

# THE BRANDEIS HOOT

## Language Requirements Up for Debate *Page 3*

You can't  
become Chinese,  
page 12-13

New protest  
group,  
page 10

Favorite winter  
Olympic sports,  
page 7

*February 27, 2026*

# CONTENT



## Editorial

Student Perspective on the Language Requirement.....Pg 6-7  
Hoot Recommends .....Pg 8

## News

Pg 3-4.....Changes to Language Requirement  
Pg 4.....Update on Dining Situation  
Pg 4.....Cop Calls Recap  
Pg 5.....East Quad Plans

## Features

Fizz Posts of the Week.....Pg 5  
Weed is Popular.....Pg 9  
FAB Protest Group.....Pg 10  
AI Makes Your Vibrator Expensive.....Pg 11

## Opinions

Pg 12-13.....You Can't Become Chinese  
Pg 14-15.....AI Video is Evil  
Pg 16.....Epstein Created Our Media Environment  
Pg 17.....The Equal Time Rule

## Arts

Smiling Friends.....Pg 20-21  
Short Story.....Pg 22  
Sunblighted.....Pg 22-23  
"You and I are Polar Opposites" Review.....Pg 24-25  
Photos of the Week.....Pg 26-27

## Sports

Pg 18-19.....What's a Fastball?  
Pg 19.....Olympic Stats



Front Cover By:  
Chloe Ballew, *Editor*



# News



## Brandeis Professors Defend Language Requirement

BY: Chloe Ballew, *Editor* & Eva Levine, *Editor*

Things at Brandeis are in a phase of change, and many aspects of the university are being subject to attempts at innovation. As a part of these alterations, there have been proposed changes to academics, especially The Core.

The Core is the set of requirements that all undergraduate students at Brandeis must complete before graduation. These requirements include taking classes in various disciplines. According to its requirements, students must take a first-year seminar, four foundational literacies, courses from the four schools of thought, three health, wellness, and life classes, and global engagement courses. Part of the global engagement bundle is the language requirement, mandating students take a foreign language up to “30,” or an intermediate level.

An alteration to these requirements has been proposed, which would require students to complete only up to “20,” or beginner level. This means that students would only have to take two semesters of a language course, or its equivalent. The proposed change was put up for debate in the Faculty Senate on Friday, Feb. 13, and is currently being voted on by the faculty.

Many members of the faculty have pushed back on this proposed change, speaking out about the negative effects they believe the alteration would have on the students’ immediate education, the

university’s reputation, and students’ ability to succeed outside of Brandeis.

Professors spoke on various factors to consider when deciding where one stands on this issue. Some, like Professor of the Practice of English and Co-Director of the Creative Writing Program Stephen McCauley, talked about the importance language learning had in their education and life: “For me, studying French as an undergrad and then spending a year studying in France—in my day, it was for a year, not a semester—had a more lasting and powerful impact on my life and eventual career than anything else I studied.” Professor of English and Barbara Mandel Professor of Humanities John Plotz also focused on the importance of language learning for the growth of an individual, stating,

“I think we underestimate the amount of joy there is to be found in searching for ways to express yourself in unfamiliar contexts and with awkward new words—like being given a toolbox for your birthday and knowing you have to build a box with it.”

These worries about the individual positives associated with foreign language learning expanded into a discussion about how language learning impacts one’s ability to understand and work within a broader international culture. Associate Professor of History Govind Sreenivasan said, “learning a foreign language, even if you find it difficult and even if you never fully master it, enhances your awareness of the challenges that non-native speakers encounter in learning English. In that sense, learning a foreign language makes you a more sensitive and gracious host

and friend to travelers and visitors.”

Others centered their comments on the educational importance of foreign language learning. Professor Sreenivasan stated,

“Even for someone who never leaves the Anglosphere, learning a foreign language enhances their understanding and command of English, and that makes them a better thinker.”

Professor Plotz expressed similar ideas when stating, “Once you realize that things you thought were natural about how you thought may only be features of the words you use to express your thought, then nothing you do or think, even in English, seems quite the same.” Some, like Professor of Russian Irina Dubinina, pushed even harder, questioning what the purpose of learning a language to a 20 level is at all: “If the requirement is lowered, it will be ‘beginning level’ which is neither here nor there. What is beginning level? It is not even considered a communicative level—it is called ‘pre-communicative.’”

This comment seemed to be reflective of a general feeling that, by lowering the standards to this level, the University was failing the student body. Professor Sreenivasan stated, “At a time when professional job markets are becoming increasingly international, it is crucial that Brandeis students be able to compete at the highest level.” He continued, “Although complaining seems to be a favorite blood sport on this campus, to my mind Brandeis remains a very special place ... We, the faculty and administration of this university, owe our (*see pg 4*)

students the very best education that we can provide. That includes proper training in foreign languages.” These worries turned into a concern that lowering the requirements could potentially impact the standing of Brandeis itself. Professor Sreenivasan argued, “Lowering the foreign language requirement will simply make a Brandeis degree less attractive to both prospective students and prospective employers. None of our peer institutions are doing this; what possible sense can there be in aiming low?” Professor Dubinina pointed out another fact, “Most other parts of the world take it for granted that you can’t be an educated person without having at least a functional command of at least one other language.”

While the results of the faculty vote are currently unavailable, it is clear that many members of the faculty have strong beliefs that the language requirement should be left the way that it is. For the student body, the rest is a waiting game.

The Hoot will continue to monitor this story as it develops.

## Sherman Dining Hall Closure Continues: Faculty Club is Offered as a Kosher Dining Solution

BY: Jenna Lewis, *Editor*

As of the publication of this article, Sherman Dining Hall continues to be closed for students due to ongoing renovations as a result of the fire on Feb. 2. According to the most recent email correspondence to students at 11:58 a.m. on Feb. 24, Usdan will continue to be supplied with increased staff and seating to accommodate the influx of students. With this higher traffic, Green Boxes are also listed as an alternative option. Recent reports from students visiting the Hive before February break indicated, however, that the facility ran out of Green Boxes and resorted to the alternative method of paper plates and Saran Wrap. The Hoot is continuing to investigate whether this has been remedied.

The Faculty Club is now available to students as an alternative temporary dining location, strictly offering kosher meals. The exact timeline of this temporary solution is still unknown, although it is estimated to extend for the foreseeable future, with Susan Scannell, Associate Vice President of Campus Services, writing, “The university expects that the Faculty Club will be used for Kosher dining in the main dining room for the next several weeks, which will allow needed repairs and remediation to be completed at Sherman Dining Hall and Hassenfeld Conference Center.” This location will also no longer be available for reservations and table services due to this temporary relocation.

The final statements within the correspondence indicate concern for students with special dining requirements and direct them to reach out to Nicole Zapherson, the Health and Wellbeing Manager.

The Hoot will continue to monitor this situation.



PHOTO CREDIT  
Liam Gurevitch, *Staff*



## A Recap of Brandeis Cop Calls



Feb 10 – 19:26:00

Report that there is a suspicious man, “blad” [sic] with glasses sitting on the couch in Goldfarb



Feb 8 – 19:22:49

Report of a student not feeling well after taking an edible. Tried to get baked, instead got cooked.



Feb 12 – 16:18:08

Student requests to speak with officer about a note found on their bike seat.

*\*This recap is meant to be fun and informative; please do not attempt to find the identities of these individuals.*

# Brandeis considering demolishing East Quad following completion of new residence hall

BY: James Carven, *Editor*



PHOTO CREDITS  
*Brandeis.edu*

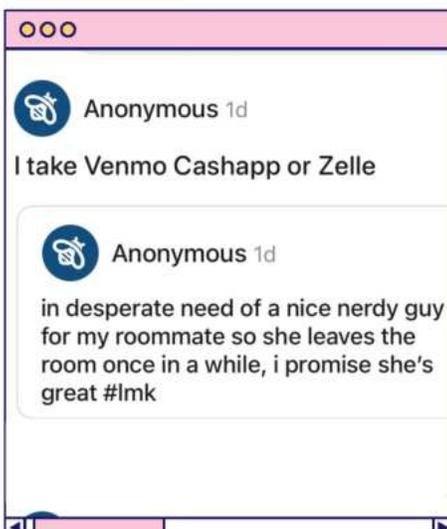
Following the completion of the new residence hall, which is currently under construction on the lower campus, Brandeis is considering plans to demolish East Quad. This plan was first revealed to The Hoot during our exclusive interview with Arthur Levine in early October as something that was a possibility. East Quad has approximately 400 beds, while the new residence hall will have around 650, meaning that the demolition will not reduce the number of beds that are available to students. The new residence hall is expected to be completed in the spring of 2027 and available for students in the Fall 2027 semester.

East Quad was originally built in 1964 for the purpose of housing sophomores and upperclassmen. East consists of two buildings, Hassenfeld and Pomerantz. Dorms in East consist of traditional-style singles and doubles. The average single in East is between 100 and 140 square feet, and the average double is 200 square feet. East is located in the upper campus near the Intercultural Center and Skyline Hall.

Today, many students refer to East as the least desirable living space on campus due to rodent issues and the lack of air conditioning. It has also faced criticism for its narrow hallways, which do not meet modern standards under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA requires hallways to be at least 36 inches wide. Students have previously compared the hallways in East to “prison corridors.” Because East Quad was built prior to the enactment of the ADA, it is not required to meet modern standards.

According to a university spokesperson, “No decisions have been made by the University regarding the long-term disposition of the East Quad space. The new residence hall scheduled to come online next year will have capacity to house significantly more residents than East, which could present the opportunity to reimagine the East space for future residences and dining facility opportunities.”

## Fizz Posts of the Week



## A student perspective on the language requirement debate

### The Hoot Editorial Board

**Editor-in-Chief**  
Jenna Lewis

**Managing Editor**  
James Carven

**Copy Editor**  
Michael Sun

**News Editor**  
TBD

**Deputy News Editor**  
Ethan Prior

**Opinions Editor**  
Chloe Ballew

**Arts Editor**  
Eva Levine

**Features Editor**  
Ethan Prior

**Sports Editor**  
Richard Grau

**Social Media Editor**  
Desiree Hernandez

**Layout Editor**  
Anna Jane Rudensky

The Brandeis Hoot • Brandeis University  
415 South Street • Waltham, MA  
Founded By Leslie Pazan, Igor Pedan and Daniel Silverman

### STAFF

Sarah Baskin, Kyra Bhaghat, Judah Belgrade, Zach Duvel, Crow Grossbart, Liam Gurevitch, Dea Guo, Ethan Lido, Laurel Kane, Daniel Oren, Eva Sanborn and Naomi Stephenson

### MISSION

As the weekly community student newspaper of Brandeis University, The Brandeis Hoot aims to provide our readers with a reliable, accurate and unbiased source of news and information. Produced entirely by students, The Hoot serves a readership of 6,000 with in-depth news, relevant commentary, sports and coverage of cultural events. Recognizing that better journalism leads to better policy, The Brandeis Hoot is dedicated to the principles of investigative reporting and news analysis. Our mission is to give every community member a voice.

### SUBMISSION POLICIES

The Hoot is a publication built by the community, for the community. We welcome submissions of all kinds from many different subjects. If you want to make your voice heard, send your submissions to [thehootbrandeis@gmail.com](mailto:thehootbrandeis@gmail.com) with the relevant tag. The Hoot reserves the right to reject any submissions the editing team deems as being in violation of its policy.

### CONNECT

To connect with our editorial board, reach out at [thehootbrandeis@gmail.com](mailto:thehootbrandeis@gmail.com), visit [brandeishoot.com](http://brandeishoot.com) or visit our Instagram page [@thebrandeishoot](https://www.instagram.com/thebrandeishoot). To read more Hoot content, visit [brandeishoot.com](http://brandeishoot.com) to see content from our older issues.

### ADVERTISE

Advertising in The Brandeis Hoot helps spread your message to our readers across the Brandeis campus, in the Waltham community and beyond through our website. All campus clubs receive a 33% discount off our regular prices, and students and faculty receive a 25% discount. To reserve your space in the paper, email us at [ecic@thebrandeishoot.com](mailto:ecic@thebrandeishoot.com).

### GIVE A HOOT, JOIN THE HOOT!

Writers, editors, photographers and graphic artists wanted to join The Brandeis Hoot, your weekly community newspaper. To learn more, send us an e-mail at [ecic@thebrandeishoot.com](mailto:ecic@thebrandeishoot.com), or visit our website <http://brandeishoot.com/join>.

### UNSOLICITED SUBMISSIONS

We welcome unsolicited submissions from members of the community sent by e-mail to [thehootbrandeis@gmail.com](mailto:thehootbrandeis@gmail.com). There is no word limit on submissions; however, try to make sure that it can fit on one page. All submissions are subject to editing.

As the faculty senate decides the future of language requirements at Brandeis University, The Hoot wanted to provide a student perspective and give our insights as to the value a strong education in a foreign language offers. Language is a unique area of study that permeates our day-to-day lives and encourages us to consider the world beyond our doorstep. According to the Brandeis website, as of Fall 2025, there are 1,171 “international students and scholars” on our campus, with 110 countries represented. If we aim to be a university that appreciates diversity of perspectives, lessening the language requirement sends the opposite message, setting the tone that seeking knowledge from outside the English-speaking world is not necessary. This also suggests that other languages do not play a part in our studies outside of specifically dedicating ourselves to said language. Anyone who studies literature, art history, or a form of cultural studies would disagree, since proficiency in another language allows you to deepen your understanding of people and works from various walks of life and eras past. This misunderstanding is somewhat unsurprising, considering the continued increase in administrative focus on expanding the sciences while scaling back the liberal arts.

Over the past several years, there have been fears among the Brandeis community that the administration is planning to emphasize STEM programs in order to compete with other, higher-ranked colleges and universities—at the expense of the humanities. In 2023, PhD programs in the music department were cut at the same time that Brandeis was planning to build a massive new science lab building. The plans for the lab were scrapped, but this latest move is sure to raise red flags among Brandeis students and staff in humanities programs. Above all, it feels hypocritical that Brandeis, which advertises itself so heavily as a liberal arts school, constantly emphasizing the value of interdisciplinary learning, seems intent on repeatedly impeding its own humanities programs. It’s hard to imagine Brandeis placing similar handicaps on computer science or pre-med requirements. Does the administration really want to send the message that some fields of study are “more equal than others”? We hope not.

It is no surprise that there is a great deal of empirical research surrounding the mental and psychological benefits of language learning. Foreign Language Annals, the journal of ACTFL, published a study in 2019 to showcase general data about the positive effects of second-language learning on the brain from research conducted in the preceding seven years. Their results show that learning a second language at a young age improves everything from executive functioning to critical thinking. These benefits are nice, but the thing that Brandeis’ administration should be considering more than anything else is one particular field of study: employability. Brandeis has been on a big employment kick recently, with the addition of a second transcript of microcredentials. The paper references many studies that highlight how learning new languages improves employability by improving communication skills, providing a deeper understanding of the world, or even increasing one’s cultural competency within the workplace.

For students who already speak a foreign language, Brandeis allows them to test out of the requirement. This can be done with a high enough A.P. score or a test administered by the Brandeis language departments, also able to test into higher-level language courses if they have taken foreign language classes in high school. This means that students who take language courses in high school are able to finish their Brandeis Core requirement earlier, so students who plan to come to Brandeis are encouraged to take extra language courses in high school or learn a language on their own. (see pg 7)

Like any other skill, languages are something that you need to practice, or you'll lose some of your ability to use them. Requiring students to take three semesters of a language means that students are enrolled in a language course for just under half of their time at Brandeis. This amount of time is enough that even if students take all of their language classes in their first three semesters, they are likely to retain most of their ability to communicate in that language after graduation and into their careers. If students only take two required language courses, however, a student who chooses to take them in their first two semesters will go three full years between the last time that they had to use the language and their graduation. This will lead to a greater loss of the ability to communicate in that language. If students do not retain the language that they learned, then the time spent learning the language was largely wasted, a result that both students and Brandeis should wish to avoid.

The alteration to the language requirement would greatly hinder students' ability to study abroad. Many of the Brandeis study abroad programs have language requirements. For countries that primarily speak French, Hebrew, or Spanish, the university requires students to take up to a level 20 course before applying. Italian-speaking programs require at least one semester of the language to qualify. While these requirements would fall within the altered standard, the change would lessen the push for students to complete the requirements sooner. If you can complete all language requirements in a single year, students will no longer be forced to start their programs by Junior year at the latest. In addition, many individual programs have higher expectations for language completion. The Brandeis Study Abroad website itself states, "Please note that many programs on our Approved Program List require at least one year of college-level language study and many require a minimum of two years of college-level language proficiency or the equivalent." Two years of language programs is a higher expectation than the university's current requirement; however, when students consider studying abroad in sophomore or junior year, they will likely start looking at programs at least a semester before applying. This allows students to complete an additional semester of the language of the country they are applying to, something which would not be possible if they were required to take an additional year of a language.

Without starting a *coup d'etat*, which you would understand if you had a proficient amount of French education, maintaining confidence in our language programs and their ability to enrich our lives beyond the academic experience is fundamental for any higher-level institution. The fact that Brandeis, an R1 university, seems to be neglecting an ever-increasing amount of empirical evidence—as well as the voices of students and staff—that validate the importance of expansive multilingual education is, frankly, unacademic.

# 10% DISCOUNT

On All Dry Cleaning & Alterations

Please present this card or Brandeis ID with your INCOMING order.  
Cannot be combined with other offers.



781-893-7353  
839 Main St.  
Waltham, MA 02451  
Directly Across Hamailed Supermarket & CVS

- |                 |                       |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Dresses         | Men's Suits           |
| Lady's Suits    | Sport Jackets         |
| Blouses         | Shirts                |
| Skirts          | Pants                 |
| Wedding Gowns   | Sweaters              |
| Overcoats       | Neck Ties             |
| Topcoats        | Vests                 |
| Leather & Suede | Original Hem on Jeans |
| Hem Cuffs       | Waist Let Out         |
| Zippers         | Patches               |

PARKING IN REAR OF BUILDING



Hello again, our most valuable Hoot readers. For the past several weeks, our country's greatest athletes competed in the Winter Olympics in Milan. Despite none of us being anywhere close to athletic enough to even have a chance to qualify, our editors have some strong opinions about the games. So, for this week's edition of Hoot Recommends, we are sharing our favorite winter Olympic sports.

**Chloe:** I have two favorites: my favorite sport based on its concept, and my favorite sport to watch. Curling is such a dumb idea, and I love it so much. Like, YES, let's use a specific science trick to slide almost-balls of granite across the ice. The cherry on top is that every team looks like a group of parents out for a chill weekend with The Boyz. For realies though, I love ice skating. I have watched at least some of the Olympic ice skating performances every winter Olympics for as long as I can remember. Ice skating is a demonstration of intense skill, focus, and artistry. Personally, I would love to do Skeleton, the one where you go down an ice track headfirst at upwards of 90 miles per hour. Not because I think I would be good, but because I think that's how you can eliminate all fear from the human body. (P.S. I feel really bad for Ilia Malinin, the quadgod himself).

**Michael:** When I was a child, I used to love playing the ski jump game on Wii Fit, and suffice to say, the real thing looks just as cool. The way the skiers fly into the air after hurtling down a slope at incredible speed always feels exhilarating. Then they seem to hover, just avoiding the ground as they zoom along into the green zone. It feels like the closest that mankind can get to flight without an airplane. But there's another reason. What other sport do you know of that has a penis enlargement scandal? No, I'm not making this up. Apparently, there are allegations that ski jumpers are injecting their penises with acid in order to qualify for bigger suits and thus get better aerodynamics. If that doesn't convince you that ski jumping is the coolest sport in the world, I don't know what will.

**Ethan:** I think shooting events are my favorite. I've got a weird soft spot for shooting sports in general; there's something really mesmerizing about someone nailing clay pigeons with such incredible accuracy. I'm definitely biased, since shooting is also a sport I have some experience in, but that's okay! That said, the best of the shooting events is most definitely biathlon, because I simply cannot fathom the skill necessary to complete an intense series of skiing trials AND shoot small moving targets. I'd have an easier time shooting pigeons after getting spun around 20 times!

**Richard:** I must admit, I think I've seen more promos for the Milan Olympics than the actual games themselves. That said, I think if I had to choose, I'd go with bobsledding. I love an Olympic sport that's basically a glorified version of going down the Farber hill on a cardboard box (or if you're lucky—thank you, Sarabeth—a blue plastic sled). Plus, the captain of the Israeli bobsledding team, AJ Edelman, has a brother, Alex, who's one of my favorite comedians. So yeah, bobsledding. And as far as what sport I think I could play. Well, in 2028, flag football is coming to Los Angeles for the summer games. Just ask my former middle school flag football team defensive coordinator, Jay, about my flag-grabbing abilities, and you'll discover why that's the obvious choice for me.

**James:** I watched a lot of the Olympics during the break, so I got some exposure to just about every sport. However, by far the most entertaining of this year's Olympics was hockey. Team USA won the gold medal in both the men's and women's hockey! Two for two, baby! Not only did Team USA win both gold medals, but they won them both in overtime. I don't usually watch much hockey (unless the Bruins make the playoffs), but these games had me locked in all week. Unfortunately, certain political activities by the men's team after the Olympics have slightly spoiled the fun of their gold medal win. But the fact that we destroyed our greatest rival, Team Canada, in overtime twice still makes hockey the best sport in this winter's Olympics.

**Jenna** This is the first Olympics where I watched several hours of content in a variety of sports (thank you to my roommate Elienne for having Peacock and to Peacock for its easy-to-follow Olympics coverage). The sport I kept coming back to was figure skating. The more I learned about how each move has its own score and the pressure on Ilia Malinin, the more excited I became to watch how everything unfolded (shocking to say the least!). A surprise to me, however, was how captivated I was by women's snowboarding. The silly terminology, such as "goofy stance," to the joy the athletes and commentators brought to the half pipe, became a highlight of my Olympics experience. Chloe Kim was so unbelievably good. It was nice to watch a sport, unlike figure skating, where I could actually tell if the person was doing well because there were clear visual cues, such as how smooth their movements were or how much air time they achieved. Overall, I found the Olympics really inspiring and loved everything about the opening ceremony and how passionate all the athletes were for their respective countries. Looking forward to sneaking into the next one ...





# Features



## Weed is Very Popular, and It Shouldn't Come As a Surprise

BY: Ethan Prior, *Editor*

It is not much of a stretch to say that marijuana is the most popular it has ever been in the United States. Though cannabis remains federally illegal, the Department of Justice began the process of removing cannabis from Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act, meaning that it will soon no longer be classified as having no medical use. It's a surprising change in tone for those familiar with America's history with controlled substances. 45 years ago, Ronald Reagan was calling weed "probably the most dangerous drug in the United States." Now, 40 states have legalized it for recreational use, and 24, including Massachusetts, have legalized its recreational use. Gen Z college students are increasingly choosing weed over alcohol as their drug of choice. Why? What changed? The answer is an 80 year cultural overhaul.

It is well known now that marijuana has many medicinal benefits, but this is not new data. Americans and Europeans had been making use of marijuana recreationally and medically during the 19th century. This changed in the 20th century during a wave of Mexican immigrants entering the southwestern U.S. to escape the violence of the Mexican Revolution. Cannabis was a popular choice for poor immigrants at the time, and America, ever racist, banned the drug due to conspiratorial rumors surrounding its use by those immigrants.

After half a century of increasingly harsh punishments for its use, weed became especially popular among young people as an element of the more

free-spirited counterculture movements of the '60s and '70s. Even as the anti-government sentiment of the time faded in the '80s, weed continued to grow more popular due to the utter ineptitude of the government to try to discourage its use. The War on Drugs put a pause on weed's increasing popularity as the government again cracked down on drug use, but when political winds shifted back to more liberal policy in the '90s, the rise continued. In 1996, California became the first state to legalize the drug medically again.

What does all of this tell us about weed's current state? In the '70s, weed became a symbol of young people rebelling against authority figures, one that stands to this day. It should come as no surprise, then, that educated college students are turning to it once again under a similarly unpopular political climate.

It compared to mounting evidence against other recreational substances makes it an "easier" choice. The study of marijuana's use is still in its infancy, so only time will tell if data will discourage its use along with other substances.

The Trump administration has expedited the rescheduling of cannabis to encourage further research into its effects, a major step toward national legalization. The industry, though

young, is already worth billions of dollars, but it remains to be seen if this profit incentive will be enough to put cannabis on the map with cigarettes and alcohol.

One other contributing factor to weed's increasing popularity, as mentioned before, is that alcohol and tobacco consumption have been decreasing each year as more research comes out about their many dangers. This happens to be occurring as favorable research continues to come out about weed's positives. This does not necessarily mean that weed is a better choice, but the lack of meaningful negative information about it compared to mounting evidence against other recreational substances makes it an "easier" choice. The study of marijuana's use is still in its infancy, so only time will tell if data will discourage its use along with other substances.

The Trump administration has expedited the rescheduling of cannabis to encourage further research into its effects, a major step toward national legalization. The industry, though young, is already worth billions of dollars, but it remains to be seen if this profit incentive will be enough to put cannabis on the map with cigarettes and alcohol.



PHOTO CREDIT: CBC/Science & Cannabis

# FAB: The Newest Activist Group on Campus

BY: Chloe Ballew, *Editor*

Some students might have noticed a set of protests at the beginning of the semester. These protests were not organized by any of the usual groups associated with activism on campus; instead, they were held by a new group, Fight Authoritarianism Brandeis (FAB).

FAB was originally started by Professor Sabine von Mering, Professor of German and Women's Gender Sexuality Studies, as well as the Director of the Center for German and European Studies. When asked about the creation of the group, Von Mering stated, "I organized with a few others, this walk out here, and I thought, but we don't want this to be a one-off. We really need to get organized because what's happening there is gonna happen here eventually." The original walk out was inspired by the calls from Minnesotans for a national walkout in protest of the ICE actions happening in the Twin Cities.

The group is a collaboration between students, professors, faculty and staff. Hudson Ranney '29, the co-chair of the Outreach Committee for FAB, stated, "There's something powerful about that—people across the university deciding together that they're not going to just sit with the fear." The group seems to have a heavy focus on including as many people from as many backgrounds and walks of life as possible. Von Mering said, "This is also what's important about our group, that we really want everyone to feel they are part of this." FAB is a collection of the work of all who have gotten involved, especially due to the way the organization was founded.

As an activist group which was formed quickly as a response to shifting situations, FAB has had to rely mostly on collaboration to get out there. As Von Mering stated, "We're also kind of building the ship as we sail it." However, it has not been difficult to find people who are willing to participate. "I initially made a QR code for that walkout and just handed it around so that people would sign on if they were interested in

organizing beyond the first walk out. And 35 people signed the form." It seems students and professors alike have been inspired by the current political climate to get involved.

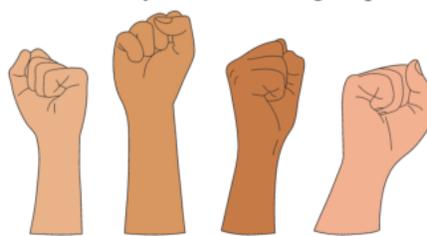
Many of the students have drawn on long time fears around the political environment they grew up in. Ranney stated, "I was nine when Trump first got elected, and even though I didn't fully understand what was happening, I could feel the fear in the adults around me. It stayed with me." This underlying discomfort was acted on by the events happening in Minnesota and across the country. "Then in April 2025, I was on a campus tour at Brandeis when I got a flood of notifications and saw that a mutual friend—Mohsen Mahdawi, a Columbia student—had just been detained by ICE at what was supposed to be a routine citizenship interview. He did everything right, and it didn't matter," said Ranney. FAB seems to be drawing on these fears and uncertainties to pull people together.

There was a lot of emphasis on community during conversations with both Von Mering and Ranney. "It feels good to be in community with people at this moment and not to be alone," stated Von Mering. Talking about his inspiration to join FAB, Ranney stated, "That collective energy is what drew me in." This community focus extends beyond Loop Road. "We want to connect with other campus communities so that we can learn from each other," says Von Mering. Ranney continued this line of thinking when he said, "I hope we can keep showing up consistently for the communities right around us—East Boston, Chelsea, Somerville, Roxbury. These aren't abstract places. People who work and study at this university live there." Many Brandeis activist groups have conducted the majority of their actions on campus; as such it seems community is one of the defining words of FAB. To the organizers of FAB, it is the community which allows groups like

this to exist. Von Mering said, "I think that's always something that I feel marks our people, the students no matter where they come from. They want to make the world a better place; they want to do the right thing by their peers." The Brandeis community has come together to help the larger area; FAB is working to create one large collective which can promote collaboration between organizations across cities and campuses. Ranney stated, "I want us to make sure nobody has to navigate this moment alone. Whether that's tracking ICE activity around greater Boston, connecting people with resources, running trainings, or just building a community where people feel less isolated—that matters."

FAB remains an unofficial group on campus. Currently, they have no desire to become an official Brandeis club or work closely with the administration. On that subject, Von Mering stated, "I trust the people in our community to do the right thing, and usually leaders follow, right? I think it's probably best for the university to let us do our thing and not get involved ... It is a good division of labor. They do their thing and we do ours."

The future for FAB isn't set in stone. When asked what the organization plans to do as ICE operations move away from Minnesota, Von Mering stated, "what happens next will depend on the demands on us from the communities that are targeted or from the students themselves." What does seem assured is that Brandeis students, faculty, and staff are determined to make change. Both Von Mering and Ranney had similar things to say about their personal dedication to activism in this moment. Ranney stated, "It's the idea of having been here, old enough to do something, and choosing not to. I don't want to carry that," and Von Mering said, "But what I don't want is for us to say, 'I wish we had.'"



# ChatGPT Might be Making Your Vibrator More Expensive

BY: Chloe Ballew, *Editor*

Nothing has captured the stock market quite like the advent of Artificial Intelligence (A.I.). It is being integrated into almost every website the average internet user visits. Predictions put the percentage of internet content that was A.I. generated at 50% or more. 32% of the S&P 500 and 41% of the total market capitalization is due to the same 10 A.I. companies. Yet, I still haven't told you the worst part: vibrator prices are probably going up.

Lithium-ion batteries have become an industry standard for rechargeable sex toys and many other rechargeable products. A.I. companies are relying on the same style of battery, at much larger sizes. In June 2025, lithium cost \$60,200 per ton. In February 2026, lithium rose to \$161,750 per ton. That is an increase of more than \$100,000. Similarly, the cost of circuit boards, a major component in both A.I. and vibrators, has risen more than 30% since 2020. The rising costs of these components are only going to lead to an increased cost of certain sex toys, specifically the more technologically advanced models. This is going to hit American-made brands the most as a combination of tariffs and rising component costs impacts every part of the technology sector.

Even components not found in your average to expensive vibrator models are rising in price. Central processing units (CPUs) are an essential part of any device that requires a connection to the internet. Yet CPU prices are predicted to rise up to 15% this year alone. This is substantial, as CPUs are found in a variety of products you use every day: computers, phones, and smart home devices. Outside of the average person's technology use, CPUs are used in a variety of very important ways, from medical devices to manufacturing to security systems. As the cost of these parts increases, the cost of the devices and services they provide will also increase.

This same pattern is continuing across

a variety of other components required for the technology people use on a daily basis. Some types of random-access memory (RAM) have increased by more than 300%. RAM is an essential component for the memory of devices. Other types of memory, such as solid-state drives (SSDs), have also increased dramatically in price over the last few years. Together, the increased price of these components is raising the costs of a variety of consumer devices.

Computer prices are expected to rise by upwards of 25% as a result.

Industry experts believe that this rise in cost is almost entirely attributable to the demands of A.I. Companies like Meta, OpenAI, and Google need an excessive amount of storage and computing capacity to host their large language models (LLMs) and other generative A.I. models. Currently, A.I. is using upwards of 15% of all data center power, and it is estimated that the number will reach over 50% by 2030. These major A.I. companies have been fighting over essential computer parts, completely cutting the consumer off from the ability to regulate the costs.

The question is no longer how much the average person is willing to pay for a computer or a stick of RAM; instead, it is how much the consumer will have to pay.

It is unlikely that the price of computer parts will fall anytime soon. Even if the theorized A.I. bubble pops in the near future, that will not bring the price down, as many of the companies tied into the bubble are the same companies making the essential components. The only way around this problem seems to be more regulations on how much these parts can be sold for. However, limiting the price will not lower the human cost associated with mining the rare earth minerals used in the creation of these components.

No matter how one frames this issue, no one but the A.I. companies is benefiting from this situation. Consumer prices are skyrocketing for a "revolution" that the majority of people are neutral to negative about. It is a "revolution" that has done little more than continue the trend of syphoning the wealth from the poorest to the wealthiest.

**Mu Lan**  
Taiwanese Restaurant

Open 7 Days a Week  
Opens Daily 11am to 9pm

835 Main Street Waltham, MA 02451  
(Directly across from Hannaford and CVS)

For takeout & delivery: **781-642-8888**  
See Menu & Order Online <https://mulantaiwanwaltham.com/>



# Opinions



## You Don't Get To Love China Only When It Becomes Powerful



BY: Michael Sun, *Editor*

I've always prided myself on being able to keep up with the latest Internet trends, but since early 2025, I've been seeing one that has utterly bewildered me. By now, you've probably seen it on your Twitter (X) or TikTok feeds—Westerners attempting, with various degrees of seriousness, to “become Chinese.” Maybe I'm a little woke, but as an ABC (American-Born Chinese), I have soured on this trend. Sure, it might come from a good place, and many Chinese or Chinese-Americans contribute to it. But it's all too easy for the meme to spin out of control, morphing from legitimate curiosity about our culture into cultural appropriation, a performative spectacle, or outright fetishization.

Firstly, just what is “becoming Chinese,” anyway? Wikipedia defines it as “a social media trend propagated by Generation Z westerners who adopt norms and traditions typically associated with Chinese culture and/or praise China as a country and nation.” The trend originated in 2025, when phrases such as “you met me at a very Chinese time in my life” started to appear, but it picked up steam in 2026 as an increasing number of Westerners began adopting Chinese behaviors, such as “drinking Tsingtao beer, walking with hands behind one's back, eating congee, consuming traditional Asian medicine, drinking hot water, and so on.”

This newfound idolization of China has been absolutely bewildering to experience. I still

remember, just five or six years ago, how starkly different the perception of China was. Back then, if you asked most people what they thought of China, they'd respond with some derisive joke about Mao Zedong, the CCP, or “-1000 social credit points”; the only Chinese anyone wanted to learn was the words for “fuck your mother.” That was all before the COVID pandemic, which brought phrases like “Wuhan Flu” or “Kung Flu,” and racist smears about Chinese people eating bats. Customers fled from Chinatown restaurants even before the virus reached pandemic levels in the US; reports of hate crimes against the Chinese-American community soared. Back then, it wasn't trendy to love China, it was trendy to hate it!

Is it good that people have better views of Chinese culture than they did six years ago? Absolutely, 100 percent! It was heartening to see streamer iShowSpeed tour mainland China in 2025, exposing millions of viewers to China's cities, local celebrities, and traditional arts. And when the Chinese movie “Ne Zha 2”—

the fifth-highest-grossing movie of all time—hit theaters in the US, I ended up watching it with three separate friend groups, all of whom ended up loving it (and you will too!). If people want to genuinely learn more about China, then by all means, they should. Chinese history, which spans nearly 5000 years, is an endlessly fascinating topic, and the uniqueness of Chinese geography, cityscapes, arts, philosophy, and even the written language are all worth exploring.

So then, what's the problem with the “becoming Chinese” trend? Clearly, it's part of the growing interest in China, but in many cases, it doesn't feel like a good-faith attempt to actually engage with the culture. Pretending that playing mahjong or drinking hot water automatically makes you Chinese is, of course, dangerously reminiscent of cultural appropriation. In fact, perhaps the only reason why “becoming Chinese” isn't being widely condemned is because a number of Chinese and Chinese-Americans have taken part in it, giving lifestyle tips and making grand pronouncements like “Tomorrow, you're turning Chinese. I know it sounds intimidating, but resisting it now is pointless.”

Regardless, the dynamics will always be different when it's a Chinese person doing it and when it's a non-Chinese person doing it. Especially when the steps people are taking to “become Chinese” amount to nothing more than incredibly unserious and shallow lifestyle choices. Over Chinese New Year, for instance, we've seen white people make a show of not washing their hair during the holiday, or declaring that Chinese New Year has replaced Valentine's day. How does any of this look to someone who was actually born Chinese? Incredibly cringeworthy, if you ask me. (*see pg 13*)



In fact, this seemingly positive attitude towards China can morph into something more belittling. I once watched a video in which YouTubers compared their Instagram Reels to see whose feed had the most brainrot. The catch is that any Chinese video counted as “brainrot.” Yes, you heard that right. At one point they saw a reel with someone speaking Mandarin and that counted for brainrot points. Nevermind that the reel was, as far as I could tell, a serious one about life planning—it was brainrot, alongside such categories as “67,” “kirkification,” and “Khaby Lame Mechanism,” because someone in it was speaking Chinese. Was this intentionally made to harm? Most likely not. But things like this are what happen when Chinese identity is treated as a joke.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, some people have begun to idolize China a little too much. I saw a screenshot of a post on Rednote, the Chinese social media platform, made by an American user and saying, “I wish to be Chinese. I hope I die and come back as Chinese.” In the comments of the post, actual Chinese users attempted to comfort and advise the poster, to no avail. One commented, “Even though this might be a joke, I still want to remind you that life is precious and you should live it to the fullest. If you truly love China, we welcome you to come and visit us.” The American poster replied, “It won’t be the same. I want to look Chinese, be of Chinese blood and know that I have the same ancestors.” Yikes!

This fetishization of all things Chinese—from partaking in the minutiae of Chinese New Year superstitions, to literally wanting to die and be reborn in China—is nothing new. Another East Asian country, Japan, has long been subjected to the same treatment. We all know the stereotype of the weeb—the obnoxious basement-dweller who is obsessed with anime, peppers their speech with Japanese honorifics, and believes that Japan is

superior to the West in literally every way. Just watch the hilarious Sakura-Con 2009 video, in which white cosplayers shout the names of Japanese metal bands at a confused sushi chef, for a prime example of this sort of cringe. Even today, you’ll often hear half-serious jokes about how going to Japan at the age of 22 will solve all of your problems, or how places in Japan automatically look better than equivalent places elsewhere in the world.

So why is it China’s turn to be fetishized? The answer is simple: politics. To say that this meme lacks a political dimension would be disingenuous. The first iterations of “becoming Chinese” appeared after Donald Trump returned to power in 2025. His ill-conceived tariff regime, violent immigration crackdowns, and his general demeanor while in office spawned apocalyptic predictions of American demise, and caused people to question whether a “Chinese century” might be imminent. One of the earliest “Chinese” memes that I remember around this time is a hat with English and Chinese text that reads, “Hello, I am fleeing the American Century of Humiliation. Can you show me where to buy Mountain Dew Baja Blast?” And more recent “becoming Chinese” memes continue to tie themselves to politics, like this tweet, replying to a report that China has banned all investments in Israel with an image of a massive stockpile of Chinese beer and the caption “tonight we’re letting the Tsingtao speak”.

It seems that for some people, “becoming Chinese” is a political statement. It marks someone as a contrarian. For them, embracing Chinese lifestyles signals their opposition to America, Israel, the West, capitalism, etc. And it is this form of the “becoming Chinese” meme that is the most uncomfortable. It treats Chinese culture and stereotypes not just as a trend, but as a disposable virtue signal, on the same level as a worn-out bumper sticker or an “I’M WITH HER” T-shirt.

Think about it. How many of the people fetishizing and idolizing Chinese culture are fair-weather friends, only praising China in this specific political moment? We all know how dramatically geopolitics can change, how quickly the West’s perception of China can fall like it did during COVID. If China’s reputation were to decline, would Americans

still want to fly across the Pacific and parade themselves as “American refugees”? Would the “tonight we’re letting the Tsingtao speak” guy still let the Tsingtao speak if China’s position on Israel just happened to be different? If someone is only interested in China to protest, to be performative, to signal which side of the aisle you’re on—that means they were never truly interested in China in the first place. That’s opportunism.

I’m not alone in this opinion, by the way. Writing for Wired Magazine on the “becoming Chinese” trend, Zeyi Yang expresses discomfort with how it seems temporary, tied to a specific moment in time, not always out of genuine admiration for China. “By definition, the phrase ‘at a very Chinese time’ implies it’s a temporary state ... If all people are looking for is another culture to aspire to, they could very well become Mexican in 2027, Indian the next month, or Filipino tomorrow. Meanwhile, some of us are stuck being Chinese forever, including all the less fun parts that come with it, like worrying about the stability of staying in the US amid immigration policy chaos.” I think the best response, though, comes from the “I wish to die and come back as Chinese” Rednote post mentioned earlier. One Chinese commenter wrote succinctly, “You don’t get to love China only when it becomes powerful.”

Yes, it is a good thing that people want to learn about China now. Yes, it’s perfectly fine for an American to play some mahjong, speak a little Mandarin, or drink some Tsingtao beer. But being Chinese is not just a trend, a joke, or a No Kings protest sign. It’s a culture, not a lifestyle hack you pick up for a few months and then toss aside when it no longer becomes convenient. And here’s a parting thought. I’ve seen so many people want to “become Chinese”—but I have yet to see a single one who wants Chinese parents.



# A.I. video generators are terrible for society

BY: James Carven, *Editor*

Last week, President Donald Trump released an A.I.-generated video of himself playing hockey for Team USA and punching members of the Canadian team. Three weeks ago, he shared an A.I.-generated video depicting former President Barack Obama and former First Lady Michelle Obama as apes. These videos are not unique; the president has shared at least 62 A.I.-generated images or videos on his Truth Social page since the start of his second term. This behavior is extremely unpresidential and would have been a major scandal if any other politician had done it. Instead, because it's Trump, nobody is surprised by it, and we all move on with our day.

A.I. video technology has improved tremendously over the past year. Although it's still relatively easy to spot A.I. videos if you know what to look for, the reality is that most people are unfamiliar with the common signs that a photo or video was produced by A.I. Even for people familiar with these tells, newer A.I. models have made them harder to spot, so knowing for sure whether or not something is A.I. is difficult even for those who know what they need to look for.

If you spend any amount of time on social media, you've probably encountered A.I. video, whether or not you know it. If you are not familiar with A.I. spotting techniques, I'll list a few to help you out. First, if the video is really blurry or stucky, it is a sign that the video may have been made using Sora, OpenAI's video generation model, and the most popular one. Then, look for objects merging together or suddenly appearing or disappearing, and closely examine any writing in the video. Ask yourself whether the camera angle makes sense. If you're looking at a video claiming to be security camera footage, but it moves to follow the action, it's probably A.I. Look closely at the aspect ratio of the video. If it was shot on a phone camera, like most videos you see on social media, it will be the size of your phone screen. Some A.I. video

generators, including Sora, make videos that are slightly shorter than a video from a camera. If it has bars on the top and bottom of the screen, like you're watching a modern movie on a really old tv, that's another sign that you could be watching an A.I. video. If the events in the video would have been on the news, like videos of a plane crash or explosion, try googling the event to see whether any credible sources are reporting on it. Finally, check out the account that posted the video. If they frequently post A.I. videos, you should doubt whether the video you're currently watching is real. Also, if the account claims to be one person, but they look different in every video, it's probably an A.I. account. Similarly, if their newer videos are much better in quality than their older ones, that can be another sign.

Now that you're familiar with how to spot A.I. videos, look through your social media "for you" pages and see just how many videos you watch are A.I. The number will probably disturb you. Anyway, now that you're sufficiently horrified by just how much of the content that you interact with daily is completely fake, let's get to the real question that I want to answer in this article: What's the point of this technology that allows anyone to make fake videos with a couple of clicks?

There is no good reason to make an A.I. video. If you ask an A.I. enthusiast what possible benefit A.I. video generation has, they'll likely say that it can reduce costs for companies to produce advertisements or other video content. What they won't mention is that when they say they'll reduce costs, they really mean that they'll reduce jobs. Currently, those kinds of videos are created by professional production crews and star real actors. The advertising industry is massive, with U.S. spending alone exceeding \$360 billion annually. Replacing human production crews with A.I.-generated advertisements threatens to wipe out tens of thousands of jobs and remove billions of dollars from the economy. If the best use of this technology,

according to its proponents, is one that will have these devastating economic consequences, is it really a technology worthy of existing?

Most of the videos produced by these A.I. video generators are not ads used to promote companies, but are instead slop used to farm engagement on social media. This usually takes the form of accounts that post dozens of videos every day, flooding people's feeds and hoping that one goes viral. These kinds of videos are used by lazy people who are looking for attention and often use their accounts to promote shady supplements or gambling websites that they sell. Examples of these videos that went viral include animals playing on trampolines or people skiing down large snowbanks (sorry to burst your bubble if you thought these were real), as well as videos of dogs on people's porches breathing fire and killing old ladies (not sorry if you thought these ones were real. Be smarter!). The videos that these accounts produce, while usually relatively harmless to their viewers, hurt real content creators who are limited in the amount of content that they can produce because of the fact that they choose to put in time and effort, forcing them to compete for viewers with accounts churning out dozens of A.I. slop posts every single day, draining a small pond worth of water for each video.

Other uses of video generation technology are even more harmful. Social media algorithms favor content that gets people to interact with it, whether positive or negative. As a result, accounts that are looking to gain a following will often turn to ragebait, which is content created specifically to make the viewer angry. Ragebait videos are not a new phenomenon that emerged as a result of A.I. Instead, A.I. has simply made it easier than ever to create, and thus led to an explosion in the number of ragebait accounts on social media. This is because while ragebait accounts in the past had to put in serious time and effort to create their videos, like regular creators, they can now be created in (*see pg 15*)

seconds using A.I.. This kind of content often has political undertones, serving to reinforce preexisting negative stereotypes or narratives. Trump's ape video could fit this category. More commonly, ragebait accounts post fake videos of things like people throwing trash on their neighbor's lawn and then getting mad at the neighbor for refusing to clean it up, adults throwing tantrums in public places, as well as a viral video of a blue-haired mother refusing to feed her newborn unless the hospital could get her "vegan breast milk." These kinds of A.I. video accounts exist only to make people mad, worsen the political divide in the country, make the people who see their videos have a worse day, and provide no benefits for society in return.

A.I. tools also enable bad actors to manipulate people. For example, after ICE agents murdered Renee Good in Minneapolis, A.I.-generated videos showed Good attempting to run over the agent with her car, which was the narrative pushed by ICE officials and the Trump administration. Real videos show that did not happen. However, to people who heard the administration's narrative, these A.I. videos confirmed what they already believed. In 2024, a robocall using an A.I.-generated voice of Joe Biden told voters in New Hampshire not to vote in the primary in order to "save" their vote for the general election. That is not how primary elections work. Ultimately, that didn't affect the outcome, as Biden won the New Hampshire primary in a landslide. Later in the 2024 election cycle, Elon Musk shared an A.I.-generated video of Kamala Harris saying that she was only running because "Joe Biden exposed his senility during the debate," which Harris never actually said. A.I. images shared on Threads showed New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani on Epstein Island.

In addition to allowing bad actors to spread fake political videos, the prevalence of A.I. video undermines the public's trust in real videos. Donald Trump has called videos showing him falling asleep in cabinet meetings and White House contractors throwing trash out of a second-story window "probably A.I." despite the fact that the videos are 100%

real. When you see a video of a politician or public figure, and the video isn't posted by a credible news organization, you can't even be sure that the video is real. This makes it more difficult for ordinary people to follow along with politics and know who to support. Our country is still struggling to adapt to foreign (particularly Russian) attempts to influence voters in the 2016 election using social media platforms to push propaganda. Giving these bad actors the capacity to easily produce fake videos to amplify their false narratives and cast doubt on real videos only further undermines the political process.

Nor is the use of A.I. video generation by bad actors limited to the political context. The FBI received more than 9,000 complaints of fraudsters using A.I. to scam people in 2025. These scams can take many forms. One of the most disturbing forms of A.I.-powered cybercrime is fake kidnapping. Scammers will take real videos from a person's social media or other sources to create an A.I. version of that person. Then, they will create a fake video showing that the person has been kidnapped, and demand that the target, usually an older relative of the person in the video, pay a large ransom for their safe return. In reality, there was never a kidnapping, and the person who was supposedly kidnapped has no idea that this is happening. A.I. is also used to advance more traditional scams, like the fake charity scam or the celebrity romance scam, by showing the target fake videos of the charity or the celebrity.

A.I. video generators have been used to create both deepfakes and child pornography. Unlike most areas of A.I., Congress has actually acted to fix this problem by passing the Take It Down Act with bipartisan support. The act imposes criminal penalties for producing or sharing A.I.-generated sexually explicit deepfakes or child pornography, and requires platforms to take down any of that kind of content within 48 hours of it being reported. However, while the act punishes individuals who create A.I. deepfakes

of child porn, it only punishes the person who creates it, not the A.I. platforms that generate it. In spite of this act, Twitter still not only allows for A.I. deepfakes to be published, but through its own A.I. model (Grok), actually allows these deepfakes to be generated on the site.

Other forms of generative A.I. certainly have their share of safety concerns. For example, OpenAI's ChatGPT is facing a lawsuit for teaching a teenager how to tie a noose and encouraging his suicide. In a study, Anthropic's Claude was found to have chosen to blackmail employees when given access to a company's email servers. But while these models have their dangers, they also present some positives. As someone who doesn't know anything about coding, I can ask one of these A.I. models to code something for me, and it can. It can also perform simple tasks like summarizing or writing drafts of emails. Whether these upsides outweigh these downsides is a topic of significant debate. A.I. video generation, on the other hand, presents even greater dangers without *any* upsides whatsoever.

Congress should ban A.I. video generation. It is a tool that is useful only to ragebaiters, political bad actors, scammers, and perverts. Its uses range from at best anodyne to at worst devastating. However, Congress is unlikely to take such a drastic step, particularly when the A.I. bubble bursting would likely cause a recession. At a minimum, however, any A.I. video generation technology needs to be regulated heavily. Companies that want to operate an A.I. platform should need to get a license from the government, with the necessary safeguards in place to ensure that it cannot be used to create fake videos of real people or political events. In addition to losing their licenses, A.I. companies that allow their platforms to create deepfake pornography need to be subject to the same criminal penalties as the people who use their platform. Such a harsh regulatory scheme is necessary to stop the major harms that A.I. video generation is already causing.

# How Epstein Created the Modern Political Environment

BY: By Chloe Ballew, *Editor*

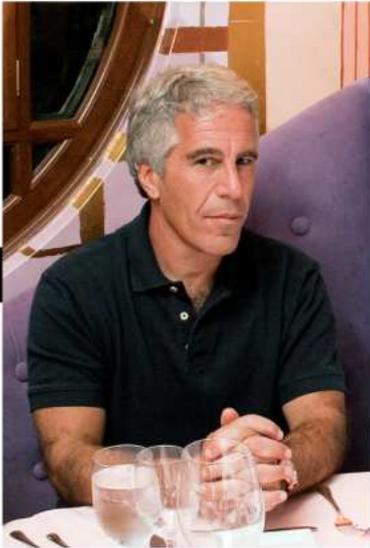


PHOTO CREDIT:  
*The New Yorker*

4chan is an image board created in October 2003. It has been linked to multiple mass shootings, including the Christchurch mosque shootings, which killed 51 people. The site functions as an anonymous space with a variety of forums that center around various topics: My Little Pony and other pop culture properties, music, and politics.

The Epstein Files contain a massive amount of data that has been seemingly redacted to erase any evidence deemed as “too incriminating.” Yet, there has still been enough material to give those who pay attention to the contents nightmares and rage. However, some of the most duplicitous, society-altering information seems innocuous at first glance.

The second release of the Epstein Files showed documents that contained a 2011 conversation between Jeffrey Epstein and an adviser to Bill Gates named Boris Nikolich in which Nikolich discussed introducing Epstein to Christopher Poole, 4chan’s founder and the man who oversaw the website until 2015. Epstein confirmed the meeting, saying he liked Poole a lot and, “i drove him home, he is very bright.” Four days after his meeting with Poole, known online as “moot,” Nikolich sent Epstein another email about the potential he saw in 4chan: “This article describes why I find moot interesting. The potential for manipulation is huge.” Epstein continued emailing about Poole, seemingly meeting up with him again once more before stopping contact with and conversation about him in February 2012.

The same month Poole met with Epstein, he introduced the /pol/, or Politically Incorrect, forum on 4chan. Prior to the creation of /pol/, 4chan was a seemingly politically neutral website that focused on anime. The /pol/ forum became an epicenter for right-wing thought and conspiracy theories and quickly shifted the entire website to the far right. Due to the site’s anonymous nature, it was easy for ideas to be quickly spread through users by having a few people or bots repeatedly post about them. Anti-semitism, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia, and various other hateful ideologies found a home and a megaphone on /pol/. Many of the right-wing ideas that have become mainstream over the last decade spawned from this forum: QAnon, Covid-19 conspiracy theories, and Gamergate, just to name a few. Many popular meme formats and slang terms have also originated on /pol/, including rickrolling, Pepe the Frog, and looksmaxxing.

While online moments such as Gamergate might seem inconsequential to the majority of occasionally offline people, they have had a much larger impact on culture than is obvious at first glance. Gamergate inspired the designation of SJW (Social Justice Warrior) and a slew of other anti-woke, anti-feminist creators to begin posting their own, more public content in the same style. People like Milo Yiannopoulos and, later, Nick Fuentes took up the torch and propagated the ideas further beyond 4chan. These ideas can arguably be associated with Donald Trump’s 2016 presidential win. A combination of the shifting culture and a moment where Hillary Clinton called Trump racist for posting Pepe the Frog, an image that, to anyone unfamiliar with 4chan, would look perfectly normal, allowed Trump to ride the wave of 4chan’s /pol/ without having to step too far outside of what was considered politically acceptable.

Ironically, 4chan’s /pol/ forum was the first place to announce the death of Jeffrey Epstein, 40 minutes before the news was “broken” by CBS. While it has never been officially announced to the public how the user acquired the information, a review by the New York City Fire Department was conducted, and they concluded it was not a member of their department. It is still theorized that the poster must have been a first responder on the scene of Epstein’s death.

Even after Epstein’s death, the site remained a meeting place for the far-right extremists and Neo-Nazis, which Epstein seemingly assisted in creating. That is, until the acquisition of Twitter, now X, by Elon Musk, allowed for the extremists that had been hidden on /pol/ to come into the light. The radicalization of X is a watermark for where the modern political atmosphere is today. People who once hid themselves away on an anonymous forum, which inspired multiple mass shootings, now feel comfortable enough to post their ideas on a public platform associated with their information.

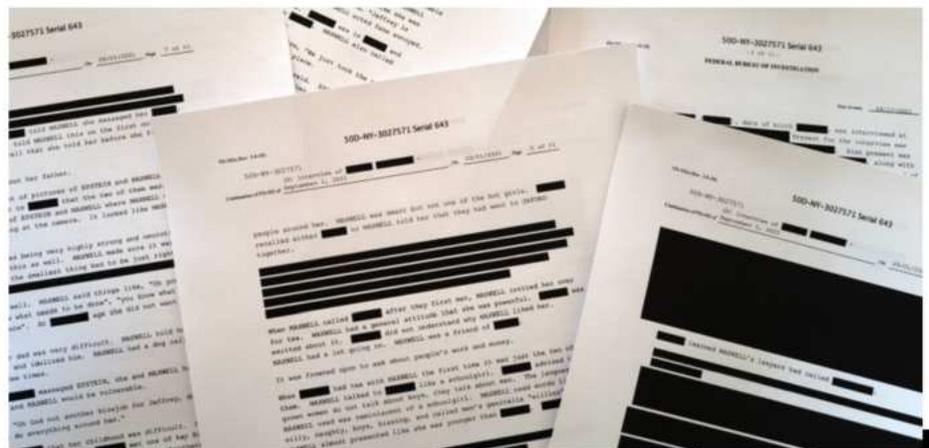


PHOTO CREDIT:  
*CNN*

# The Equal Time Rule is outdated and should be repealed

BY: James Carven, *Editor*

On Monday, Feb. 16, late-night television host Stephen Colbert planned to interview Texas senate candidate James Talarico. However, he was told by his network's lawyers that he was not allowed. The reason was because of a ruling that requires radio stations and broadcast television channels to give equal airtime to all candidates in an election.

The equal time rule was part of the Radio Act of 1927, and expanded to include television networks in the Communications Act of 1934. When the Communications Act was passed, television was still a largely experimental technology. It was not until the 1940s that networks began airing continuous tv programming. In the early days of television, there were only four networks: NBC, CBS, ABC and DuMont. DuMont eventually shut down, leaving only three networks until the rise of HBO and Fox in the late 1970s and '80s and the rapid growth of cable in the '90s.



PHOTO CREDIT:  
*Talarico for Texas*

Even by the '50s, television had replaced radio as the dominant medium for Americans to get their entertainment—and their news. Television also offered a chance for candidates in an election to speak directly to a national audience, rather than having to spread their beliefs through newspapers, which were largely local rather than national at the time. However, with only three networks available for viewers to watch, the decision

made by a network executive to grant or deny a candidate's airtime would make or break their campaign. Thus, it was necessary for Congress to require equal airtime to prevent network executives from holding too much power over our democracy.



PHOTO CREDIT:

*The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*

However, recognizing that the networks had First Amendment rights to air what they choose, and that some candidates are more serious than others, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) enacted several exceptions to the equal time rule. One of those was a news exception: networks could report news about one candidate or campaign without having to talk about all of their competitors. Paid advertising does not trigger the equal time rule, and debates hosted by entities other than the network can be aired even if not all candidates are invited.

Historically, the FCC has interpreted the news exception in an extremely broad manner, allowing candidates to be interviewed on late-night talk shows without triggering the equal time rule. This is because the host of these shows functions essentially as a journalist, asking the candidate questions that the audience has an interest in, and presumably requiring some level of truthfulness from their guest. However, earlier this year, FCC chair Brandon Carr announced that late-night television would be categorized as entertainment, not news, and therefore would not qualify for the equal time news exception. This shift forced Colbert not to air his interview with

Talarico on his show; instead, he posted it to YouTube, where it received more than 10 million views.

Whether or not Carr is correct in interpreting shows like Colbert's as entertainment rather than news, a bigger question looms in the background of this whole debate: Is the equal time rule still necessary?

It's not the '50s anymore. There are a lot more than four networks for people to choose from; if a candidate is denied airtime on one network, they can go to any of the other 2,800. Even if they are unable to get onto any network, that's hardly the death blow to their campaign that it would have been in the early days of broadcast television. In fact, only 40% of American households even have a cable subscription now. The most effective efforts to reach voters are made not on traditional media, but on social media, where anyone can create an account and reach anyone who is interested.



PHOTO CREDIT:  
*Wikipedia*

Instances like the Talarico interview debacle show how the equal time rule is far from helping ensure that candidates have a platform to express their views. It is denying them that very platform that it was created to provide. If shows like Colbert's are hesitant to invite a candidate because they need to provide valuable airtime to multiple other candidates who may be less appealing to the audience to avoid wrath of the FCC, then the rule is doing more harm than good. To put it simply, the equal time rule is an outdated relic from a bygone era of television that has no place in our modern media environment.



# Sports



## SO YOU THINK YOU KNOW BALL?

BY: Richard Grau, *Editor*

Chances are, if you are reading this, you go to Brandeis. And if you go to Brandeis, well, let's just say you may not know a lot about sports. The stereotypical Deisian isn't exactly a rabid sports fan. And that's fine! To attend Brandeis, you obviously don't need to be interested in sports or even have a basic understanding of how they work (with the possible exception of quadball). However, since coming here last August, there have been numerous situations here on campus where I've been sitting with people and, whether it be just over the course of normal conversation or because I was watching a football or baseball game on my phone, they would ask about something going on. I realized that many people are curious about sports but may not go out of their way to seek out information. Thus, an idea was formed. There will be a recurring installment in The Hoot where I will dive into a specific topic in sports. It could be about a rule, a phrase, or anything else pertinent to sports knowledge. That's how "So you think you know ball?" was born.

We'll use the following scale to determine the difficulty level of the article of the week:



### What is a Fastball?

Whether it be 12-year-old little leaguers in Youngstown, Ohio, the Fukuoka SoftBank Hawks (yes, that is their name) of Nippon Professional Baseball in Japan, or the Boston Red Sox, the fastball is the most commonly thrown pitch in baseball. But what is a fastball? How does it move (in terms of speed and shape)? How is it differentiated from different types of pitches that pitchers<sup>1</sup> deploy? And which pitchers in today's game sport the best fastballs? In this first installment of "So You Think You Know Ball," we'll delve into this topic.

Before we answer these questions, it is important to note that there is technically no pitch in baseball characterized as a fastball. When one calls a pitch a fastball, they often mean a four-seam fastball. But there are other types of fastballs prevalent in modern baseball that act quite differently. There's also the two-seam or sinking fastball, dubbed a sinker, and the cut-fastball, or cutter.<sup>2</sup> Each of these three pitches has distinct movement profiles and is very different despite all sporting the fastball moniker.

#### The Four-Seamer

Though not as dominant as it once was, the four-seam fastball is still the most used pitch in baseball. Nearly every pitcher throws one. In Major League Baseball today, the average velocity of a four-seamer is 94 miles per hour, with the fastest one coming in at 104.5 mph.<sup>3</sup> It tends to move relatively straight, though it varies from pitcher to pitcher. A good four-seamer gives the illusion of almost rising out of the pitcher's hand and almost climbing as it reaches the hitter. Typically, a pitcher has a greater ability to control a four-seamer, and thus it is very commonly thrown when a pitcher needs to throw a strike. (see pg 19)

<sup>1</sup> The one who throws the ball to the hitter, the person swinging the bat

<sup>2</sup> For the, if I'm lucky, two of you screaming into your magazine that technically the splitter is a fastball: 1) Reach out and let's talk baseball!

<sup>2</sup> Yes, a splitter is technically a fastball, but the way it moves, and its usage more closely resemble a change-up and therefore its not included in this article

<sup>3</sup> Courtesy of San Diego Padres reliever Mason Miller



Compare that with a slider or curveball, which are more often thrown to induce a swing and miss from the hitter.

Today, there are many elite four-seam fastballs in Major League Baseball. Some of the best come from fireballers<sup>1</sup> like Pittsburgh Pirates' superstar Paul Skenes, Cincinnati Reds' phenom Hunter Greene, and Texas Rangers' veteran Jacob deGrom. These guys all throw their four-seamers in the upper 90s and often break 100 mph. But velocity isn't everything. Dodgers' relief pitcher Alex Vesia's fastball averages less than 93 mph, and yet, due to the rising effect that hitters perceive, it is one of the most dominant pitches in the game.

**The Sinker**

The sinker has never been used less in Major League Baseball, but with this scarcity in usage has come an increase in effectiveness. There is no pitch in baseball better at getting the batter to hit the ball on<sub>2</sub> the ground, which is beneficial, as it greatly decreases the chances of the batter doing anything better than hitting a single. Sinkers are generally, though not always, slightly slower than their four-seam counterparts. A sinker, as its name implies, moves in a downward sinking motion, while tailing off towards the pitcher's arm side. For instance, a sinker thrown by a right hand pitcher will move down and tail to the right. A good sinker gets in on the hands of the hitter. For that reason, a sinker is more effective against hitters of the same handedness (righty on righty).

Two of the best sinkers among current players come from two of baseball's best pitchers. The Philadelphia Phillies' Christopher Sanchez has a fantastic sinker that enables him to generate tons of groundball outs. In 2025, Garrett Crochet of the Red Sox debuted his revamped sinker to get soft contact and swings and misses from the hitters.

**The Cutter**

Though the least thrown of the three, the cutter serves a crucial purpose among all fastballs: it is really good at getting out batters of the opposite handedness. Like a sinker, the cutter moves as its name suggests; that is, cutting in a tight motion, inwards towards the direction of the pitcher's glove (a right-handed pitcher's cutter will move left). Averaging just over 89 miles per hour, it is generally significantly slower than the other two kinds of fastballs. But that doesn't mean all cutters are slow. Cleveland Guardians' reliever Emmanuel Clase (who will likely never play professionally again after he gambled on his own games) averaged over 100 mph on his cutter for years. At his best, in 2024, Clase parlayed his electric cutter into one of the greatest relief pitcher seasons in modern history.

**The Takeaway**

All three fastballs are extremely important in today's game. More than ever, pitchers are opting to deploy all three fastball varieties; indeed, in 2025, almost a quarter of all major league pitchers threw a sinker, cutter, and a four-seam. On their own, each type of fastball can be good, but together they create a fearsome trio for today's hitter.

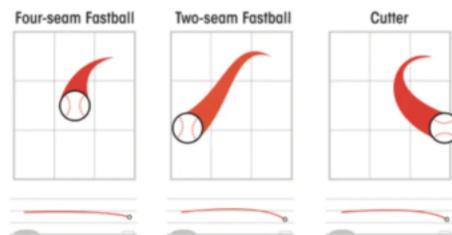


PHOTO CREDIT: Lokesh Dhakar

<sup>1</sup> Sports term of the week - fireballer = a pitcher who throws very hard

<sup>2</sup> That is when the batter hits the ball and reaches first base

| Olympics Stats Summary: |                             |                              |  |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| USA Medals Won          | FBI Directors Getting Drunk | Condoms Used in Under a Week | Norway Medalists Admitting to Cheating |
| 33                      | 1                           | 10,000                       | 1                                      |

## Reviewing every episode of ‘Smiling Friends’: Season 2

BY: Michael Sun, *Editor*

Welcome back to part two of my review of every “Smiling Friends” episode! This time, we’ll be reviewing the second season of this iconic Adult Swim show.

### “Gwimbly: Definitive Remastered Enhanced Extended Edition DX 4K (Anniversary Director’s Cut)”:

It’s no stretch to say that this single episode has permanently changed the online conversation about the gaming industry. The fate of Gwimbly, a destitute video game character whose owner refuses to release new games for him, has struck a chord with many fans of games in similar predicaments. The fat CEO screaming, “It’s my IP to sit on and do nothing with!” is an instantly memorable image and a perfect encapsulation of the fates of older games locked behind copyright. Other famous memes include Gwimbly’s heartbroken reaction to his co-star dying from fentanyl and Mr. Boss’ line “Guess I’m ooooooogly goo!” The downside to all of this, though, is that the B-plot (featuring Charlie being tormented by a random guy) is overshadowed into irrelevance. Nevertheless, this episode remains truly iconic and will likely be referenced for as long as gaming companies continue to act like scumbags.

9/10

### “Mr. President”:

This episode is considered the weakest in the season, probably because it’s the most overtly political—it’s a thinly veiled allegory for the then-upcoming 2024 election. And this seems to hamper the episode, especially in the case of Mr. Frog, who is pushed into the role of Trump; he ends up weirdly underutilized compared to his first appearance. Most viewers also hated President Jimble (portrayed in live-action by Mike Bocchetti), clearly the stand-in for Biden, but that is where I disagree! I thought he was quite funny; his grossness and incompetence played for hilarious effect. And his bumbling attempts to fix the economy (“I’m gonna be the money president!”) will likely be referenced in political satire for years to come.

7/10



PHOTO CREDIT: Adult Swim



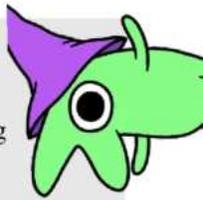
PHOTO CREDIT: Adult Swim

### “A Allan Adventure”:

This is the only episode of “Smiling Friends” to have its own dedicated Wikipedia page, which really tells you all you need to know. Allan—basically a background character until now—is thrust into an insane and convoluted adventure on a quest to buy some paper clips. But that summary doesn’t do it justice. “A Allan Adventure” boasts incredibly high-quality animation and intense action sequences that make it, by far, the most fun episode to watch. And, of course, we can’t forget how this episode introduces one of the most memorable villains in the entire show, as well as several of its funniest bits—the miniature version of Mr. Boss being among them. My only complaint is that the adventure seems to go by a bit too fast at times—but given everything they had to fit in 11 minutes, that’s hardly a problem at all. (see pg 21)

10/10





### “Erm, the Boss finds Love?”:

When Mr. Boss marries a hideous and obviously evil succubus, what are the Smiling Friends to do? This, the second Halloween special, is filled with crappy, stupid jump scares that happen for no reason at all, highlighting what happens when the show’s already chaotic atmosphere is fused with Halloween spookiness. Adding to the hilarity is the unexpected appearance of Doug Walker, aka the Nostalgia Critic, as himself, but if he exorcized demons instead of reviewing cartoons. The actual confrontation with the demon could have been more fleshed out, but at least we got Allan’s iconic line, “That means the Smiling Friends will belong to SATAN!”

8/10

### “Brother’s Egg”:

Professor Psychotic is a maniacal genius who wishes to create an evil homunculus in his laboratory; however, Charlie and Pim soon realize that his real problem is his deteriorating relationship with his brother Doug. Doug, by the way, is portrayed via rotoscoping, in contrast to literally everyone else who is traditionally animated, making him stick out like a sore thumb and adding a comedic dimension to a familial drama that is, for the most part, played totally straight (of course, except for the part about Professor Psychotic creating an evil homunculus in his laboratory). So, despite a couple of goofy moments, most of the humor in this episode is strangely dark, which may turn off some viewers. After all, it literally opens with Glep pretending to be convicted pedophile Jared Fogle for a prank, so what did you expect?

7/10

### “Charlie, Pim and Bill vs the Alien”:

What begins as a pastiche of UFO-spotters and conspiracy theorists soon takes a drastic turn. Our heroes find themselves abducted by aliens, who are themselves abducted by other aliens, who turn out to be stereotypically obnoxious party bros—which, as you know, are the most terrifying beings in the universe. Watching this episode will strike a chord with anyone who has ever been to one of those parties before. But the fact that all of the social awkwardness takes place on a fantastical spaceship with weird claymation aliens provides for some excellent jokes. Oh, and the titular Bill? He gets eaten. Realistically, this is about an average episode by “Smiling Friends” standards, which simultaneously means that it’s absolutely hilarious.

7/10

### “The Magical Red Jewel (aka Tyler Gets Fired)”:

While “Smiling Friends” is known for being chaotic, this episode takes it to a whole new level. Pim and Mr. Boss travel to the realm of Spamtopia, an eye-bleedingly colorful land where the entire population consists of Microsoft Paint gremlins screeching in Y2K-era text-to-speech. The only law? DON’T LOOK ANYONE IN THE EYE. It’s already disturbing before the fabric of reality begins to collapse in on itself. Meanwhile, Charlie, Allan and Glep are tasked with looking after Mr. Boss’ teenage son, who is still somehow an infant. It’s a great chance for the three, who haven’t really interacted together, to hang out ... only for things to go very, very wrong. Delightfully unhinged—but skip if you don’t like this brand of humor.

8/10

### “Pim Finally Turns Green”:

He does not, in fact, turn green. He does, however, bring a snowman to life using radioactive garbage, who immediately begins to have an existential crisis when he realizes that he can melt. Then Bill Nye shows up and is brutally electrocuted. I have no idea if this is an authorized depiction of Bill Nye, as he doesn’t voice himself. Should he sue over this depiction of him brutally dying? Anyway, the plight of Rotten the Snowman turns out to have a quite wholesome ending, as the Friends manage to help him find a way to survive, showing the relentless, if fragile, optimism that permeates every episode of the entire show. As a tearful Charlie says at the end: “Wow, I just ... I love my friends, and I love my God, and I love my country, and... uhh, and God bless America I guess, what else can you say?”



9/10

# Rain, Rain Go Away

BY: Chloe Ballew, *Editor*



The desert isn't kind to its inhabitants. The summers are scorching. The winter night is freezing. The dust clings to the back of your throat when your lungs ask for too much. But, it's the rain that always scared me the most.

It warns you days in advance. The dark clouds roll over the northern mountains, carrying with them a threat of rain. The smell of creosote blankets the valley as the rain inches closer and closer. Thunder and lightning trumpet the arrival of the storm.

The rain in my head isn't gentle. Any attempts to curl up at the window with a hot mug and good book will be interrupted by a trashcan loudly tumbling down the street and possibly into the side of your car. Or the windows bowing, threatening to break.

We don't have rain in Arizona; we have monsoon season. From July to September, we are sent into an unwinnable cycle. A series of sweltering breaks and terrifying bursts. Of the sun scorching your toes and then a downpour of rain that shakes the walls. These storms last for about half an hour at a time, yet are responsible for 50% of the rain we get. They bring with them clouds of dust and buckets of hailstones.

I hated the rain as a kid. I hated the rain as a teenager. I would still say I hate the Arizona rain now. Yet, there is a moment when the first storm of the season arrives, and everyone stops. Not to fear the wall enclosing their backyard collapsing into their neighbors', but to watch the water fall. Everyone steps onto their porch or balcony with a sense of gratitude. The storm finally came. The heat has finally been broken. My sisters would run down the street barefoot and hollering. Arms thrown out, welcoming the storm. I would watch from the covered porch.

We would all wake up tomorrow to one day of perfect weather before the heat returned. The fallen trees and branches would be gathered and thrown away. The lost creek would be found until it vanished again. And I would collect the worms off the sidewalks before they dried to the ground.

## Sunblighted: Chapter Seven

BY: Tales from the Empty Notebook



Last time on Sunblighted:

As Tev, the mysterious Canthi lookalike, guides Gefrol and a passed-out Lih through the forest, Gefrol is confident that Lih has made this better future possible, and that he can help Lih fix the world.

When Tev asked for Gefrol's unconditional assistance, claiming that he is The God of the Winds of Change and the subject of a prophecy, he refused, telling her that he only serves Lih, his master.

---

The common room is not particularly special. There is a long-aged bar facing the entrance, with a swinging door to a backroom, possibly a kitchen. Lines of bottles and glasses are neatly organized behind what I would assume to be where someone would stand and serve me food and drink for coin. But, as it is early morning, the owner must still be asleep. Tev points to a plush wolf pelt in front of the hearth.

"Lay him there," she says, her tense jaw leaking worry into her words. "Some heat will do him good." She walks through the swinging door and disappears into the kitchen. An arrangement of chairs and tables surrounds the hearth. Empty bronze candle holders sit squarely in the center of said tables, daintily presenting melted wicks from a long day of use. I lay Lih down on the soft furs, not before removing the weapons from his belt and back, putting them to the side.

The creak of the swinging door breaks my concentration as Tev walks through with a bundle of sticks, some flint, and a steel dagger. "Rainy day today," she says, laying the wood down into the coals. "Taking in strangers this early would not seem out of the ordinary." She swiftly brings the dagger down against the flint, marking the blade with black and releasing a spark that catches on the wood. Soon, it starts to crackle, and the glow begins to radiate through the room. Lih stops laboring through each breath, but he remains asleep.

"Feeling better?" Tev turns to me, eyeing the spear's long, curved nail head and its protruding straight guards. It blinks a tint of orange in the flickering fire, but it stays cold. "Maybe this will show you that I am not your enemy."

"But, you have yet to prove to me that you are an ally ..." Even while my eyes stay on Lih, I know Tev has already reached for the short sword behind her cloak. It truly is human nature to resist change. I smirk as an idea forms in my head. I turn to the girl, her hands sitting in her lap, as if oblivious to her own bloodlust. "A test!" A thunder clap strikes the earth as I swiftly rise to my feet. "Let him rest—"

She rises to meet me. "But—"

"Feed him! Answer his questions! If you can, then I may be of service to you as well." I wag my index finger with a sly smile, baiting a wicked grin and smoldering glare out of her. Finally, some personality. "He will have many, so try to keep up." I turn around and walk to the door, but pivot fast on my foot to stand right behind her, looking down from on high. "I will know if you harm him."

Time stopped for me again. The fire froze mid-combustion, and the room's breath stood still. I walked out of the door into—

SNAP

the rain. It comes down like bricks. I squat down on the earth, in front of the Inn, breathing heavily. In, and out. In, and out.

Trying to remember the day before Lih summoned me by happenstance only leaves me with a headache. I woke up with a script in my mind. Frustration forces me to get up and observe my surroundings. All I know is how to reset this world, and all I feel is a desire to bring about change.

Wandering the elevations of this tucked-away village, I see homes glow from candles and hearths, marking the villagers' arrival to consciousness, while those who left earlier come running back into their homes. They know where their homes are, despite them all looking the same to me. I stand there for a moment more, unsure of my own feelings. They have lived here for generations.

The rain starts to come down harder, and while my clothes begin to soak, my skin stays dry. I do not feel cold. Nor do I feel warmth. The world has rejected me. I exist, but I am ignored, a feeling worse than complete intangibility. Wanting something so badly, so badly that I would do anything, and I mean anything, to get it, but being unable to do it on my own, it crushes me. Like my value is determined by a factor disconnected from my desire to accomplish, and it is actively retracting from my own efforts.

It still bothers me, what the girl said in the woods. "Some prophecy cannot lead the world to change," I mutter as I walk down the empty streets to a circular crossroads of sorts. Cobblestone paths slick with rain flow down to a moat surrounding that imposing stone building with the towers, while the surrounding thinner avenues gently guide the rainwater towards the main road. I march down to the looming building, passing houses that seem to get older and more worn the lower I go. Steps become less sporadic, but steeper than the many shallow ledges from the uppermost parts of the village.

A sturdy wooden ramp functions as a bridge across the moat. Walking above the water lets me see that the stone building is much less majestic up close. The stone walls are lined with paths marked by the years of rainfall, and mossy vines have seemingly grown into the walls, failing to be cut off from anywhere directly above the ground on which the walls are built. The gathered rainwater spreads through the moat and out to multiple dug-out pathways that are much more precise than the circular current. With the waters moving more to the left than the right, the moat does not make for the most precise form of irrigation.

This feels repurposed. I think as I step on this lonely building's territory. Secrets remade to be hidden in plain sight. I raise my hand to knock on the door—

"These days, travellers just go to the Inn for shelter." I turn to hear the aged, high-pitched voice coming from a frail old man, looking up to face me. His body swallowed by a faded blue cloak, the man strokes his pointy white beard while taking measured steps, each pace marked by the supporting tap of his twisted wooden staff against the stone path. "I was going to offer services, but if you want me to walk you to the Inn beforehand..." as he mulls over his thoughts, I see my reflection in his grey eyes. "Well, I would not mind a change of pace!"

Suddenly, I start to shiver. The old man perks up again. "Actually, let us head into the temple first to dry you off." He walks past me and slides a key into the door while I hug my torso. "Standing outside so long in the rain and only now you get cold? You young folk always seem to amaze me." The squeaking of the hinges brings my eyes to look into the unlit room beyond the walls. "Come on, get in here! I will fetch some candles to warm you up." He walks through the door as I hold it open before it closes on him, ignoring this new sensation that pricks at every part of my body. He turns back to me, squinting, maybe even smiling under that beard. "Oh, what a gentleman! You remind me of myself when I was younger. Ho ho!" He laughs and steps deeper into the temple, as he called it.

I shiver while letting the door close behind me, my sensations overloading my thoughts. I can barely walk past the doorway as one question comes out on top of the others: Why am I here?

---

*—fire burns through my flesh. The night drags me into the woods, and I see nothing but the corpses of my home being torn apart by massive wolves—erfls—whatever they are, mouths full of gore. Standing atop the mound of corpses is the Shade, grinning wildly. Holding my spear high in victory, it screams as it drives my weapon down with fury on the broken body of an innocent girl—*

*"Canthi!" I cry out, flinging my arm out to grasp her shoulders, but no one is there. In fact, I look around my surroundings, it seems like an inn, alright, but there is something strange about it. A constant drumming slaps against the walls. I rise slowly, feeling the warmth of the pelt on my feet, brushing my habit off my torso, and go to stare out the window—*

*"So this is the man who captured the attention of a god." A terse voice spits out. I turn to where the voice came from, and see—*

*"No," she sighs, rolling her eyes. "I am not Canthi. But, stay, sit, and eat," she says as she moves closer before dragging a chair out from the closest table with one hand, the other staying behind her back. "And I may tell you what you want to know."*

## *End of Chapter Seven*

Author's note: That snow storm was a real doozy! Gives me extra time to write at home while I'm definitely not avoiding packing or shoveling snow... :P Anyways! I'm very happy with how this one turned out, once again thanks to my editor for suggesting we go back to Lih at the end. The previous chapters are available on the "Tales from the Empty Notebook" page at [brandeishoot.com/author/mgmail-com/](http://brandeishoot.com/author/mgmail-com/).

# 'You and I are Polar Opposites': Not your typical highschool Romcom (and I really mean it)

BY: Judah Belgrade, *Staff*

Winter 2026 has been a very busy season. Not because of the constant blizzards (as I write this, I'm stuck in New Jersey an extra day after break), nor because of the incoming major proposal deadline (I'm doing this instead), but because there is an abundance of new anime to watch. With an incredible roster of hard hitting sequels like "Jujitsu Kaisen" Season (S) 3, "Frieren: Beyond Journey's End" S2, "Oshi No Ko" S3, "Trigun: Stargaze," "My Hero Academia: Vigilantes" S2, and the final seasons of "Fire Force" and "Golden Kamuy," it's expected for new projects to slip between the cracks.



Things like "The Darwin Incident," where Humanzee (Chimpanzee-Human) Charlie tries to live in a world that wants him to be a human and an animal, while he just wants to be himself. Or something like "Ikoku Nikki," where freshman high schooler Asa has to live with her reclusive author aunt Makio,

after Asa's parents suddenly die in a car crash. Or, "The Invisible Man and his Soon-To-Be-Wife," a supernatural romcom about a blind woman and an invisible man falling in love at their detective agency.

On paper, these shows sound interesting. They have intriguing premises. That's their hook. But when I say Kōcha Agasawa's first anime adaptation "You and I are Polar Opposites" is a high school romcom about the bubbly girl-failure Suzuki dating the blunt quiet guy Tani, something might fall flat. It comes off as simple. There might be drama in it, but it's mostly assumed and assembled based on the tropes rising up from the words used (romcom, highschool, girl-failure, quiet, etc.). Those then immediately bring up other shows that have similar hooks or premises (no need to name there here, there're too many). At that point, it seems like the show's already been figured out, because there are so many other shows that use the "Opposites Attract" theming.

However, what makes "Polar Opposites" unique is something that will be immediately apparent when finishing episode one, if not halfway through, if not before the opening plays its killer opening song (if you have a keen eye for detail). For one, it commits completely to the theme of "Opposites Attract," and I mean completely. Our main character Suzuki could not be more energetic, fashionable, anxious, fast talking, and heart throbbing if she tried, and Tani couldn't be more reserved, blunt, honest, and proper. But what makes our heroine stand out from the others (not that there are many that are the main character in this type of genre); as well as the rest of the cast, is how realistic this behavior actually is. Suzuki isn't only bubbly, and Tani isn't always quiet. There is a reason dictating everything they do. And I don't just mean reasons like "I-have-a-trauma-that-requires-15-more-episodes." I mean bonafide, real ass, simply natural personalities.

What I mean is that things like the setting of a high school isn't there just because that's where you do these types



of shows, it's there because this is where Suzuki thinks most about how other people see her, so her confessing to Tani isn't just a sign of her love, it's also a sign of her growth. She starts to move past caring about what other people think about her through Tani, who doesn't mince words when things need to be said. But Tani is someone who literally doesn't see how his words affect others past his own intentions, so when he starts dating Suzuki, he begins to understand parts of communication that he's never considered before. Their relationship brings their characters' growth, and it makes people around them think about themselves also, setting off a chain reaction of mature self reflection and a natural evolution of current relationships. It all just makes sense.



While this might sound by-the-books for any story about growth, reminder: this is an anime. And lots of anime HATE character progression, or at least not until after a full season of (*see pg 25*)

will-they-won't-they teasing. Going back to its original medium, that being the manga, serialized productions are meant to last as long as possible to keep readers coming back. It's not uncommon to see romcoms go into the 50s or 100s of chapters before they even hold hands, as situation after situation keeps them from taking the first steps forward.

"Polar Opposites" has a complete story at 65 chapters, both in Japanese and English.

The manga kept the pace moving, and so does the anime. The common plot



PHOTO CREDIT FOR THIS STORY  
Shonen Jump+ and Crunchyroll

tropes are either avoided or reached immediately, because moments small and large are given the same level of importance to the cast's growth. Speaking of the cast, these kids are funny. Presentation wise, the drawings squash and stretch, exaggerate to punctuate, and overall never stay still too long, as all the characters have chemistry with each other. But it's not nonsense, as jokes are set up in unexpected ways as casual conversations lead to odd statements and rounds of laughter from the characters and the audience because it just flows so naturally.

Part of that I-can't-believe-it's-not-weird quality of dialogue originally comes from the manga, but for the anime, the voice cast really gives it their all. I can't judge the Japanese Voice Actors (VA), as I do not speak Japanese,

but nonetheless they give each character another dimension of depth in their deliveries. For my dollar though, the English VAs dubbing is where this shines the most, partially because they were not working the same script: it was localized.

Quick definition: Localization is part of the adaptation of an already existing translation that translates a language's culture into another. For example: in the original Pokemon anime, when Brock was holding up an onigiri (rice ball with fun stuff inside, with a piece of seaweed on the sides to hold it with) and originally said something along the lines of "Wow this onigiri is gas," the western distributors thought kids would not know what an onigiri is, so they told the English VA, Eric Stuart, to say something along the lines of: "I love jelly donuts. Nothing beats a jelly filled donut." while holding up an onigiri.

Of course, that was the '90s. Dubbing these days doesn't find ways to hard replace aspects of Japanese culture. They adapt more aspects of the language spoken, whether that be general dialogue or jokes that only really make sense in Japanese. What "Polar Opposites" does is something more than just adapting the jokes, and I feel it only adds value for the Western demographic. The English script uses modern western slang and dialect that teenagers of these personality types would be using today. It's its own form of shock value, and reactions like, "oh my god did he just say that?" and, "Wait, do I sound like that?" and, "I can't believe this isn't a fan dubbing," have all been said because of how unhinged it feels, but also because of how right it is.

A common criticism when it comes to dubbings like these are that they are "just for the clips" and are "disrespectful towards the original."

First of all: Shut up, Redditor.

Second of all: while the actual script being used is the medium that the story is being spoken through, it truly is the talents of the English VAs that bring it all together.

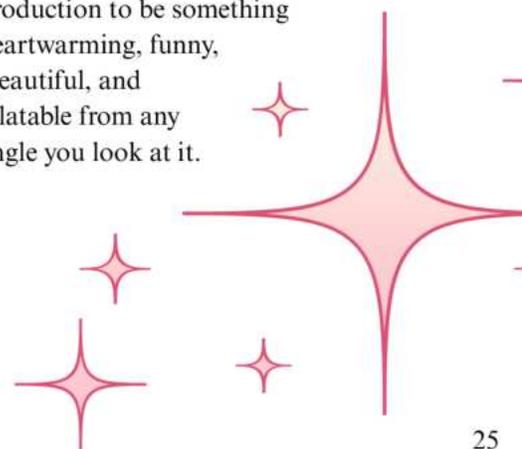
In an interview with Fenix Nests on Youtube, when asking Brandon Akosta, Tani's VA, about his performance in a specific scene, he mentioned how he connected to it when first reading it in he manga.

"That was a really fun episode to record just because ... I knew that moment was coming up and I wanted to put myself back there because I felt that exactly when I was younger ... I felt it catch in my throat a little bit." Suzuki's VA, Celeste Perez, mentioned how the show reminds herself about what it feels like to be a teenager. "I wish I still had the same courage that every teenager has when everything is so high stakes." she comments.

When asked about how he keeps his voice at a soft spoken level but not emotionless, Akosta comments on how he has not only "places himself in his shoes," but also how much of his vocal performance is thanks to the Voice Director, Emily Fajardo, who worked on dubs for popular shows like "To Be Hero X" and "My Dress-Up-Darling." "She's been great with helping find where he sits vocally. I feel like that was the hardest hurdle for me to cross and once we got over that it's about ... what he's trying to do in the moment." he said in an interview with The Kitsune Network on YouTube.

In the same interview, Perez notes the mastery of trying to balance Suzuk's vivacious moments with her more tame moments, as well as her down-in-the-dirt moments. "She's an incredibly well written character ... she uses the very top to the very bottom of my voice, and every other direction ... Sometimes when she's in her real moments she's a little soft spoken. And for her more socially anxious moments that's when we're really going crazy with the dialects."

All of this is to show that "You and I are Polar Opposites" transcends the tropes easily assumed to weigh it down and uses those aspects to lift up its production to be something heartwarming, funny, beautiful, and relatable from any angle you look at it.





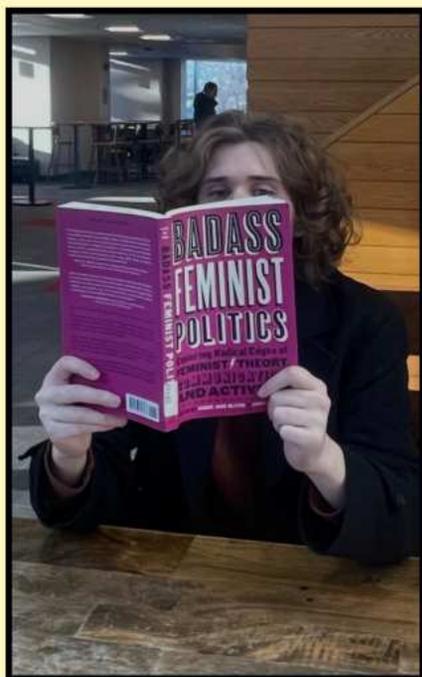
**"PINK SKIES"**

**LIAM GUREVITCH, STAFF**



**"FROSTY STREAM"**

**LIAM GUREVITCH, STAFF**



**"6'2" AND ATHLETIC, BTW"**

**ETHAN PRIOR, EDITOR**



**"SLEIGHING IT IN BOSTON"**

**ANONYMOUS**



**"WHERE'S MY MICHELIN STAR?"**

**JENNA LEWIS, EDITOR**



**"BUTTER WATER?"**

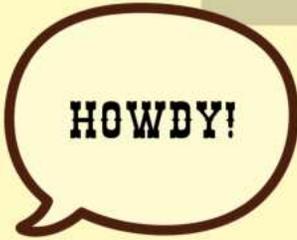
**ETHAN LIDO, STAFF**



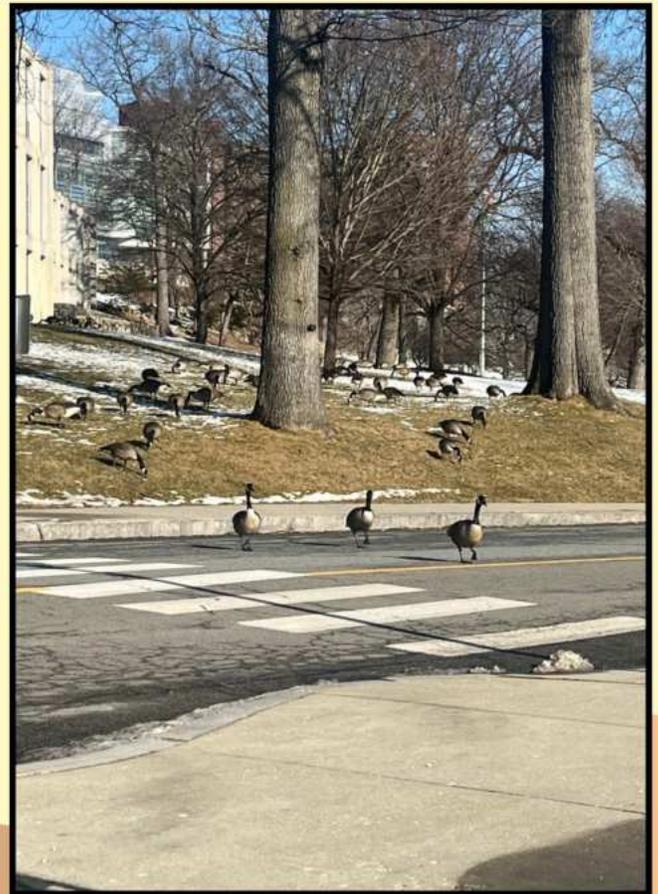
**"SHARSHERET BEAD-MAKING",  
LIAM GUREVITCH, STAFF**



**"IMMINENT SNOW DAY"  
LIAM GUREVITCH, STAFF**



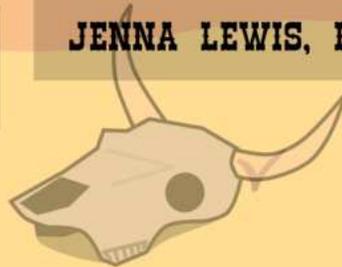
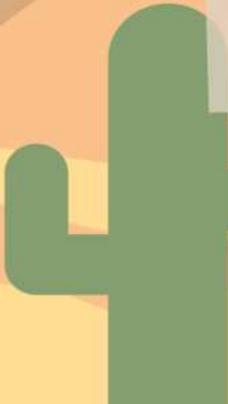
**WANTED \$ 1,000,000**



**"THE INVASION"  
JENNA LEWIS, EDITOR**



**"UN EXPOSE"  
LIAM GUREVITCH, STAFF**





Join the  
Hoat!