

Editors Column

Senior Year Graduation Activities from a Junior's Lens



Aspen Lee
Grade 12
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Graduation is often the most looked-forward-to event of a student's learning career since elementary school. Finally having no more homework, wearing a cap and gown, and saying goodbye to childhood friends to embark on a new journey towards a future career. However, many seniors will say that their final year of high school leading up to graduation came and passed much faster than they expected.

Senior year marks the time when most students become adults and have to make their own decisions for their lives. This means that they gain freedom, but also immense pressure to decide their futures and fully live independently. As a rising senior in the fall, I have already started to embrace this combination of freedom and pressure, and I've especially seen it play out in my older classmates who have now graduated. At Santa Fe Christian High School in San Diego, CA, the graduating senior class undergoes various final activities that promote unity amongst one another, their families, and the teachers. Such events make graduating seem a lot less daunting and more enjoyable—as if everyone is not



Three eleventh-grade students, including myself, enjoying lunch at Senior Business Week. [Source: Lola Hubbell]

going to all move away to separate parts of the country in just a few months.

Some events include the Father-Daughter Dance, Grads-and-Dads Kickball Game, and Mother-Son Brunch. These events mentioned are aimed at creating an authentic space for seniors to connect with their parents, express their gratitude, and demonstrate their love for them altogether. For example, the Father-Daughter Dance

kicks off "Graduation Season", as many students call it, and it consists of various competitive games for the students and fathers followed by a sentimental dance and dinner to celebrate their next stage of life.

Senior Business Week (SBW) is a time for all the seniors to showcase their work in Economics throughout their final semester of high school. Groups create a business, partnering with local restaurants

and vendors, to provide meals, merchandise, and activities for the student body, families, and alumni. As senior Annabelle G. stated, "Even though SBW is so stressful and takes a lot of planning, it taught me how to work in a group to create a functioning business." The success of every SBW group relies on months of logistical coordination, endless PowerPoint presentations, and multiple adjustments. This was my final year purchasing from the senior vendors since I'll be doing the selling myself next year, and I was able to see the pride and happiness every student had after making it through the week.

Senior Linxi B. agreed that "Your senior year flies by much quicker than you think, so you have to cherish every moment with your friends, family, teachers, and hometown." With my own senior year struggles of college applications and constant future-oriented conversations piling up, these words of advice could not be more true. After witnessing all these senior grad events take place all the way through Graduation itself, I am so ecstatic to begin my own 'lasts' and truly live in the moment.

Student Reporter

K-Town Comes Alive for World Cup Watch Party



Yein Cho
Grade 8
Rosemont Middle School

Recently, on June 12, Red Devils (the nickname for Korean fans) from all across Los Angeles County gathered at Liberty Park for the World Cup watch party. An ocean of red crowded the entire park as fans arrived, decked out in team gear, chanting enthusiastically even before kickoff. Food trucks lined the streets offering Korean favorites along with other cuisines that catered to every taste. I treated myself to a refreshing agua fresca and a serving of Korean-style bulgogi fries.

After people purchased their food and drinks, they made their way onto the field to settle in for the match. Families spread blankets, while others brought chairs to secure a good view, and many simply sat on the grass. No matter where they were seated, everyone had a clear view of the game thanks to the massive screen that projected it.

As the match began, the announcer led the crowd in singing the Korean national anthem and chanting traditional cheers. The energy was contagious. Guided



Community, culture, and soccer come together as fans pack Liberty Park for the World Cup watch party. [Source: Author, Yein Cho]

by the announcer, hundreds of voices joined together, creating a roar that seemed to echo through the entire park. After a scoreless first half, the crowd was even more eager for a goal. During short water breaks in the game,

cheerleaders took the stage and performed dances and cheers that kept the crowd pumped and entertained.

When Czechia scored its first goal in the 59th minute, a brief

wave of disappointment swept over the crowd. However, it did not last long. The announcer quickly reignited the energy of the fans with spirited chants that kept everyone's hopes alive. After a tense period of anticipation, South Korea delivered the victory the crowd had been waiting for with two second-half goals that secured the dramatic 2-1 comeback victory. It was at that time that everyone immediately erupted with cheers. Strangers began to high-five, hug, and cheer alongside one another, united by the pure joy of victory.

Pride and passion from Korea's win seemed to bring the community together into celebration. Watching the celebration unfold, I realized that the World Cup is more than just a soccer tournament—it is an opportunity for people of the same nationality to come together and support their team with a shared sense of pride and belonging. This experience truly transformed the watch party into an unforgettable celebration of soccer, community, and Korean culture.

Student Reporter

A Question Could Save a Life: My QPR Training Experience



Grace Song
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Lexington Junior High School

What would you do if a friend told you they were thinking about taking their own life? Before attending the QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) suicide prevention training, I honestly wasn't sure what I would do. Like many people, I knew suicide was a serious issue, but I had never been taught how to recognize warning signs, start a conversation, or connect someone with help. However, after spending just two hours at the training, I realized that suicide prevention is not just about awareness, but more importantly, knowing how to take action when someone needs help.

Hosted by the YouStar Foundation at the start of summer, the training began with an online survey that asked questions about suicide prevention. Some questions inquired about how comfortable we felt asking someone if they were thinking about suicide, while others asked us to identify warning signs. As I answered, I quickly realized how much I still had to learn. Although I thought I knew the basics, I wasn't as confident in my knowledge on this topic as I expected.



Participants listen as presenters explain the Question, Persuade, and Refer (QPR) method during a suicide prevention training. [Source: Dong Hee Kim]

One of the first things students learned was the importance of language. The presenters explained that phrasing that someone "committed suicide" can carry negative meanings, while saying they "died by suicide" is more respectful. Similarly, instead of saying "successful suicide," we should say, "fatal suicide attempt." Learning these differences showed me how the words we use

can change the way mental health is thought of and addressed. Even simple phrases can shed light on a different way of thinking.

Next, those taking the class learned the meaning of QPR, which turned out to be the most memorable part of the training for me. QPR stands for "Question, Persuade, and Refer." Before today, I assumed that asking some-

one directly if they were thinking about suicide might make the situation more uncomfortable. Instead, I learned that many people are simply waiting for someone to notice and ask. A direct question can open the door to a conversation they may have been afraid to start themselves.

The "Persuade" and "Refer" steps especially stood out to me. Helping someone means supporting them as they find help, not leaving them to solve their problems alone. Rather than saying, "You should find a therapist," we can say, "Let's find a therapist together," or "We can look for resources together." Those small changes can remind someone that they do not have to face their struggles on their own.

By the end of the training, I left with so much information and a new perspective on the role each of us can play in supporting others. The QPR training taught me that helping someone doesn't have to start with a grand gesture, but something simple like noticing, asking a question, and letting them know they are not alone.

Editors Column

College Applications: Start Early or Wait?

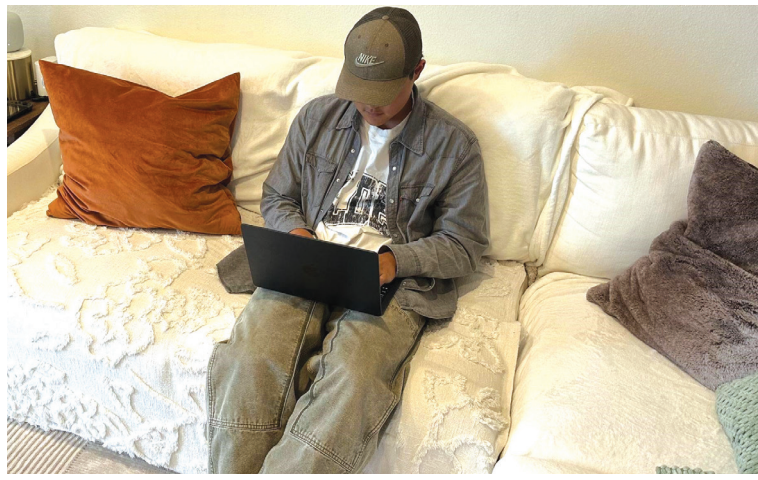


Robin Ryul Kang
Grade 11
Palos Verdes Peninsula High School

As the school year ends, many rising seniors are overwhelmed by a new worry: college applications—specifically, the essays. While some students plan to wait until the fall to start the process, others begin preparing months in advance. This raises an important question: is it better to start early, or should students wait until the application season officially begins?

To some people, starting in the summer might seem like too much. After all, the essay questions for different colleges aren't even released yet. However, starting early doesn't necessarily mean writing full essays right away. Instead, it is about building foundations and skills that make the process less painful later on in the fall, after the senior class workload is added.

But unlike previous years, Common App, the most widely used platform for college applications, announced that for the 2026-2027 application season, the personal statement prompts will be unchanged from the previous year. This means that all rising seniors get access to



A rising senior begins drafting his UC Personal Insight Questions early to stay ahead of many upcoming deadlines. [Source: Author, Robin Ryul Kang]

the prompts they will be choosing from for the fall. So for this year, many can get a head start by drafting their personal statement over the summer. However, depending on the number of schools you are applying to, you could end up having to write 20 different essays due to each school's supplemental essays. In this case, it is probably better to start during the summer if you're applying to more than 7 schools.

Here are some things that students can do even when the essay prompts are unavailable, such as with specific schools: they can reflect on their last three years of high school and try to write down events that may be related to the possible essay prompts. These can be questions like "What has been your biggest challenge and how did you overcome it?" or "How do you demonstrate your leadership?" Another task is to

go over well-written essays from previous years to get a grasp on what college essays look like and possibly become inspired by some of them.

To understand how others approach the process, I spoke with ten rising seniors. Many agreed that the summer was the ideal time to begin unless you had very time-consuming summer activities or jobs. All agreed that this summer shouldn't be wasted by staying home all day and scrolling on Instagram. One student explained that starting in June or July allows students to work at a comfortable pace rather than rushing to meet the deadlines in the fall.

But ultimately, there is no single correct answer. Every student has their own responsibilities, schedules, and goals. Whether students choose to begin now or wait until later, the key is having a plan to follow. College applications will be overwhelming when approached head-on without a strategy. Only with thoughtful preparation and organization can the process become a bit easier to navigate.

Student Reporter

A Plate of Indian Food Breaking a Flavor Barrier



Amber Lee
Grade 10
La Mirada High School

As we advance into July, summer has officially marked its beginning. Students are out of school and starting to enjoy their break. With more time available, I have decided to register for a summer dual enrollment class at Cypress College with the help of my counselor. The class I decided to take is Cross-Cultural Psychology, which teaches how culture influences human behavior and investigates aspects of multiple cultures when compared to one another.

The first task I was assigned by the professor was to complete an Intercultural Experiment by either trying a cuisine from a different culture, visiting a local market that I don't usually go to, or watching a foreign film/TV show. As a foodie, I decided to try Indian food because I realized that I have never actually had authentic Indian food.

At first, I was a bit nervous about trying food from a different culture because although I would consider myself a foodie, I tend to eat at the same restaurants I've been to and loved instead of experimenting



The Chicken Coconut Curry, Chicken Tikka Masala, and Garlic Naan paired with white basmati rice offered me a new cultural experience of India. [Source: Author, Amber Lee]

with different types. Knowing that Indian food is famous for using various spices and having strong, vibrant flavors, I worried if it would match my appetite. Though, with an experimental mindset, I decided to stop by a local Indian restaurant ten minutes away from my house.

Due to going to the restaurant at a later time, I decided to take out the food. After looking through their menu,

I decided to try the Chicken Coconut Curry, Chicken Tikka Masala, and Garlic Naan. The curry was made with tender chicken, various spices, and a creamy coconut milk base. For the tikka masala, it was also mainly roasted chicken in a spiced tomato and cream sauce. The Garlic Naan was an Indian-style flatbread with garlic and cilantro.

Overall, I had a great experience learning about Indian

culture, food, and their spices. At first, the dishes seemed a bit saltier than the flavors I am used to, but when paired with rice, the flavors balanced out nicely. My absolute favorite was the Chicken Coconut Curry because the chicken was incredibly soft, and the creamy coconut sauce was perfect with rice, or when dipped with the Garlic Naan.

To sum it up, I think this assignment was perfect as it pushed students to consider the importance of gaining actual experience with cultures and showing why cross-cultural psychology is important. Stepping out of my comfort zone to try Indian food is something I would not have done if it weren't for this class. I realized that my professor gave us this assignment not just to add to our workload, but to have her students learn that being culturally open-minded is the first step to understanding one another. Ultimately, I learned that breaking down cultural barriers doesn't require a lot of time or money, and gaining a new perspective can start with just a single plate of delicious food from another culture.

Student Reporter

Hanbit Church's 2026 Summer Retreat "Thrive"



Kristine Park
Grade 11
Del Norte High School

Over the course of three hot summer days, Hanbit Church hosted its summer retreat, which brought together students, teachers, and families for a weekend. This year's retreat was centered on the theme "Thrive," which was drawn from Isaiah 40:31. This retreat was led by guest speaker Pastor David Lee, who emphasized spiritual renewal and community bonding. During this retreat, attendees learned more about the importance of teamwork and genuine worship.

From the opening session, the theme "Thrive" was woven throughout sermons, group discussions, and activities. Pastor David Lee's messages were focused on a broad range of topics, including the idea of finding renewed strength through faith. His sermons at retreat encouraged participants to be more perseverant during difficult times of life. Many students described Pastor David's sermons as understandable, grounding, and uplifting, which set a reflective and positive tone for the rest of the retreat.

One of the most engaging aspects of the weekend was the division of students into small game groups. Many of these groups



Hanbit Church poses for a group photo at their 2026 summer retreat, "Thrive." [Source: Hanbit Youth Photo Team]

quickly became tight-knit teams, competing in challenges while also collaborating on creative skits. Many of them had creative names, as well, that they came up with based on a commonality of everyone in their team. The skits, performed later in the retreat, blended humor, storytelling, and biblical themes, giving students a chance to express themselves while reinforcing the message of the Bible in a memorable and understandable way.

Outdoor activities were another highlight, especially those like the water balloon dodgeball game. Laughter and friendly com-

petition were particularly prominent as multiple teams went against each other in different games. Alongside these games, there were also teamwork challenges that required communication and trust, pushing groups to rely on one another in order to succeed. These activities not only added excitement but also reflected the retreat's theme of unity.

The weekend reached its peak on Saturday night with a celebration that many described as the most memorable part of the retreat. The high school praise team led a lively worship session after a long session of prayer, featur-

ing well-known songs, including "Washed" by Elevation Worship. The music created an irreplaceable atmosphere of joy and reflection, with many participants singing along enthusiastically. Many attendees revealed that their favorite part of the night was Celebration, where they could truly be themselves, jump with their friends, and appreciate their faith, which made this evening especially impactful.

Behind the scenes, teachers and parents played a crucial role in making the retreat successful. From organizing car rides to running activities and ensuring safety, their involvement allowed students to be fully engaged without distraction. Many participants expressed appreciation for the dedication and care shown by adult volunteers, noting that it helped create a welcoming and well-organized experience.

As the retreat came to a close, attendees had a shared sense of gratitude and renewal. Many students described leaving with stronger friendships, deeper faith, and great memories from the weekend. I would strongly recommend attending next year's summer retreat at Hanbit to be able to experience all of this again.