



IN THIS ISSUE:

ACADEMY UPDATE

So, what do sophomores *really* think of Academy classes?

PAGE 2

ZODIAC GUIDE TO GIFT-GIVING

What presents do the stars say you should be wrapping this year?

PAGE 4

FAVORITE MOMENTS OF FALL

Which fall events led the pack in popularity?

PAGE 6

WINTER FORMAL DANCE COMING IN 2026

By Olivia Hayes

“Will you be my sweetheart?”

This is what students will be asking each other as an exciting new dance enters Urbana’s social calendar!



In February, the sophomore class and their sponsors will be hosting the first annual Sweetheart Dance, giving them a new event to plan before diving in to planning prom and homecoming their upperclassmen years.

“We were thinking about a way to raise money for the sophomore class that wasn’t just the typical fundraiser, and that’s how we settled on doing a second homecoming. Not everyone gets to experience prom second semester, so we thought it would be fun,” said sophomore class sponsors Abigail Dace and Rosalie Esparza.

Although some students had doubts, 70.5% of the student body agreed that a winter dance would be

enjoyable and bring the entire school together.

“A winter formal would be so fun and raise school spirit. I always feel so much FOMO when other schools get to dress up and do a Vice-Versa,” said senior Leah Smith.

In some ways the dance will be similar to the Homecoming dance hosted earlier this year and the sponsors plan to promote it as a second homecoming as all grades will be able to attend, unlike Prom which is for juniors and seniors only.

“Having a winter dance would be a lot of fun. It would give the students an incentive and something to look forward to,” said junior Claire Daniels.

In the days leading up to the Sweetheart Dance, the sophomores will plan a spirit week, with each day representing how those around you can be your sweetheart. This is an idea the sponsors want to reinforce as the Sweetheart Dance isn’t just for couples. Days like matching costume day can be expected during this fun week.

Class sponsors hope this will become an annual tradition that brings the school together again in the winter like it does with homecoming in the fall.

So come on and get dressed up with your friends for the first annual Sweetheart Dance on February 7th!

PARKING LOT CRACKDOWN

By Ruby Pittenger

The student parking lot has become a steady source of frustration as more and more students without paid parking passes continue parking in the lot. Despite the school calling tow trucks on one

occasion, students without passes still appear to park in the lot each morning, leaving many paying students without the spaces they were promised.

Some students say the system feels unfair, especially when they’ve followed the rules and paid the fee but still end up searching for a spot or running late because others aren’t being held accountable.

“I paid for my spot, so I deserve to be able to park there without issues. Sometimes the lot is filled with cars that don’t have stickers, so I have to go park in the Aquatic Center lot which is so inconvenient for

me,” said senior Mia Schroeder.

The issue has impacted many students in negative ways, although some say the system of paying for parking in the first place is unfair.

“Students shouldn’t have to pay to park. It’s our school too, not just the staff, and parking should be available without extra cost for the students, just as it is for staff,” said senior Prium Patel. “The student lot is packed while the teachers’ lot is barely full, and students end up walking far in the cold.”

PARKING LOT CRACKDOWN



Continued from Page 1

The cost and availability of parking passes has limited some students from buying passes, leaving students without the resources to get one.

"I tried to buy a pass before school started, but they were already sold out. There wasn't enough for everyone," Patel added.

Some students have recommended solutions to the issues, explaining that the school should expand the lot or create assigned spots for students with passes.

Dean and the head administrator of the parking lot, Phil Sexton, believes the solution is a bigger lot.

"We need to make a bigger lot. There aren't enough spots for everyone, causing an overflow of cars. I've been trying to talk with Dr. Ivory Tatum to make a bigger parking lot," said Sexton. He also noted that there is ample room to do so.

This semester the school began towing cars as a solution. The attempt worked, but after a few days, the lot returned to its original state.

The parking lot situation remains complicated; hopefully next semester it will be solved!

HALF A CLASS FROM LUNCH: UPDATE ON ACADEMY CLASS MANDATE FOR SOPHOMORES

By Ananyah Tangmunarunkit

The school board implemented a lot of changes for this year's curriculum, but one that stands out--and directly affects a whole grade of students--is the change to sophomore Academy.

Academy is a class designed to help students learn information about education and beyond, covering career exploration, postsecondary education planning, financial aid literacy, and social and emotional learning, such as the new Seven Mindsets Program introduced this year.

While the class is only half a period long, it takes place during the students' lunch, cutting into the time designated for eating. During either 4th or 5th period, sophomores and freshmen take half the period to eat in the cafeteria, and the other half in different teachers' classrooms.

Although this means less-crowded lunch lines and a quieter cafeteria, the overwhelming consensus of this year's sophomores is that they want sophomore Academy gone.

"I really don't like it," sophomore Alisa Aksimtyeva said.

"It doesn't teach me anything, it's a repeat of last year, and [it] really just takes time out of my day when I could've had a longer lunch [to] finish up homework [where] I'd actually be with all my friends."

She's not the only one. Sophomore Vanessa Castillo Garcia was bummed to not have a longer lunch with friends, and sophomore Lahori Mitra, though understanding of how the Seven Mindsets Program may be "benefiting our social and emotional skills," really wishes it could be taught in a different way or time.

"It keeps me from seeing my friends and socializing," Lahori said. Because of new schedules and sophomore Academy being split between fourth and fifth period, she (and many others) don't get to see some friends for the whole day.

"... [N]o one told us we were going to have an Academy until our schedules came out at the end of the year," sophomore Luke Foley said. Having not enjoyed the Academy experience his freshman year, the news of taking it again as a sophomore was a shock to him and many others.

Continued on Page 7

'AND THAT'S EXCITING TO WATCH': ALUMNUS SEAN SMITH RETURNS TO UHS AS ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

By Trinity Dickens

If you were at the Homecoming Pep Assembly, you may have noticed a new emcee this year: Assistant Principal Sean Smith. Though Smith is new to the administration staff, he is not new to Urbana High School. As a member of the Class of 2010, Smith left his mark on the school as both a performer and Prom King!

Smith recalls one of his favorite memories from that time:

"I had a solo and I sang and it was the first time I think anybody could really hear me sing and I can sing. Everybody started screaming and cheering for me, and I felt so cool the rest of the day. And then my other favorite memory was when I was Prom King, so I thought that was really cool," he said.

After originally majoring in Mass Communications and living in Arizona, Smith decided to move closer to his roots. He began working at Jefferson Middle School in Champaign as a teaching assistant, where he fell in

love with special education and the administrative side of education.

What brought him finally back to Urbana was his love of the diversity the Urbana community offers.

"So for me, and I still see it to be true, there's a lot of diversity here, especially with having the university so close and having just all types of people from all over the world. People who are from the community are also very diverse in general. Urbana is a quirky town. The diversity really helps shape me to be very open-minded. I love to explore all different types of people and their cultures and just



feeling comfortable and confident to accept all different types of people," he said.

Community is important to Smith, and he is working hard to make his mark and be a strong part of it.

"I want everyone to view me as somebody who's very supportive and caring, and fun, right? And like funny and cool and stylish, but at the same time, I also want people to know that I have to do my job as an assistant principal to make tough decisions. It's coming from me trying to make the school a better place and have students and staff in a place they feel safe. Sometimes that involves tough

decisions or tough conversations, but I think the more you have those and the more you grow, the more you create a place that people want to be."

This is especially important to Smith because he sees high school as a place where students can flourish, just like he did at UHS.

"At high school, you really get to see who people become and be comfortable in their own skin. And that's how I felt in high school. As I was a junior and senior, I really felt like I could kind of open up and be myself, and I see that a lot with you kids. You grow into who you're meant to be. And that's exciting to watch."

THE SPARK BEHIND US: WHAT MOTIVATES YOU?

by CJ Blanden

Motivation is key for young minds to continue to grow. As students navigate through different obstacles in life, they all face various challenges. What motivates them might be different, but what they have in common is a desire for a better future.



Photo Credit: Maria Poblano

Having high expectations and exceeding those expectations are what sophomore Kenya Covington is all about.

“It’s hard to explain, but I just know that I have high expectations for myself because I’m known for being such a great scholar and getting what I want means a lot to me. Grades motivate me depending on the day because they can really get to your head and cause extra stress, but aside from that, I just strive to be the best version of myself academically, and that’s my motivation,” she said.

While many students focus on their personal futures, freshman Noorullhuda Ahadi cares a lot about what her teachers feel and how it can impact other students.

“Grades are the most important part [of motivating me] because the teacher is happy when you do well. It shows they are teaching effectively, and having good grades helps ensure a better future,” she said.

A focus on the future was a popular answer for what motivates students.

Junior Joseph Mirelez is looking forward to leaving high school and working for himself.

“I just want to graduate school so I can actually have a good job and own my own company one day,” he said.

Sophomore Ethan Scharf has also made up his mind: he knows that with good grades in high school, he can go to a great university, then get a great-paying job, and in the future may even work for NASA.

“I like helping people, I guess, and I’d like to do that as much as possible. Education can empower me to do that, to make a difference for the better in someone’s life, and it lets me make an impact on a large number of lives,” he said.

Scharf wants to “make some sort of innovation that helps people in some way. Along the way, helping other people as much as possible [is my goal]. That’s why I’m tutoring.”

Senior Alasia Gibson’s core motivation keeps it simple: “If my grades are good, I feel better about myself,” she said.

We all have different ways and different reasons, but we are all on the same journey of accomplishing our goals in the future, so take these words to heart. They might make you work even harder!

HOW’S LIFE FOR EARLY GRADS?

By Lillian DiSanto

December is a busy time of year with finals, concerts, and holidays right around the corner. Many forget about something that tops all of that for a small group of UHS students: graduation!

The UHS December Grads worked hard throughout high school to earn their credits early and prepare themselves for their amazing future.

Despite their accomplishments, many of the seniors had mixed emotions about this process, with many already feeling a pang of nostalgia for the friends they will not be seeing everyday any longer.

Though most December grads said the experience is a mixed moment, they still overwhelmingly recommend graduating early.

“I 100% would recommend early graduation to an underclassman, because I believe if you can do something great like graduate early you should take advantage of the opportunity, I think that you should stay ahead while you are ahead so that more opportunities can present themselves,” said Josie Bailey.

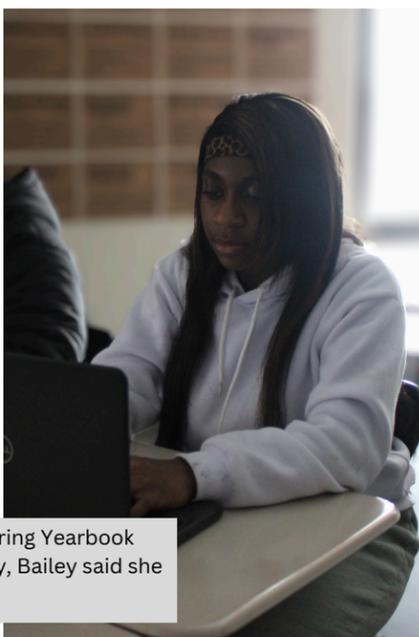
Nariyah Manley agreed, mentioning that early graduation gives students “a lot of time to think and prepare yourself for your future.”

This doesn’t mean the feelings are all positive. The pressure graduating early is getting to a lot of these students, including Cara-Lynn McGhee.

“There is a lot of pressure, honestly. You’ve only got a few months, so you gotta lock in and keep on top of your classes,” she said.

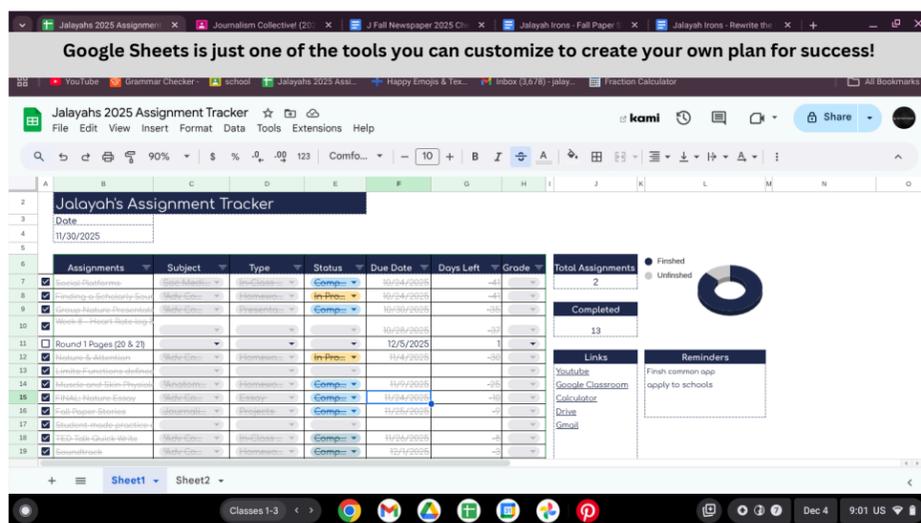
Bailey agreed. “The early graduation process had been a little scary due to me being on more of a time crunch than I would be if I stayed, but I know graduation year in general is stressful, so I didn’t expect anything less,” she said.

Even though the process can be tedious, the December grads of the class of 2026 are determined and focused on their academics and are ready to get a head start on their future. Good luck!



December Graduate Josie Bailey works hard during Yearbook class. Despite the challenges of graduating early, Bailey said she would still recommend it to underclassmen.

THE SUPER SIX: STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL STUDYING



By Jalayah Irons

When attempting to get all of your last-minute assignments done before break, there may be road blocks. After surveying students, we found that procrastination and time management were the biggest obstacles for most.

With finals and second semester right around the corner, here are some tips to beat them!

Tip 1: Imitation
Imitate the study habits of a character from a movie or TV show! Example: Rory Gilmore from *Gilmore Girls*, Hermione Granger from *Harry Potter*, or Elle Woods from *Legally Blonde*. Just don’t start watching the show instead of studying!

Tip 2: “Only at This Time”
Pick a habit or item that you use exclusively while studying. This small trick helps signal to your brain that it’s time to focus. For example, wear a special hoodie only during study sessions, chew mint gum only while studying, or snack on Goldfish crackers only when hitting the books.

Tip 3: Study Environment
Find a good productive area that’s not your bed when doing work! The library is a studying staple, but places like coffee shops, bookstores, or museum/art spaces with reading areas can also fit the bill! The University has a ton of options!

Tip 4: Music
Bye, bye lyrics! Give Jazz, Instrumentals, or Lo-Fi channels a try!

Tip 5: List
You can create an assignment tracker that will help you to see what assignments need to be done. Planner, Google Sheets, and Notes apps are perfect for organization and customization!

Tip 6: Discipline
Set goals for yourself to get assignments before they’re due. Prioritize your most important assignments first, then start on the rest. Keep yourself accountable by checking things off as you complete them!

With the Super Six, there will be no stopping you!

LOOK TO THE SKIES: ZODIAC GUIDE TO GIFT-GIVING

By Tristan Tanta

From when Babylonian priests in ancient Mesopotamia first aligned twelve signs to their calendar, to the ancient Greeks integrating constellations for the first time, to modern-day astrologers predicting moods and events, people have always looked to the skies for answers. Learn your friend or partner's ideal gift this winter and the coming new year based on their Zodiac Sign!



Aries: March 21 - April 19

Aries are brave and enthusiastic. They are determined, optimistic, and passionate. As a fire sign, Aries are active, individualistic, and natural leaders. A good gift for an Aries would be sports tickets, gear, or comfortable clothes. A sillier gift would be a Frisbee.

Taurus: April 20 - May 20

Taurus are the most dependable sign of the zodiac. They are reliable, patient, and responsible. As an earth sign, Taurus are practical, grounded, and committed. Good gifts for a Taurus would be modeling clay, cotton or linen clothing, or a cookbook. A sillier gift would be a Bonsai kit.

Gemini: May 21 - June 20

A Gemini looks forward to spending time with friends and family this holiday season. As an air sign, Gemini love spending time with others and are always curious and communicative. A good gift for a Gemini is a book or anything music-related. A sillier gift would be some unique sunglasses.

Cancer: June 21 - July 22

Cancers are imaginative, intuitive, and tenacious. As a water sign, Cancers are emotional, mysterious, and artistic. Some good gifts for a Cancer are painting supplies, a nice dinner with friends, or a trip to the zoo. A sillier gift would be a lego set.

Leo: July 23 - August 22

Leos are natural leaders, cheerful and passionate. As a fire sign, Leos are kind, courageous, and generous. Some great gifts for a Leo would be theatre tickets, jewelry, or new shoes. A sillier gift would be a bow tie or watch.

Virgo: August 23 - September 22

Virgos are practical, loyal, and analytical. As an earth sign, Virgos are organized, strong in character, and loyal. Some good gifts for a Virgo would be a day planner, a picnic with friends, or a new pet. A sillier gift would be a typewriter.

Libra: September 23 - October 22

Libras are kind, social, cooperative, and diplomatic. As an air sign, Libras

are sharp and intelligent, but also gentle and motivated strongly by their sense of justice. Libras are less motivated by material possessions than the other signs, but a good gift would be eccentric clothing or anything handmade or meaningful. A sillier gift would be a magazine subscription.

Scorpio: October 23 - November 21

Scorpios are a very understanding and intense sign. They are brave, passionate, and resourceful. As a water sign, Scorpios are experienced, emotional, and honest. A Scorpio would like a unique perfume or a concert ticket. A sillier gift would be an umbrella.

Sagittarius: November 22 - December 21

Sagittarius love going outside, debating, and speaking their mind. As a fire sign, Sagittarius are enthusiastic, as well as being known as the travelers and philosophers of the zodiac. A good gift for a Sagittarius is a trip, a philosophical text, or a new backpack. A sillier gift would be a pair of binoculars.

Capricorn: December 22 - January 19

Capricorns are responsible and disciplined. As an Earth sign, they appreciate friends, family, and tradition. A good gift for a Capricorn is anything handmade or anything exhibiting quality craftsmanship. A more unexpected gift would be a pair of crazy socks.

Aquarius: January 20 - February 18

Aquarius are intellectual, original, and independent. As an air sign, Aquarius hate wasting time and potential, but love mental stimulation and taking risks. Some good gifts for an Aquarius are headphones or difficult games and challenges. A sillier gift would be a Rubik's Cube.

Pisces: February 19 - March 20

Pisces are compassionate, artistic, and romantic. A water sign, Pisces are forgiving, selfless, and musical. A good gift for a Pisces is a musical instrument, digital album or vinyl; or a chill social event of any kind. A sillier gift would be a pet fish.

MEN'S WINTER FASHION TIPS

By Khaleel Pelmore

As the school year comes to an end, let's look at some of the coldest styles for this winter season, recommended by junior Marquan Dunn and senior Amir McDuffie, two students known for their style.

What's the go-to winter accessory that keeps you warm and stylish?

This winter, beanies are one of the best essentials to wear when it's cold while also helping you to stay warm. According to Dunn, a beanie always completes the outfit in the cold.

What trend will define winter fashion this year?

According to McDuffie, the top piece of the year goes to Carhartt jackets. Big and warm on the inside for the body, and a unique style on the outside for the soul. Who doesn't want to stay warm while looking good?

What's keeping your feet warm?
This is where the experts differed. According to McDuffie, his favorite winter shoes are a pair of grey and

black Balenciagas. Yes, they might cost a lot, but to him it's worth it for the added style.

Dunn's winter fashion tip that is a must is a good pair of wheat colorway Timbs because you can never go wrong with some good boots and classic style.

The experts had a lot to say about this year's winter fashion, but also wanted to give a shout out to their winter fashion icon: junior Melvin Braxton.

"When it comes to waking up in the morning and putting that stuff on," said Dunn, "Melvin is the man. He has great fits when it comes to fashion. His whole aesthetic is just great for the season."

QUIZ: WHICH WINTER WONDERLAND SONG ARE YOU?

1. HOW DO YOU START THE FIRST DAY OF BREAK?

- A. Open presents with your family
- B. Reach out to someone special
- C. Eat breakfast in your pajamas and goof around
- D. Watch a movie or show
- E. Post your morning on social media

2. WHAT DO YOU DO NEXT?

- A. Spend time with family
- B. Go on a winter walk with someone special
- C. Eat snow or build snow forts
- D. Catch up on work and chores
- E. Play games or hang out with a big group

3. PICK A FOOD TO EAT!

- A. Turkey
- B. Mashed potatoes
- C. Corn on the cob
- D. Stuffing
- E. Gingerbread house

4. IT'S THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY. WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

- A. Enjoying family time
- B. Taking a walk outside
- C. Making a snowman or snow angels
- D. Sleeping
- E. Planning a party

5. CHOOSE A GAME TO PLAY!

- A. Monopoly
- B. Connect 4
- C. Uno
- D. Jenga
- E. Operation

6. CHOOSE A DRINK!

- A. Hot chocolate
- B. Tea
- C. Juice
- D. Soda
- E. Energy drink

7. WHAT DO YOU DO ON THE LAST DAY OF BREAK?

- A. Relax and reflect
- B. Go shopping
- C. Play games, watch movies, or goof off
- D. Sleep in
- E. Hang out with friends

RESULTS ON PAGE 8!

STAFF SECRETS: BLIND ITEMS

Can you use the clues to figure out which staff member is hiding behind each blind item?

By Ruby Pittenger

The Globe-Trotting Gourmet

Near the main office, you might find her whipping up new recipes or internship opportunities for her students, but what you don't know is that she is a world-renowned traveller. Having been to 28 countries and 36 states, this fashionista is known all over the Urbana community and the world!

The Tri-Lingual Bird Whisperer

This staff member is known to speak in two languages, yet some may not know his third language: the language of ornithology. This Habitat for Humanity devotee spends his off time as the conservation chair for the Champaign County Audubon Society, spending his Sunday mornings leading guided bird walks!

The Drone-Flying Greenhouse Guru

In the greenhouse is where you might find her, nurturing her plant babies. Yet some may not know she is not only skilled in agriculture, but Unmanned Aircraft Systems, too! This blondie holds a commercial drone flying certification, meaning she has been licensed by the Federal Aviation Administration to fly drones for commercial purposes!

The Six-String Historian

This staff member is known for his witty personality and obsession with all things past, yet some may not know he is also obsessed with his guitar. This history buff and building boss spends his free time in his home music studio or performing at his church.

The Stats-Savvy Sportsman

You may know him as a math whiz, but some may not know he also has a passion for league sports. When not showing off his skill stats, this mathematician enjoys playing pool, ping pong, and bowling, and has even participated in leagues for two of these hobbies!

Turn to Page 8 for the Big Reveal!

ADVICE FOR LIFE'S MOST PRESSING QUESTIONS

By Vincent Podroykin

Life, believe it or not, is difficult. Everyone's experience of it is different, but what we all have in common is that nobody tells you how to live it to the fullest. That is, until now. Read on for advice for life's most pressing questions!

How do I talk to random people?

Life is short and difficult, so try to make friends; the worst they can do is backhand you. Remember, sticks and stones! Just walk up to somebody and try to strike up a conversation. Recent news and trending topics are always a safe bet. And if they don't respond, who wants to talk to them anyway?

What if I want money, but I don't want to work?

We all have been there before. We want some coins, but we don't want to be breaking our backs at a place of work! Although it may seem like a job is the only way to get the bag, there are other ways! If you have a lot of things lying around, sell them. Your trash could be someone's treasure! Selling snacks could work too because everyone likes to eat! But if all else fails, you might have to get a job (sorry).

How do I decide what I want to do in the future?

Honestly, nobody really knows what they're doing, so don't stress it. Start by figuring out what actually makes you happy. Try out different hobbies,

classes, or activities until something clicks. If you enjoy it and you're pretty good at it, that's a win. And remember, your future isn't set in stone. You can always change your mind later!

How do I not become bored?

Becoming bored is one of the many things that we will all feel at many points in our lives and even many points doing our day (I'm bored right now writing this!). Try to find a hobby or something to do that can occupy you for a good few minutes. It could easily turn into hours before you know it. After that, embrace the boredom! Believe it or not, studies show boredom is actually good for you!

How do I deal with all this drama?

Let it pass! Drama is messy and may be bad, but is the world going to stop? No, it's not. Remember: sticks and stones! Find a good way to resolve it and move on with your life! At the end of the day, most drama isn't worth the stress. Give it a little time, take a deep breath, and you'll probably wonder why it felt like such a big deal in the first place.

FALL SPORTS SENIOR SIGN OUT

By Valentina Gonzalez Ahuerma

Now that fall sports have come to an end, we are going to take the time to shine a spotlight on all the Fall sports with highlights from our seniors!

Volleyball: Rah'Kiyah Boatright Williams

"Volleyball has taught me so many things, and has introduced me to so many new people. I am so grateful for having the opportunity to play for this team for four years."

Soccer: Jayden Leman

"Playing soccer for Urbana has been an exciting sport for me in building skill and character. This experience has also given me the opportunity to be part of a great team."

Football: Curtis Blanden Jr.

"My favorite memory from senior year was getting first team BIG12 All-Conference and making the All-State Academic team. It showed all the hard work I have been putting in since my freshman year."

Girls Swim and Dive: Cecilia Birdsley

"Being in the water with these girls made it feel like summer never ended, and I'm super grateful that I was able to swim with them and make memories that will last a lifetime."

Golf: Landyn Hannah

"My favorite memory from this year's season was when we won the Oakwood Scramble as a team, placing 1st out of 16 teams."

Color Guard: Kailee LeNoir

"Being in color guard has helped me branch out and find my forever friends. Having to be in practice with these people and seeing it all pay off on the field is the best feeling."

Cross Country: Lavie Maisha

"Cross country is an amazing, yet difficult sport. You're out there racing miles alone, yet you're never truly on your own. We don't just push each other to hit PRs, we genuinely love each other. The care that we have for each other's success is the heart of our team."

Cheer: Asha Williams

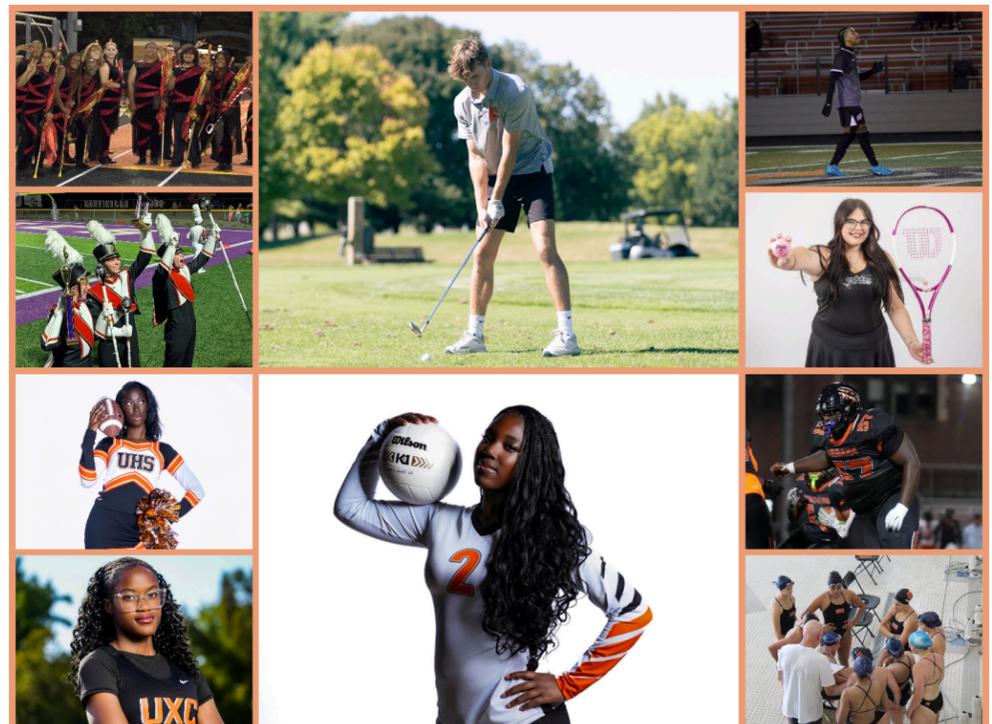
"My favorite memory of this season was on the boys senior night when we won our first game and everyone ran on the field to celebrate this accomplishment!"

Girls Tennis: Madolyn Posey

"My favorite memory from this season was getting to be captain of a team, that means so much to me!"

Marching Band: Beatrice Biggs

"My favorite memory is all of our bus rides listening to loud music and singing together."



IT'S THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME

By Ananyah
Tangmunarunkit

It's beginning to look a lot like that time of year again: the air is feeling cooler, the trees are almost bare, and the festive spirit is rising! With the forecast showing snow ahead this winter, it's the best time to start planning for some fun seasonal traditions to occupy you this winter break.

Don't have any ideas? Here are 7 activities to make your winter more cheerful:

1. Hang up some winter decorations!

The first step for getting into the festive spirit is to put yourself in a festive atmosphere! From garlands, wreaths, and lights to window stickers and props, even a small touch goes a long way.

2. Snow much fun!

There's so much you can get up to when there's snow on the ground. Have a snow angel or snowman-making contest with friends, find a big hill to sled down, or go ice skating at the local ice arena!

3. Warm up by a nice fire!

Nothing can go wrong with a comfy fireside tale. Watch a timely winter movie, read a holiday story, or even write one yourself for a story exchange with friends.

4. Yummy food...

One of the best times to eat warm cookies is when it's chilly out. Bake sweet treats and make hot chocolate to combat the cold outside. Gingerbread is always a good classic (whether in a decorated house or as a non-running, very-catchable gingerbread man) or make some ready-to-go hot cocoa bombs for a fun drink.

5. Exchange gifts!

Feeling jolly? Have a small gift exchange with friends to share some joy! Through games like secret santa or white elephant, silly joke presents or meaningful gifts from the heart, receiving any present is sure to make someone smile.

6. Winter crafts

Paper snowflakes, homemade snow globes, frozen ice lanterns, decorated candles, and handmade cards: there are plenty of winter-themed crafts to keep you busy when it's too cold to go outside!

7. Spread some cheer!

Laughter always feels more fun when it's shared with others. Send a few fond messages to relatives and friends through thoughtful cards or even go carolling to spread warmth and amusement to strangers.

There's so much to be done with the winter season. Whether celebrated with friends and family, or just enjoying your own company, have a cheerful break!

TASTE OF THE FUTURE: CAFETERIA MAKEOVER

By Madisyn Evans

Last year, the Urbana High School cafeteria made headlines for all the wrong reasons when it failed its health inspection with nine violations. In the year since, the cafeteria has undergone major transformations. What was once a source of concern for students, staff, and families has now become a point of progression and a show of perseverance.

After receiving the yellow flags and the criticism, the cafeteria staff committed to improving food safety, cleanliness, and the overall dining experience. This year, students are noticing cleaner serving areas, fresher food choices, and a stronger focus

on meeting health standards. The staff of the cafeteria is working hard to turn last year's setback into a success story of responsibility and improvement.

"After last year's inspections, we took immediate and thorough action," said manager of Quest Foods, Emily Lane. "We reviewed every procedure carefully. We looked into everything we could."

One of the biggest changes was upgrading equipment so food could be stored and prepared at the correct temperatures as well as in the right amount of time. The school also introduced stricter cleaning routines, with staff sanitizing surfaces more and following updated safety procedures.

These upgrades not only fixed the issues pointed out in the inspection, but also created a safer and more welcoming space for students. The improvements show how seriously the school took the situation and how

STUDENTS SPEAK: FAVE MOMENTS FROM FALL SEMESTER

By Elena Ortiz

As the fall semester is coming to end, students reflected that these past months were unforgettable. From assemblies to field trips to football games, many students shared all their memories full of excitement, community, and school pride.

Many students' favorite memory was the homecoming Pep Assembly, which is a tradition full of music and spirit, as well as class colors.

Freshman Abigail Wells described it as something so new for her. "I loved it. It was so cinematic for me as a freshman that has never experienced that kind of excitement before."

Junior Grey Martin agreed, especially with the opportunities to dress up: "I've always really liked dressing up in my class colors and following the parade after the music showing and games."

For other students, field trip excursions give them an opportunity to break from the usual classroom.

"I really enjoyed a field trip when I went with Mr. Birdsley to Colin Park to do some bird watching and exploring nature," said junior Olivia Gilbert.

Junior Kelby Schroeder agreed on the importance of new experiences, adding, "I went to the first football game and that was really nice because everybody was there, and I got to cheer for my classmates."

Cultural events are also so important and meaningful to sophomore Mi'a Garvin, who chose the Latine Heritage Assembly as her favorite moment.

"It's a special appreciation for those who are little-to-not-celebrated. It brings attention to their heritage and allows people to understand and experience their traditions that they grew up with. It's a good balance, especially showing how our school follows the PAWS system with diversity," she said.

Sports created very memorable moments for the students, too.

Kenya Covington, sophomore, remembered the excitement of her first football game, and said "I went to the first football game and that was really nice because everybody was there, and I got to cheer for my classmates."

As the semester winds down, students look back on their favorite moments of Fall 2025. Here's to making more memories in 2026!



The cheer team performs during the Homecoming Pep Assembly. In a poll, students reported that the assembly was their favorite moment of the Fall Semester!

committed they are to doing better.

Even though Lane wasn't the manager at the time of the violations, she still is very open to feedback and has taken it upon herself to improve the cafeteria.

These changes have not gone unnoticed, and Lane looks forward to continuing to improve in order to meet the needs of students, all while making the cafeteria a welcoming (and safe!) space for all.



UPDATE ON ACADEMY MANDATE FOR SOPHOMORES

Continued from Page 2

Foley is a big advocate against Academy for his grade. He believes that the half hour that the class takes place can't be used as productively as lunch or free time, since they "have to do the Academy lesson before [they] can do work for [their] real classes."

He also points out that topics like Social-Emotional Learning could be learned in action around the lunch table with friends instead of at desks in separate classrooms.

"It's frustrating because [district representatives] say a lot about how they're building Academy off of student feedback," Foley said. "But I'd guarantee you if they'd asked the sophomore class if they wanted to do Academy again, there's no way they would've thought this was a choice we wanted."

But if the sophomores are so against it, why did the school board decide to change the curriculum for sophomore Academy?

Junior Fionna Merritt found the change quite sudden and odd, but can see the need from an administrative perspective. "After thinking about my experience as a sophomore during lunch last year, it started to make sense," she reflected. "[T]he lunchroom lacks enough chairs and tables for everyone to sit quickly and comfortably."

Still, even given the number of students in each grade, she doesn't

say she likes Academy. "I remember finding Academy very tedious... since every assignment given to me was just busy work; I was learning nothing so it felt like a waste of my time." Merritt finds herself lucky, as many other juniors do, to not have had it sophomore year.

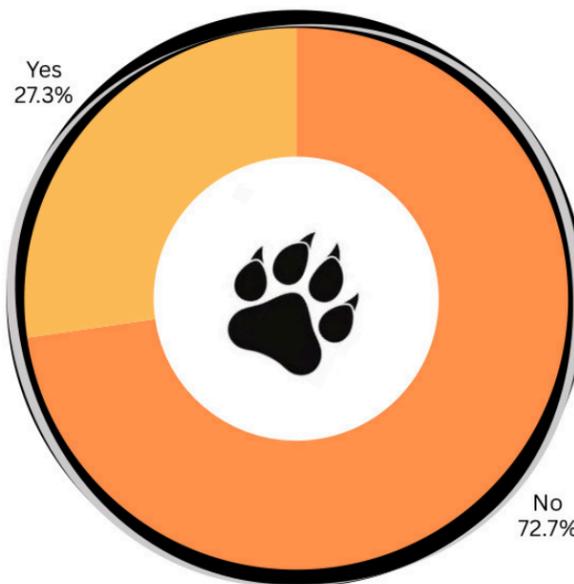
Before Academy was introduced three years ago, lunch time was very different from the way it is now. Instead of reserving sixth period lunch for upperclassmen, all lunch periods used to be "mixed with all different grades," senior Valentina Gonzalez-Ahuerma recounts.

The main reason they switched to more rigid lunches was because the admin didn't have a way to reliably keep track of who was an upperclassmen and who was an underclassmen. This meant "underclassmen were able to sneak out for lunch and leave and not get in trouble," Gonzalez Ahuerma said. The year after, freshmen were given Academy classes, because they were "mainly the people who fight and [cause trouble]. [Teachers] needed to form a way to be able to cut lunch down and minimize [that]."

Spanish teacher Zachary Sutton has taught Academy since it began three years ago. "At times," he says, "the Academy curriculum can be a little dull. Even though there are parts of it that are valuable, it is difficult to make that information accessible and engaging for the students."

Many Academy teachers had the same

Should Sophomores have Academy?



Infographic by Sanaa Parker, based on Student Google Poll

sentiment: the class itself isn't using its potential as well as it could be. They agree that Academy does have some positive aspects, though.

"My favorite thing about Academy is when we get to do the choice classes," Sutton said. Every other quarter, teachers get to come up with a fun, themed class to share what they're passionate about with the students who choose their course, including subjects that aren't regularly taught in school. "The students find it very engaging, and it's an easy way for teachers to make connections with students that they don't have in their other classes," Sutton added.

Sutton has been sharing his passion for birdwatching with students for the past three years. By the end of the quarter, though, all the students are back to their original academy classes again.

So what's the compromise to this unpopular decision? Academy was implemented for a reason, but sophomores overwhelmingly do not support it. The curriculum as it is now is not the most beneficial for students, as one academy teacher pointed out, so is an overhaul in order? Or, like Luke Foley suggests, require it only for students who need it? Or maybe the school should just go back to how it was last year, with Academy only for freshmen, and make room in the commons for new tables and chairs?

"For right now, I just think more students need to voice their opinions about Academy," Foley said. "[I]t's far from perfect in its current state, and the best solution will [surely] be found through students and administrators collaborating."

The Echo Fall 2025 Word Search

S	M	P	P	B	G	T	W	D	E	V	Q	R	H	P	I	S	A
T	A	O	E	A	L	R	A	C	Z	H	W	V	J	R	N	S	C
C	S	G	T	P	R	I	A	T	U	U	X	G	I	O	F	W	A
A	S	T	I	I	A	K	N	D	H	R	M	U	S	M	O	E	D
F	L	A	U	T	V	S	I	D	U	L	F	F	B	K	G	E	E
E	E	C	D	D	T	A	S	N	I	A	E	D	N	I	R	T	M
T	D	J	B	V	Y	A	T	E	G	T	T	T	W	N	A	H	Y
E	D	W	B	O	I	I	R	I	M	L	E	I	E	G	P	E	Z
R	I	F	P	E	S	C	N	I	O	B	O	M	O	S	H	A	L
I	N	W	A	P	I	D	E	G	U	N	L	T	S	N	I	R	S
A	G	F	A	S	H	I	O	N	W	S	W	Y	U	C	C	T	H
I	Q	S	E	N	I	O	R	S	M	R	E	D	C	O	A	T	L

SAGITTARIUS
INFOGRAPHIC
PEPASSEMBLY
PARKINGLOT
BLINDITEMS
SWEETHEART
MOTIVATION

GRADUATION
CAFETERIA
ATHLETES
SLEDDING
STUDYING
PROMKING
SENIORS

ACADEMY
FASHION
REDCOAT
ADVICE

THE ECHO STAFF

Editors-in-Chief:

Valentina Gonzalez Ahuerma
Ruby Pittenger

Echo Staff:

CJ Blanden
Trinity Dickens
Lillian DiSanto
Madisyn Evans
Olivia Hayes
Jalayah Irons
Micaela Jose Gomez
Emily Nazario Hernandez Elena
Ortiz
Sanaa Parker
Khaleel Pelmore
Vincent Podroykin
Leah Smith
Ananyah Tangmunarunkit
Tristan Tanta
Gabriel Vincencio
Adviser: Felicia Tufano

Photo Credits: Robin Kravets,
Maria Poblano, Janelle Walker

BUY YOUR YEARBOOK TODAY



REDCOAT #1 BY MATT CHAVIRA

Matt Chavira Presents:

REDCOAT



NO. 1 NOV. 7



QUIZ RESULTS: WHICH WINTER WONDERLAND SONG ARE YOU?

By Gabriel Vicencio

MOSTLY A'S? YOU'RE "FROSTY THE SNOWMAN"

You're classic and cheerful! You love tradition, familiar favorites, and things that just feel "right." Like the song, you bring comfort and good cheer wherever you go.

MOSTLY B'S? YOU'RE "BABY, IT'S COLD OUTSIDE"

You're a total romantic! You love cozy moments and sweet connections. Like the song, you have charm and a playful, flirty energy.

MOSTLY C'S? YOU'RE "LET IT SNOW"

You're carefree and fun! You go with the flow and live in the moment. Like the song, you bring excitement and joy to the lives of everyone around you.

MOSTLY D'S? YOU'RE "SNOW ON THE BEACH" BY TAYLOR SWIFT (FT. LANA DEL REY)

You're mysterious and bold! You follow your own rules and keep people guessing. Like the song, you mix emotion and edge in a totally unexpected way.

MOSTLY E'S? YOU'RE "ICE, ICE BABY" BY VANILLA ICE

You're the ultimate party starter! You stand out, take risks, and keep everyone's energy up. Like the song, you own the spotlight and turn every moment into a party.

THANK YOU SPONSORS!



GLOW

by Lola



Voted #1 Orthodontist in 2023, 2024, and 2025!

- ☑ Metal Braces
- ☑ Clear Aligners
- ☑ Ceramic Braces
- ☑ Retainers
- ☑ Teeth Whitening
- ☑ Bonded Retainers



Kimberly Baptist, DMD, MSD

Schedule Your Consultation Today!
217-359-1911
www.BaptistOrthodontics.com

FINALS SCHEDULE

DECEMBER 17:

- 1st period final: 8-9:20
- 2nd period final: 9:25-10:45
- Dismissal: 3:16

DECEMBER 18:

- 4th period final: 8-9:20
- 3rd period final: 9:30-10:50
- 5th period final: 11-12:20

DECEMBER 19:

- 6th period final: 8-9:20
- 7th period final: 9:30-10:50
- 8th period final: 11-12:20

STAFF SECRETS: BLIND ITEMS REVEALED



- The Globe-Trotting Gourmet:** CTE Department Chair Amanda Perez-Rosser!
- The Tri-Lingual Bird Whisperer:** Spanish Teacher Zachary Sutton!
- The Drone-Flying Greenhouse Guru:** Agriculture Teacher Joan Jach!
- The Six-String Historian:** Social Studies Teacher Mark Foley!
- The Stats-Savvy Sportsman:** Math Teacher Nick Stillwell!