

# The Greylock Echo

Winter Edition

Mount Greylock - Williamstown Mass

February 15, 2022

## Capital Gift Debate Concludes: New Grass Field and Track on the Way

By LUCY MCWEENY

On January 13th, the Mount Greylock School Committee voted in favor of a proposal which would implement a new grass field and artificial track at Mount Greylock Regional School.

The 6-0 vote, with one member abstaining, came after years of discussion surrounding the Williams Capital Gift, a five million dollar donation from Williams College to the Mount Greylock Regional School district to be used to maintain and improve the Mount Greylock campus.

A particularly contentious topic regarding the gift was the question of whether to implement a synthetic turf field using this money. The School Committee and communities of the district have long discussed the advantages and disadvantages to the turf field, many opponents citing environmental concerns.

The School Committee has now voted in favor of a proposal that does not include a turf field. Instead the proposal, if carried through, will implement a modern natural grass field.

In past months, the School Committee was considering a turf field as opposed to grass. However, issues arose with the landscape architect that had drawn out the original documents for the turf field proposal. School Committee member Carrie Greene, the member who outlined the most recent proposal, said, "We reached a point with them where we wanted to part ways because we were having issues with communication."

This split from the landscape architect meant the School Committee had to start over with the plan for the Williams Capital Gift. For Greene, "that was an opportunity to hear from the folks in our community and learn from the folks in other communities that have recently considered turf projects."

Although there had long been opposition to a turf field within the community, this new beginning led to a deeper look into the benefits of a modern grass field. The impacts of the turf field on the environment continues to be brought up as a reason to implement a grass field instead.

School Committee member Julia Bowen said the committee's primary goal is to "increase the playability [of the fields] from where we are now." The turf field would allow for more hours of playability, "but," said Bowen, "at what cost to the environment?"

In looking for a more environmentally friendly option, the School Committee turned to a "modern" grass field. This modern grass field that they are looking to put in place will be better maintained than the current grass fields at Mount Greylock.

"It has irrigation, it has drainage, and is made of a mix of grasses that is designed for our environment in New England," Greene said. "It doesn't require any more maintenance or knowledge of maintenance than a synthetic turf field."

Bowen said, "There are ways to maintain a natural grass field that will increase playability from where we are now, but may not get us all the way to where artificial turf would get us."

Although this modern grass field will not allow for as much playability as that of a turf, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages for the School Committee. Greene said, "I think we can achieve playability that is adequate for our needs and friendly to the environment."

However, there are concerns of whether the required resources will be put into the maintenance of this field to keep it in adequate condition. Brain Gill, a health and wellness teacher and track coach at Mount Greylock, said he is concerned "that they will not invest the same kind of resources they would have invested into an artificial turf."

The turf field, Gill notes, would not have only benefited the athletes at Mount Greylock. It would have created a place for students to exercise during gym classes. Gill said, "I understand the reasons why turf didn't get put through, but I think it would have benefited an incredibly large percentage of the student body."

However, as the Coach for the Mount Greylock Girls track team, Gill is "excited that we'd have a track." He said, "It will benefit arguably the largest team [at Mount Greylock] and it will benefit, to some degree, our Phys Ed program."

Sophomore Ceci Malone, a member of the track team, said she is "excited because we don't have a track and the grass track is pretty beaten up." She added, "I feel like this track is really going to help bring the track team to a new level."

Although there is excitement surrounding the artificial track, some students are unhappy

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## 1 in 650: An Interview with Catherine McAllister

By JOSIE SMITH



*Photo courtesy of Catherine McAllister*

*Catherine McAllister is a senior at Mount Greylock Regional School. The Echo sat down with Catherine to discuss her mental health initiatives within the school community, as well as her plans for next year.*

**E: We hear you led a mental health presentation for the Mount Greylock staff. Is that correct?**

CM: Yeah, I did one with the teachers and one with the students. In sophomore year, I went to residential treatment for a few months. And when I came home, I really wanted to talk about OCD and mental health and how teachers can best support students and so that they could understand a little bit more about it. So, I talked with the faculty during one of their after school meetings for a little bit. I also gave a presentation with the previous school social worker. We talked about struggles with mental health, and

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## NEWS

## Mount Greylock Returns to Midterm Testing

By KIERSTEN SIMPSON

After taking a COVID-based hiatus in the 2020-2021 school year, midterm exams returned on Mount Greylock, beginning on January 24th, 2022. Students took midterms in their World Language, Math, Science and Social Studies classes.

Students' experiences and opinions on the exams varied. One student who would like to remain anonymous, described the experience as "stressful and not worth it," highlighting the fact that many teachers continued to teach in the week leading up to midterms, leaving limited time for class review.

Senior Kate Swann echoed a similar sentiment. "If teachers aren't reviewing in class, students have to study for a big test while also keeping up with their coursework, which can be a lot to deal with," said Swann.

Some students felt that the year-long hiatus was a detriment. Senior Malina Woodbury said that she believes that this year was more stressful than her tenth grade midterms, citing the fact that it had been "almost a year and a half since [she'd] taken a major examination."

However, some students, such as junior Elena Caplinger, shared that the experience was "not the actual, chaotic one [she] expected it to be."

One major debate amongst students was over the usefulness of midterms. One anonymous student said, "I don't think that big tests like midterms serve their intended purpose. Most students forget all of their material they learned for the midterm within a week."

While many students argued for the banishment of the tests, some students had no strong opinions regarding the midterm testing.

Sophomore Maggie Nichols said, "[Midterms] are made out by students and teachers to be a bigger deal than they are. They hardly affected my grade, and felt wasteful."

Contradicting those who felt that midterm exams are a waste of time and energy, several students appreciate the mid-year check in. Caplinger said, "it's a comfort to know that, when AP exams roll around, I have at least a background in the information I have learned so far."

Many students and teachers alike agreed that the stress of midterm season was apparent. "The midterm experience was overall very stressful, especially the preparation part. I felt like I was trying to remember four months of work in four different classes all in one weekend," said sophomore Anabel Gonzales.

Social studies teacher Jeffrey Welch said, "[midterms] help to cause anxiety because teachers may give students a test that is a whole different format to the tests that they give during the regular semester."

Teachers had mixed opinions on midterms and on whether or not they aid learning. Science teacher Shawn Burdick said, "They're good, especially in classes like physics, which has an MCAS at the end of the year, and AP Physics, which has a big AP exam at the end of the year. They're a big deal in semester classes; it's classes with an external exam that they're

useful for."

Welch said, "[Midterms] are good as finals for electives courses. As for my AP classes, it's really close to 2/3 of the way through the year, so it's not really a midterm. But, it is somewhat helpful in teaching students to take the AP exam."

Teachers also struggled with returning to midterms after not having administered them for a year. When asked how her midterm process was different this year than it was in her pre-pandemic midterm, math teacher Ann Marie Barber said, "The Math Department had to make sure that the questions covered what we had covered this year, which was slightly different than it had been in years past. We had to fill in some gaps from the past school year."

Many people question if there could be some sort of solution or alternative to midterms. One anonymous student said, "I believe that something cumulative to break up our semesters is good, but I don't think it has to be a midterm."

Welch agreed, saying, "I think that the original idea of midterms, that they could be a project as opposed to a high stakes exam, has been partially lost."

Latin teacher Christopher Lovell wondered how midterms affect students' wellbeing, saying, "When I see generally good students stressing about midterms, I think that maybe there's a way to make students feel more secure and happy about how they're performing in class."◆

## Williams Fellows Return to Greylock

By MAISIE DUFOUR AND KNOWL STROUD

Over the past two semesters, Mount Greylock has welcomed the return of Williams College students. Students and teachers alike are excited to have this resource available for all grade levels and course subject tutoring.

Writing fellows are available every day during directed study and high school lunch, and are available to help with any writing assignments. Senior Henry Art worked with Quincy Powers, a four year tutor, on his college essay and plans to run new essays by him in the future as well. Art said, "The help I received from Quincy was pretty great, because it helped me sharpen the focus of my essay."

There are also some fellows available to help out in academic support classrooms in a variety of different roles, ranging from homework support to mentorship. Librarian Liza Barrett said, "They are there to fulfill that big brother, big sister role." Students have come to enjoy spending time with these fellows, working on schoolwork, and learning from each other.

Mount Greylock is also offering an after school tutoring program facilitated by Williams fellows. Students of all grades can participate, whether they are seeking a helping hand

on a science project or looking for someone to chat with over history assignments.

Students can meet with tutors in the library from 2:45 to 4:00, and snacks are provided for participants. Seventh grader Olivia Eakin said, "It is really helpful to work with someone closer in age. It has helped us with the transition from elementary school and having more

homework."

For high school students with busy afternoon schedules, the Williams students are also offering free evening remote tutoring sessions, which are meant to allow students to focus more in depth on subjects while maintaining their weekly schedules with sports and other extracurriculars.

The fellows, teachers, and students are excited to interact with one another in person again. Tutor Quincy Powers said, "I'm so happy to be back in the building at Mount Greylock after being over zoom all last year. I love getting the chance to reconnect in person with students I haven't seen since before the pandemic, and meeting new ones while in classrooms and the library!"

The library has become a hub for studying and working on projects for all students at Mount Greylock and the addition of the Williams College students has only added to this positive environment. With the tough transition back to full in-person learning, Williams fellows have been a beneficial resource for students. Barrett said, "It is just incredibly rewarding to work with middle, high school, and college students and seeing them work together."◆



Photo courtesy of Maisie Dufour

# NEWS

## The Filibuster: Not Busted

By JENNAH SIMPSON

On January 19, 2022, two related debates came to a close with regards to voting within the Senate chamber. After a year-long battle with the filibuster interfering with voting rights legislation, Senate Democrats were outvoted 52-48 in an attempt to suspend the filibuster procedure. The filibuster is a political strategy used to stop a bill from passing without allowing it to be debated in Congress.

Such calls for change from Democrats came from beliefs that Republicans abused the filibuster to block Democratic President Barack Obama's policy agenda. Currently, many Democrats fear that there is a similar pattern with President Joe Biden's agenda, suspecting that the filibuster is blocking bills which they believe the majority of Americans support.

In the Senate, a bill is considered "In Debate" until cloture is enacted. Cloture essentially begins the countdown on the amount of time the bill can be debated. After cloture is enacted, 30 hours of debate divided evenly for each party, are allowed.

Enacting cloture is the key to passing legislation. Until there is cloture, debate is indefinite. Before 1917, there was no way to force cloture on a bill. In 1917, the policy changed to a two-thirds majority vote to force cloture. In the modern day, a three-fifths majority is required: 60 senators.

While the filibuster was intended to force cloture and votes on a bill, it is often used in the opposite fashion. Senators use the filibuster to prolong debate on a piece of legislation. While a piece of legislation just needs a simple majority, 51 votes, for the final vote, it needs 60 votes

after a filibuster is enacted. Therefore, the threat of the filibuster is usually enough to make senators put a bill to rest. If a bill has surpassed the filibuster, it will likely pass into law.

In the last year, Republicans have repeatedly blocked voting rights legislation using a filibuster. It began with the For the People Act, which was filibustered in June of 2021. Then, Democrats attempted to pass a pared down version of the bill, the Freedom to Vote Act, in September of 2021. In November 2021, Democrats tried the John Lewis Voting Rights Act of 2021; again, their attempts were thwarted by the filibuster.

These repeated defeats culminated in a vote in mid-January. Democrats were determined to pass their Voting Rights legislation, but achieving Republican support in order to achieve the majority of votes proved to be difficult.

The Democrats wanted to attempt to change filibuster rules, get all 50 of their senators to approve of the rules change, and have Vice President Harris cast the tie-breaking vote, as they would only need 51 votes if the filibuster was suspended.

Two Democratic senators voted along with the 50 Republican senators resulting in a 52-48 vote to keep the filibuster rules the same. The voting rights legislation also did not pass. Democrats needed 60 votes, but all senators voted along party lines. The final vote was 51-49; Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer changed his vote for procedural purposes.

Some Democrats remain wary of total filibuster abolition. They worry about the effects of a Republican-held Senate without the filibuster. The main Democratic opponents to any change

of the filibuster are Senators Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona. The two are interested in preserving the institution of the filibuster and have not been susceptible to any compromise.

It currently looks like the filibuster is going to remain in place, at least through the end of the current Congressional session. Despite repeated negotiations between the different sides of the aisle, the current chances of passing concrete legislation are low. ♦

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## A Glimpse at the Student Council

By QUIN REPETTO

This year, the Student Council has looked into adjusting the dress code and school start times, and has initiated a school-wide book drive.

The Mount Greylock Student Council is a group of 20 elected high school student representatives that is meant to serve as a conduit between students and administration to advocate for ideas that they believe will create a better school community. Five students are elected from each grade to represent their peers.

The Student Council meets every Tuesday in advisor Mary MacDonald's classroom. Meetings start at 2:35 and adjourn around 3. During the meetings, the Council begins discussing relevant issues that affect the student body as a group. The Council members are then broken into subcommittees which take a closer look at important issues and work to resolve them.

The student dress code subcommittee is headed by freshman Polly Rhie and junior Annie Art. The original dress code includes a ban on clothes whose "bottom of the top" does not cover the "top of the bottom," as well as a requirement for clothes that are "clean, neat, and in good taste."

The Council plans to eliminate the top-bottom clause, which, according to Rhie, "seems outdated," as well as "unnecessary and strange."

They also plan to change the clause requiring clean and neat clothes, as this unfairly discriminates against students who may not have the means to consistently keep their clothes neat.

"The idea of neatness requires resources at home that some students may not have access to," said Rhie. The Council plans to completely rewrite the dress code, basing it off of a model dress code from Oregon. They may also work with School Council member Alayna Schwarzer, who is also working on a new dress code modeled after the National Organization for Women.

The Student Council has also been running a book drive that will go from January 10 to February 7, where new and gently used books will be collected and donated. They have accepted donations from communities in the district and had drop sites in the MGRHS library, at Williamstown Elementary or Lanesborough Elementary, and at the Lanesborough Town Hall. The books will be given to inmates at the Berkshire County Correctional Facility.

"Any books are greatly important to us and our mission," said sophomore Student Council member Caleb Low, who is on the book drive subcommittee.

The Student Council is also working on adjusting the school start time. They are hoping

to either delay Mount Greylock's start time, or swap start times with the elementary schools, which start at 8:30.

Dover Sherborn School District, a Massachusetts school similar to Greylock, swapped the start times of their high school and elementary school and were successful. The Mount Greylock student council has discussed this process with them.

According to Student Council President and senior Luca Hirsch, "we are working with the administration to further pursue our objectives."

This potential change to the school start time was viewed with mixed reactions from the students. Many are optimistic about the potential changes, as it will allow students to sleep in later.

"Every day I wake up and I just don't want to go school," said junior Cailean Fippinger. "Students are actively being hindered. It's harder for them to pay attention if they're tired in the morning."

Principal Jake Schutz mentioned that he prefers waking up early, but said, "I wouldn't mind starting up later, so it wouldn't really affect me too much. However, it's clear that it would benefit student learning, and so for that reason and that reason alone I'd vote for the changes if it

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# NEWS

## 1 in 650:

### Catherine McAllister

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answered some questions that teachers had. I also talked with the Peer Team of that year about it. It was good; I think that people liked it. People had questions and were receptive to it, so that was good.

**E: Do you notice anything specific within Mt. Greylock that you think impacts mental health in a negative way?**

CM: Yeah. I mean, I'm sure it's not specific to Greylock, but I guess overall just anxiety and stress. Greylock obviously is a very academically focused school and there's a lot of academic expectation. I think that can be really stressful and sometimes hinder mental health and just priorities.

**E: I also know that you organize the social emotional wellness groups. Would you mind telling me a little more about that?**

CM: Yeah, I work with Mr. Jones and the groups meet each Monday during directed study. It's just to kind of have a space to talk

about anything that is bothering them or just talk about whatever they need to.

**E: Do you have any future hopes for emotional wellness at Mount Greylock?**

C: Yeah, I hope that the groups can continue going. For the groups, I work in collaboration with Mr. Jones; he's there to help facilitate, but we're just kind of there to listen. I like the student perspective with the teacher perspective. I hope that a future student would like to step in and keep doing that. It's a space for people to just talk or not talk, so that's awesome.

**E: That is awesome! Can anyone go to the meetings on Monday?**

C: Yeah. So it's open to middle and high school during Monday, directed study.

**E: Do you have any finalized future plans?**

C: Yes! I will be going to Dickinson College.

**E: Are you excited?**

C: I'm very excited!

**E: Do you know what you want to study?**

C: Yeah, right now I'm interested in psychology

and English. We'll see what kind of courses. They have a pretty big dance program too.

**E: How long have you been dancing for?**

C: I've been dancing since I was three so this is my 16th year. There's times I've been more committed to it. And now I'm trying to split interest between this and mental health and everything, but hopefully I can get into some classes or some groups, which would be a lot of fun. I just like that there's the presence there.

**E: Thank you so much Catherine! ♦**



*The Echo Online*

## A Look at the NHS

By ARTHUR MILLET

The National Honors Society is a nationwide organization for high achieving juniors and seniors across the United States who exhibit the core principles of scholarship, service, leadership, and character.

To be eligible to apply, students must be in their junior or senior year and demonstrate academic achievement by maintaining a 3.65 GPA or higher. The application consists of writing an essay and detailing ideas for leadership and community service projects.

The Mount Greylock chapter inducted 24 new members at their ceremony on December 21st, bringing the total number of members to 50 juniors and seniors.

The National Honor Society encourages students to exceed academic and service expectations, and to build on pillars scholarship, leadership, service, and character. This achievement grants special recognition on their college applications and as well building skills for their future careers.

The Mount Greylock chapter is led by President Alayna Schwarzer, Vice President Emma Sandstrom, Secretary Maisie Dufour, Treasurer Mackenzie Sheehy, and advisor Jacqueline Vinette. The group meets once a month to discuss community service initiatives to better their surrounding area.

"For me, it's nice to be able to get to know students from outside the music program. I'm really impressed by our members' dedication to their communities and how active they are in and outside our school," said Vinette.

The group is currently trying to decide on what their next group project will be. They had

planned on doing a "Parents' Night Out" during the holiday season, an initiative in which they would babysit children while parents went out to do shopping or have an evening to themselves. Unfortunately, due to Omicron case spikes at the time, Superintendent Jake McCandless and Vinette decided to cancel for safety reasons.

According to Schwarzer, the group is now "having to focus on more individual projects." The Berkshire Game Society, Berkshire United Way, and The Elizabeth Freeman Center have all expressed a desire for group projects, but are waiting on committing to anything until the spring.

Schwarzer's main focus is being understanding with the lack of volunteer opportunities. She said, "I know it's such a stressful year especially considering that juniors and seniors make up our membership base."

Both Schwarzer and Vinette are not expecting kids to dedicate every second of free time to NHS activities, but instead are looking to make volunteer activities accessible to members and provide enough of a selection where each student can find something that they are interested in and passionate about.

Ultimately, Schwarzer is looking to make the most of the National Honor Society this school year.

"Especially since the majority of our members have applied or are thinking of applying to college, volunteer experience is a nice thing to have on transcripts and can also be equally rewarding as students move on to future endeavors," said Schwarzer. ♦

## Capital Gift Decision

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about the decision to implement a grass field opposed to a turf.

Junior Christy Rech, a lacrosse player at Mount Greylock, said, "The grass fields we have here are horrible. They are so uneven because we have so many sports playing on the same field that over the seasons the different teams tear it up."

Junior Jane Skavlem, a soccer player at Mount Greylock, said she is disappointed that the turf is not moving forward. "I'm all for a track, but I think a turf would be more beneficial because we're allowed to use the Williams track all the time, but not the Williams turf," she said.

Sophomore Lex Anagnos is a member of both the soccer and track team at Mount Greylock. In regards to the new grass field, Anagnos is excited, "as long as they maintain it well." He said, "If they put in the work to keep the grass field nice and they also put in the track that would be the perfect balance for me."

While the School Committee has voted in favor of this proposal, which outlines the construction of a new grass field and artificial track at Mount Greylock, there are many steps to be made in this process. The school will likely not have either facility for a few seasons.

Greene said the School Committee is "planning to get the documents out to hire the landscape architect this spring." The documents will then be put out to bid in November. Construction of the track and field will happen next spring and summer, and should be ready for use by Fall of 2023. ♦

# NEWS & FEATURES

## Mental Health Remains a Concern for Greylock Students

By MACKENZIE SHEEHY

With the passing of midterms, Mount Greylock Regional School has officially completed its first full semester of in-person learning since the fall of 2019. While the school has solved a myriad of issues, with having to fit students into classrooms and creating safe lunch spaces, there is one ever-present issue that has especially worsened during the pandemic: mental health.

Recent COVID-19 spikes have played a key role in kids' increased stress and anxiety. On top of the fear of getting the virus, there is now concern every time a phone rings in a teacher's classroom on Friday morning, alerting students that they are in a positive pool.

"COVID is constantly on the back of my mind," said sophomore Lily McDermott. "There is a fear of getting it and having to deal with the quarantine protocols while also continuing to get school work done adds immensely to my stress levels. It is really difficult to focus on school work and grades when our lives have been changed so much due to the pandemic."

Freshman Zeke Singer added, "With Covid right after the new year, I just found school to be kind of unreasonable, not so much taxing as it was kind of absurd to have to keep going in everyday."

Not only do spikes in COVID-19 cases provide academic stress, but it also takes away from extracurricular activities that often give students a breather when they need it most. Junior Ainsley Abel said, "COVID has also caused a lack of social events which is my escape from the weight of junior."

On top of the mental strain that COVID-19 is providing, midterms this year happened to coincide with Omicron spikes. While they had to take a yearlong hiatus due to the virus's impact on in-person learning, midterms returned this year, with many sophomores and freshmen engaging in their first major testing experience.

Senior Catherine McAllister, echoing this fear of once again taking midterms said, "It had definitely been a really long time since I had taken one so the preparation for midterms was really stressful and overwhelming."

School adjustment counselor Keith Jones noted that midterms are stressful for students, staff, and teachers alike as they try to wrap up the semester and meet deadlines. Jones said, "In this office, we don't have to look at the calendar to know it's the end of the quarter or semester. Everyone is more stressed."

Added to the academic weight was the fear of getting the virus and missing in-class review time or vital contact with teachers, with the additional worry of potentially missing the exams and having to make them up. Abel said, "I also tested positive for COVID two weeks before, so that definitely added stress to the whole situation."

With COVID-19 and midterms, seniors have the added stress of figuring out their post-secondary plans. As high school counselor Kathryn Pratt noted, students must ask themselves big, existential questions about their

futures, which can be both exciting and overwhelming. Overwhelming full course loads, extracurricular activities, part time jobs, and spending enough time with friends and family leave very little time for the postsecondary planning process.

Pratt said, "I have noticed in my years as a school counselor that students experience a tremendous amount of anxiety during the fall of their senior year. Students expressed feeling overwhelmed and stressed, and have indicated that they are not prioritizing their mental health."

Some students have made definitive decisions about what next year holds for them and can begin to relax; but many seniors who are still in the middle of the planning process.

"For students who are still making decisions about next year, I still see many experiencing heightened levels of anxiety. The unknown can be scary and anxiety provoking, no matter what stage of life you are in," said Pratt.

Fortunately, the counseling office has been developing resources to help students learn and cope with their mental health struggles during the pandemic earlier on in their academic career. Starting last year during remote learning, Jones began piloting a social-emotional wellness class in middle school. The class was based upon the program Second Steps, which is also used in elementary schools in the surrounding area.

Jones said, "We thought we would carry [Second Steps] through to continue building the skills they were getting. It is like an enrichment class built in, so every seventh and eighth grade gets one quarter."

The program centers around the five core competencies outlined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Research shows that programs like the one Jones has implemented have positive effects on students. Jones said, "Studies done on social emotional learning show that outcomes of having [a social emotional class] lead to greater academic success."

Overall, students feel that Greylock has been assisting them with bettering their mental health. Sophomore Vincent Welch said, "I certainly feel that if I needed to talk about it, many teachers, along with guidance and the nurse, would be willing to listen to and help me."

However, some students have expressed a desire for more academic support surrounding midterms. Abel said, "I think that the school would benefit from a program where students can get better access to specific midterm tutoring."

Ultimately, both Jones and Pratt emphasized taking time for oneself and taking relaxing breaks when needed. For seniors especially, Pratt said, "You only get to be seniors in high school once. For now, enjoy being in this moment." ♦

## Behind the Scenes: Greylock Snow Day

By EMMA SANDSTROM AND MACKENZIE SHEEHY

The minute there is the whisper of snow or ice on the horizon, Berkshire County rushes to Greylock Snow Day in hopes of discovering their odds for a snow day, delay, or early release. Mount Greylock English teacher Blair Dils, the man behind the curtain, is always at the ready.

Dils got his start back in elementary school when he and his friend had "snowfall prediction contests" between the two of them. The contests turned into a tradition in his teaching career. Dils said, "I would put some percentages on the board [where I used to teach], and then when I came here to Mount Greylock, I started doing the same thing. And then with the growth of blogs back in the 2000s, it made perfect sense for me to just start making it a digital platform instead of having people constantly coming into my room and interrupting me to see what I thought about the snow day for the next day."

Since his start, the Greylock Snow Day following has grown to over 3,000 Facebook followers and over 1,000 Twitter followers, with the historic landmark of three million page views coming up. "I would think between five and 6,000 people read [Greylock Snow Day], so it does seem to be popular in the county," said Dils.

While he has no professional qualifications, Dils has lived in the Berkshires for over 20 years and has been predicting the weather patterns of New England for over 50. Dils believes that he gets "a little bit of a sense of the way certain meteorologists might get a little too excited or might downplay the severity," eventually developing his own recognition of patterns to storms.

Dils and Greylock Snow Day have become so influential that many administrative teams in the county turn to him for guidance when it comes to their calls for the school day. Dils admitted that "every once in a while [he] might goose the numbers just a little bit, or might write about a storm and play up the danger of students driving at that hour" in an effort to get a snow day or delay the next day. However, Dils said he generally tries to be reliable and not over exaggerate storms.

However, Greylock Snow Day does make the occasional blunder in its predictions. Dils said, "I think probably the biggest mistakes are ones where a storm will sneak up on us and I might miss the severity of it and we get a surprise delay or for a snow day, but usually on top of it throughout the winter."

Even with the rare mistake, Dils has been fairly accurate, with a 97.65% success rate, according to the GSD website.

"If I had to do it all over again, maybe I'd be a meteorologist rather than an English teacher," said Dils. ♦

# NEWS & FEATURES

## Student Art Displays

STUDENT SUBMISSIONS



“moods”

By JOSIE SMITH (Senior; College Portfolio Art)

Artist’s Statement:

This is one of my paintings; it is an acrylic on canvas self-portrait and I call it “moods.”

I decided to use a lot of colors in my painting, such as blues and greens, to put emphasis on the shadows of my face and areas underneath the eyes.

I love this painting because it was challenging, but also so much fun to create. I was inspired to do a self-portrait because I am so used to painting things that I can physically see in the world, but I realized that I can’t see myself besides how I subconsciously view myself. It was interesting to see how it got reflected on the canvas, given I wasn’t sure how it would turn out. I wanted to use different colors to show my different emotions; that’s why I call it “moods.” ♦



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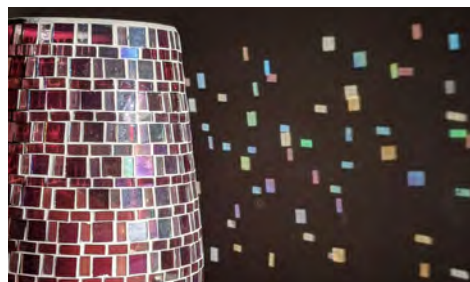
“An Extraterrestrial Coral Reef”

By ZOE ARMET (Senior; Advanced Studio Art)

Artist’s Statement:

This painting was an exploratory piece that I really had no objective plan for throughout the process. I knew I wanted to play around with color and tried to allow myself flexibility with shapes, color and the overall direction of the painting.

This ethic allowed me to create an abstract piece of artwork, allowing myself step out of my comfort zone and enjoy myself freely with paint all at once. I had a lot of fun creating this piece, and the evolution of shapes in terms of the circular patterns and line work made it especially gratifying to see the final product. ♦



“Reflecting Color”



“Red”



“Wine and Zatar”

By DANIEL WARREN

For the month of February, I will be submitting these 3 photos in a photography contest. The contest is hosted by Rocky Mountain School of Photography.

The first piece, “Reflecting Color,” is a picture I took of a candle holder in the sunlight.

The second piece, “Red,” shows a Chinese restaurant counter that I visited in D.C.

The last piece, “Wine and Zatar,” is a photo I took in my living room when my parents had laid out snack for some guests we had that day.

I will be entering these three photos specifically into the “smartphone” category of the contest, meaning that they were all taken on a smartphone. None of these photos were taken in an actual photo session, I just got on the habit of taking photos whenever I saw something I liked visually. Hopefully my work pays off. ♦



“Pandemic Portrait”

By JULIE LAWSON (Senior; College Portfolio Art)

Artist’s Statment:

The pandemic has even started to take over our artwork; when drawings start wearing masks, you know it’s bad.

This piece is pencil on paper. ♦

# NEWS & FEATURES

## Band Concert Comes to MG

By KRISHIV MALHOTRA

On January 12, the middle and high school bands, in conjunction with the jazz band, held a concert with former Mount Greylock band teacher Lyndon Moors acting as a guest conductor.

The middle school band played five song arrangements. The middle school performance was conducted by band teacher Jaqueline Vinette. "I was very satisfied with the results and am very proud of the middle school. We received many great compliments from the school community and parents," said Vinette.

Amelia Madrigal, an eighth grader who played in the concert, said, "I am very proud of what I did at the concert, but it was a little less enjoyable as everyone had to take their masks off to play, which was concerning because if one person had COVID, everyone would get COVID."

The Jazz Band had its first ever performance, playing three pieces. Anthony Welch, Arthur Millet, Simon Shin, Quinn McDermott, Quinlan Repetto, and Killian Scanlon each had solos. The jazz band had a rehearsal once a week after school, unlike the daily orchestra and band rehearsals which occur as part of their classes.

Vinette said, "I thought it was especially exciting that this was our first ever jazz band performance. The group of 19 students, who meet weekly after school, has come a long way since the fall. Many students were playing secondary instruments, but the concert went well."

Yeshe Rai, an 8th grader who played in the jazz band, said, "The jazz band was much more difficult as we only met once a week, but we made it work and had a great concert."

The high school band played five arrangements, including "Music for a Celebration by Dirk Brosse." Moors returned to Mount Greylock for one final concert and was in charge of conducting the band.

Vinette said, "It was really nice to see Mr. Moors come back and conduct a few pieces. I'm glad that he was able to finish what he started back in 2020. It also helped me listen to the band from a different perspective, which was very valuable."

Anthony Welch, a senior who plays the clarinet, said, "I had fun playing in the concert. Having Mr. Moors come back and conduct had some learning bumps, but I am glad he finished what he started."

Four students from the high school band, Anthony Welch (clarinet), Emily Dupuis (flute), Quin Repetto (trumpet), Killian Scanlon (trumpet), and Simon Shin (trombone), were recently chosen for the Massachusetts Music Educators Association Western District Honor Ensembles. ♦

Record the news through pictures and words.

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## The Future of YES Club

By LUCA HIRSCH

After some temporary difficulty finding a teacher advisor, the Mount Greylock YES (Youth Environmental Squad) Club is back up and running. With bi-weekly meetings every Wednesday in Ms. Stack's room, the coming year promises many new environmental initiatives.

To begin, the YES Club wanted to restart the Mount Greylock garden. After applying for funds to do so, the project has been supported by a grant from the Sustaining Educational Excellence fund of Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation.

This coming spring, YES Club members and any other students who would like to participate will be renovating, planting, and caring for the new garden. In order to provide the best environment for a healthy garden, YES Club members will collect soil samples and send them to the UMASS Agricultural Extension to test. They will provide detailed insight into the quality of the garden's soil while also suggesting any treatments to improve the quality of said soil.

Along with growing flowers, vegetables, and fruits, the garden also intends to start a school compost that will process some of the food waste from the cafeteria.

Traditionally, the YES Club has done trash clean-ups around Williamstown, Lanesborough, Hancock, and New Ashford on Earth Day. This year is no different. Once the weather improves and the ground thaws, the Club intends to select a location to clean up.

The YES Club is also planning to work with HOORWA (Hoosic River Watershed Association) to organize a river clean-up of either the Hoosic or Green River.

This coming year, YES Club also plans to continue to work inside the school building. By continuing to support green school policies and suggesting environmentally-minded change, the YES Club will continue to be a voice for the environment at Mount Greylock. ♦

## Student Council

*Continued from Page 3.*

came down to that."

However, students also have concerns about having a later start time, as it will push the end of school back as well, potentially causing problems with sports and afterschool clubs. This change could disrupt family schedules.

"Getting home late will be difficult for students, especially in the winter when it'll be dark out," said sophomore Florentina Klingenberg.

One of the obstacles ahead of the Student Council is figuring out what effects pushing the start time back would have. As Schutz said, there would be effects "on school, on clubs, on athletics, and on the community, whether it be the bus company or families in the other schools. The Student Council, the superintendent, and the school committee are just starting discussions to explore those effects."

Students can see what the Council is currently working on as well as access any updates by looking at the Council's bulletin board next to the main office. Students can also see the Council's meeting notes and minutes on the MGRSD website.

Council meetings are open to everyone. Any student is "welcome to join us... to observe, to bring something up, or to add their valued opinion to our discussions," said Hirsch. If you are unable to attend a meeting but want to voice your concerns or opinions, you can tell your ideas to your grade's representatives and they will bring it up to the Council for you.

The Student Council is always ready to hear student's opinions and feels it is a good place to make your voice heard. "We address any topics presented to us by the students," said Hirsch. "The Student Council has always and will always want to hear what issues you have and want resolved." ♦



The student council at work

# NEWS & FEATURES

## New School Improvement Plan puts Emphasis on Equity

By MOLLY SULLIVAN

The Mount Greylock School Council is currently focusing on equity and inclusion as key pillars of education as they move forward with the new School Improvement Plan for the 2022-23 school year.

The council, which is a representative group of faculty, students, and community members, is required by Massachusetts law to meet and create an annual School Improvement Plan. In the plan, the council will be addressing issues from the 2021-22 school year and brainstorming preemptive ideas for future growth.

"We look at issues that pop up during the school year, and things that we think could be improved," co-chair Rob Mathews said, "and we try to fit those priorities and proposals into the School Improvement Plan."

The School Council is divided into five subcommittees that correspond to the different tenets the council will be addressing in the plan. Each subcommittee outlines specific activities that will help them achieve their various objectives, decides which personnel within the school community should be involved, lays out the timeline for implementation of their suggestion, and creates measurable outcomes for their goals.

In their most recent meeting on January 11, the council collectively established their goals for the current school year in areas such as "Academic Achievement, Social Emotional Wellness/Social Emotional Learning, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, and Access, Enhancing and Promoting the Arts, and Core Competencies for Data Analysis."

One big focus for the School Council is their commitment to the ideals of diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and access. In their most recent "Commitment to Diversity Statement," the School Council stated that they "will include representation of the diverse student body at Mt. Greylock. Thus, we commit to intersectionality to allow for the inclusion of multiple perspectives, even if they cannot be represented in the room."

The DEIBA subcommittee, in the most recent draft of the School Improvement Plan for 2023, addressed several of the ways they intend to create a more equitable school district, including hiring a diverse body of educators and assessing student accessibility, such as revising the dress code.

The council is also committed to "collaborating and inviting members of organizations that represent diverse views within the school community," including the Superintendent's Diversity Task Force, the Greylock Multicultural Student Union, the Gender Sexuality Alliance, and the Special Education Parent Advisory Council.

The subcommittee ultimately hopes to "increase awareness of DEIBA issues to build empathy and understanding while working to end bias and hate within the MGRS community."

The School Council is also looking to improve Social-Emotional Wellness and Learning (SEW/SEL) at Mount Greylock. The SEW/

SEL subcommittee is looking to "expand and deepen opportunities for SEW/SEL to pervade the school community," according to a draft of the improvement plan. This will include increased interactions with the wellness staff and social workers and expanding opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to engage in social-emotional learning.

Testing equity is also a current topic of conversation for the council. Taking a closer look at test scores, such as the MCAS, Principal Jake Schutz found that "since 2018, multi-racial, economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities have scored significantly lower than state average on significantly more questions than their MG peer counterparts." The council is looking into hiring additional help to assist these students, as well as review and revise academic practices to better serve the entirety of the Mount Greylock student body.

A collective focus between the various subcommittees has been looking at how to ensure every middle school student is coming in with the same base level of educational skills. As of right now, students are coming in with greatly varying academic abilities. These educational

**"Is [the curriculum] allowing everybody to have the same ability to take the courses they hope to take, or are there economic situations or other environmental factors that will prevent them from taking the course?"**

Rona Wang;  
School Council Representative

gaps only extend further as middle and high-school progress.

Senior representative Rona Wang spoke about a council initiative to hire more instructors and potentially create additional courses for the middle school to catch students up to their grade level standards. "There are some students who are struggling to the point where, instead of being at the seventh grade level for math or English skills, they're at second grade or fourth grade level," Wang said. "Instead of making the students take a different course completely, separating them from their peers, it'll just be an additional course [with]...other instructors that will come in and help the teachers plan for their classes and help the students."

As a part of the new School Improvement Plan, the council has decided to take a deeper dive into the analytics of standardized testing, with the goal of finding and addressing areas of possible problems. Historically, Mount Greylock has only looked at average scores in standardized testing, without taking into consideration any confounding variables or possible areas of bias.

"In [the academic subcommittee], we're looking at the curriculum. Is it allowing every-

body to have the same ability to take the courses they hope to take, or are there economic situations or other environmental factors that will prevent them from taking the course," Wang said.

Wang spoke on her research with teacher Mary MacDonald about opening up the opportunity for AP classes to everyone. "What I'm doing right now with [Mary] McDonald on the Academics [subcommittee] is that we're looking to see if AP courses are mostly only Williamstown students or are only Lanesborough students and seeing if there's a trend in that."

The School Improvement also pays attention to the arts program. The subcommittee that specifically focuses on the arts wants to evaluate arts programming and "identify areas for expanded opportunity and engagement," as stated in the School Improvement Plan draft, in a way that provides representation and open artistic expression.

According to Mathews, "there's some momentum coming from the Friends of the Arts group, trying to make sure that we have a strong arts program in the school."

With all of these tenets of focus, the council hopes to improve the school community for the better. Mathews said, "All of [the council's goals] serve as a foundation for making changes within the school at either the administrative level or at the school committee level. Those proposals can work their way into a school budget, and we can suggest to the School Committee that we hire people. We can look to have speakers come, we can look at making policy changes at the school."

The budget cycle of the school committee begins in January, so the council is pushing for a few requests to be included in the budget presentation at town meetings in May.

In Schutz's budget presentation to the School Council, he wrote that his 2023 budget proposal is intended to be a "therapeutic academic approach to learning gaps of our most vulnerable population exacerbated and highlighted by the effects of the pandemic."

"We wanted to make a proposal to get something included into next year's school budget...so in order to get that in there, we focus on the budgetary items as early as we can in the school year," Mathews said.

The School Council encourages members of the community to attend their meetings. The next meeting is on Zoom on February 15 at 3:30. Minutes can be found on the school website, as well as agendas and Zoom links, which are always open to the public. ♦



## SPORTS

## SEE Fund Pays for Student Tickets

By MOLLY SULLIVAN

On February 4, athletic director Lindsey von Holtz announced via school-wide email that students will no longer be required to pay to attend school events.

Senior Parker Winters, a member of the SEE fund, wrote a proposal for a grant which would cover the cost of student tickets for school events. The SEE Fund—a group of parents, students, and teachers who award grant money for causes related to the school—recently approved his proposal.

Students will now be able to attend the remainder of the regular, winter athletic season games and drama performances free of charge. “The free ticket initiative started because I heard the idea from Coach Gill,” Winters said. “I brought it up in a SEE Fund grant meeting, and it seemed to be something everyone was interested in, so I filled out an application and it was passed.”

Tickets were previously \$3 per student, with season ticket passes available for home games. Concerns were voiced over accessibility issues for students, given that the tickets were online and required a credit card, as well as financial burdens for students who might not have been able to pay.

“We are hopeful that this will both increase the student attendance and support at these activities as well as ensure no student is unable to attend for financial reasons,” Athletic Director Lindsey von Holtz wrote in an email to the student body.

During the fall season, volleyball games operated with a student sign-up sheet, and tickets had no cost. Winters wanted to return to that format so that students could easily attend basketball games, as well as the school musical in March.

“After talking it over with Coach von Holtz, we came up with a plan on how to make it work, which was getting rid of student tickets and going back to the sign up sheet which was present for volleyball,” Winters said.

Von Holtz expressed gratitude and excitement over the idea in her email: “Thank you Parker,” she wrote, “this is a great idea to help support and improve our school community!” ♦

## Athlete Spotlight: Seamus Barnes

By ANDREW PETROPOLOUS

*The Echo recently sat down with Mount Greylock junior Seamus Barnes. Barnes is a leading scorer on the boys' varsity basketball team, which currently has an 8-4 record.*

**Echo: How has your season gone this year?**

Seamus Barnes: We've made big strides from last year. There's been tons of different changes, partially because we've had to go through a lot of players being out, but we've been resilient. Overall, it's been going very well.



*photo courtesy of iBerkshires*

**E: What are the specific COVID regulations?**

SB: I don't know all of the exact rules regarding masks or protocols. I know we have to wear them during games and practices. It's pretty much the same rules as when you're in school. It's unfortunate, but it is what it is.

**E: Are you guys pleased with your overall record this year?**

SB: Yeah, I'd say we are, especially considering this year, our record is much better than last year. There have been some tough games we have lost. From each of those losses, though, we've been able to pinpoint exactly what it is we

did wrong. I think we've become a much stronger team than we were at the beginning of the year. We're very happy so far.

**E: Do you see yourself playing in college?**

SB: I really have no idea. I'm not concerned about that right now because I'm mostly focused on college for academic reasons. If the opportunity presents itself, I would love to. As of right now, I really don't know.

**E: Do you think your team has a bright future?**

SB: One-hundred percent, at least for the next couple of years. Of course we have a lot of seniors who are a big part of our team, but next year we'll have like seven or eight seniors. I'm not disrespecting any of the guys we have now, because they're putting in a lot of work and they're a big part of our team. Next year, we'll have an older team and we'll have the experience under our belt.

**Echo: Do you guys have good team chemistry?**

SB: I'd say so. A lot of us have been playing with each other since house basketball. We've been playing with each other for a long time so we have very good chemistry.

**Echo: When did you start playing basketball?**

SB: No different than anyone else. They had those programs back in elementary school for when you're in first or second grade to play. I remember playing at the Youth Center when I was younger.

**Echo: What's your favorite part about basketball?**

SB: Of course, everyone loves winning. That goes without saying, but what really appeals to me is that it gets me out, it's something to do, it's something I love. It pushes me to compete to the best of my ability. It demands the most out of me. It puts me in situations I wouldn't normally be, which pushes me to be a better person. ♦

## Winter Sports Update

By LUCY IGOE

On November 29th, winter sports once again began at Mount Greylock. Last year, due to the pandemic, there was an abbreviated and modified winter sports season. This year, the school has been able to return to normal winter sport schedules.

The girls varsity basketball team is currently 3-9 this season, recently winning a game against Mount Anthony Union High School on February 3. The team is captained by senior Tessa Leveque and juniors Molly Sullivan, Emma Newberry, and Emma Gilooly. The team is coached by John Jacobbe and assistant coach Lyndsey Wadsworth. The team has had multiple cancellations due to weather and COVID-19

cases thus far.

“Honestly, I'm just so excited to be with my team. I am trying to be a role model and someone they can look up to,” Newberry said. “They really are the best and they make my day so much better when we are all in the gym.”

The boys varsity basketball team is currently 9-4, recently achieving a win against Athol High School. Seniors Henry Art and Thomas Martin as well as junior Chase Doyle are captains. Coach Robert Thistle is returning to his position as head coach after taking last year off and is assisted by David Hadley, Russ Howard, and Harry Trites.

*Continued on Page 10.*

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mountgreylockecho@gmail.com

# SPORTS & OPINIONS

## Winter Sports Update

Continued from Page 9.



Photo Courtesy of Charles Swabey

“Last year, Mr. Thistle’s absence was definitely felt, so it is nice to have him back and I am excited to see that we are off to a great start,” Art said. “We are coming together as a team and

I can’t wait to see what we do in the rest of the season.”

The nordic ski teams have only had two races this season so far, with many cancellations due to insufficient snow or inclement weather. The team is coached by Hiram and Hilary Greene, along with Mark Santella and Tyler Hallenbeck. The boys team has won both of their races, and the girls, after winning their first race, placed 3rd in the second race.

“I am excited to spend more time with my fellow captains and have fun with the team because this is my fifth and final season,” senior captain Parker Winters said.

The Drury Hockey Team, which co-opts with Mount Greylock, is currently 4-4, with a recent win against rival Wahconah. The team is coached by Derek Deroucher and features several Mount Greylock players, including senior Cam Taylor.

The wrestling team has competed in 3 meets this year, most recently placing fourth in the Mountie Invite at Mount Greylock. At the Berkshire Holiday Tournament in December, Mount Greylock took eighth place. In their first meet of the year, Greylock lost to Taconic, but coach John Carvalho was excited with the promise his team showed.

“This season we have a bunch of new faces

who all have a lot of potential,” junior Quin Whaley said. “I’m excited to see how far we can go this year with the team as a whole.”

Although the winter seasons this year look almost normal, all indoor teams still have to wear masks for the duration of the events.

“The masks make conditioning difficult but other than that we have adapted pretty comfortably,” Whaley said. Almost every team has dealt with different pandemic issues, but all of the teams are hoping to follow their schedule for the rest of the season and be as close to normal as possible (with the addition of masks). ♦



Photo Courtesy of Francine Field Hartman

## Stewart Strikes Again—*Spencer* Review

By EMMA SANDSTROM

*Spencer*, directed by Pablo Larraín, follows the life of Diana Spencer, princess of Wales, for a three day period during the Christmas season in 1991. Described as a “psychological drama,” *Spencer* is far from your traditional, heart-warming Christmas film.

Telling the story of Princess Diana is hardly a unique venture. In fact, Diana’s life has been the basis for countless modern films, television shows, and novels. Larraín’s film diverges from the traditional path that so many directors of historical films have previously taken. He doesn’t attempt to impose a story on a historical figure; rather, he lets one arise in a natural and artistic way, never claiming any of it to be entirely historically accurate.

The film itself isn’t necessarily a biopic; the opening text accurately proclaims the film to be a “fable from true tragedy.” Rather than presuming to understand the inner workings of Diana’s mind—a method which could yield a poorly executed, insensitive piece—Larraín takes Diana’s authentic personality and commonly understood struggles, and creates his film as an *interpretation* rather than a reenactment.

Through Claire Mathon’s excellent cinematography, consisting of sharp camera movement and strategic symmetry, we see Princess Diana, played by the outstandingly versatile Kristen Stewart, unravel as she breaks down under the pressure of an authoritarian cabal.

Universally known as an independent-minded “princess of the people,” Diana suffers from the psychological effects of captivity as she spends her holiday hiding from the royal family, being forced to follow a cruelly strict schedule, and even suffers from taunting hallucinations.

*Spencer* is special. It is in no way your

typical retelling of Diana’s tumultuous relationship with the royal family, nor is it yet another exploitative melodrama about her final days alive. The key element that makes the film so powerful is that, while these elements of her life are interwoven into Steven Knight’s script, they don’t dominate the plot.

The story is driven by Larraín’s vision as he captures a cinematic glance into Diana’s

**“Here, there is only one tense. There is no future. The past and the present are the same thing.”**

Princess Diana; *Spencer* (2021)

psyche. Through the cinematography alone, we see a surreal portrait of an isolated woman, trapped in a position in which her agency and identity have been stripped away from her. We are provided with a narrative that humanizes Diana through dialogue, and is perfectly executed by Kristen Stewart’s phenomenal performance.

When I first heard that Stewart would be playing Diana, I was skeptical. Knowing Stewart from her notorious, nonchalant off-screen attitude and her performances in films such as *Twilight* and *Charlie’s Angels*, I was curious to see how she might portray such a famous constituent of the royal family and complicated figure.

Any actor can merely learn an accent. It takes true talent to actually embody a character. Kristen Stewart has taken her acting to the next level with her performance in *Spencer*. Not only does she match Diana’s intonation with perfection, but the way she carries herself appears to mirror the late Diana flawlessly. Despite

Larraín’s unconventional approach to history (twisting the story to fit his own ideas), Stewart’s captivating performance never ceases to evoke a feeling of truth.

*Spencer* will capture your attention for the entirety of its runtime. The film opens with a wide angle shot of a convertible driving over the rolling hills of Norfolk, England. Rather than immediately establishing Diana, Larraín instead chooses to initially focus on the Sandringham House, which he depicts as a desolate prison.

The first people we see are the guards, symbolically representing the captivity into which Diana is soon to fall. A mutilated pigeon takes the screen, one of countless, clever recurring symbols throughout the film, representing the lifeless horror for which the palace is known.

There is no pretense surrounding Diana. We soon see her, lost and confused. This concept of not only being physically lost, but also mentally lost, will be a theme that the filmmakers return to throughout the film. This is the first of a series of many beautiful entendres interwoven throughout the course of the narrative. The closer Diana gets to the palace, paradoxically, the more lost she becomes.

While undeniably beautiful, it wasn’t solely the script or cinematography that led me to fall in love with the film. Johnny Greenwood’s score adds the film’s tumultuous nature in the most magical ways. His unsettling dissonance between light piano melodies with sinister undertones perfectly matches the ever fluctuating storyline.

While the film is rooted in truth, it is merely a beautifully invented story. *Spencer* feels incredibly real, probably because there is a little piece of Diana in us all. ♦

# OPINIONS

## Why Censorship in the Media is Important

By ALAYNA SCHWARZER

If you have been reading the news for the past year, it is almost a guarantee that you have seen the name Marjorie Taylor Greene in a couple headlines. If you have had such an opportunity, you must (1) be offered my greatest condolences and (2) should be aware of a few of her opinions. Greene, a representative for Georgia's 14th Congressional district, has been labeled a "far-right conspiracy theorist" and is known for her fiery, offensive, and often objectively wrong statements. As a contemporary politician, Greene would often share her opinions on Twitter. The representative has tweeted such things as "#FireFauci" and "Save America, Stop Communism!" along with multiple posts spreading COVID-19 misinformation.

On January 2nd, 2022, Twitter issued a permanent ban on her personal account, after receiving five strikes from the company's Coronavirus misinformation policy guidelines. This ban followed a tweet associating the COVID-19 vaccine with high death rates, and coincided with Facebook placing a 24-hour suspension on her account.

This was evidently not Greene's first rodeo with Twitter suspension. In July of 2021, she was issued a twelve hour account suspension after her third strike, to which she responded by comparing Twitter to "Communist China." She claimed that the company had unrightfully censored her and violated her freedom of speech. Twitter is a private entity, even if it operates as a public company. In the same way that restaurants can enforce shoes and shirt requirements, Twitter is allowed to manage and enforce such regulation within its platform.

As much as this would dismay Greene, the First Amendment's "freedom of speech" protects citizens only from congressional acts limiting one's expression. The hot-button question is not whether Twitter could do this, but rather if they should have. The issue of censorship as a concept has been called back in from pasture, as it seems to be every other week. With an issue such as censorship, its refusal to rest is partly because there seems to be no general consensus, and I think it's because we are using too small of a net to capture a sea of fish.

I admit, it would be nice for censorship to be a clear-cut issue. "Censorship is bad" is a catchier headline (and much easier on the eyes) than actually exploring the muddled intersection of moral subjectivity and free speech on social media and politics.

The issue of censorship, I find, is similar to the word "fire." If your friend invites you over for a bonfire, you are not necessarily going to feel the same way about the word fire if you read: "Devastating House Fire Envelopes Home, 15 Dead." Censorship is the same. For such an intensely debated issue, I think it deserves a bit more specificity and respect for its multitudes.

Trixx Mattel tweeting "I will tear your other leg off you whore," at Tempest DuJour from season seven of Rupaul's Drag Race is an entirely different situation from an influential politician tweeting incredibly harmful myths about a global pandemic. I am not going to pretend that I have magically stumbled upon the principle of subjective enforcement. I just merely would like to convey that our lack of

tangible separation between levels of censorship is part of the problem. We cannot have a discussion if we are not speaking the same language.

As much as I am sure Greene would like to believe in her unique martyrdom, she is not the first to be exiled from Twitter. She follows in the footsteps of Donald Trump, who was banned from the platform on January 9th, 2020, following the January 6th insurrection at the Capitol. As it did then, the banning of a right-wing politician from a popular social media platform has reinvigorated the debate over whether the media favors the left and unfairly discriminates against the right.

Now is as good of a time as any to point out some slight discrepancies within the case of Marjorie Taylor Greene. Each time Greene was given a strike by Twitter, she would, as aforementioned, tweet about how she was being censored.

Since when has hypocrisy ever stopped Greene before? Her anti-abortion conquest seems never ending, yet bodily autonomy is key when it comes to her anti-vaccine mandate stance. Not to mention that Greene's only issue with censorship arises when it affects her.

Black, indigenous, and Asian people of color on TikTok have attempted to draw attention to the issue of "shadowbanning," a practice suppressing their content through the app's algorithm. Are we shocked or surprised that Greene's political agenda leaves behind individuals who are part of marginalized groups? Considering this is the same woman who has actively used slurs in both private and public settings, I can't say I am.

What defenders of Greene, such as House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, seem to misunderstand, is that unchecked misinformation is not a casual expression of self. With over 886,000 COVID-19 related deaths, misinformation kills. Even in the hypothetical scenario that Greene's defense of freedom of speech did apply (again, it does not), she still would not be protected. The Supreme Court ruled in the infamous Schenck vs. The United States case that "shouting fire falsely in a theater" is not protected under the First Amendment. Although the decision was slightly altered in *Brandenburg v. Ohio*, the risk of endangerment as a result of Greene's words puts it well within the limits of the Court's decision.

It is the responsibility of politicians to understand the impact of their words and act accordingly. Greene's opinion stopped being "just an opinion" when it began causing harm. Even if her stances on COVID-19 could be labeled as just opinions, the potential damage caused by them is not then struck from the record. If I told you "yeah, I hate your shirt, and I think your mom is ugly," the harm that statement caused is not automatically erased if I tag on "but that's just my opinion." Said harm would be compounded if I were an individual that people look to for shirt or mom-based input. If anything, Twitter was doing her job for her, by allowing her speech to be moderated through at least one filter, since she seems unable to do it herself.

Whether Jim Jordan is right that "Big Tech

is out to get conservatives" opens the next can of worms, as far as the general public knows, Facebook and Twitter have both kept the inner workings of their algorithms largely a secret. Consider this: if your party's language has repeatedly violated misinformation guidelines, does that perhaps say more about your party than it does the platform? But I digress, as I am sure that Greene would say that the misinformation guidelines are just anti-conservative robots run by ANTIFA and the communists.

However, there does exist a bit more information on Facebook's popularity trends, giving us insight into what their algorithm values. According to research sought out by New York Times columnist Kevin Roose using Crowd-Tangle, software available to researchers and journalists to track Facebook trends, "right-wing commentators like Ben Shapiro and Dan Bongino were getting much more engagement on their Facebook pages than mainstream news outlets."

Although the program just looks at engagement, it nonetheless puts a slight damper on conservatives' case that Big Tech is targeting them. The Joe Rogan Experience, a podcast featuring many conservative views that has also been accused of peddling Coronavirus misinformation, was placed number one on Spotify's 2021 charts. Again, things are not looking too damning for the conservatives.

Siva Vaidhyanathan, a media studies professor at the University of Virginia, also does not think the anti-right media bias exists. Instead, algorithms on platforms like Facebook and Twitter flag "content that generates strong emotions." Because (most) alt-right politicians have largely based their current platform on reactionary politics (i.e. denying the validity of COVID-19 vaccines), there is a larger chance that their social media posts will contain more strongly worded, emotional statements about hot topics. For a niche of the right that spouts "facts over feelings," the facts don't seem to be adding up in their favor.

The need for misinformation-spotting algorithms on social media platforms is a relatively new phenomenon. Misleading information from politicians is not. Yellow journalism in the late 19th century was one of the factors that pushed the US into war with Spain. The presence of political figureheads on social media has expanded the scope of info-sharing beyond what is easily regulatable. Bush did not have a Myspace in 2003 to post about why he lost his flight status.

Many researchers mark 2016 as the point where the full scope of the rendezvous of political misinformation and social media became evident. Before, when posts were made centered around politics, they were just that: posts. However, in the presidential election of 2016, we saw the back and forth conversation of social media and political action.

Reddit saw a huge increase in the amount of extremist political radicalization on its platform. After December 2015, according to Dr. Rishab Nithyanand, an assistant professor for computer science at the University of Iowa, Redditors who had previously shown political affiliation with the right were more likely

# OPINIONS

## Sylvie's Book Corner: *Iron Window* Review

By SYLVIE CLOWES

Xiran Jay Zhao's debut novel, *Iron Widow*, is the most gripping book I have read in a long time. It is the perfect mix of politics, history, romance, and action. This feminist science fiction novel, set in Ancient China, reimagines the rise to power of the historical Wu Zetian, China's only female emperor. In Zhao's version, the main character, Zetian, is 18, and from a small village on the frontier of Huaxia, where her entire life is controlled by the misogynistic expectations of her family and community. From a young age, Zetian's life has been shaped by the beliefs that her only worth is in being beautiful, fetching a good bride price, and bearing children for her husband. This means that she keeps much of her life a secret from others, including her relationship with her best friend, Gao Yizhi, the fifth son of one of the richest men in Huaxia.

Her sister suffers a worse fate as a "pilot concubine." The people of Huaxia wage war against the aliens that control the land past the Great Wall. Their weapons are giant Chrysalises, which are run on Qi, the Chinese term for vapor, air, or breath, and need both a man and woman to pilot them. Although almost all women die from the strain on their minds and Qi, those who survive are held up as ideals of what girls should aim to be. Those who die, however, are used as evidence that women are weaker than men.

After receiving the news that her sister has died while powering a Chrysalis, Zetian decides to take her place in order to kill the pilot, whom she blames for her sister's death. She succeeds in her mission, but unexpectedly survives because of her abnormally high Qi levels. Instead of killing her for her crimes, the government pairs her with Li Shimin, the strongest pilot in centuries and a very controversial man. He murdered his family and was sentenced to die, but is now forced to fight instead. This is how the partnership between the Iron Widow and Iron Demon is born. Although they are both despised, they are also too useful to kill.

*Iron Widow* is a complicated look at the lengths people will go to to survive and to uncover the truth amongst a corrupt society. What I found most intriguing about the book is how, although it is obvious that the main characters are not "good" people, I found myself agreeing with their actions anyhow. Zhao does an excellent job with creating multifaceted characters, not only in Zetian and Shimin, but also the side characters who help drive the plot. Although a tale of speculative fiction, *Iron Widow* left me believing in its characters and eager for a sequel. ♦

## Three Ingredients to the Perfect Valentines Day!

By RAFA MELLOW-BARTELS

February is often cold, dark, and dreary. But, there is a bright spot in the middle of the month that is easy to overlook: Valentine's Day. The holiday is named after St. Valentine, who was the patron saint of love. Lesser known, people also used to call upon him to intervene with plagues. So, the pandemic is a perfect time to be celebrating Valentine's Day. Who knows, maybe if enough of us celebrate on February 14th, the pandemic will end! At this point, it can't hurt to try.

If you are like me and you love sweets but do not like to cook, then this is the perfect treat: Chocolate covered strawberries are a great way to brighten up February. They are the perfect gift for anyone, whether it's friends, someone special, or yourself.

The process couldn't be more simple. You will need: strawberries (about one pint), coconut oil (two tablespoons), and of course, chocolate (around two cups). You can use any kind of chocolate you like, but make sure it is cut up into small pieces.

Medium to large sized strawberries are best so that they can hold more chocolate. Look out for strawberries of a deep red color; this means that they are ripe and will be sweet, rather than bitter, to bite into.

### PROCESS:

Wash and dry the strawberries. Leave the stems on (you need something to hold on to when you eat them.) Then, put your chocolate in a bowl and add the coconut oil. Put the bowl in the microwave and heat it for thirty second intervals until it is melted. Next, lay a piece of parchment paper on a cookie sheet. Now, for the most important step, take each strawberry and dip it into your bowl of melted chocolate. Once they are laid out in rows on the cookie sheet, you can slide the sheet into the refrigerator to allow the chocolate to harden. Set your timer for forty five minutes and wait.

The great thing about chocolate covered strawberries is that they look sophisticated and take hardly any of your time. Enjoy! ♦



## Censorship

Continued from Page 11.

to interact with "topics [where] violence and hatred toward women, minorities and LGBT people were discussed as the primaries heated up."

With political fringe groups becoming increasingly mainstream, misinformation and conspiracy theories have become inevitable. Prior to the normalization of extremism, if a user identified with a specific fringe, they had to actively search it out. That isn't the case any more. Your Aunt Lisa, innocently scrolling on Twitter, could see a photo posted by Blake Lively directly next to a tweet claiming that drinking water will allow your stomach acid to kill the Coronavirus (yes, this was a real tweet). It no longer takes effort to completely indulge in conspiracy and misinformation. Without any regulation, it is practically served on a platter for the user. The ease of access movement has made it all too easy to be sucked into the anti-vaccine, QAnon rabbit hole.

In the span of writing this, the death toll has risen to 893,000 deaths due to COVID-19. That is not even an accurate representation of the havoc the pandemic has wrought. People have lost so much due to the virus. This modern "infodemic," as coined by Scientific American, is killing people. For social media companies to allow it to continue would be incredibly irresponsible on their parts, not to mention refusing to regulate users' posts could pose potential legal and moral qualms, if people's deaths can be directly attributed to the spread of misinformation.

We cannot afford to lose more people to a virus who's narrative has been twisted to fit the agendas of right-wing politicians looking for cheap power grabs. As much as politicians like Greene would love to cast this issue as one of society's vendetta against right-wingers, this issue deserves a bit more respect than that. But yes, Mrs. Greene, how dare those communist companies put a damper on your right to spew non-scientifically backed, baseless, opinions that could possibly lead to the deaths of your constituents. ♦

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