

The Acta Diurna

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As we enter the last stretch of the 2017-18 school year, I am reflecting on the experiences and events we have had thus far. One of the most influential and inspiring events of this past quarter was hearing Dr. Samantha Nutt speak. I went into this assembly as most students do, expecting to hear about an important issue but not expecting to be given any solutions or practical ways to make a change. This assembly was much different. She began by sharing her experiences working with people in war-torn parts of the world. While sharing the horrors she has experienced, she also made sure to provide concrete actions we, as students, can take to make a difference. Even here in the states, especially with the increasing violence

Editor's Letter

Emily Hardwick

against students, women, and people in general, we must make a difference. In this quarter's issue, you will have the opportunity to read about the gun issue and the #metoo movement. As a group, we have decided that, while these topics may be uncomfortable for some, they are important to discuss and address if we are to become as informed as possible about the world around us. Unlike most politically charged issues, this one is different, as sexual violence is generally accepted as wrong. However, positions on this, as well as gun control, are varied and there is not always one right or wrong solution. As always, the views and opinions expressed in this issue are just that; views and opinions. If anything, I hope these topics start important conversations.

After reading this issue, if you have any thoughts, criticism, or ideas you would like to share, I encourage you to get in contact with me (ehardwick@altamontschool.org), Mr. T (ntsivourakis@altamontschool.org), or any of the writers.

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#MeToo

Anabelle Davis

The #MeToo movement, a movement against sexual assault and harassment, has erupted in the past few months. This movement is based on victims of sexual assault or harassment coming forward and sharing their experiences. The movement has encouraged many women and men to re-explore their experiences with inappropriate sexual encounters, and it has led to a greater national conversation about sexual misconduct.

The movement has given victims a forum for confronting their harassers and has led to many victories regarding justice in these allegations. Larry Nassar, former U.S. Olympic gymnastics team doctor, has been sentenced to up to 175 years in prison for assaulting over 125 athletes, at least 98 of whom addressed him in court. Harvey Weinstein has been removed from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and from his own company after being accused of sexual misconduct, from unwarranted sexual advances to rape, by more than 84 women.

Not only has the #MeToo movement been effective in serving justice to violators and providing support for victims of sexual abuse, the #MeToo movement has also caused us to question what constitutes sexual harassment and, by extension, what constitutes consent. In January of 2018, actor Aziz Ansari was accused of sexual misconduct by a woman with whom he went on a date. The woman claims that Ansari “ignored clear non-verbal cues” from her, but she admits that “most of [her] discomfort was expressed in [her] pulling away and mumbling,” and that she did consensually engage in some sexual activity with him. In response to this article (from a website called *Babe*), Bari Weiss wrote a response article for the New York Times entitled “Aziz Ansari is Guilty. Of Not Being a Mind Reader.” Weiss argues that this woman’s intended exposé “transforms what ought to be a movement for women’s empowerment into an emblem for female helplessness.” Stories such as these force us as onlookers to define consent and sexual misconduct. To discredit this woman’s story is to discredit her discomfort with the encounter, but to include her story with those of the women who have faced sexual abuse in more forceful and violent ways, with no signs of consent, seems almost dishonorable to the movement. So, we must ask ourselves: what do we define as sexual abuse, and how can we then prevent it?

The resolution to this issue, I believe, has already begun to take place through taking a stand. Women must be strong enough to take a stand -- whether that means speaking out against those who have victimized us or knowing when, and how to say “no.” Transparency is key to diminishing the prevalence of sexual misconduct in our society, and we may only achieve transparency through empowering one another. We must not discredit one another, and we must not discredit the movement by “transform[ing]... [the] movement... into an emblem for female helplessness.” In an article on feminism and sexual assault, Margaret Atwood argues that “a war among women, as opposed to a war on women, is always pleasing to those who do not wish women well.” Through the #MeToo movement, victimized women have achieved an unprecedented level of transparency regarding sexual assault. It is only by empowering one another to take a stand may we strengthen each other. #Time’sUp.

#MeToo

Anna Kate Lembke

Since October of last year, no social movement has created larger waves than the one born from the seemingly unspectacular hashtag that finds its origins in MySpace over a decade ago. Focused on drawing attention to workplace sexual assault, #MeToo has sparked an international effort to transform the discussion of sexual misconduct from a taboo into regular subject matter. The movement highlights the scope of sexual harassment, asking women who have been victims to tweet out the hashtag to show solidarity with their fellow women and hope to encourage others to come forward and share their stories. The issue of unwanted sexual advances in the workplace is pervasive, as 54% of women in the workplace report having received unwanted sexual advances and 95% say that even when brought up, these issues go unaddressed and the perpetrators go unpunished. #MeToo provides an immediate and wildly successful platform, as the hashtag was tweeted nearly a million times in the first 48 hours of the movement. Women across the globe have seized upon the wave of speaking out, and anyone watching the news can see this: numerous celebrities, politicians, and other social figures have had their actions exposed and have faced the consequences of their actions. The popularity of the movement speaks to the decades of societal aversion to tackling the issue of sexual harassment, as well as the newfound drive women have to break through the stigma surrounding sexual assault to create social change.

But, while many have lauded the movement as a success citing the platform that allows victims to have their voices heard, others have criticized the movement's willingness to accept allegations as immediately true. Allegations of sexual misconduct come at high costs; the accused lose jobs, and credibility, and even if the allegations are disproven, the damage already done is sometimes irreversible. With the ability to spread information quickly on social media paired with a social justice movement fixated on removing abusers, these false allegations are particularly dangerous. That's why movements like #MeToo that are based on social media are wildfires—impossible to control once they have begun. There is no way to control or fact check all of the accusations, no way to validate if anything said is true, and no way to navigate the track of the movement. The moment that people began with tweeting that hashtag was the moment that the movement became effectively uncontrollable. Among the critics of the movement's growing power is author Margaret Atwood. She comments that because of the movement's origin as a solution to a broken legal system, the danger comes when the movement itself effectively replaces the law, allowing the avid supporters of #MeToo to become the law itself. In this situation, Atwood worries that "extremists win". The danger of extremists corrupting the movement is why the current leaders should seek to capitalize on their momentum and push for solutions that reach further than social media accusations. I believe in the importance of #MeToo as a step in the right direction. But it is just that, a step on a bigger path that will take reform on a far broader scale. The dialogue that #MeToo has generated is critical in establishing lasting discussion of how to address this issue, but it is not the solution. The movement needs to keep pushing, aim higher, and use its power to create broader reform. This is a critical part of the path to lasting reform that will hopefully be able to target root causes of workplace harassment and set up a safer and more inclusive society for

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future generations. #MeToo is an important societal step, but it is only a band-aid for an issue that requires a deeper and more complicated solution.

Guns and School Safety in America

Asher Desai

On Valentine's Day, 2018, a gunman, who was expelled from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School over a year ago, entered his former high school and killed fourteen students and three teachers. In the following weeks, surviving students of MSD have decided to make it clear to the rest of the nation that they want change. Those students have reopened the national debate on how to address the problem of school shootings in America. They have made it clear that they will continue to lobby for legislation which will help make them safer in school.

It is clear from the coverage of these students that there is one topic that they believe will stop these shootings if addressed: gun control. Oh, gun control! The topic which never unites and always divides. It is an issue which seemingly has no common ground. Conservatives claim that liberals want to take their guns away to allow a tyrannical government to destroy the ideals that make America great. Liberals claim that conservatives ignore the killing of children in schools. The majority of Americans, through the continuing polarization of our political system, fall into one of those two camps.

The only way to solve the issue of guns in America is to compromise. There is simply no getting around that. There is no way that both sides are going to get everything they want, and there is also no way that either side can fully convince the other of their argument. We must assess which issues both sides could feasibly get behind, and then work on continuing to make compromises. Right now, that middle ground is fixing the existing background check system and ensuring that all information is properly updated. Some may feel that this goes too far, and some feel that this does not go far enough, but it is a healthy compromise, and that is what America needs right now.

Athletics Update

Caroline Lee

Altamont athletics have been thriving the past few weeks. From soccer to golf, and track, Altamont sports have no limits on their successes. Congratulations to Darian Sanders (senior) for placing second in long jump at the Cullman Invitational track meet on March 17th. Darian is now second in the boy's long jump school record. At the same meet, James Dixon had a second-place finish in the 800-meter run. Altamont had a wonderful showing at this meet, placing in the small schools' division. The varsity and junior varsity boys' soccer teams are defending a win against Gardendale, JV winning 4-0 and Varsity 6-1. The girls' soccer team is currently holding a 4-4 record, with their rivalry game against Indian Springs coming up. Both boys and girls golf teams are also doing great, with tournament wins this past week. Julian Collier (sophomore) placed ninth overall in the Fairview Invitational golf match. The girls' tennis team is 7-1 this season, including wins against a 6A school, Indian Springs, and Randolph. Watch for them at Sectionals on April 17th. Our boys' tennis team is looking just as strong with wins against Westminster and Capital. Congratulations to all the athletes and teams at Altamont and Go Knights!

Track and Field

Asher Desai

The winter is a difficult season for Track and Field athletes. Though we compete indoors, there is no way to train exclusively indoors, so we must endure the cold throughout the majority of our training. We ran, jumped, and threw in the midst of some of Alabama's coldest weather of the last few years. The cold can also cause a variety of injuries, because an athlete's body is not as flexible in low temperatures. Still, we had to continue our training through the sub-optimal weather.

At the Indoor State meet, Altamont exceeded expectations. We entered the indoor season with the intent of preparing for outdoor. Indoors, we compete against 1a-3a, which includes schools against whom we are not equipped to compete. Still, our girls' team was able to place 1st among the other 2a schools, and the boys' team placed 2nd out of 2a, and 7th out of 1a-3a. These team scores were underscored by terrific individual performances. James Dixon won the 800m for the second year in a row, and Cole Hall placed 4th in the pole vault.

Those strong indoor performances set us up well for the outdoor season. Altamont has competed in the Vestavia Hills and Cullman meets so far this season, and both meets saw great performances in a variety of events. There are still seven weeks left of outdoor track, and at the State meet, the culmination of the season, both the boys' and girls' teams seek to return home with blue trophies. The girls' team has become a powerhouse in 2a track and field, and they hope to defend their title from last year. The boys have not won the state title in years, and this year there is a real possibility that it could happen. Strong new talent in the jumping, sprinting, and middle-distance events could help bring home the championship.

Fine Arts

Abby Lee

Fine Arts are a crucial part of an Altamont education, and students devote time and effort into plays, musicals, exhibits, and sculptures throughout the year. Each year, Altamont never fails to bring the student body and parents creative dialogue on the stage and stunning works in the Hames Gallery. Here is what some of our talented students are up to now:

In musical theater, students are working on the production of *Big Fish*, a charming story written by our own alum, Daniel Wallace. Set in Alabama, it tells the story of Edward Bloom and the interaction between himself and his son in fantasies and fairytales. Come check out their shows on April 23rd and 24th. Choir has their spring show coming up soon, too. Comprised of medleys, their show is a Disney extravaganza, with ensemble pieces and solos sure to excite. Lynn Park is soon to display two pieces from the art and sculpture classes. One of the landscape designs has three mountains with rivers spiraling from three different directions, made out of surprising materials only our own art students would think to use. Photography students have recently finished their "Human Rights" exhibit, featuring photographs meant to capture the emotions of someone who doesn't have the rights they should, such as the right the religious freedom and the right to an education. It is a deeply personal exhibition and I would greatly recommend taking a look, located outside of Mrs. Hunter's room.

Outing Club

Amrita Lakhanpal

The Outing Club, one of Altamont's newest clubs, was created for the sole purpose of getting people outside. It is a common belief that people are happier outside, separated from phone screens, textbooks, etc. After realizing that he made the best relationships with people that he enjoys the outdoors with, President Will Denniston decided to start the outing club to not only spark an interest in the amazing nature areas Birmingham has to offer, but to also bring people closer. The Outing Club was received with much excitement on club signup day from both students and faculty alike. Members of the club have participated in many activities throughout the year including hiking, skiing, and volunteering at the Mulberry Fork Kayak Race. As every event passes, the club gains a few more interested students who seem to truly care and enjoy spending time outdoors. In terms of goals for the future, Will spoke of a possible end-of-year trip to the Palisades for rock climbing, and hopes to recruit more members and get more people excited about nature. When asked about his favorite part of being President of the Outing Club, Will said, "If you haven't figured out by now, I'm in love with the idea of adventure. I've gotten to spend some great times enjoying and exploring places with fun people, and I look forward to that in the next year." Not only does Will plan the various events for the club, he also wrote a trail guide for its members and the Altamont community. Having been hiking the trails of Birmingham for quite some time, Will felt that others should have a nice overview of all of them. He says, "The purpose of the club is to get outside, and the trail guide is there to remind people how accessible these epic places are!" Check out Will's trail guide under the Student Life "Clubs" section of the Altamont website!

AR Sandbox

Henry Chang

Have you ever wanted to play with an AR sandbox? Students, working with Mr. Dominguez and Mr. James have created Altamont's own Augmented Reality Sandbox (AR Sandbox for short). Using the open source software from UC Davis, the originator of the AR sandbox, Altamont students constructed the auto-updating topographical map. The AR sandbox allows students to create and mold the geography of the sandbox and watch as their creation changes.

The Sandbox utilizes the Microsoft Kinetic sensor to determine the exact topography. The sensor continuously sends out Infrared red light into the sandbox, which travels as far as possible before bouncing back toward the sensor. Using the time for the light to travel back, the Kinetic is able to determine the height of the sand within the sandbox. These data from the kinetic allows the software to determine the exact shade and color that needs to be projected. By continuously running this cycle, the AR sandbox is able to create a real-time auto-updating topographical map.

Furthermore, the AR sandbox is able to scan anything within the pit. Using the same data from the Kinetic, it is possible to create a 3D Printed replica of the terrain. Students can then build features in the sandbox and print it out for display without worrying another student destroying their work. Aside being an excellent learning tool, the construction for the AR sandbox provides computer science students with opportunities to benefit the school while applying their knowledge to areas outside the classroom.

Academic Teams

Wei Shiow Fong

Altamont is immensely proud of the academic prestige its students achieve and sustain, and rightly so. In just one quarter of the school year, a short nine weeks, we can show off awards won by our French students, our Scholar's Bowl teams, and our students who participated in the Science Fair.

Beginning with our Scholar's Bowl teams, both Varsity and Junior Varsity teams competed very well at the Alabama Scholastic Competition Association District Tournament. The Junior Varsity team, consisting of Kuleen Sasse, Ahad Bashir, Benjamin Tang, Sameer Sultan, Shawn Goyal, and Hannah Ashraf, advanced to the Division I State Tournament. The Varsity team, comprising Asher Desai, Max Renfro, Benjamin Tang, Isabel Coleman, Kuleen Sasse, and Elise Solazzo went undefeated in the District Tournament and also advanced to the Division I State Tournament.

In addition to our regular Scholar's Bowl teams, our French Scholar's Bowl team, led by Matthew Hamrick and consisting of Otulissa Zhu, Vivek Sasse, Caroline Lee, Simms Berdy, David O'Brien, Lauren Perry, and Eleanor Roth, performed exceptionally well at the Alabama Federation of French Clubs Convention at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. They received a Superieur (1st Place) for their outstanding work.

Lastly, Altamont students displayed their work at the Central Alabama Regional Science and Engineering Fair, held at the University of Alabama, Birmingham. Students from both middle and upper schools had incredible showings, with several taking home awards in all different divisions. Alexandra Pritchard, Amrita Lakhanpal, Sarah Miller, Lewis Rand, Mason Coleman, Siddharth Doppalapudi, and Colin Thatcher all qualified to advance to the State Fair. Congratulations!

Beneficial Bacteria

Maddie Thomas

New research focusing on the microbiomes found on human skin has uncovered a strain of bacteria that has the ability to inhibit the growth of some types of cancers- such as melanoma, or other skin cancers. This study, done at the University of California San Diego School of Medicine, has uncovered potential new roles for the microorganisms that exist on our skin. These newfound bacteria- called Streptococcus epidermis- is commonly found on the outer layers of a healthy human's skin. Streptococcus epidermis produces a chemical compound called N-6-hydroxyaminopurine, or 6-HAP for short. This compound is able to prevent or impair DNA synthesis and, therefore, inhibit the spread of tumor cells. The molecule is especially beneficial since it can suppress the development of tumors caused specifically by exposure to UV light. The University's experiment involved injecting mice with 6-Hap every 48 hours over a period of two weeks. After this, the scientists transplanted melanoma cells into the mice. It was found that not only were there no apparent and/or toxic side effects from the 6-HAP injections, but also that the melanoma tumor size was suppressed by more than 50% in comparison to control group. Staphylococcus epidermis is not the only bacterium known to have a positive effect on human health. Previous studies have shown that most bacteria that dwell in microbiomes in and on our bodies have some sort of symbiotic

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relationship with us. An example of this is seen in the strain of bacteria known as *Staphylococcus aureus*- which produces antimicrobial peptides. However, these bacteria are also the most common cause of food poisoning. This perfectly represents the delicate balance our body must maintain with the microorganisms that coexist alongside us. New advances in this field of study are crucial to understanding the microscopic life that exists all around us. However, more research is needed in order to understand the effects of 6-HAP on the human body.

In Defense of Liberal Arts

Maya Guru

As we move deeper into the digital age, the STEM course of study is becoming increasingly emphasized in our education. Many argue that this field of science and engineering is much more lucrative and useful as technology becomes more present in our daily lives. Others state that computer literacy is a necessity in our age. While there is some truth to these statements, the value of a solid foundation in the liberal arts cannot be overlooked.

The liberal arts allow us to challenge our beliefs and perspectives in ways that an objective math-based education cannot. This is crucial especially in the field of policy-making, for STEM-oriented minds can sometimes get caught up in the excitement of a technological era without thinking of the important ramifications of these actions. As a lifelong science/math-oriented student and a prospective STEM student in college, I would argue that a basic understanding of history, literature, and culture is what really teaches us how to think critically and analytically. In a future dominated by artificial intelligence and a digital presence, it gives us character and individuality.

I myself am partial to math and science; however, rather than encourage all members of the younger generation to pursue a STEM career, I would encourage them to pursue what they love. This is not to deny that computer literacy is an essential skill, but simply to assert that there is a place in our future for people of all academic orientations.

Pet Peeves

Matthew Hamrick

In my last article, I wrote about how hallways are commonly blocked, one of my biggest pet peeves. I figured I could elaborate some of my others. A pet peeve is specific activity or mentality that annoys specific person, and learning about someone's pet peeves gives new insight to that person's inner workings. Friends become better friends when they know more about them. Here are three more pet peeves of mine that I'd like to share:

1. "For lunch I'm eating my favorite sandwich, carrots and potato chips." (The Oxford Comma)

For those who don't know, the Oxford comma (or the Serial comma) is the comma that appears before the "and" or "or" in lists of three objects or more. Consider the following statements.

1: I like butter, cheese, and milk.

2: I like butter, cheese and milk.

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In sentence 1, the Oxford comma is after “cheese,” and sentence two lacks the Oxford comma. Both are grammatically correct! But the Oxford comma sometimes does matter. Consider these two sentences:

3: On Friday, I learned about two types of birds, momentum, and The Civil War.

4: On Friday, I learned about two types of birds, momentum and The Civil War.

Sentence 3 makes sense. You know exactly what I learned about in presumably three different classes on Friday. There’s no ambiguity. For Sentence 4, apparently, I learned about a bird called “momentum” and a bird called “The Civil War.” You might be thinking, “Wouldn’t it be just as easy just to take ‘momentum’ and ‘two types of birds’ and switch them? Then you don’t need the Oxford comma.” But what if I had Biology class, Physics class, and then History class, in that order? Swapping them around loses some of the meaning. While it may be true that newspaper and magazine publications need to save as much space as possible, the fact that many are turning towards online publication means this restriction does not matter as much. Which would you rather prioritize? Clarity or saving space? I’ll take clarity.

2. “Why do I need algebra?” (A defense for “useless” mathematics)

Some adults say, “I was never good at math in school,” like it’s no big deal. After I finish my education, if I ever said, “I was never so great at reading in school” when I’m older, then people would look at me and think I’m stupid. Maybe the word would be “illiterate.” I ask a simple question. Why is this ok? There’s a weird double standard against numbers. In my experience, the aforementioned people say they’re fine with math “until they mixed in letters,” or algebra. Let’s use that as a baseline. These people struggled with algebra, which is perfectly fine. There’s no problem with having an academic weak point. But let’s look at it this way. At Altamont, we take math classes and read literature ahead of other schools. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a common book for most freshmen to read for public schools. I couldn’t get away with saying, “*To Kill a Mockingbird* killed me. I barely got through it.” when people know I’ve gone through high school English. Mathematical literacy is just as important as learning how to read. Yet people can get away with statements like, “I’m never going to use algebra!” Except they use it every day and don’t even realize it. Algebra lets people have a better understanding about “miles per hour,” interest rates, etc. Also, how do these people know they’ll never need algebra? Algebra is important for a basic education. I didn’t learn how to turn words into sentences because I knew, without a doubt, that I’d read *To Kill a Mockingbird* in 7th grade English class at Altamont. I think it’s important that we stress mathematical literacy in today’s society. It’s important to understand how numbers work for economic decision-making, for most job opportunities, and for checking to make sure the data makes sense.

3. One Hundred and One Dalmatians (How to say bigger numbers)

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On one hand, the story of One Hundred and One Dalmatians is charming. But that's not the point here. I despise this title not because it falsely advertises but because I find the "and" unnecessary. Think about it. Say out loud the following number: 1,608,521. I read it like this: "One million, six hundred eight thousand, five hundred twenty-one." But maybe you read it as "One million, six hundred and eight thousand, five hundred and twenty-one." Why does the "and" come after only the word "hundred?" If we like putting "and" there, shouldn't it come after every large-number name? Maybe you're thinking that "One million and six hundred and eight thousand and five hundred and twenty-one" sounds stupid, but that's the point. "And" is just cumbersome and unnecessary in numbers, except in one place. Think about how "\$52.43" is spoken aloud. "Fifty-two dollars and forty-three cents." What about "5.6 miles?" Maybe you read it as "Five point six miles," but the other way to say it is "Five and six-tenths of a mile." What about "4.5 feet?" It reads as "four and a half feet." The decimal place is where "and" appears pretty much without fail, unless you use "point," which is a suitable alternative. Basically, either the title should read One Hundred One Dalmatians, or I don't remember the poor one-tenth Dalmatian that the title suggests.

This last pet peeve of mine might be oddly specific and pedantic. But that's what a pet peeve is: something in particular that a person finds annoying. Everyone has pet peeves, and sometimes it's important to know who has what pet peeve. Maybe it's more serious than how one pronounces large numbers, and he or she is too polite to speak up about it. Though, if the pet peeve isn't so serious, it can be really fun to ask people why they have such pet peeves, as usually there's a funny story attached. Just, while you're near me at least, don't say that there are three hundred and sixty-five days in a year, that Algebra is useless, or that the Oxford comma is not important.

Odds and End



**Do you want to write
for The Acta Diurna?**

Email

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for more information.

Upcoming Events

Spring Holiday: April 27

Review Day: May 16

Exams: May 17, 18, 21

Commencement, Graduation: May 24