens '25



CARRIE ALTER

**A Tale of Two Continent, Turkey**

Hagia Sophia, Byzantines, Blue Mosque, Taksim, Balat, Ephesus, Pamukkale

JTerm Travel Guide

This past January, NCSSM students traveled all over the world to explore new places, form relationships across campuses, and learn about different environments! Our JTerm experiences were worth reminiscing about, so here is a brief snapshot of the geographical reach NCSSM students ventured to, and some of their favorite memories.

EDUCATION

You Didn’t Understand The Assignment

BY TERESA FANG
STENTORIAN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Two weeks ago, Dr. Jeff Lichtman, Dean of Science at Harvard University, began his research talk with five claims, each answering the specific question, “What is school for?” Together, the five claims expanded on education in the 21st century, stemming from a variety of philosophical considerations throughout his 50 years of teaching. If you consider that almost everyone in the world (or at least, in this country) has access to a phone, “nearly all knowledge is at one’s fingertips,” which is the first claim Lichtman makes. I agree. I also agree with his fourth point, on behalf of educators: “The peril of education in the information age: because of the glut of information, professors are necessarily teaching an ever-smaller proportion of the extant data.”

But the fifth point raises a series of questions as Lichtman questions the ways in which educators “fail” their students. Of these five claims, as someone who cherishes the value of education, I was curiously intrigued by his thoughts.

Rather than dissect his claims, I would like to summarize his argument, which he does himself quite nicely:

“First, irrelevancy. The subjects we [educators] teach are irrelevant to your ultimate career plans. For example, in medical school, you don’t use calculus. A doctor uses 0% of the calculus knowledge they learned in school.”

After presenting his points, Dr. Lichtman asked the audience of high school student researchers if they disagreed with anything he said. I was already responding to his points mentally, so I took the first microphone immediately. “Why is that a failure?” I asked. When I emphasize the importance of school, like Dr. Lichtman, many people echo similar claims that most of what you learn in school will not be applicable in the real world or that they will forget nearly everything they once learned. But I say the answer



HARVARD DEAN OF SCIENCE DR. JEFF LICHTMAN PRESENTED HIS THOUGHTS ON STEM EDUCATION AND HIS NEUROSCIENCE RESEARCH AT THE HARVARD NORTHWEST BUILDING ON FEBRUARY 14. TERESA FANG

depends on what type of learning we’re referring to: the type on the whiteboard or the type beyond the whiteboard.

“Second, prematurity. When the courses are relevant, we [educators] hardly explain why they are, so you can’t focus on what is important as it is presented long before you might use this material, maybe 5-10 years later.”

I might not remember that Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492 in twenty years when I’m trying to interview people for a job hiring. But I will definitely remember a friend saying, “you should design the poster art because you’re good at art, and I’ll write the content in the meantime.” I learned that designating tasks to an appropriate individual with the perfect skillsets will finish our task faster so we can finally

eat our meals during lunch break. You may forget the curriculum, but you won’t forget the experience. Learning to judge one’s ability to fulfill certain responsibilities and justifying your selection are examples of knowledge that do matter. Perhaps, these are skills you might need that separate you from a good candidate for your dream job versus the ideal candidate for the responsibilities of the job.

“Third, preoccupation with the right answer. Perhaps the most important failure is that the whole science enterprise [sic] is just a continuation of the secondary school preoccupation getting the correct answer on exams, problem sets, and homework assignments. Regurgitating an expected answer has little to do with the real world,

where the ‘right’ answer is unknown.”

Besides calling the entire occupation of researching science an “enterprise” (throwback to my previous piece on ncsm.edu’s misrepresented marketing of students) as if the sole purpose of research is to generate economic value, I think the preoccupation with the “right” answer is a universal failure that permeates through all subjects, not just in STEM. We endure numerous “irrelevant” courses in history, English, physics, and math, not because we intend to become an academic jack-of-all-trades (go on, make your snarky “erm, actually’s), but to develop our method of thinking and reasoning. Will I ever need to prove the Pythagorean theorem using geometry postulates when I’m in my late-30’s? No. But will

I ever need to make a claim, learn how to support it with evidentiary facts, and arrive at a logical conclusion? Yes. I think me writing this article proves that I can.

Thus, school is for teaching you how to think. Not what to think, but how to think. You are getting your critical thinking in, your collaboration skills, and most importantly, the connections you might need later in life, aka your support system or your potential business partners.

Indeed, you could think of this column as the sequel to my article “Settling the debate between STEM and the humanities.” Do I wish that more people were aware that “Frankenstein” is more than just a classic Victorian novel but a commentary on Marxism, Freudian psychoanalysis, and much more? Or that Emerson and Thoreau are two completely different people camping around the same pond? Of course, I’d love if America’s level of general knowledge of literature, and social studies, or just being more news-savvy about the world was more proficient, but I do not think that it is equivalent to trashing the entire education system.

“Last but not least, the fear of failure. Solving a problem often requires showing all reasonable ideas fail. Failure is a necessary part of finding a solution.”

School is not a promise of success and prosperity, but I do think that Dr. Lichtman and others are approaching school with misjudged expectations. He makes many sound and fair points, and undeniably, it’s important that students learn the curriculums they are taught in the classroom. But they shouldn’t walk away with report cards and memorized flashcards. They should be walking away with new and improved models of thinking and an arsenal of approaches for the real, structure-less world.

It’s undeniable that the quality of our education system, federally and at NCSSM, is flawed. Nonetheless, there is still value in it. But if you measure the value of school based on test scores and grades, then I suppose you really didn’t understand the assignment. ■

SPIKEBALL

NCSSM Spikeball Is Not For The Faint-Hearted

BY HIMA MANNE
STENTORIAN STAFF WRITER

NCSSM Spikeball is not for the faint-hearted. It’s a high-stakes battle for pride, glory, and satisfaction of proving absolutely no one can beat your superior reflexes—at least until they do, and then you make excuses. There’s an art to this madness, a rhythm that combines the agility of a jungle cat with the competitiveness of a caffeine-fueled teenager. At its core, spikeball is about spiking a ball onto a tiny trampoline with a ferocity that makes it difficult for the opposition to spike it back onto the net within three passes.

No earlier or later than 9:30 p.m., three spikeball nets are set up on Watts Lawn with dozens of people leaving the Happy Half scene to instead witness spikeball rivalries. For a school that takes pride in its STEM prowess, you wouldn’t think people would be so excited to run around chasing a tiny ball that’s basically trying to outsmart them at every turn. Yet here we are.

Of course, being a part of this spikeball culture means learning how to navigate the occasional failure with grace—or, at least, with a semi-acceptable excuse. If you miss the ball, it’s not because you’re bad at the game. It’s because

“the wind caught it,” or “the net was uneven,” or “I wasn’t ready,” or the classic “my partner didn’t set me up right.” There’s a whole catalog of explanations ready to go at any moment, because no one ever truly misses a spikeball. It’s always the environment conspiring against you.

Still, for all the sarcasm and the competitive edge, spikeball at NCSSM is the best kind of chaos. There’s something oddly satisfying about diving for a ball that’s already out of reach, or that rare moment when your team pulls off a combo so perfect that the other team can only stand there in awe (or confusion—either works). You bond over the shared frustration of a close game and the memories that come from all the laughter and bruises. Because let’s be real: if you’re playing spikeball and you’re not leaving with at least one new bruise, did you even play?

At the end of the day, spikeball at NCSSM is more than just a game. It’s an unspoken tradition, a rite of passage, and a chance to momentarily forget about that upcoming test or lab report. Plus, it’s just plain fun, even when you lose. And if you do lose, there’s always the next game.

Or a good excuse. ■

CAMPUS

Why “Locking In” At The Library Is Hard To Accomplish

BY LILY GALAPON
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

At almost any other library, one would imagine the academic environment as a reserved intellectual harbor, a collective haven for students to hone in on their work and reach an optimal state of focus. In nearly every other circumstance, libraries are equated to silent reservoirs of studying, enforced by a constant need to keep one’s voice down. From the moment one usually walks through the door comes a shift in the atmosphere, of conversations softening, the mind preparing to sharpen for the day’s load of assignments. However, at the Borden Mace Library, many NCSSM students experience quite the opposite phenomenon.

Especially at the beginning of the year, many members of the junior population have fallen victim to finding the school’s arguably loudest landscape, expecting to find a familiar space for concentration. Of all places, the scene at the Borden Mace library has ironically turned more social than studious. But how did this come to be?

Through a spatial perspective, the NCSSM website states how “the Learning Commons design of our Library creates a warm environment for interaction, inspiration, and creativity with spaces designed specifically for individuals and groups,” emphasizing the school’s importance for students to foster relationships with one another to academically succeed. The library has incorporated many openly-spaced

design elements for groups of students to work together in, whether that be the multiple yellow study rooms built along the left wall of the space, or the many circular tables, some of which are embedded within the not-so-soundproof glass lounges. By incorporating friendly architectural designs to bring people together, Borden Mace has allowed positive community building to prosper—though, often with its downsides.

Because the library has majorly devoted the working space for groups of people, a lot of students are naturally inclined to hang out with their friends, leading to an avoidance of accomplishing the objective at hand: Their assignments. As one junior complains how “all of my friends are there and I can’t lock in...there’s no quiet rule”, the social restrictions of the library—or lack thereof, have allowed noise levels to get extremely high without consequences. This has contributed to the development of an unbounded gregarious workspace with little to no “work” getting done. One senior notes how “a library is a social place, not a study place”, highlighting the reality for many other students how the design features of Borden Mace have



LILY GALAPON

STUDENT LIFE

NCSSM Hall Theme Rankings

BY LILY FRANK
STENTORIAN STAFF WRITER

We spend almost half our year on campus, so our RLAs and CCs work hard to make the cold halls (especially in recent days) feel more lively so that one day, we might consider NCSSM home. However, not all themes create as much joy or jealousy as others. In the following pages, I will give you my completely subjective and untrained opinion on this highly pressing matter. As was the case last year, I have removed my hall, 2nd Beall, to remain “neutral” ...

1. 4th Bryan: Cat Cafe

The theme board is top-tier. I can only imagine how cozy 4th Bryan must be. The RLAs also go above and beyond, adding extra cat themed decorations outside of the hall for valentines day. Thank you for making the treacherous journey to physics slightly less soul-crushing.

2. GREynolds: Strawberry Shortcake

This theme gives off so much 2010s nostalgia, and makes for such cute decorations. Because Greynolds is

tucked away it might not be one of the most frequently seen themes, but the beautiful theme boards in front of the halls make the cold space of Ground Reynolds so much warmer.

3. 2nd East: Pokemon

I like it: relevant, infinite decoration potential, and nostalgia. The individual Pokemon cut out for the theme board shows dedication, though I feel like you are missing a few hundred Pokemon...

4. 2nd Hill: 2HL Grand Prix

NCSSM already moves fast enough, living here would just stress me out. Unless we are talking Spec Miata. For a hall displaced in the mods this is a very solid theme, and even without a themeboard, they make up for it with creative door decks.

5. Royall: Royall’s Freezeria

I love seeing Papa Louie on my Hillgrimage journeys staring at me from Royall Lounge. A theme that is so original, that I am stunned.

6. 3rd East: Super Smash Brothers

I have no notes. Just another

video game-themed hall, the main difference is this one is respectable.

7. 3rd West: Olive Garden

Nothing says mild disappointment like family dinners at Olive Garden. The only thing missing is the smell of breadsticks; a bribe of endless pasta wouldn’t hurt. As for the decorations, the door decks are lackluster, I mean, who wants to see a low-resolution picture of Olive Garden complimentary mints?

8. 2nd Bryan: Hollywood cinema

I feel like a new variation of “movies” comes around every year and 2nd Bryan just happened to be the victim this year. That being said, they committed to the concept well enough to earn a respectable spot. Though at this point, the theme itself feels more like a reboot than a blockbuster premiere.

9. 3rd Beall: Pillow Pets

3rd Beall does a great job of turning a seemingly simple hall theme with little possibilities for decorations into a soft patchwork blanket, pillow pets, and clouds.

10. 4th East: Ancient Greece

This theme hurts no one, and exists as a good neutral, like the plain toast of hall themes. It’s not particularly exciting or in reference to something that connects our generation, but there is no reason to complain about it.

11. Reynolds 1c2c1d: Beach Vacation

In light of the recent weather, I am craving a sunny beach. Do you think Reynolds 1c2c1d stays warmer in the winter?

12. 1st Hunt: Cars (the movie)

This is like 2nd Bryan, except “movie” is singular.

13. 1st Beall: Tropical Rainforest

An ambitious choice, because the only thing tropical about NCSSM’s buildings is the unpredictable temperature control.

14. Reynolds 1c2c2d: Winx Club

REFLECTION

Dear Seniors...

BY TEJASVI SHIROLKAR
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

Late campus walks, no longer stressing about grades and walking to Ninth Street every day. Ding, ding, ding! That is the sound of a second-semester senior’s life at NCSSM. As a current junior, I have watched this life from afar, knowing it will be mine next year, but still looking at it wishfully.

Transitioning from a large, public high school to a smaller one was not an easy decision for me. From taking new, rigorous coursework to watching life pass by without me at my home high school, I was terrified during my first semester at NCSSM.

There seemed to be no end at the tunnel; with assignments piling on and winter drifting in, I settled into a familiar routine; study during the week, study during the weekend.

However, I soon found my own pockets of community within NCSSM. With friends in my hall and classes, I realized that through all the studying, the tight-knit sense of belonging I acquired was what kept every senior going, even during their junior year. “Maius Opus Moveo,” or in other words, “Accept the Greater Challenge.” With spring on the way and cap and gown ceremonies near, I would like to send my seniors off with this message: thank you for your guidance, your unwavering support, and your belief. Through you all, I have seen what NCSSM embodies; a small-yet mighty-community of future changemakers. ■



Disagree? Prove us otherwise in a dissenting article.
NCSSMSTENTORIAN.COM

JTERM

I Love Hopi Hot Beef, and Other Things On My Arizona J-Term

BY TERESA FANG
STENTORIAN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I rarely plan my trips, and I always leave some space in my suitcase. Lack of prior knowledge and lightness are the two patron saints of a good journey, in my opinion. As the saying goes, those who travel with a light load have the best adventures or something like that. “The wealthy travel light,” but in my case I’m wealthy in my immense lack of knowledge, as I looked at the itinerary for my JTerm to Arizona the night before the first flight. Since emailing our trip sponsor, Dr. David Cantrell, my reasons for wanting to go on the *The West!* JTerm trip in the spring of 2024, it’s come full circle; again a very wealthy bank of memories that reminds me why I like the movie *Rango* (2011) and the hardy terrain of a cacti-filled desert. In the week traveling from Southern Arizona to the North, every museum and interaction with locals is a chance to absorb appreciation and wisdom, just like saguaro being physical forms of spiritual ancestors of the native tribal people.

Through that week in Arizona, here are a few things I’ve taken away, and that I continue to remind myself.

Appreciating little bits of happiness

On the first day, I got lost—mentally, at least. Waking up at 3 a.m. is not for the weak, and as I boarded the shuttle at the Phoenix airport, watching the barren, beige-coded hills felt so out of pace with my life in sheltered suburbia—the world of neat lawns and nice cars, where grass was the shade of emeralds and Sprite, where political posters

sprinkled every intersection. Phoenix, Bisbee, Flagstaff, the Hopi reservation—each place, a stark contrast.

At the Hopi reservation, I kneeled in a millions-year-old bed of shells overlooking a huge limestone canyon. Our tour guide told us to express our thanks to the earth. I’m not religious or spiritual, but in that moment, I felt incredibly grateful. It’s amazing to think this Earth is the same Earth that everything I have seen in museums has also lived on and interacted with. It’s amazing to see exactly how the Hopi ancestors interpreted and interacted with this Earth (and the stars) on this land, especially through my own eyes. This firsthand experience has given me another perspective on what it means to live in the now—with appreciation and cautiousness of the past.

Perseverance takes many forms

Somewhere between tumbling over rocks at Picacho Peak and getting lost at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, I realized something: nature keeps moving forward, with or without me. The saguaros at Saguaro National Park, towering and ancient, continue to stand tall. The indigenous stories and artifacts at the Heard Museum are preserved and shared, even as modern life moves on. In Bisbee, a town full of cowboys and artists, the people seemed frozen in a perpetual, quiet celebration of life, adapting the past into a present that felt both nostalgic and brand-new. Just ask Anisa Hasanaj ’25 about the psychic lady who foretold her “strong bloodline.”

And in my own way, I was moving forward, too. At Montezuma Castle, I stared up at the five-story cliff

dwelling built by the Sinagua people. It sat in the cliff above me, precarious yet permanent. What was the point of living in the cliffs? The structure, facing south, provided warmth in the winter and coolness in the summer. The elevation protected people from annual flooding. But I realized maybe I didn’t need to focus on why things just are—but instead on the lifestyle they created for the people living there.

Stop looking for “the point” all the time

On day five, we visited the Museum of Northern Arizona. The tour guide was passionate but had a voice that could put even the most enthusiastic historian to sleep. The poet who wrote us custom pieces delivered one that was painfully generic, even though I had specifically asked for something about the evolution of forgetfulness and acceptance. But maybe that was the point—sometimes, the journey matters more than the conclusion. At the Grand Canyon, I took the Junior Ranger oath. “Don’t feed the squirrels” was the only part I really remembered, but in a way, that summed it all up. Maybe the awe of the canyon, vast and unchanging, wasn’t meant to provide some grand revelation. Maybe I didn’t need to extract meaning from everything—I could just let it be.

Things go on

Through writing this, I may have admitted publicly that I eat a lot (big backing had to be an obligation before it became a choice, alright). But my greatest discovery of the trip wasn’t an ancient



TERESA FANG



TERESA FANG



TERESA FANG

artifact or a philosophical truth—it was Hopi Hot Beef. Fry bread, beef, mashed potatoes and gravy, a dish so good that it earned my eternal love and gratitude. Thank you, Hopi Nation. Thank you, Navajo Nation. Thank you, Arizona. And most of all, thank you Dr. Cantrell, Mr. Chris Thomas, Ms. Michelle Brenner, NCSSM Foundation, and sponsors for

letting me go on such an adventure. Things go on. My Arizona J-Term has ended, but its memories continue etched into my notes, my mind, and now, here. And I will continue, too, maybe with a slightly fuller stomach, a slightly fuller suitcase, and a wealth of stories that don’t always need a point. ■



Men's Basketball Playoffs & Senior Night

PHOTOS BY LOUISA WEINARD & PRESTON MULLINS



AfricaFest 2025

PHOTOS BY LOUISA WEINARD

SIKHADU LA: EXPLORING THE GOLDEN CITY. The Black Student Union (BSU) organized and hosted AfricaFest 2025 on February 22 in the ETC Auditorium. This festival showcased a variety of incredible performances, spoken word, songs, and marches highlighting African, African American, and Afro-Caribbean cultures.

