

## Editors Column



**Sora Ju**  
Grade 11  
Geffen Academy

## Making the Most of Summer With COSMOS



UCLA, one of the host campuses for the COSMOS summer program, offers high school students a chance to experience college-level STEM learning while living and studying on a UC campus.

[Source: Author, Sora Ju]

For many high school students, this time of year marks the start of a new semester, as well as the last stretch of rigorous academics before an eagerly anticipated vacation. Summer break is usually seen as a well-earned pause—a time for vacations, late mornings, and catching up with friends. Yet, although all of these luxuries

are certainly important (student burnout is real), summer is also one of the few stretches of time when students can meaningfully explore their interests without the pressure of school. For students interested in STEM, especially, selective summer programs can turn a few weeks off into an experience that genuinely shapes their

future. One such program worth consideration is COSMOS.

COSMOS, also known as the California State Summer School for Mathematics and Science, is a highly selective, four-week residential program hosted on several University of California campuses, including UCLA, UC San Diego, UC Davis, and UC Irvine. This program is carefully designed for California high school students, and COSMOS offers rigorous, college-level coursework through specialized “clusters” that focus on topics such as artificial intelligence, engineering design, biomedical science, and applied mathematics. Unlike many other summer classes, however, COSMOS emphasizes hands-on learning, research, and collaboration with UC faculty.

COSMOS is especially impactful due to how immersive the camp is. Students live on campus, attend lectures and labs, and work closely with peers who are just as passionate about STEM. Rather than passively learning advanced material, students can discover whether a field’s topics are what they truly want to pursue in college and beyond—a clarity that is invaluable, especially before junior or senior year.

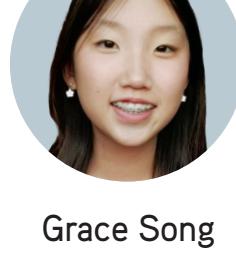
Applications for this year’s

COSMOS 2026 are already open, with materials due in early February. Because of the program’s highly competitive nature, applying requires thoughtful essays, strong recommendations, and preparation—another reason to start early. While COSMOS is not a guarantee of college admission, it presents a strong demonstration of high schoolers who take initiative, pursue academic curiosity, and indicate a willingness to challenge themselves—qualities that colleges consistently value.

Of course, COSMOS isn’t the only answer to having a meaningful summer. Other university programs, internships, or research opportunities can also be highly valuable. The key for high school students to make the most out of their summers lies in their intentions. Instead of filling the summer with random activities or letting it slip by entirely, students should aim to do one or two things that genuinely matter to them.

So, in addition to taking the vacation, sleeping in, and otherwise enjoying a break from school, if you’re looking for an experience that combines learning, growth, and a glimpse of college life, COSMOS might be the perfect opportunity to make this summer one to remember.

## Student Reporter



**Grace Song**  
Grade 8  
Lexington Junior High School

## Lexington Junior High’s Servathon: Beach Clean Up



Students from Lexington Junior High pick up trash at Seal Beach to give back to the community and environment during their school’s Servathon.

[Source: Author, Grace Song]

On Saturday, January 24th, Lexington Junior High hosted its annual Servathon, a school-wide event dedicated to giving back to the local community. This year, students headed to Seal Beach, located in Southern California, for a beach cleanup where they would combine fun, service, and teamwork.

The Servathon event began at 9 a.m. at the pier in Seal Beach, where students, teachers, and ASB members gathered to give back to the community and the environment. After signing in, students made their way to the sandy beach where they were handed a large plastic bag and a pair of gloves. They were asked to form a small group and pick up trash along the walls, in the sand, and near the water.

For the next two hours, students worked hard, transforming the beach into a cleaner, safer place. While some trash items were easy to spot, others were hidden amongst the shells or buried beneath the sand. As volunteers continued to work, they began to notice how much debris had become blended into the beach. Among the trash they cleaned up were countless pieces of styro-

foam, plastic straws, and wrappers that had been destroyed and washed up on the shore. It became clear that there was much more trash than expected, and soon, volunteers realized how these materials could easily remain in the environment without ever being noticed.

Beyond the environmen-

tal impact, Servathon was also an opportunity for students to bond and get to know each other. While picking up trash, many shared stories, laughter, and memories. Walking along the shoreline made it easy to open up and talk to new people as well as connect with old friends. Being in the company of others

made picking up trash feel less like a chore and more like a special experience.

Seventh-grade student Irene Kim expressed, “Being able to help the environment while also getting to hang out with my friends was a fun and rewarding experience.” This year’s Servathon allowed many students to see the large amount of trash that could pile up in a single area, and what a difference they could make by helping to remove it.

Personally, as a participant in the Lexington Junior High Servathon, I was inspired to be more active in community events, especially because of the rewarding impact it left on me and the environment. Knowing that my efforts and contributions helped to make this beach a better place filled my heart with happiness. By the end of the morning, many students felt the same way.

Lexington Junior High’s Servathon was a chance for students to give back to the environment and strengthen bonds with friends. Events similar to this demonstrate how even small actions bring about feelings of accomplishment and positive change in the environment.

## Student Reporter



**Robin Ryul Kang**  
Grade 11  
Palos Verdes Peninsula High School

## College Fair Brings National Opportunities



A student speaks with a college representative during the annual college fair at Palos Verdes Peninsula High.

[Source: Author, Robin Ryul Kang]

The main gym of Palos Verdes Peninsula High School was transformed into a blossom of opportunity and inquiries last week during the annual college fair. 51 colleges from all around the U.S. gathered at this high school, eager to tell students about their colleges and answer questions. Rows of tables and colored posters created an energetic environment, welcoming anyone who was interested. For various students, this event was not just a casual Q&A, but a chance to create a reputation for themselves. I was one such student.

During my 40 minutes at the fair, I spoke with several representatives, one of them from Harvey Mudd College. I started out the conversation by asking what made a good applicant for the college, and the rep responded that one’s passion to study at the college was one of the most important factors. Later on, she mentioned that Harvey Mudd’s strong STEM liberal arts education, hands-on learning, and small class sizes were a recognized desirable aspect of the school. “We value collaboration between students and professors. Since we’re not a research institution, we have an environment where students feel supported,”

the representative also said. I asked follow-up questions about switching majors in college as well as about the structure of final exams; during that, I aimed to leave a strong impression through confident communication.

Speaking directly with a college official made the information feel more trustworthy than hearing or reading it online. Speaking of “directly,” one of the most noticeable benefits of this in-person fair was the ability to have a “human conversation”—making eye contact, using gestures, and responding naturally. Unlike virtual college fair meetings, where conversations and questions can feel limited and uninteresting, students and parents could fully engage with the representatives at this in-person event.

In addition to purely academic programs, the fair also featured representatives from three U.S. military services: the Army, Navy, and Coast Guard. They explained the ROTC (Reserve Officers’ Training Corps) program, scholarships, and a variety of military career opportunities provided for the students. By including military branches, the fair highlighted that academics weren’t the only path-

way to learn and build a career after high school, therefore giving students a broader perspective for their future decisions.

Overall, the college fair proved to be more than just reading brochures. Rather, it was a meaningful opportunity to connect, explore, and gain confidence about colleges and the specific qualities of each one. Though the event wasn’t

as informative as in-person college tours, it still gave students plenty of information and insights, considering that it took place in a high school gym. And for me, there’s a lesson I learned from this event: there are no “right” pathways to follow after high school. Rather, the future is about finding a path that fits best, not about following a pre-determined path.

Student Reporter



Kristine Park

Grade 11  
Del Norte High School

## Elevation Rhythm's Sold-Out Goodbye Yesterday Tour



Vocalist Brittany Diaz Valeiro passionately leads the crowd in one of Elevation Rhythm's most popular songs, "Where Oh Where." [Source: Author, Kristine Park]



The crowd fills the SOMA Arena wall to wall as Elevation Rhythm's sold-out "Goodbye Yesterday" tour lights up San Diego. [Source: Author, Kristine Park]

As a group formed under Elevation Worship to engage younger audiences, Elevation Rhythm is a popular band that blends contemporary Christian music with pop and hip hop influences, resonating with younger audiences. They started "The Goodbye Yesterday Part Two" Tour on January 20 and plan to visit 12 cities. The tour included a stop in San Diego, where Elevation Rhythm performed at the SOMA Arena on January 23.

It was a sold-out show, so when my friends and I arrived nearly an hour before the doors opened, the line for the concert already snaked around the entire

building. It was immediately clear how popular Elevation Rhythm was with their unique sound and blend, especially among young listeners. Inside the lobby, there was a large line for merch, and for good reason; their merchandise had eye-catching designs that were meaningful with lyrics and symbols that reflected the tour themes. I thought it expressed the theme of their tour very well, with designs that were intentional and related back to their songs.

When we got inside, the venue itself was entirely standing room, and although it was packed with people, the large

screen behind the stage made it easy for everyone to see what was happening up front. The concert opened with Strings and Heart, an indie Christian band formed by three brothers, who had a very attention-grabbing performance. They were very energetic and engaging, and played some of their most popular songs like "Honeydew." It set the tone for a very energetic, exciting performance.

When Elevation Rhythm took the stage, the room immediately erupted into loud cheers, and from the first song, the energy in the atmosphere was overwhelming. Their stage presence was

powerful, as the band played extremely well together and the vocalists helped hype the crowd up. Song after song, my friends and I sang along and jumped with the rest of the crowd.

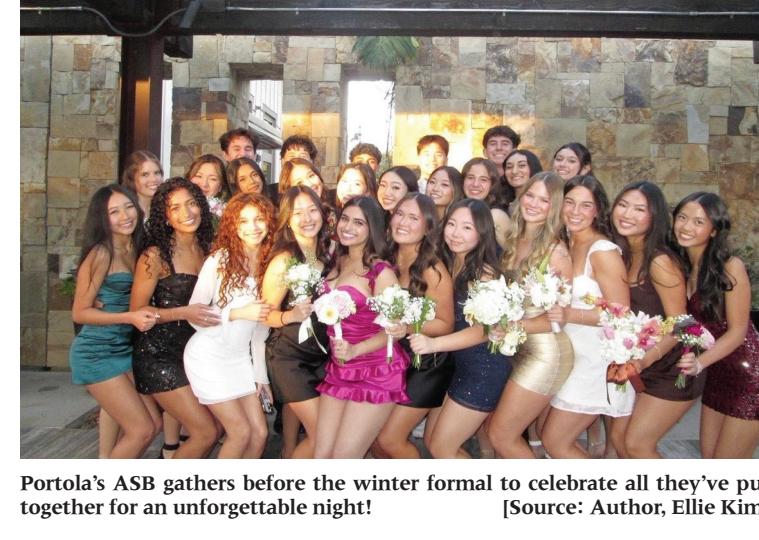
One of the most memorable moments of the night came during a quieter segment they called a "soul session." Members of Rhythm shared personal testimonies and opened up about their faith and experiences, and it was deeply personal and touching. It was a very genuine moment, and it solidified the fact that all their music came from real stories and intentional lyricism.

Throughout the concert, one of the main things that I enjoyed the most was how authentic it felt. The band often interacted with the crowd, wasn't hyper-focused on perfection, and was singing with passion and conviction. It was very enjoyable to see everyone on the stage follow their passions, and their joy in praising really shone through. One attendee described the concert as "even better live" and added that they "wish they could go back and listen all over again." It was hard not to agree, because this was definitely an unforgettable memory for me. For anyone who already loves their music, Elevation Rhythm's concerts are absolutely worth showing up early and staying late for.

Student Reporter

Ellie Kim  
Grade 10  
Portola High School

## Portola High Hosts Winter Formal



Portola's ASB gathers before the winter formal to celebrate all they've put together for an unforgettable night! [Source: Author, Ellie Kim]

As students begin to feel worn down by the academic grind of the school year, winter marks the arrival of one of the most anticipated events of my school year, the second school dance. This year, Portola High School hosted its Winter Formal dance in January, themed after The Princess and the Frog. Appropriately titled A Night in the Bayou, the dance delivered on its promise of an unforgettable night.

Winter Formal began long before students stepped into the venue. Everyone took the time to look their best on a special night, with many picking out nice jewelry, finding the right dress or suit, and styling their hair appropriately. Afterwards, students gathered at a neighborhood park to take photos together, turning the hours before the dance into an event of its own. Dressed in formalwear and surrounded by friends, students captured memories before heading to dinner. By the time

everyone arrived at the dance itself, the energy was high.

Most students, with their friends or dates, made their way to the dancefloor, and the music—arguably the heart of any dance—

did not disappoint. The mosh was lively and packed with energetic students who were eager to dance the night away. Beyond dancing, there were plenty of other activities to enjoy. Students could grab

drinks and snacks, including a dirty soda bar and fries, which provided a fun break from the dance floor. There were also interactive options, such as a VR gaming area and a photo booth, providing everyone with something fun to do.

As someone who is part of ASB, I had the chance to see the event from a different perspective. I arrived a little early to finish setting up decorations. I watched as the giant venue—both two stories of it—began to fill with the students flooding through its doors. As beautiful as the hall had been at the start of the dance, what truly seemed to light up the room wasn't the fairy lights strung along the staircase or the laser lights on the dancefloor; it was the company. A Night in the Bayou wasn't just a school dance, but a celebration of friendship. The constant chatter, laughter, and shared excitement made it truly one for the books.

Student Reporter

Karis Kim  
Grade 8  
Robert Frost Middle School

Spring break is the perfect time for families and students to take a break from school and explore new places without spending too much money. Whether it's relaxing on a beach, hiking through forests, exploring a city, or enjoying theme parks, there are many affordable and family-friendly travel options available. Choosing the right destination depends on budget, accommodations, and activities, making it important to plan ahead.

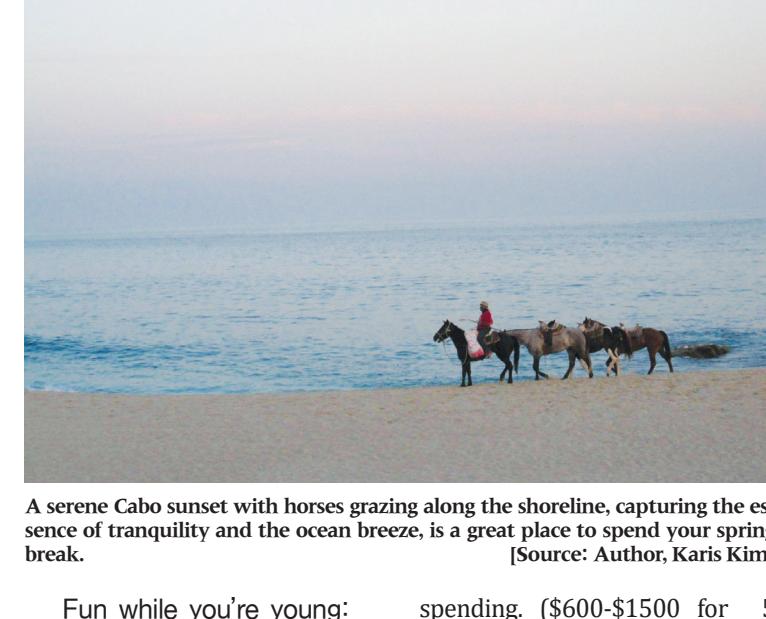
**Meals, clean beaches, and family-friendly activities.** Everything at resorts tends to be very accessible, making your stay even more enjoyable. Resorts in Cabo and Cancun offer a plethora of enjoyable activities such as snorkeling, kayaking, glass-bottom boats, movie nights, and even some dolphin programs. (1250-4500 per person 5 days)

### Mountains:

The Great Smoky Mountains, located in between Tennessee and North Carolina — known for its lush forests, misty mountains, and abundant wildlife — is one of the most visited parks in the nation. It is a great destination to visit during spring break due to wildflowers blooming and snow thawing for flowing waterfalls. Things to do: Hike the Laurel Galls Trail, Grotto Falls Trail, explore the Alum Cave Trail, Cades Cove Loop, and wildlife watching. There's nothing more healing than a cozy mountain trip watching the never-ending blanket of emeralds, cascading waterfalls, climbing up the winding rivers while the tip of your nose turns pink from the temperatures, and the abundant scent of fragrant flowers. (\$500-1250 per person for 5-7 days)

### Beach locations:

(US)- Myrtle Beach in South Carolina has beautiful beaches, boardwalks, hotels ranging from \$150-\$270 per night, mini dolphin cruises (\$40), polynesian fire shows, magic shows, etc. Myrtle Beach is considerably family-friendly, and the coast with the pier is magnificent. The price can range from \$600 to \$1000 per person for 3-4 days. Cancun and Los Cabos are exquisite locations when it comes to affordability and dramatic tropical coastlines with a relaxed vibe. Although more expensive than some others, most would say it's worth it, especially when you plan correctly. I would recommend investing in an all-inclusive resort. These combine



A serene Cabo sunset with horses grazing along the shoreline, capturing the essence of tranquility and the ocean breeze, is a great place to spend your spring break. [Source: Author, Karis Kim]

### Fun while you're young:

Washington D.C. is the nation's capital and is a great destination for young travelers who have a passion for history. This city is known for its historical monuments and world-class museums. The city comes alive during the spring with the blooming cherry blossoms. With historical neighborhoods and affordable food trucks, Washington is the perfect place to explore without over-

spending. (\$600-\$1500 for 5 days).

Spring break offers something for everyone, from relaxing beaches and scenic mountains to lively cities and adventurous jungles. Keep in mind that prices vary depending on lodging choices, activities, dining preferences, and shopping. So, as you plan your next stay, think of what type of memories you are planning to bring home.