

the accolade

September 2023 1801 Lancer Way, Fullerton CA 92833 Sunny Hills High School Volume IXIV, Issue I

*Some chase it in the form of trophies, titles and awards
Others create opportunities for it
The Accolade looks into all these aspects of*

RECOGNITION



LANCER ACHIEVEMENTS

A collection of SH award-winning programs | pg. 13

CUE THE LIGHTS

Theater tech members discuss importance of working behind the scenes | pg. 22

DIGITAL DETOX

Deep look inside how recognition has evolved post-pandemic | pg. 16



DEAR READERS,

Thank you for picking up *The Accolade's* first issue of the school year. This publication is very special to us — and we hope to you — because it marks a new era *The Accolade* is embarking on. We are thrilled to introduce a complete transition from newspaper to full-color, glossy magazine. This decision reflects part of our efforts to adapt to the increasing importance of visual storytelling and comprehensive reporting. As we make this change, I hope that *The Accolade* reaches a broader audience.

We were inspired by various news outlets in making this decision. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* has also shifted its Sports section to a magazine-esque design with a front cover and a more themed-package — that's our intention as well.

For this first issue, we decided to take on "Recognition." Some chase it in the form of trophies, titles and awards. And some strive to create opportunities for it. The past few years have been filled with successes from various groups on campus, so we wanted to take the time to highlight the accomplishments of our award-winning programs and students (page 8).

Whether student efforts are recognized with tangible awards, this issue recognizes the different paths students take. We tried covering all facts of what school recognition could possibly look like, including the administration seeing the need for campus accessibility (page 10) as well as glimpses into students working behind the scenes for theater (page 22).

This month's first edition also investigates how school recognition has evolved since the COVID-19 pandemic and what impacts honors have among students (page 16). Finally, I want to express our gratitude to the administration for increasing our budget to help us pay for the cost of printing magazines and allowing us to bring our vision to reality.

I hope that you are equally excited for our future issues as we move forward with bringing the next generation of news to you — on print and online.

Best,

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Editor-in-Chief

accolade

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

IMPACT

Lancer LEGEND 04

Student Section 06

Validated 08

PROFILES

Campus Accessibility 10

Programs' Achievements 13

COVER STORY

Recognition & Mental Health 16

OUTLOOK

Dealing With Pressure 20

Cue the Lights 22

Q&A: Awards in Admissions 24

OP-ED

Staff Editorial 26

Column: I'm a Try-Hard 28

Column: Overcoming Norms 30

‘EVERYBODY CAN BE A LEGEND’

STORY BY **ALEXXA BERUMEN**

PHOTOS BY **CHLOE KANG**



CO-LEGENDS: Seniors Savannah Taylor (left) and Camila Carriedo wear their Lancer LEGEND medallions after being recognized for their selflessness in helping another classmate in art class.



New award promotes campus unity

Academics, character, selflessness, resilience and leadership. These are the five pillar values of a newly introduced character-based recognition program for the 2023-2024 school year.

The Lancer LEGEND award, an acronym for Leadership, Excellence, Greatness, Elite, Noteworthy and Dominant, created by Associated Student Body [ASB] adviser David Fenstermaker, is the newest award available for students.

Fenstermaker said he developed this honor last semester to recognize students who are exemplary in everyday life, not just for their academic endeavors.

“It’s mostly about celebrating more than just victories,” he said. “These are students doing things that are worth celebrating, but we wouldn’t normally celebrate.”

The award gives staff a chance to nominate students as long as they are part of the following 10 programs: athletics, Advancement Via Individual Determination, band, cheer, coding & gaming/eSports, dance, Engineering Pathways to Innovation & Change, International Baccalaureate, theater or agriculture.

“These are the positive attributes that we hope all of our students come away with at the end of their four years,” principal Craig Weinreich said. “We should celebrate those things when they take place.”

The purpose behind Lancer LEGEND is to bring the campus community together, Fenstermaker said.

“I hope [students] realize that my biggest [motivation] was, if you and I are in different programs and we win the same award, that should connect us,” the ASB adviser said. “It



DRAPING THE HONOR: Art teacher Chablis Bates awards senior Savannah Taylor with the Lancer LEGEND medallion to recognize her act of selflessness on Sept. 1 in Room 22.

doesn’t matter if one’s on the football team and the other in band ... it ends up being a unifying thing for the school.”

As of Sept. 8, three students have received this recognition; however, 47 medallions remain to be given out this school year.

The honors are given out randomly throughout the year rather than at a banquet, which “reinforces the concept that being legendary is a process and not simply an end result,” according to Fenstermaker’s original award proposal.

When awarded, students receive a medallion engraved with the word “LEGEND,” as well as a black T-shirt that reads, “Lancer Legend” and the Sunny Hills mascot, Winston the Lancer, under the emblem.

The ASB will also hold a breakfast celebration for all award recipients at the end of the school year on an unspecified date. Meanwhile, the date for the next LEGEND ceremony has not been decided yet as it is infrequent and are given out based on adviser discretion, Fenstermaker said.

THE NOMINATION PROCESS

When teachers find a student they believe falls under one of the five pillars, they will notify the adviser of the program the student is a part of via email to tell them of the individual’s outstanding actions.

Sophomore Isaac Gaxiola was the first to receive the accolade on Aug. 21 for helping out math teacher Jina Shia move boxes during Lancer Days after his football practice, despite not knowing each other before.

“It feels special [to be the first] in a way that I can’t explain,” said Gaxiola, whose friends have now nicknamed him “Lancer Legend.” “That’s what I like to do — help people out who need it and hopefully make the school a better place.”

On Sept. 1, seniors Camila Carriedo and Savannah Taylor were awarded under the pillar of Selflessness when they helped translate a lesson for a student.

Carriedo said she noticed a student in art teacher Chablis Bates’ class, who primarily spoke Spanish, a language she also spoke, and asked Taylor to switch seats with her so she could assist the student.

Bates, who was the one to nominate the two seniors, said she is grateful for these additions to the campus from the perspective of an art teacher, whose students are not always high-achieving.

“I am thrilled about [these awards] because not everybody is academically the best, and it’s hard when you’re not in honors classes to boost your GPA,” she said. “This is [a good] way for teachers to recognize the kids [for] being good human beings.”



LEGEND PIONEER: Sophomore Isaac Gaxiola (left) receives his T-shirt and medallion on Aug. 21, for helping a teacher during Lancer Days.



HURRAH: Sunny Hills student section decks out in beach attire for a Surf's Up theme and lets out a cheer at the Aug. 25 football game.

LANCER NATION ROARS

*SH student section celebrates
being recognized Top 5 among
Orange County schools*

STORY BY **SUSIE KIM**

With a simple “USA” theme, Sunny Hills students automatically dressed up in red, white and blue attire or came holding the American flag at the Aug. 31 football game at the Buena Park High School stadium.

The students stood in the stands waving colorful balloons with face paint smeared across their cheeks as they cheered for the players taking on Woodbridge High School.

This crowd of spirited individuals represents the only Fullerton Joint Union High School District [FJUHS] campus named a Fall 2023 Student Section of the Week under the North Orange County division for the week of Aug. 28.

“I think that our student section is the best in the district because we go all out,” said Associated Student Body [ASB] co-athletics commissioner senior Maddie Moreno, who with Natalia Garibay comes up with the themes for each home football game this season. “I feel like a lot of people come to our games dressed out, and we just get very hyped.”

Principal Craig Weinreich also recognized Lancer Nation for its achievement at the Sept. 12 FJUHS board meeting.

“It’s been a great start to the year, and our Lancers have enjoyed all sorts of back-to-school activities, fall athletics contests and other various events,” Weinreich said. “In fact, our Lancer Nation student section was already named the Orange County divisional winner in the opening weeks of the season by OC Student Sections.”

The organization the principal was referring to includes adviser Jered Baloloy, a Yorba Linda High School Class of 2022 graduate, and 16 other OC high school students. Each week in the football season, the OC Student Student Sec-

tions’ team hosts a contest on a Sunday using Instagram polls before posting the winners the following Tuesday on @ocstudentsections featuring the most-voted schools in the Central, West and South OC regions.

“No matter if our team is winning or losing, being a part of the student section at the game can be really, really fun,” Moreno said. “Being recognized by the OC Student Sections gives a good reputation for our school, and I can be proud of saying, ‘Yeah, Sunny Hills High School, I go to that school.’”

As part of the voting process, schools submit or are asked to send a photo of their student crowd to the organization through a form on its website, Instagram or email. Results are announced under a category titled People’s Choice with an overall winner for the week and runners-up as divisional champions.

“Student sections are more than a group of students cheering in the stands; they’re the heart and soul of the school,” Baloloy said. “I think it’s very important to recognize student sections because it’s one of the most special high school experiences when you have your entire school cheering super loud at football games.”

Moreno and Garibay work together to lead the crowd chants and promote a sense of cohesiveness. Besides the shoutout from Aug. 31, their efforts brought the team three past Student Sections of the Week People’s Choice wins during the 2023 winter season and one recognition this school year.

“As the athletics commissioner with Garibay, we put lots of hard work into everything that we do, especially for the student section,” Moreno said. “Seeing the hard work pay off and seeing everyone enjoying themselves at the game is really rewarding.”

The student-run OC Student Sections program began in 2019 before halting its activities with the COVID-19 pandemic restricting in-person sports games. Baloloy initiated a relaunch in 2021 after realizing the lack of student motivation and leaders to prompt the crowds’ cheers.

“There’s nothing better than the Friday nightlife experience,” he said. “Going into the fall of 2021, I wanted to encourage students to get back into the stands.”

One of his main goals as the adviser of the program was to place students as the first priority rather than administrators and parents, to represent the schools’ games.

“Students are the ones who dedicate the passion to support their teams and display that energy every single game,” Baloloy said. “I think these crowds are super important because at the end of the day, when you have a student section, no matter what sport you’re at, it motivates the athletes to win that game.”

Now, he believes that the ongoing friendly battles among student sections in OC schools help acknowledge the ASB’s dedication and the fans who bring more life onto the field.

“The ASB put hours and hours of work behind the scenes, making posters only to have it thrown away after a two-hour game,” Baloloy said.



LOUDER: Senior Natalia Garibay hypes up the crowd with a megaphone during the first home football game on Aug. 25.

PHOTOS BY **JAIMIE CHUN**

Student Section >> Page 12

**New award honors those
who fall short of valedictorian status**

VALIDATED

STORY BY **IRENE PARK**

All then-senior Mireya Mondragon needed was one more Advanced Placement [AP] class.

For the past four years of her high school career, she had taken 10 AP courses, ranging from AP U.S. History to AP Calculus BC.

However, because the AP Environmental Science course was full, and she didn't want to complicate her senior year by taking another AP class she was not interested in, she ended up being a teacher's assistant for Teresa McCarty's English 1 Honors class.

This caused her to fall one AP class short of meeting the valedictorian requirements.

"I was honestly super frustrated with myself, and it just sucked," Mondragon said. "It would have been really sad to miss one requirement and not get anything at all."

But her work did not go unnoticed because she ended up getting some recognition after all.

In fact, for the first time in school history, school officials gave black and gold honor cords to Mondragon and five other students, letting them know their efforts to obtain an unweighted 4.0 GPA deserve commendation.

"I was pleasantly surprised; I did not

expect anything like it and honestly, it felt good to get my work recognized," Mondragon said. "I got a 4.0 GPA all four years of high school, and I worked really hard for it, so it was nice."

Known as the Academic Excellence Award, the new recognition program honors students who maintained an unweighted 4.0 GPA throughout their high school years but for various reasons did

"We should congratulate students for their hard work more often."

- Class of 2023 alumna Mireya Mondragon

not take the required number of honors or AP or International Baccalaureate classes to be eligible for valedictorian status, school officials said.

The award wasn't considered before the 2022-2023 year since the problem wasn't very prominent in the past, said principal Craig Weinreich, who credits the idea for creating the Academic Excellence Award to suggestions from school coun-

selors.

"I just was seeing a trend [in late March of 2023], ... and that's why I presented it to Mr. Weinreich and our administration," head counselor Beth Thomson said. "The administration team got all involved with it, and the counselors talked about it as well and thought it would be nice to acknowledge those students."

The trend Thomson was referring to involved students who transferred to Sunny Hills from another country and had not taken as many honors classes as required for valedictorian status, or they chose to take other programs that don't have a weighted option like Orchestra and Advanced Journalism, she said.

Eventually, the award was approved in mid-April by the administration nearly a month before the Lancer Awards ceremony on campus so those who qualified for it could be called up to receive their cords.

Becoming a valedictorian comes with a multitude of requirements stated in the Lancer Handbook, including an unweighted 4.0 GPA, 32 minimum honors semester classes along with no academic honesty violations.

There are also senior year requirements of eight minimum honors semester class-

es, 10 minimum academic classes and all A's and B's at the third quarter grade report.

Six Class of 2023 alumni received the honorary cord during the Lancer Awards ceremony, which they wore during the graduation ceremony along with a special symbol of recognition next to their names in the graduation brochure.

Weinreich said the award is currently only offered at Sunny Hills in the Fullerton Joint Union High School District.

"A lot of people have a lot of dynamics that happen in their life, and they're not able to do all the criteria that you need [to become] valedictorians, so it's just another way to celebrate our awesome students' success," Thomson said.

The alumni recipients were summoned to meet with Weinreich on May 11, before the awards ceremony, where they were informed of their eligibility for the new student recognition, Mondragon said.

Weinreich said the students were summoned to his office, where all available student counselors and administrators were present to give the recipients a sense of a special ceremony.

Class of 2023 alumna Katey Tran, one of the six awardees, said she was nervous when she was summoned, even after being informed that it was for good news.



Image used with permission from Katey Tran
HARD WORK PAYS OFF: The six Class of 2023 recipients of the Academic Excellence Award, given to seniors with unweighted 4.0 GPA who almost met the valedictorian requirements, pose with the black and gold cords around their neck in the Performing Arts Center on May 18.



Image used with permission from Craig Weinreich

SIGNING OFF: Principal Craig Weinreich stands in the main office with the six students who received the Academic Excellence award for achieving an unweighted 4.0 GPA.

"I knew I did well in my classes, but I didn't expect to get any award for it," Tran said. "As soon as Weinreich told us the news, everyone was happy and excited."

Mondragon finds the new recognition to be a perfect way to get students to work harder for a slightly more attainable goal.

"I think this is a really great addition besides the valedictorian [title], similar to being a salutatorian, and it's just another way to tell students, 'Good job, you're hardworking and you're going above and beyond,'" the alumna said. "I think we should congratulate students for their hard work more often."

Weinreich said that with the extremely excited reactions from students who received the award, he plans to keep the new honor in place.

For something that the school has never done before, it yielded positive results, he said.

"We're definitely hoping to continue it again this year," the principal said. "It's a way of recognizing students who are achieving really well academically."

Among Sunny Hills’ diverse student body, sophomore Faith Won, who has muscular myopathy, is the only student on campus with a mobility condition, school officials said. To share Won’s experiences, *The Accolade* has obtained permission from Won’s parents for their daughter to be interviewed. ¶ After spending some time with the sophomore, editor-in-chief Jaimie Chun learned about Won’s story that encompasses self-advocacy and school accessibility — something worth recognizing.

A memorable color that sticks after meeting Won is red — not because that’s the color of her electric wheelchair, rather through her personality.

“I like red because it looks clean, bold and straightforward,” Won said. “That’s why I chose red for my wheelchair’s color because that’s how I feel about myself and my wheelchair.”

She has relied on the same wheelchair since second grade because she has muscular myopathy, a condition that weakens the muscles from birth.

The sophomore said it was around the time she was 2 years old when her mom realized her movements were more restricted than those at her age.

“My mom said that she noticed how I didn’t have as much movement as a newborn child,” Won said. “Infants struggle usually getting around — I just kind of didn’t.”

As she got older, her muscles could not support her body weight, making walking difficult.

Beginning her second year of high school, she said part of school recognition is about valuing students’ needs in diverse circumstances — in her case, physical accessibility.

“My voice being heard is important,” Won said. “I hope that people who have physical disabilities like me in the future can have a safer, more inclusive and convenient four years at Sunny Hills.”

SELF-ADVOCACY

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 7 adults in the United States has a movement-related disability, making mobility impairments the most common form of conditions.

Being the only wheelchair user at Sunny Hills has made it difficult for Won to make friends freshman year because finding people with shared experiences is rare.

“I had 20-plus absences in one semester [last year] because of doctor appointments, so there’s the fact that I’m physically not at school,” she said. “I’ve also felt that people can find it difficult to approach me, which makes it hard for me to reach out, too.”

Instead of trying to shy away from the attention she may get because of her condition, Won said she’s grown to ignore occasional stares or glances from students and speak to those who may treat her differently.

“Many people don’t understand my ability and make assumptions based on my appearance,” she said. “I will always advocate for myself, but I never felt that I have to go out of my way to explain my condition.”

Junior Lucas Saab, who relied on crutches during his freshman year because of an ankle sprain, said he agrees that conversations

surrounding physical disabilities are still an avoided subject, though the campus was accessible from his experience.

“The taboo of speaking about disabilities is no different than outside of school,” Saab said. “I think most see disabilities from a sympathetic viewpoint.”

Won said she may consider building a community on campus to support better inclusion and education on disabilities.

“If I could initiate something like that, that would be great,” she said. “Some people think that it’s an obligation as a disabled person to become friends with another disabled person, but it isn’t.”

Won’s older sister, Janice, a senior at Sunny Hills, said her younger sibling has always been resilient growing up.

“Faith is very independent and even though you may think that she needs help, she’s able to overcome any challenges she may face,” she said.

FAITH WON’S NAVIGATING THE HILLS

With the SH campus extending across 39 acres on a slope, Won said traveling between classes can be an uphill battle.

“School life in general, like grades and social life, is hard as it is for any student, so I would hate it if getting around school is difficult,” she said.

Though the disabled community at Sunny Hills or any school is very small, that shouldn’t prevent schools from taking action to solve the problems affecting students with mobility conditions, Won said.

“From my personal experience, I know that this school supports my needs, which I really appreciate,” the sophomore said. “My only wish is that it continues doing so — recognizing what can be done more for the small population of us.”

The sophomore said navigating school grounds can still be challenging with chaotic hallways, slopes and uneven pavement.

“The halls are really overcrowded, and I sometimes run over someone or someone falls on me,” Won said. “I might hurt someone or I might fall myself.”

The sophomore said she has communicated such challenges to her case manager Jessica Espinoza, who’s in charge of overseeing Won’s Individualized Education Program and who then shares Won’s concerns with assistant principal Sarah Murrietta.

“I just hope I can be an empowering adult on campus to really further those skills she already possesses,” said Espinoza, 1 of 6 case managers at Sunny Hills.

Faith Won >> Page 12

UPHILL



CLASS TIME: *Sophomore Faith Won writes in her notebook during sixth period English class in Room 64.*

STORY BY **JAIMIE CHUN**

PHOTOS BY **ASAPH LI**

JOURNEY

“**I KNOW THAT THIS SCHOOL SUPPORTS MY NEEDS. MY ONLY WISH IS THAT IT CONTINUES DOING SO.**”



LUNCH PERIOD: *Sophomore Faith Won munches on a sandwich while talking with her friend sophomore Jessica Yu on Sept. 15 during lunch in front of the 130s classrooms.*

FROM PAGE 4

STUDENT SECTION

Baloloy emphasizes the importance of unity to bring the community together and foster a memorable Friday night.

“You can have only 40 kids with students who stay involved through the entire game compared to the 120 from the other school that may be across the bleachers,” he said. “At the end of the day, you have those students who are passionate and energetic — that’s all that matters whether you’re from a small school or a big school.”

Baloloy said he and his team manage school rosters, aid with game promotions and oversee the Instagram account.

Students interested in joining OC Student Sections for the next school year may submit an application located on its homepage in April

2024, according to its website, oc-student-sections.square.site.

At the end of each school year, the program comes up with other awards for students’ efforts in showing support for athletics.

Lancer Nation, for example, was named the 2023 Students’ Choice Award winner under the Best Fan Atmosphere category for the 2022-2023 school year.

Weinreich praises the organization for how it has attracted so much interest among students during and after the school day.

“It’s a cool, proud moment for me as a principal to see that we get the recognition that we deserve,” Weinreich said. “Students are able to get involved and try out new things they wouldn’t have done before by being a part of these student sections, and that’s what’s creating a good, lasting high school experience for students.”

FROM PAGE 10

FAITH WON

Moreover, the school, which was built in 1959, has made consistent improvements to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA] regulations established in 1990, Murietta said.

“It is an older campus, but there have been a lot of upgrades and modifications to comply with ADA standards, just like how every school does, so those are always continual,” she said.

In fact, the revamping that occurred over the summer involved widening the sidewalks around the Performing Arts Center parking lot, giving those with mobility issues an easier path to navigate, the administrator said.

Meanwhile, Won said she appreciates how teachers make accommodations for her, such as allowing her to sit near the entrance.

Because traditional desks, like the ones in which the chair is attached to the table or the recent-

ly added swiveling chairs, aren’t inclusive of people with disabilities, school officials have ensured to assist in providing adjustable desks if needed.

However, that doesn’t eliminate all inconveniences in the classroom, Won said.

“I’m really thankful that all my teachers are understanding,” she said. “But seating plans and the classroom layout are awkward. Doing group activities can be awkward because they all have to come to my area.”

The sophomore said she also looks forward to receiving a new motorized wheelchair that will help alleviate stress on her back from sitting for long periods of time at school.

Won said she hopes to have a fulfilling sophomore year.

“Just because I’m in a unique situation doesn’t mean I would have different goals or dreams,” Won said. “Like a lot of people, I hope to keep getting closer with my friends, make new ones, earn good grades and finish sophomore year on a strong note.”

LANCER HALL OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Sunny Hills High School offers a variety of programs that create opportunities for students to earn recognition in what they do. From award-winning publications to ribbon-crowning farm animal owners to record-setting Freeway League undefeated teams, many students choose to enroll on this campus to see how they can contribute to the school’s legacy of medals, trophies and plaques. Here are just some of the most recognizable organizations. Go to shhsaccolade.com to read about more programs.



Image used with permission from Joyce Choi

► HELIOS

Over the past five years, the *Helios* yearbook – named after the Greek god of the sun – has won six national honors, including a 2019 Columbia Scholastic Press Association [CSPA] Gold Crown, 2019 NSPA Pacemaker, 2020 CSPA Silver Crown, 2021 NSPA Pacemaker Finalist, 2022 CSPA Silver Crown and 2023 Best of the Best of Herff Jones award.

“We pay attention to what makes a good yearbook, which is good photography, good design and good storytelling,” said the annual’s 16-year adviser, Lindsay Safe. “Winning an award is just like icing on the cake; if we’re doing a good job, that’s what happens, so it’s nice to be rewarded and recognized for that.”

Helios co-editor-in-chief senior Tiffany Elnitiarta believes the staff won the awards because of its dedication.

“I feel very proud for every award we win because of all of the hard work that goes into our publication,” Elnitiarta said. “The staff does so much all year long to create the yearbook, and it feels really rewarding to know we are being recognized for all of the work we’ve done.”

Safe said she encourages students to join the award-winning staff, as it provides various real-world experiences.

“For kids that are interested in getting more involved in their school and being a part of that school community, it’s a great way to utilize all those skills while learning real-life skills at the same time,” the adviser said.

— JUSTIN PAK

PHOTO BY CHLOE KANG



► THE ACCOLADE

Since its inception in 1960, the school newspaper has continued to inform its readers with what current adviser Tommy Li often calls “all the news that’s fit to print,” an allusion to *The New York Times* motto. The publication has also aimed to create *Los Angeles/New York Times*-quality work. Such a work ethic has resulted in *The Accolade*’s living up to its namesake, winning numerous regional, state and national awards, including the most recent honor from the National Scholastic Press Association [NSPA] — a Pacemaker finalist, the program’s fifth.

“Our school has a rich history of journalism advisers and students who came before me who established the award-winning legacy we have today,” Li said. “This is my dream job because I was aware of how strong this school’s journalism program was when I applied for the opening, and I felt I had the background and training to elevate it to the next level.”

Since the 2016-2017 school year, the newspaper has evolved from a broadsheet to a tabloid size product starting in the 2018-2019 school year. For 2023-2024, *The Accolade* is embarking on another level of growth, moving from a newspaper to a full-color, glossy magazine product.

“I hope we can continue continue *The Accolade*’s award-winning legacy with our four magazine issues that we plan to produce,” said *Accolade* editor-in-chief senior Jaimie Chun, who agreed with Li to make such a change this school year.

— JUSTIN PAK

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► CONSERVATORY OF FINE ARTS



Image used with permission from Preetha Mathen

Post-COVID-19, the most prestigious honor awarded to a member of the Conservatory of the Fine Arts [COFA] came in the spring semester of 2022.

The *Orange County Register* recognized then-senior David Burn as its top dancer for commercial dance and a finalist for Artist of the Year.

As a team, the Lancer Regiment — comprising the marching band, drumline, front

ensemble, and the color guard — placed first at 2021 CSBC Division Championships and CSBC State Championships. It earned the program \$1,500 and a banner that reads, “CSBC Band Championship Champions Division 3A.”

Although the Regiment placed second the next year, it still reaped in \$1,000 and a check that reads, “CSBC State Finalist Division 1A/2A/3A.”

Dance Production and the Lancer Regi-

ment are just two of the various programs that COFA offers. The others are visual arts, theater, vocal ensemble and instrumental.

“We aim to widen the mindset of students to explore art forms outside of their personal pathway while expanding their interpretation of what it means to be an artist,” said co-COFA coordinator Preetha Mathen, who teaches 3-D Design. “The focus of COFA is to create an atmosphere that welcomes all art students, inspires each student to succeed and celebrates every discipline in a community of artists.”

Currently consisting of 986 members, Mathen said COFA — first organized under that name in 2010 — always has room for more.

“COFA offers field trips, opportunities for awards, chance to hear and learn from professional artists in addition to receiving special recognition at graduation with a stole and certificate,” she said. “Since we have a lot of teachers as a part of this program, it is truly the place to seek guidance.”

— AIDEN PARK

► GIRLS WATER POLO

For the girls water polo team, the stats epitomize the Lady Lancers’ success in the pool.

Six consecutive Freeway League titles. A league winning streak for the past six seasons — never having lost one single match at home or away.

That totals up to 48 consecutive league victories in a row.

“This ongoing winning streak is only possible because we have a strong culture of hard work that gets passed down from one class to the next,” said Keith Nighswonger, who has overseen the girls water polo program for roughly 30 years. “Everybody wants to uphold our culture, so we have been very fortunate to have a lot of high character people in those positions.”

The team’s success reached a new level last season when the Lady Lancers went 30-3 in addition to winning the Garden Grove and Chino Hills tournaments in November and December respectively. Those titles ended up being a prelude to the team’s first CIF Divi-

sion 3 finals appearance.

Despite the Lady Lancers’ letting that CIF title slip away to private school J Serra of San Juan Capistrano, Nighswonger praised his team’s overall season efforts, referring to his players as the best public school girls water polo team in Southern California.

Utility player senior Julianna Garcia attributes the team’s recent achievements to her coach’s high standards and her peers’ emphasis on teamwork.

So for those seeking to join the girls water

polo team to help keep its unbeaten Freeway League streak going, the irony is Nighswonger, who retired as a social science teacher on campus last semester, will never mention it.

“I tend to avoid mentioning past achievements as those were the accomplishments of last year’s team and not this year’s team,” he said. “When we don’t dwell about the past and simply practice to get better and do things fundamentally correct, the positive results tend to naturally follow.”

— AIDEN PARK

Image used with permission from Julianna Garcia



► BOYS GOLF

Since 2004, the Sunny Hills boys golf team has maintained a “par”-fect Freeway League record, consisting of 19 consecutive titles.

It has also achieved other major accomplishments including third in the 2020-2021 Division 1 CIF championship and first in the 2022-2023 Division 1 CIF championship.

“We’re blessed to have Los Coyotes Country Club near our campus because the junior golfers there all know the excellence and tradition of our golf program,” said boys golf head coach Scott Enrico, who took over the program in 2018. “They want to play for Sunny, and I think the success of the golf program that the old coach brought to Sunny Hills makes our team better.”

Boys golf player junior Caleb Kim credits Enrico for keeping the



Image used with permission from Scott Enrico

team in the best shape to maintain its competitive edge year after year.

“He just knows how to bring a team together by having trust in us,” said Kim, who’s been on the squad since his freshman year. “He takes new players out to new courses and encourages us to practice and grow together.”

The Lancers’ dominant legacy on the links should be something to be proud of, the junior said.

“We’re probably the best team there is,” he said. “You can’t name any other team that has been to state more than our team in California, and we’re always up there and always in contention.”

The coach said he has been able to maintain such a high level of commitment to excellence because of the mindset he has established in his players each season.

“Our boys all live and breathe golf,” Enrico said. “It’s a passion — it’s a lifestyle for our boys.”

— NATHAN LEE

► AGRICULTURE

Just one year after Sunny Hills opened in 1959, the agriculture farm was added at the bottom of the hill near the corner of Lancer Way and Bastanchury Road for such animals as horses, goats and sheep. Many students who took agriculture classes eventually joined the local Future Farmers of America [FFA] chapter. Besides learning about floral design and agricultural science in the FFA program, students have the chance to raise an animal like a cow or a pig from the beginning of the school year and then showcase it the next summer at the Orange County Fair [OC Fair], where they can earn ribbons.

“The goal of the program is to ensure that students are learning not only the science curriculum, but also having an opportunity to experience events that most students don’t have on campus, such as raising an animal, or traveling up and down the state of California just by taking an agriculture class,” said agriculture chairman and teacher Brian Kim, who serves as the Fullerton Joint Union High School District’s teacher on special assign-



Image used with permission from Preetha Mathen

ment overseeing all agriculture programs since the 2022-2023 school year.

Alongside the OC Fair, the agriculture program produced students who have won State Championships in their respective categories including the Fruit Tree Judging competitions and Grapevine Judging team.

Kim said he wants to see students stand out from the rest by giving it their full effort compared to other schools.

“We’ve [continued] to push our program by being committed to our students

and driving home the motto that students come first,” he said.

Kim invites future students to join this program for its unique perks and the opportunities it provides.

“[This] is such an appealing program and students don’t know that it makes them stand out on their college applications,” he said. “This program will give students an alternative journey through their science curriculum including different hands-on [experiences].”

— NATHAN LEE



New awards uplift students' morale after years of distanced learning

STORY BY JAIMIE CHUN AND HANNAH LEE

Digital detox

Before the widespread COVID-19 pandemic, the Sunny Hills administration had honored students with academic awards like Student of the Month, Lancer Knight and Rotary Top 100. However, titles of individual student recognition like these faded away during the era of muted gray boxes and faces half-covered by woven cotton.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, forcing all public schools in the state to shut down mid to late March, several of these awards programs either disappeared or got revamped upon students' return to in-person instruction more than a year later.

"We used to have Student of the Month awards quite a bit, but it was a lot of work from over 90 teachers to try to [arrange the awards] in their departments," principal Craig Weinreich said. "We weren't getting very consistent input from teachers across the board, and during the pandemic, there were just so many other things that teachers had to do, so it was difficult at that time."

The pandemic also altered Lancer Knight recognitions, as the award ceremony relocated from the Fullerton Auditorium to the SH quad because of safety restrictions within enclosed buildings and became referred to as Lancer Awards Night.

Now more than a year back in person, school officials have approved two new methods to honor students — both of which have little to do with academic achievement.

Introduced in November 2022, the Parent Teacher Student Association's E cubed award honors students nominated by teachers or staff with a certificate for their effort and engagement in the classroom. Originally proposed near the end of last semester but didn't start until the 2023-2024 school year, the Lancer LEGEND medallion is another program that recognizes students for their character and work ethic.

"Oftentimes, we just focus on the academic side of things," said Weinreich, who oversaw the approval process of both recognition opportunities. "We want to focus on the whole student, and that's always been our balanced approach to create good young adults."

Though the negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic may have lingered strongly in people's minds, it has also paved the way for positive educational changes. With direct links between mental wellness and recognition, Sunny Hills has updated its ways of honoring students that steer toward increased self-esteem.

To explore the link between teens' mental health and recognition — even if it's not for academic excellence — *The Accolade* reached out to mental wellness and psychology expert Shibeal O'Flaherty.

"Now more than ever, it's important to understand how to make students feel valued and recognized for their work," said O'Flaherty, who specializes in behavioral science applications in the professional workplace as a research fellow at Harvard-Kennedy College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. "It's still really important for the organi-

zational leaders at a school to figure out the best ways to recognize and reward students for a job well done."

PANDEMIC'S EFFECT ON AWARDS

During the over-a-year period of distance learning in the pandemic, student motivation experienced a sharp decline as the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis impeded peer relationships and introduced uncertainty about the future, according to a 2021 study by the U.S. Department of Education.

The abrupt situational change altered daily responsibilities, causing students to lose motivation in enthusiastically tackling any other tasks, said Wendy Boring-Bray, a doctor of Behavioral Health and Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor, in an August 2020 *Psychology Today* article.

"The main contributors — being disconnected, not having the chance to be with friends, having that social belonging component — is what drove lower self-esteem across not just students, but everyone," O'Flaherty said. "If autonomy is low, and if you feel like you have low control over what you're doing in the job, that's gonna make you less motivated."

Teachers found it difficult to develop interpersonal relationships through Zoom, which could have left many deserving students unrecognized during the pandemic, Weinreich said.

In light of such events, SH mental health specialist Staci Balliet said improving students' mindset is a goal Sunny Hills is striving for.

"I can confidently say that Sunny Hills is putting an emphasis on student wellness and putting several things in place to work toward this vision," said Balliet, who's in her first year here in a full-time capacity working in Room 20.

Though Advanced Placement Psychology teacher David Wilde wasn't aware of what motives the administration had in implementing new recognition programs, Wilde said these awards could be a way of improving students' low self-esteem.

"There were definitely mental health issues that people observed and recorded for young people and students as a result of COVID-19, so maybe this is a way to try to address those things or try to help those students who are still suffering some of the side effects of that," said the social science teacher, who also coaches football. "I don't know if that's a conscious thing that they did, but it definitely could be."

By expanding the scope of who can receive these awards and not limiting recognition to a select few based on measurable achievements, Wilde said this fosters a more inclusive community.

"It also gives them a sense of purpose, like they belong as part of this campus community and [are] doing something to help the campus be better, so that's going to help their mental health," he said.

WHAT'S THE SELF-EFFICACY THEORY?

Awards have traditionally put the spotlight on measurable achievements, such as academic records or the number of athletic championships.

O'Flaherty refers to the self-efficacy theory, which emphasizes the importance of people's own perceptions of their capabilities as reflective of their successful outcomes.

"This theory is about our belief that you are competent, and you can get the thing done — feelings of connection to whatever you're doing," she said.

Similarly, Wilde points to two psychological areas to explain how honors can be related to mental health.

"The psychological community, in terms of behaviorism, [believes] that human behavior is based on external factors like rewards and punishment, and it's not based on any sort of internal factor — so self-esteem is an internal factor," he said. "Humanistic school of psychology would be like, when they're getting a reward, it's helping them to self-actualize — become the best version of themselves."

O'Flaherty said the importance of non-academic awards is that it focuses on the character of the students.

"It's not just about academic achievements, it's also important to be a good person," she said.

COUNTERPRODUCTIVE EFFECTS?

However, O'Flaherty said studies about the advantages of awards that emphasize integrity aren't as widespread.

According to a 2016 study by Harvard University, highlighting exemplary peer performances may have counterproductive effects, such as leading to quitting. This study coins this phenomenon as "discouragement by peer excellence."

"If you recognize people in that way, then it can actually undermine the motivation of other students," O'Flaherty said. "The reason being that it can cause them to perceive that they can't achieve that level of performance."

The usage of some awards made its appearance during the pandemic early on to encourage attendance, according to O'Flaherty, who referred to a colleague's study on the demotivating effects of awards.

In this study, handing out rewards for attendance following the pandemic actually led to a decrease in student attendance.

"That's just a good example of how it's really important to back up any kind of reward or recognition kind of policy that you're introducing — really understand whether the award is motivating and can increase performance," O'Flaherty said.



FUTURE OF RECOGNITION PROGRAMS

Though the start may have been with the introduction of Lancer LEGEND, Weinreich said this small step toward a more comprehensive recognition system for Lancers may broaden.

"We're trying to find ways to recognize even the students who aren't getting all A's or doing things academically," he said. "We have amazing students that do great things all the time."

"It's a matter of us trying to become more aware of those things so that we can give them recognition for what they did and make them feel good about themselves and how they're helping out."

Senior Savannah Taylor, who received a Lancer LEGEND medallion for selflessness, said she encourages Sunny Hills to continue to recognize her peers in similar ways for years to come.

"The existence of such awards shows that we still have kindness in this world," she said. "Getting this award also showed me that maybe I can change and be more outgoing because getting recognized means that what I do matters."

With much to still discover in the implications awards can have on students, O'Flaherty said it's important for school officials to get feedback from the student body.

"In the academic world, I would say, speak to students about it, figure out what works for them, what are the ways they want to be rewarded," she said. "I think that's the best way to figure out what is working, what can be changed and what should be continued."

“THE EXISTENCE

of such awards shows that we still have kindness in this world. Getting this award also showed me that maybe I can change be more outgoing because getting recognized means that what I do matters.”

- senior Savannah Taylor



DEALING WITH PRESSURE

Athletes learn to balance the weight of recognition

STORY BY **STACY KIM** ILLUSTRATIONS BY **JINA HAN**

It was the first time the Sunny Hills girls water polo team reached the CIF title game. For six years, the Lady Lancers had dominated the Freeway League, remaining undefeated.

In previous years, the girls water polo players saw their season end abruptly in the early rounds of CIF playoffs — but not during the 2023-2024 school year.

The Lady Lancers (30-2) defeated their CIF playoff opponents handily en route to the championship round vs. private school, JSerra of San Juan Capistrano.

“It felt great to be recognized every morning after a good win... It made the team feel more validated as a whole,” water polo goalie Sienna Bertsch said. “We all knew it was possible to make it to where we were and people recognizing it was an amazing feeling.”

On Saturday morning Feb. 18, the girls water polo team traveled from Fullerton to Irvine High School’s aquatic stadium to face the Lions (24-4). The Lady Lancers kept pace with the Lions through most of the first half but could not hold off JSerra’s offensive push in the second half.

After losing 13-5, Nighswonger helped his players deal with the defeat during a post-game meeting before the bus ride back home.

“We’re public school champions so regardless of the score, I’m proud of all that we’ve accomplished,” The coach said to the girls.

Varsity water polo utility player senior Hannah Reekstin only expects the best for the next season.

“Even though our game ended with a loss, I’m so proud of us for being the first girls team at Sunny Hills to make it to the CIF finals,” Reekstin said. “It was worth everything, and I’m confident that we’ll work harder because there’s always room for improvement.”

Though Bertsch and Reekstin managed their anxiety over each playoff match, some athletes may find it a struggle to deal with the grueling pressure before and after games is an example of the challenges they face when choosing to add sports to their academic load. Whether the goal is a Freeway League title or a CIF plaque, the burden per-

sists. However, with resources like the Sunny Spot and athletes’ own coping mechanisms, mental wellness among athletes is largely recognized.

Mental health specialist Staci Balliet said she intends to follow the footsteps of previous mental health specialist David Saldana, who now works full time at the Fullerton High School, by doing classroom presentations later this school year regarding mental health for sports teams and different programs.

Having experience as a swimmer in high school, Balliet said she understands the importance of regrouping into an optimistic mindset after each sports contest.

“I know that a lot of my teammates often felt pressured during and after games, so it was always helpful for everyone to just completely forget about their bad game and focus on what we’re going to do good next,” she said.

For athletes returning to a new season or entering competitive tournaments, the mental health specialist reminds athletes not to link their self-worth to their performance in

sports.

“I think students feel very connected to [their sport] and oftentimes find a lot of their identity in that community,” Balliet said. “A big part of their identity is in their sports, so their mental health can definitely be affected by how well or bad they do.”

Just as she suggested student athletes to deal with pressure, baseball outfielder and pitcher senior Peter Mellen said he has made efforts to calm his teammates’ nerves.

“I tell everyone that it’s just a game that we’re playing, and it’s just for fun so don’t stress too much and don’t take it too seriously,” Mellen said. “Then, of course, finding time to put in work for baseball and school through good management is key.”

Performance pressure is common for SH athletes like junior varsity soccer player sophomore Lucy Lamping who participates in competitions and tournaments in hopes of meeting the expectations of winning from parents, coaches and team members.

“I’m always trying to stand out in some way, and I don’t think it’s necessarily for praise, but the pressure to just do well,” Lamping said. “It’s mostly so I don’t disappoint my teammates, and I also hold myself to a high standard, so it’s more pressure from myself to do better.”

Senior Madison Moreno said she also experiences the constant need to live up to certain expectations either created by herself or by her Corona Angels Softball club sport.

“Sometimes, I have imposter syndrome because whenever I do bad, I think to myself, ‘Do I even deserve that spot in college’ or constantly compare myself to my other really good teammates,” said Moreno, who also plays pitcher on the varsity softball team.

From her sixth period SH softball practices to after-school private lessons for her club softball team (totaling 20 hours a week), Moreno’s night routine begins later than most people to complete homework and study for tests — all while attempting to take care of her body and mind. For her, she acknowledges the latter has often been forgotten.

“There are definitely times when I subconsciously put my sport above my own mental health,” she said. “I think sometimes I put everything second to softball because of all the expectations I set for myself, so it definitely gets really stressful at times.”

She also learned a lot about herself during her underclassman years.

“In sophomore and junior year, I took a

lot of AP [Advanced Placement] and honors classes that made playing a sport really difficult for me because there was just so much work,” the senior said. “I would find it hard to manage school assignments, ASB [Associated Student Body] and softball, and it would be too much for me at times.”

Moreno said she has since found ways to cope with the stress of balancing school and sports.

“This might sound really childish and funny, but genuinely playing Roblox with my sister always takes my mind off of everything and of course, playing with my dogs,” said Moreno, who usually takes part in these activities after sports competitions have ended.

Mellen testifies to the additional stressors of rigorous classes on top of sports and finds himself struggling to balance his priorities among baseball, extra lessons and school work.

“When [the] season is around, I’ll be a lot more focused on practice, and school might not become the first priority for me,” he said. “But this would just cause me more stress in school because then I won’t be performing as well so it just snowballs.”

Balliet also offers the Sunny Spot in Room 22 which welcomes all students, including athletes who combat the burdens of balancing school work and sports, through a referral from their counselors.

“If these athletes are feeling overwhelmed or stressed, they can come in and utilize any of the stress balls, coloring book, and other stress relieving items in the room,” she said. “They can come in and touch base with me and if they’re in need of extra support, we try to connect them with extra assistance as well.”

Balliet agrees with Moreno about student athletes taking the time to find coping strategies to deal with balancing academics and sports.

“It’s healthy for students to learn what types of coping skills are going to be helpful for them to utilize in order to manage their stress,” she said.





ILLUSTRATIONS BY **JACOB KIM**

CUE THE LIGHTS

Theater Tech students reveal the importance of those working behind the scenes

STORY BY **CHRISTINE YOO**

With a clipboard, papers and a pen in hand, then sophomore stage manager Rachel Kim sat at the front row seats in the Performing Arts Center [PAC], her eyes scoping the stage as the actors rehearsed their lines for the upcoming “Lord of the Flies” production in April 2022.

Kim’s mind jumbled together as she attempted to properly correct any misspoken lines, convey stage cues to the actors and make sure that the lighting and sound were in tune with the scenes — all tasks of a stage manager.

“‘Lord of the Flies’ was definitely my hardest production because I was so inexperienced and anxious with the bigger cast and set than compared with ‘Alice in Wonderland,’” she said. “I struggled to keep up with my responsibilities and communicate with the cast members, but it was also a learning experience, and I feel a lot more comfortable stage managing now.”

Contributions like hers, which the audience will never see, fuel and run the shows and musicals performed in the PAC, theater teacher Christian Penuelas said.

“Without them, it just wouldn’t be possible to put on a show,” Penuelas said.

This behind-the-scenes team known as Theater Tech — which Kim is a part of — manages all the technicalities that come with running a production. Instead of striving for the limelight as an actor on stage, the group finds more reward and joy in being part of the backstage process.

“I was the only tech kid who adamantly didn’t want to act because of my social anx-

iety, so Mr. Penuelas had me be a teacher’s assistant instead and eventually asked if I could stage manage our first show — ‘Alice in Wonderland,’” said Kim, who joined the combined Technical Theater and Advanced Theater class in her sophomore year in 2021. “From then on, I’ve been the stage manager for all the shows, which I am incredibly thankful for.”

The stage manager said she gains a sense of comfort when being a part of the process behind the scenes rather than as an actor.

“I did want to be involved in theater in some way, just not on stage,” she said. “So during the pandemic, I did some research on backstage theater mainly by watching a lot of YouTube videos and decided that I wanted to do something like that at least once.”

Now as a senior, Kim has stage managed and helped in sound and lighting in all the theater productions so far: “Alice in Wonderland,” “Lord of the Flies,” “Wait Until Dark” and “The Sound of Music.”

Although the stage manager said she joined Theater Tech to avoid the spotlight and doesn’t expect any awards, she hopes more people recognize the team’s contribution.

“I wish people were more aware of just how much work and stress goes to each production behind the scenes,” the senior said. “Rehearsals are long, and we get there before the actors do to set things up; I’ve invested at least 350 hours into the theater program with rehearsals.”

Regarding recognition, Kim said although she would be thankful for small gratitude, she feels rewarded and satisfied through seeing the actors’ performance and their appreciation toward her rather than a grand

gesture of recognition from students aimed at Theater Tech.

If those in Theater Tech want recognition from an outside source, they can look into the *Orange County Register’s* Artist of the Year program, which celebrates and recognizes student artists.

In the theater discipline, students have the chance to win in either acting, musical theater performances or theatrical design. However, for the Theater Tech crew to qualify for such an honor, Penuelas would need to add another task for those behind-the-scenes — stage design.

“Props depend on the show and all the productions we’ve done so far required certain sets and props that were more grounded and the students couldn’t make,” he said. “I do sometimes ask the tech crew to bring small props they may have from home or to find any online for myself to buy.”

Penuelas said he has mainly rented sets from companies such as The Electric Company Theater or rented from other schools like La Habra High School.

Nevertheless, the theater teacher said implementing something like this is possible in the future.

Meanwhile, Kim said she’s content with how she’s received by castmates and their respect for her and Theater Tech.

“I don’t think it would be good to have something like that at Sunny Hills,” she said. “Although it would give recognition to those who want it, I don’t want the theater to become a competitive program — it should be about growth and establishing relationships with others.”

Despite being behind the limelight, the unexpected and hidden aspects of theater that behind-the-scenes work brings is what attracts crew members, Penuelas said.

“It’s a completely different side of what people think of when they think of theater,” the theater teacher said. “It gives students an opportunity to shine in different aspects of the performing arts that don’t revolve around the performing aspect — they can be a part of the storytelling process in another way.”

“PART OF THE STORYTELLING PROCESS IN ANOTHER WAY.”

-THEATER TEACHER CHRISTIAN PENUELAS



ILLUSTRATION BY IRIS KIM

As college application season for seniors approaches, The Accolade copy editor Nicole Park conducted a Q&A with the campus guidance technician Genesis Perez, who supports the counseling team and aids students with college applications, financial aid and career awareness.

Q

How can students try to stand out in their application?

Using “I” statements and going straight to the point could definitely help a student stand out.

Don’t make your essays too vague — always give as much detail as possible.

You should utilize every opportunity that they’re providing you within the application for you to speak about yourself.

Why is the honors/award section so important?

It’s important because now it’s a bigger component of the application. Because SAT and ACT scores are not required [for University of California and California State University schools], admissions officers are looking at other avenues to admit students in.

Honors and awards could express what you do not only as a student but as an athlete or as someone in the community.

Are there awards that can make an applicant stand out?

There isn’t really one that is worth more than the other because they’re giving you an award for a specific reason.

Is it impressive if a student has a lot more awards than other applicants?

No, I wouldn’t say that. It’s not too much about quantity but rather the quality of work you are doing. If your awards are only one or two areas but you’ve been there for a long time and you hold leadership positions, it’s better to be value quality over quantity.

What might the honors/awards section reveal about an applicant to the admissions officers?

It can show that you’re a well-rounded student. Not only are you focusing on your academics, but you’re also looking into your extracurricular activities.

Again, it can be within Sunny Hills or within your community.

What can and should applicants include in the honors section?

I mean it can be like honor roll. It’s very broad and there are many awards titles to the awards, so it is just anything and everything that you’ve received.

Activities and awards are usually written in the most recent order.

What are some activities that make an applicant stand out from the others?

Anything and everything that you’re involved with, not only here at Sunny Hills but also in your community, could make you stand out. Whether it’s through the church, supporting your siblings or tutoring any of your neighbors, anything like that still counts and can be put on your application.

The Accolade also reached out to academic writing and research coach Dr. Lauren Joseph. Previously a professor of sociology at Pennsylvania State University, Joseph now runs LJ Academics, an online platform that offers academic support to high school, college and graduate students, including research and applications.

Is there a certain way students should write their college application?

Students should think about writing their application as a holistic whole, like painting a picture of who they are, what they care about, their values and their qualities.

The admissions committee wants to know what’s special about you and why they should choose you over someone else. Also, make sure you spend enough time writing up those activities and honors sections.

How can students try to stand out?

To stand out, conveying the uniqueness of who you are, looking at the application as a whole, a holistic whole, and being able to convey your values, qualities, skills and your talents to that committee is important.

I would say, do not attempt to deliver what you think they want to see. If you’re trying to do that, it’s going to backfire, and you’re gonna come off as really generic, and there’s no reason that they would pick you over someone else.

Why is the honors/awards section so important?

It is important because it can show students are really taking initiative in the world, that they’re showing leadership, and that they’re having an impact in whatever area they choose.

So whatever it is that you’re really into, just try and shine in that little piece of the world and shine in that one way that’s unique to you.

You don’t need to be diverse. You need to bring one piece of you.

Is it impressive if a student has a lot more awards than other applicants?

It’s not the quantity of awards that matters, it’s the quality. To put it bluntly, six awards for “good participation” or something like that are not equal to one National Merit Semifinalist award!

What do you think is the most important part of the college application?

I think that there are two ways to answer this question: the first way is, the most important part of your application is your academic achievement, like your grades and the

rigor of your curriculum.

In some cases, your test scores and then things like your activities, honors or awards.

But another way to think about it is to think about the application itself as a way to represent yourself as a whole, as a unique individual, and to kind of construct or to paint a picture of who you are in a holistic way, like what you’ve done and really what you would be bringing to their campus if they chose you.

As more and more students receive the same recognition, how can they stand out in the honors sections?

You want to stand out by not only being a well-rounded student, but going for the depth, not the breadth, and kind of demonstrate initiative and impact.

You want to make sure that you express the quantifiable impact of what you’ve done. Look for honors and awards and that special field that you’re a total nerd about, and then also to stand out, make sure that you’re telling them.

Is there a certain way students should phrase their awards and honors section?

I would not include any humor in the awards and honors section; that is not the place for humor.

I think that there can be some humor if it’s natural in the rest of your application and in the essays.

You should have active verbs that show what you did that had a quantifiable impact.

What can and should applicants include in the honors section?

So my understanding is that, if it’s not an academic type of achievement, it would go in the activities section and not the honors or awards section.

It can also include certificates, so if you do a program that comes with a certificate, that is an award in a way.

Can students include awards that they’ve earned before high school?

Only awards earned during high school should be reported.

Q

“YOU DON’T need to be diverse. You need to bring one piece of you.”
- Dr. Lauren Joseph

A

A SPARK

OF

LIGHT

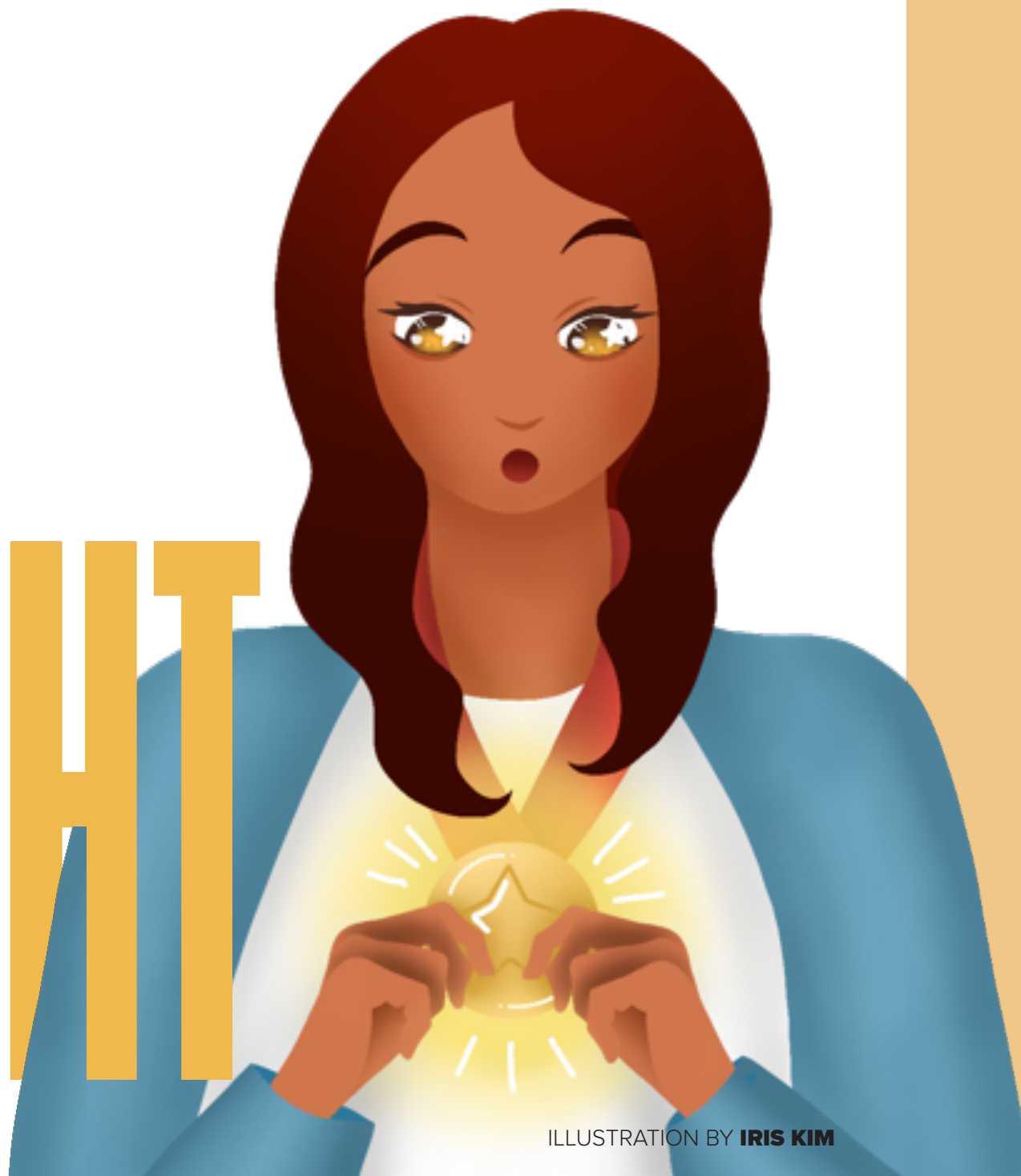


ILLUSTRATION BY IRIS KIM

STAFF EDITORIAL

Character-driven awards deserve more praise

The Accolade Editorial Board count: 11 agree and five disagree with the benefits of the new character-based recognition programs that school officials have implemented since the 2022-2023 school year.

Sunny Hills recognized 18 valedictorians in the 2022-2023 school year. With the requirements of maintaining a 4.0 unweighted GPA as well as 32 minimum honors semester classes, this prestigious title is typically associated with high academic performance and rigor throughout all four years here.

Yet one demand still remains understated: no academic honesty violations. In essence, the school not only rewards valedictorians for excelling academically, but also morally.

Seeing that the esteemed recognition of being named valedictorian still requires students to have virtue, the SH administration's decision to implement Lancer LEGEND — a solely integrity-based honor — highlights what truly matters in the long run.

Amid a hypercompetitive society that seems to only value constant innovation and academic perfection, the awards demonstrate that building integrity is just as, if not more, important than getting straight A's.

According to a draft document that explains the recognition program Associated Student Body [ASB] adviser David Fenstermaker created, students will be acknowledged for reaching their "full potential" in academics, leadership, selflessness, resilience and character. As of Sept. 14, three students have been rewarded with a T-shirt, medal and brief distinction in class, according to a Sept. 1 digital newsletter from principal Craig Weinreich.

Upon receiving such tributes, students can know that their character, as well as their peers', don't go away unnoticed.

In February of the 2022-2023 school year, the

administration also introduced the Parent Teacher Student Association's [PTSA] Exceptional Effort and Engagement award, also known as E cubed. Though it was an inaugural award, a total of 11 students received a certificate that commended them for their effort and participation in the classroom.

Although the benefits of these awards are clear, some wonder whether they are necessary. After graduating high school, students are forced to face a society still dominated by resumes and measurable accomplishments, such as the number of championships or those that show academic prowess. As a result, some may argue character-based awards stir false hope of the same recognition in the workforce.

Regardless, living with "Lancer values" should not be treated as a competition.

Our campus should be a place where students feel recognized and supported — and not always in the academic sense. More importantly, out of the 2,400 and more students on campus, not all Lancers are acknowledged for their academic success, which could leave others in the dust. So if these awards help promote recognition, then by all means, our administration should continue this practice.

When the administration introduced such programs, its desire was not to promote a Lancer culture in which students "fake" their way into acting out in kindness to submit more promising college resumes. When students are appreciated for their moral actions, they not only feel instant gratification, but this would compel them to continue their good deeds and put our campus a step closer to becoming a more wholesome one.

These awards reward the students who have received them directly, but they can also encourage others on campus after seeing the benefits of their service to be more valuable to their campus. It wouldn't be a way of forcing good behavior but simply alerting the students that their kind and moral behavior aren't ignored.

Besides, if this bolsters students' confidence and fills them with joy, who is to say that this sort of recognition is unnecessary or not worthy of appreciation?

All in all, the administration desires to promote a moral and rewarding culture, and its decision to provide these opportunities should be lauded — if not considered Legendary.

The Accolade Editorial Board is made up of the top editors and section editors on the new 2023-2024 staff with the guidance of adviser Tommy Li. If you have a question about the board's decision or an issue for the board to discuss and write about, please send an email to theaccoladeshhs@gmail.com.

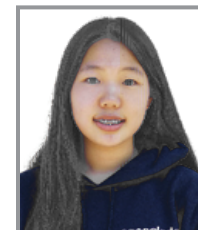


I'M A TRY-HARD

Toxic overachievement culture pushes me for recognition

In sixth grade, I first overheard this phrase passing by a lunch conversation: “Asians get A’s because they’re not ‘B-sians’ or ‘C-sians.’”

After processing it for a second, the underlying message behind it shocked me.



SEOWON HAN

Growing up, I experienced many different environments because my family moved from South Korea to Michigan in fifth grade for a few months, then to San Jose and then to Fullerton in eighth grade.

Because I had to keep up with the fast pace and learn ahead of what’s being taught at school in South Korea, the education system in the U.S. allowed me to relax a bit

more.

I spent my last year of elementary and almost the entirety of middle school in San Jose, where nearly half the student population was white. Despite being a member of an ethnic minority group, I wasn’t discriminated against or ripped down for my hard work — being in advanced classes and aiming for straight A’s — but encouraged to keep up and work together with peers.

So hearing such a phrase wasn’t insulting but rather funny especially because it did capture who I was — an Asian with straight A’s. But I attributed this accomplishment to my hard work, not my race.

Now, moving to Fullerton for the last couple of months of eighth grade was a big shift. Learning that Robert C. Fisler School had honors, pre-Advanced Placement [AP] classes and informational flyers for parents written in English and Korean — not English and Spanish — was shocking in itself and marked the distinction in the academic environment and culture.

I kept up with the differences by managing to motivate myself to get involved instead of my parents pushing me into everything. Thus, before my freshman year, I emailed the journalism adviser to learn how to get into *The Accolade* and the band director to audition for Symphonic Band to continue playing flute in school.

After spending two years at Sunny Hills, I noticed that overachieving students tend to squeeze in more AP classes rather than taking multiple electives. However, being part of *The Accolade* and band had greater value to me than trying to get my GPA as close to 5.0 as possible.

Still taking as many honors and AP classes as I could, I con-

tinued to strive for A’s and actively participated in class. Again, I tried my best to understand the material by participating in class and helping my peers in my math class. I aimed for a perfect A.

“Overachiever.”

I’ve been called this, too, and it’s surprising because I don’t consider myself as such.

However, the phrase, “teacher’s pet,” is a different case.

According to grammarist.com, “Calling someone a teacher’s pet is an insult; it implies that the person does not deserve his high status and has an unfair advantage. In this case, the word, ‘pet,’ refers to a pampered or spoiled person.”

If “try-hard” was a way to recognize the effort, “teacher’s pet” was the phrase that seemed to mock my intentions harshly.

At Sunny Hills, I met more who strive for excellence. That’s evident by our school ranking in the Top 1,000 in the nation with an AP participation rate of 66%, according to the *U.S. News and World Report*. On the other hand, some choose to stay in regular classes because they have different objectives.

Those who have other goals for high school and the future may think I’m a “nerd” for wanting to take on the rigor. I am a self-proclaimed perfectionist, but I’m not ignorant of the upward trend of maladaptive perfectionism — setting unrealistic expectations with low self-esteem and high self-criticism. The increasing pressure to exceed is profound and sometimes smothering.

A lot of students who fall in this category obsessively stress over tests, struggle with mental health even without noticing at times and sacrifice time to sleep and socialize with friends.

I also experience those circumstances, but it also tends to motivate me to become academically successful.

School encourages people to reach their full potential. Recognition programs like the Lancer Awards, Rotary Awards and Parent Teacher Student Association’s Exceptional Effort and Engagement [E cubed] Award aim to encourage and reward students for their academic and community achievements.

As a recipient of a math Lancer Award and Rotary Award freshman year and an E cubed one for the community building category the following year, I felt that my efforts have been valued.

“Why wouldn’t you want to achieve?” People have different priorities, and it’s OK not to be an overachiever or a try-hard. While aiming to get straight A’s might not be the goal for everyone, I will still strive for that title — continuing with the overachieving culture.

ILLUSTRATION BY JINA HAN



How my parents defy cultural stereotypes in education as I stay intrinsically motivated toward pursuing my dreams

STORY BY **FAITH JUNG**

NORMS

My parents gave me my first phone—an iPhone 6—when I was in sixth grade. After I started using social media, I always saw and heard about typical Asian parent stereotypes, but I never experienced that with my parents.



FAITH JUNG

Even today, I see people making parodies about how parents act and treat their children in the typical Asian household. For example, they would punish their kids for not receiving perfect grades and compare them to other students.

Although I did get a quick laugh out of these exaggerated videos and posts about the strict expectations these parents have on their children, I didn't think they represented real Asian parents and families.

Ever since I was in elementary school, my parents always made sure to recognize my efforts and express their pride in me often, unlike the stereotype that immigrant parents rarely praise their kids.

My parents never missed out on any of my award ceremonies throughout elementary to junior high school, always acknowledge my efforts and achievements and

help me when I need assistance or advice.

As a second-generation immigrant, I disagree with the stigma that Asian parents only focus on the drawbacks of their children's academic achievements rather than the positives.

Contrary to these common misconceptions, I never experienced this because my dad, a pastor and missionary born in South Korea, always prioritizes my own happiness and comfort over my grades or success. He rarely expresses his disappointment in me and instead lets me know that it's OK to not live up to everyone else's expectations, as long as I'm satisfied with myself.

My mom, who also immigrated from South Korea when she was 30 years old and is now a clinical psychologist, often reminds me to put in my best effort to attain my goals but never pushes me to feel like I need to do so to make her proud.

My parents don't pressure me to get straight A's or badger me about receiving low scores on tests.

I think high achievers tend to already be self-motivated and don't need extrinsic prompts to accomplish their goals.

Although I was rewarded for my success in school, I was happier with my own achievements than receiving the prize.

My accomplishments are a result of my own efforts, not my parents'. Juggling several honors classes, *The Accolade* and all my extracurriculars last year was no easy feat, but I still managed to maintain straight A's and my sanity.

I think not having to stress over satisfying my parents also contributed to my exceptional performance.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY **JACOB KIM**



I feel proud of myself when I attain my academic goals through intrinsic motivation, and I think it's enough that my parents are also proud of me. My motivation stems from my desire to thrive and succeed, so I don't think it's necessary to receive a reward every time I accomplish something.

For example, my mom earned a Ph.D. in clinical psychology without any pressure or reward from her parents to pursue such a high academic achievement throughout her whole life.

Because of the way my mom was raised, she encourages my internal motivations and interests in finding and pursuing what I want to do in my life.

For instance, instead of just telling me to succeed, my mom reminds me to explore what I genuinely want to do for my career so that I can enjoy it.

I study hard because it's just a necessary process to pursue my dream, not because academic excellence in high school is my only goal.

I feel happier accomplishing goals driven by my own passion, as opposed to completing tasks instructed by others.

People seem to think that these parents take their kids' achievements for granted and often don't acknowledge their hard work. However, they actually do recognize their children's successes and feel proud of them as well.

Whenever my brother and I do well in school or attain a goal, my mom and dad never fail to give us verbal acknowledgment. They always praise us with words of recognition and compliments.

Despite the stigma that Asian parents only emphasize what their children should accomplish and not what they already have, I believe these misconceptions are exaggerated. It is important to recognize that these familial relationships are built on something much deeper than what common stereotypes suggest.

So, to my parents, thank you for raising me in this kind of understanding and supportive environment.

NOWHERE BUT UP

