

Editors Column

Test or Rest? The Debate for Pre- vs. Post-Break Exams



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While not having to study over winter break is something I initially looked forward to, I realized that doing a little every day made me feel more productive and focused. [Source: Author, Isleen Lee]

If there's anything that all students unanimously agree upon, it's that by mid-December, everyone is desperately waiting for one thing: winter break. With the overwhelming amount of assignments and exams due at this time, stress levels peak while motivation drops to an all-time low. Many students, especially high school seniors, stress over their upcoming deadlines for



This winter break, I spent a few days testing recipes and figured out that a mix of berries, Greek yogurt, milk, and some chia seeds produced the best flavor for my smoothie bowls, something I wouldn't have had time to do during the school year! [Source: Author, Isleen Lee]

regular decision college applications, while juniors worry about doing well on their mid-year exams. With everything coming at us students, it only made sense to look forward to the few weeks of nothing but rest – no homework, studying, or worrying over a test. But is that best?

Unfortunately, some schools don't have mid-year exams until after winter break. This in-

cludes my school and applies to all grades, from 7th to 12th. While it sometimes depends on the classes and the teachers' decisions, most at the Upper Campus, designated for 10th-12th grade students, give midterms after our return from break. For example, while I didn't have a midterm for my Advanced Precalculus class last year, my friends in Algebra II had one. This year, I have two mid-year exams for my AP Calculus AB and history classes that I will be taking after winter break.

As difficult and annoying as it may sound to have big tests waiting for you after the break, I find myself having mixed opinions about it. On the one hand, I envy most of my friends who go to other schools when they say that they are finished with their exams. On the other hand, having something to study for gives me a sense of productivity without the pressure of having to wake up early or submit something by a due date. As school is out of session, students gain an extra seven hours of the day, which can be used for rest, hobbies, or hanging out with friends. Knowing that I have the entire day makes it much easier to balance

my remaining academic duties with anything else that I want to do. Therefore, although the burden of having exams to prepare for still stresses me out, it feels manageable with the extra time on my hands.

Additionally, I find that having nothing to do often leads to doom-scrolling or staying isolated in my room. Stuck in an in-between state of "I should get up" and "I won't have this time when I go back to school, let's just stay in bed," I noticed that I feel worse when I'm not productive. Having a surplus of time on my hands forces me to find a healthy, bearable balance between getting enough without overindulging, and completing enough tasks to feel accomplished without becoming overwhelmed. Thus, post-break tests compel me to improve my work-life balance, so that I can both relax and feel productive throughout the two weeks of break. Whilst winter break in the past meant spending my days feeling as if I didn't "do enough," having something to work towards, even if it's slightly overwhelming, allows me to maintain my habits from during the school year and get the well-deserved rest.

Student Reporter

Los Angeles' Love In Music Winter Concert



Reanna Lee
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As the holidays and New Year's approached, many events closed up their semester. Parents went on vacation, kids were off school, and sports seasons came to an end. The holiday season also meant that extracurriculars would host their final events—just like Los Angeles' Love In Music branch did with their Winter Concert!

Love In Music is a music education organization that provides instrument and music lessons to children from underprivileged communities through high school volunteers. They currently hold three branches across the county: Los Angeles, Santa Ana, and South Bay. I am currently a support coordinator (much like a manager) at the Los Angeles branch, where we recently held a winter concert to celebrate the end of the semester. The structure of our concerts usually depends on a schedule that includes our students' performances (violin and piano), the ensemble pieces played by all the volunteers, and any additional solo volunteer performances. This year, however, our director, Gloria Lee, wanted to add a new tradition of having the parents put on their own show as well. The parents gathered and presented ethnic and cultural songs to



One piano student performed Frosty the Snowman at the Love In Music winter concert. [Source: Su Park]

create a stronger sense of community. This new experience was something that I hope will continue throughout the program and even spread to the other branches!

The student performances included many iconic Christ-

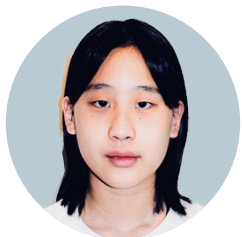
mas classics like Jingle Bells, O Christmas Tree, Silent Night, and many others. However, there were other pieces that a few of our advanced players performed. For example, one of our most talented pianists played Liszt's Etude in G# mi-

nor, otherwise known as La Campanella. In my eyes, he deserves recognition beyond Love In Music for his talent and dedication. Of course, we have other students who bring amazing assets to the group, even as beginners. For example, one violin student, who joined our program only two months ago, played Silent Night wonderfully. As a musician myself, it makes me excited to see how eager the students are to build their skills and improve. I understand how it feels to start learning a new instrument, especially one like the violin, where much coordination and practice are required. Every year with Love In Music, we hold a larger concert with all three branches to present what students from each location have been working on. Looking from this holistic point of view, I would say that the students at my branch are progressing wonderfully.

I have been at Love In Music for about two and a half years, and each winter concert has been a wonderful experience. Sharing my passion for music and seeing people perform is something that I will always enjoy. I hope that others will spread the same joy this season. Happy Holidays and a Happy New Year!

Student Reporter

Shibuya: A Glimpse into Japan's Glamour



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When one thinks of Japan, a myriad of thoughts and images come to mind, particularly those of the bustling city of Tokyo. Among Tokyo's many districts is Shibuya, a booming tourist spot and a cultural hub that illustrates modern Japan today. Renowned for its vibrant energy, fashionable stores, and scenic landscape, Shibuya was a core destination on my recent trip to Japan. Seven years prior to this trip, I had visited Japan for the first time, yet had only seen its rural side. The contrast between the two is significant, and my visit provided me with a new opportunity to explore Japan's city life.

On my one-day excursion to Shibuya, I successfully checked off my list of places I had planned to visit. Shibuya Scramble Crossing, a famous landmark well-known to many, is labeled the busiest pedestrian crossing in the world. Having only seen it on television and social media, walking across it in person was

a surreal experience. Seeing hundreds of people walk by each other on one large crosswalk was unforgettable, despite it being early in the morning. If I can return to Japan, I hope to cross it at nighttime and capture more photos of the memorable moment. A family member I went with described the experience as meaningful and fascinating despite being quite hectic, saying, "Shibuya Crossing is an impressive sight. If you visit Tokyo, it's a must-see."

Out of the several stores and locations I visited, I have some recommendations. To start off, Don Quijote is one of the major stops you should include in your itinerary; the one I went to, in particular, was Mega Don Quijote, located in Shibuya City, an immense chain store made up of eight stories that sells nearly anything one might be in search of. These products range from souvenirs and snacks to cosmetics, brand-name goods, and

more. Secondly, found throughout nearly all of Japan, ABC Mart is a footwear store that sells affordable yet trendy clothes, shoes, and name brands like Adidas and Nike. Out of all the stores I went to, Kiddy Land was my go-to place for one-of-a-kind collectibles, as the name suggests. Since animation is a staple of Japanese culture, action figures of characters are sold just about anywhere. Famous companies include Sanrio, Sumikko Gurashi, and Snoopy, with character designs that are recognized as icons even within the Western realm. As a person who enjoys finding collectibles, figures, and accessories, this was an affordable place to shop with a wide variety of items. Other stores I would recommend are Loft, a grand stationery and gifts store, and the Uniqlo Flagship Store, a 12-story building filled with fashionable clothes.

While it's difficult to capture the essence of my entire trip in



Depicted is Shibuya Crossing, one of Japan's most lively and famous landmarks. [Source: Author, Claire Lee]

a few words, my final reflection is that Shibuya is more than just a tourist spot. It is a reflection of Japan's contemporary culture and its adaptation to a rapidly advancing technological world. The district has become a hub of nightlife and the core of cutting-edge fashion.

Student Reporter

The Legendary Animator's Legacy Arrives in Kroea



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The photo zone at the exhibition features 'Heidi, Girl of the Alps' (1974), one of Takahata's famous animations based on Western novels, including 'Anne of Green Gables' (1979). [Source: Author, Minjoo Kim]

When you think of Japanese animation, the names Studio Ghibli and Toei Animation often come to mind. Both of these iconic studios are closely linked to Isao Takahata, one of the legendary animators of the 20th century. As a virtuoso in the field, Takahata's works like Heidi, The Girl of the Alps (1974), Anne of Green Gables (1979), and Grave of Fireflies

(1988) have been pioneering and renowned for their innovative themes and unique expressions. Even after his death, many disciples and followers continue his legacy, including Studio Ghibli's co-founder Hayao Miyazaki, Gundam series director Yoshikazu Yasuhiko, and Crayon Shin-chan director Keiichi Hara. This legacy was displayed in Takahata's re-

cent exhibition in Korea.

Last year I visited Takahata's exhibition in Seoul, Korea, which had also been held in Shizuoka, Japan, a few months earlier. Instead of simply displaying the author's works, the exhibition uniquely showcased unreleased production notes and storyboards, showing the animation creation process. As a huge animation fan, I was deeply impressed by the vivid production process that embodied Takahata's lifelong dedication and soul. Specifically, his last animation, The Tale of the Princess Kaguya (2013), was difficult to watch without tears after learning about his background story, as Takahata had been planning it since the beginning of his career.

Takahata's hard work for each of his animations was also displayed in the exhibition. For example, in his first directed animation, The Little Norse Prince (1968), Takahata's dedication is evident not only in his detailed handwritten storyboard and screenplay notebook but also in the emotional curve chart he created to track the characters' emotional journeys. This process was crucial for mapping out the general mood of each scene and helping to move viewers by

ensuring a smooth flow of the character's emotions. I recently watched Grave of Fireflies (1988), and I would assume that the emotional curve chart did a big job of creating the sad tragedy story of two siblings who were victims of the Pacific War. In addition to emotional curve charts, Takahata also developed a work plan to track when characters appeared and even wrote the music for his 1982 animation Gauche the Cellist (1982), showing his talent in music as well.

Despite his initial challenges, he persevered until he became an animation director who created cherished memories for families, starting from his beginnings as an amateur animator. Even with his dedication to his first directed animation, The Little Norse Prince (1968), the animation did not succeed. However, he did not stop there. Instead, he tried a new type of animation by incorporating animal characters, which led to his next animation, The Adventure of Panda and Friends (1972).

I highly recommend Takahata's exhibition in Korea because it will evoke heartwarming childhood memories for those familiar with his animations, and it promises to be a great experience for those who are new to his work.

Student Reporter

Future Ready: The Power of Pre-College Programs



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Have you ever wondered how high school students can get a head start on their college journey? Pre-college programs, hosted by universities, are designed to provide high school students with educational experience before they begin their college path. These programs offer a taste of college life, rigorous academic coursework, and opportunities to connect and engage with other students who have similar interests. Many colleges offer pre-college programs, each catering to different interests and academic goals. Students have the choice of both residential and commuter options, including specialized tracks they can complete during a university's summer sessions. Universities such as USC specifically offer pre-law, pre-health and science, and business programs. These courses provide students with the opportunity to explore their fields of interest through unique labs and real-world experiences. Students for these programs are also able to earn college credits.

There are several advantages to pre-college programs: college preparedness, increased



USC Annenberg Youth Academy 2024 cohort in the media center. [Source: AYA lecturer, Professor Allan Jayson Lopez]

exposure to a rigorous academic environment, and connection with university faculty and peers. By experiencing college-level coursework and expectations, students are better equipped to handle the challenges they will face in higher education. Pre-college programs allow the opportunity to challenge themselves and grow intellectually.

The network built between students can be valuable as they progress through their academic and professional ca-

reers. Participating in a pre-college program can help students establish a relationship with a university before they even apply. This can provide them with valuable insights into a university's academic offerings.

One such program USC offers is USC's Annenberg Youth Academy (AYA), a 4-week long summer program that focuses on media and civic engagement. As a student who participated in AYA, I had the opportunity to experience the benefits of the immersion program. AYA pro-

vided me with an introduction to the field of communication and journalism, exposing me to college-level coursework and professional practices. One of the most impactful aspects of the program was the access to USC's resources and faculty. The guidance and mentorship I received helped me to fully realize my academic interests, confirming my thoughts about what I hope to major in. Additionally, I made connections with my peers, who were equally passionate about communications, creating a supportive and inspiring community.

Pre-College programs are crucial for making higher education accessible and preparing students for future academic success. By providing early exposure to college environments, rigorous coursework, and professional networks, these programs significantly impact a student's educational journey in a positive and necessary way. They build confidence, enhance critical thinking skills, and create pathways to higher education, ensuring students are well-equipped to navigate through their academic and professional futures.

Student Reporter

Modern Housing: Lost Bonds in South Korea



Huichan Kim

Homeschool

How is your relationship with your neighbors? Do you talk to each other often and have a friendship, or is it more awkward? Personally, I believe the latter one is more common. When we think about it, we will likely feel that our relationship with our neighbors has gradually become more distant than it was in the past.

This is also true in S. Korea. Many parents in South Korea often tell their children that when they were kids, they were mostly close with their neighbors; they shared food and had conversations a lot. They now sometimes describe Korea as having become "colder" than before. However, why has Korea become detached and distant between neighbors and people compared to the past? South Korea has undergone a drastic change in its housing culture over the past 40 to 50 years. Traditionally, Korea had more single-family houses, which were lower-rise houses, rather than high-rise buildings. In the 1970s, as the population in Seoul rapidly grew, a housing shortage occurred, which led to the need for apartment buildings. From

this time, apartment-style housing began to gradually increase across South Korea.

The territory of South Korea is very small, only 100,210km², with the United States being about 95 times larger. To accommodate many people on a small piece of land, there was only one solution. In the early 2000s, as it became increasingly difficult to secure land, the number of floors in apartments steadily increased; while apartments with 12 to 15 floors were the norm before, from this time onward, apartments with more than 20 floors became common.

Although many people were able to live in one place, as the number of residents increased, the distance between neighbors only grew. Apartments typically have a complex structure, with multiple households divided by floors, and the common spaces are limited or do not exist. Also, the structures of apartment buildings provide each household with an independent space. As a result, personal space is naturally reinforced, and particularly in recent times, the rise in single-person house-



South Korea is a country full of apartment buildings and is often called the "land of apartments." This photo is a great representation of both the past and present of Korea. [Source: Author, Huichan Kim]

holds has deepened individual isolation. Consequently, the tendency towards individualism has strengthened, leading many people to feel burdened by interpersonal relationships. Additionally, the lack of time due to hectic lifestyles has become a major reason for the breakdown of re-

lationships with neighbors. Apartment buildings are gradually dominating the sky in Korea, and it is becoming more and more difficult to look up without seeing them. We must ask ourselves, what are we missing in the midst of our changing and busier lives? Our neighbors.