An underwater adventure with “The Little Mermaid”

By ELENA SAVIANO
Assistant news editor

The doors opened, the lights flickered, and chattering students, parents, faculty and young Disney fans poured into the newly-renovated Garland Theater, eager to experience the magical world under the sea. As the overture began, conversation ceased and the audience is instantly transported into the aquatic world of devious and mesmerizing music.

From April 26th to May 5th, Poly Upper School theater students performed their spring production of “The Little Mermaid,” a stage-adapted version of the 1989 animated Disney film. The musical narrates the classic story of Ariel, a young, musically talented mermaid who falls in love with life on the shore, which then pulls her away from her family. Her intrigue with humans drives her to make a dangerous deal with Ursula, a cunning sea witch, and risk the loss of her gift for singing. As the musical unfolds, the audience becomes captivated by the world of Ariel and her aquatic comrades who learn lessons of acceptance, determination and confidence along the way.

The show was packed with showstopping musical numbers that collectively required months of hard work and dedicated rehearsal to perfect. The actors began immersing themselves in their roles as early as February, focusing on every aspect of their characters to ensure two weekends of captivating performances.

Junior Addie Lillard, who played Ariel, said, “I am in awe of all the work that the cast has done. From the work we’ve done onstage to the messiness around behind-the-scenes, I’ve gotten to know my peers and myself better than before. I’ve enjoyed every second!”

Whether it be through organizing countless oceanic costumes or training for hours to master complicated dance steps, the cast and crew of the production were committed to perfecting each and every show.

Upper School Performing Arts department director Tina Cocumelli remarked, “This particular cast is one of the best groups we’ve ever had in terms of vocal ability. They’ve worked really hard on capturing the essence of the characters through the music, and it really shows. Additionally, all of the actors have had to stretch themselves to find authentic characters within the confines of the Disney stereotypes, enabling the audience to empathize with them, rather than just seeing them as caricatures.”

Every year, the actors in the spring musical form close bonds that extend beyond rehearsals.

Senior Cole Swanson, playing the role of King Triton, reflected, “I have been a part of the Performing Arts Department for all four years of my Poly career, and ‘The Little Mermaid’ is my last and final show. From the moment I walked into the Garland Theatre, I knew I had found my people and was immediately invited into the family. These people have helped shape me into not only a better singer, actor and dancer, but a better person on and off campus.”

Sustainability Council introduces reusable metal forks to the Upper School

By CHARLOTTE HART
Staff writer

When is there a better time to implement sustainable changes than on Earth Day? Each day, plastic utensils end up in Poly trash cans, eventually finding themselves in landfills. Several Upper School students recognized this unsustainable and unhealthy practice and decided to inspire a major change on campus: metal lunch utensils.

This shift on the Poly campus was spurred by the Sustainability Council, a club run by sophomore Molly Hill and seniors Liiza Kaye-Lew and Aisling Murran. With the help of Dave Yamashita, Poly’s Director of Operations and Staff, the club began the process of switching plastic utensils with reusable metal forks, a simple process with a noticeable impact.

Judging by the number of students who purchase lunch from Bevaris every day and the number of days in the school year, there is a large amount of plastic waste from utensils alone. By switching to metal forks, Poly hopes to reduce its plastic waste production considerably.

However, there are still some major obstacles in the way. Within the first week of using metal utensils, 92 forks were lost, causing a 12% decrease in forks. With such a large number of students either losing or throwing away these utensils, the new system will no longer be sustainable. As the metal forks enter their third week of usage, the Sustainability Council is planning on dealing with this challenge by placing the fork collection bins in more convenient locations around the school.

In the future, the council hopes to make the lunch service with Bevaris a completely sustainable process and
Making the roster: college recruitment for Poly athletes

Within the hypercompetitive and increasingly consuming college process, we often talk about athletic recruitment as an "easy way out." It’s true that, as students begin applying to colleges, athletes and non-athletes embark on two distinct paths: while their non-recruited counterparts obsess over acceptance rates, finess their reach to target to likely ratios and bulk up on extracurricular accolades, athletes network with coaches, send out game film and attempt to secure places on collegiate teams. However, the college process for student-athletes is far from easy.

For this feature, we spoke with athletes beginning the college process, seniors who have completed it, college counselors and members of the Athletics Department. Beginning as early as eighth grade, the college admissions timeline for recruited athletes is markedly different than that of other students.

Athletes are expected to initiate recruitment talks with coaches by reaching out repeatedly over the course of several years.

"I started emailing coaches in eighth grade. For the majority of summers before my freshman, sophomore and junior years, I went to college volleyball camps in order to get to know the coaches and evaluate the campuses," said junior Ella Mao, who began playing club volleyball when she was in elementary school and verbally committed to a college volleyball team this year.

According to Assistant Athletic Director Thomas Sale, who advises students on which camps and showcases to attend and helps student-athletes prepare their academic profiles and reach out to coaches, students rarely begin the recruitment process later than the end of sophomore year. Junior Maggie Jameson, who is being recruited for soccer, commented, "Being a student-athlete, I had to be more involved than my non-athletic [grade] peers since my school I wanted to attend, which majors I was interested in, and whether or not I wanted to go to the East Coast."

Ella Mao’s twin and an outside hitter who also made a verbal commitment, explained that recruitment regulations require players to reach out to coaches until 11th grade.

“There is a rule that college coaches can’t contact you first until September 1 of your junior year, so when I started talking to college coaches as early as eighth grade, coaches would give their cards to me so that I could reach out to them first.”

These emails and calls aren’t one-time interactions: players need to check in with coaches regularly in order to maintain the possibility of recruitment.

As college counselor Mark Rasic commented, athletes need to bring a unique level of professionalism to the process due to the need to track communication with coaches. Students often take notes during calls and archive emails from coaches.

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Students often begin the college recruitment process far earlier than DI schools, and email the head coach around every two weeks, and the head coaching process later in comparison to DI schools. I would call my college coach the summer of junior year, as the college is DIII and starts their recruiting process far earlier than Division II or III schools.

In addition to contacting coaches as early as eighth grade, athletes often need to prepare their application materials, from test scores to transcripts, earlier. As Rasic explained, coaches may ask to review the academic qualifications at any point in the recruitment talks; thus, athletes must start assembling their college profiles earlier than their peers.

Ella Mao said, “I had ACT earlier than all of my classmates; I took my ACT during the end of my sophomore year, then-juniors were taking theirs.”

Despite common belief, fulfill certain academic requirements, student-athletes have as high as regular applicants must be strong. Senior Franco, a senior who was recruited to Division I, said, “I think I got a lot more security in my choices. I was able to get to where I wanted to go at some schools and I was able to get to where I wanted to go at some schools.”

A senior, who committed to Cornell University next year and who will be a pre-read at many schools, which is when admissions counselors at a school will look over my numbers and let the coach know my chances of being admitted.”

Ella Mao added, “Athletic recruits have less flexibility in their choice of colleges because it all depends on whether or not the college coach wants you as well. It is possible that the coach at your first choice college might not be interested in you at all.”

The most stressful part of the process occurs when students reach the end of their junior year, noted, “I think the most important thing that coaches are looking for is identity. They are looking for student-athletes who have been consistent in their college process. Coaches are looking for student-athletes who have been consistent in their college process.

When they commit to a college offer from a coach, athletes have to deal with the stressful possibility that, after dedicating much of their time and energy to their sports, they may not get recruited.

Senior Ella Cornwell, who committed to the University of Chicago for track and field in the winter of her senior year, commented, “I got a lot more security in my choices. I was able to get to where I wanted to go at many schools, which is when admissions counselors at a school will look at my numbers and let the coach know my chances of being admitted.”

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Parents of recruited student-athletes are often very involved in the process. Parents often review student-athletes’ academic records and determine the range of schools they would be eligible for, while the Athletics Department reviews athletic status and advises students on which schools they may be interested in.

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The maddening process of contacting coaches, attending summer camps and visiting with teams, athletes must formally apply to the schools they hope to attend, beginning with their top choice (to which they often apply through early decision or early action cycles).

“College coaches literally rank their recruits and have about five spots per class, so they only offer the top of their list,” said Ella Mao. “The volleyball positions that college coaches recruit depend on how many [players] of each position are already on their [current] roster and how good those players are.”

After deciding which school’s athletic program they like best and where they have the best chance, for admission students apply.

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Athletes in the middle stages of recruitment must also maintain their physical health to continue playing, an injury on or off the court or field could completely disrupt their plans.

Ultimately, the experience of recruited athletes applying to college is undoubtedly different than that of regular students, yet it requires immense preparation and years of intense practice and competition to achieve the athletic skill for recruitment to a top college. While many students may view college acceptance as the culmination of their years-long academic and extracurricular efforts, athletic recruitment is the culmination of long, time-intensive athletic careers and a protracted college process.

Rasic encouraged students with even the slightest interest in playing a sport in college to be as informed about the process as possible. By researching sports available at different schools, looking for the right coaches and camps and contacting coaches, students may find opportunities they wouldn’t have otherwise.

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Navigating hookup culture in the Poly Upper School

In light of social sexuality educator, storyteller and author Cindy Pierce's recent visit to the Upper School, where she addressed how kids can both develop healthy sexualities and safely navigate college hookup culture, the Life section recently sent a survey to all Upper School students asking about “hookup culture” in the Poly community. For reference, the American Psychology Association defines the term “hookups” as “brief, uncommitted sexual encounters between individuals who are not romantic partners or dating each other.” The survey received 181 responses—approximately half of the Upper School student body—all of which were anonymous.

The term “hookup culture” is most commonly heard in the context of the college experience, where casual, uncommitted sexual encounters between individuals who are not romantic partners have seemingly become the norm. While mainstream discussions about hookup culture have mainly centered around college students, a similar atmosphere arguably exists at Poly and has been the topic of more and more conversations in recent years, both in and out of the classroom.

Poly students have raised questions about the term’s inherently ambiguous definition and its prevalence in the Upper School and, in the recent survey, raised concerns about an air of secrecy and pressure surrounding hooking up in the Poly community: “Culturally, hooking up is so expected that it practically seems required in order to have a ‘legit’ high school experience,” said one respondent. “There’s so much pressure surrounding hooking up nobody wants to be the last one to do it, but nobody wants to be seen as doing it too frequently.”

Though classes like Upper School Human Development and student discourse-heavy clubs like FemEd provide students with an opportunity to engage in dialogue surrounding sexuality and relationships in high school, much of the candid conversation takes place outside of the classroom and off campus within friend groups.

Students have placed an emphasis on the importance of—but difficulty in—developing a standard definition for “hooking up.” With this in mind, we asked survey respondents to define “hookup.” The results revealed staggering discrepancies: 23.2% of respondents defined hooking up as “kissing,” 4.4% as “oral sex,” 5.6% as “vaginal/anal sex” and 55.2% as “all of the above,” which include all three respective categories. Additionally, respondents were given the option of writing in their own definitions, which included “any of the above,” “oral, vaginal or anal sex,” “any casual, unattached sexual activity” and, most popularly, “it depends.”

This disparity in definitions is significant because it establishes “hooking up” as an umbrella term that equates kissing with penetrative sex, two degrees of intimacy that many would view as distinct on the spectrum of sexual activity. How can we comprehensively learn about and discuss sex and relationships in our community when our common terminology is as general as “hooking up?”

Based on survey results, the consensus (70.1%) stands that Poly does have a prominent or somewhat prominent hookup culture. Those who indicated that they were “not sure” of its prevalence were—based on disaggregated data by age—predominantly underclassmen, specifically freshmen, suggesting that younger students are not privy to the knowledge surrounding the Upper School’s hookup culture and how to navigate it. Although this makes sense considering that they are the newest members of the community, it does not mean that underclassmen should be excluded from the conversation.

“The most imperative time for teaching Poly students about hookup culture and how to be safe is the beginning of freshman year,” said one respondent. “Because of the unique level of vulnerability of freshmen, they are disproportionately harmed by hookup culture.”

Poly’s Upper School Human Development curriculum begins teaching about sex, drugs and alcohol in sophomore year, a late introduction for freshmen who have already found themselves in situations where such information would have been critical to their well-being.

Even human development courses, though, based on survey data, carry little weight in influencing how students navigate hookup culture at Poly. Students seek advice and information on hooking up from a variety of sources: 76.4% of respondents stated that they consult “students in their grade,” 67.8% said “older students,” 35.1% said “peers outside of Poly,” 10.6% said “human development,” 9.8% said their “parents” and 3.4% said “adults at Poly.”

When asked whether they feel pressured to hook up at Poly, 18.8% of respondents said “yes,” 35.9% said “somewhat,” and 45.3% said “not at all.” Several respondents shed light on the issue of gender impacting the pressure that students face to participate or not participate in hookup culture.

“I think a lot of Poly’s hookup culture is intertwined with bro culture and the issues that stem from that. For example, boys will pressure their female friends to hook up with some of their other male friends; it’s like they have a sense of control over the actions of their girl friends. So unlike the discussion—as opposed to lecture-based—and that in order for the Poly community to promote healthy dialogue surrounding relationships and hooking up, it’s necessary that students abstain from contributing to a culture of shame and pressure with regards to students’ participation in hookup culture.

Poly’s faculty and administration is not responsible for policing hookup culture, which largely takes place off-campus, unless it’s brought to their attention that a student’s safety is at risk. It’s up to Upper School students themselves to honor the choices of their peers and champion safety, responsibility and mutual respect in order to minimize the negative effects and harmful pressures that occur—but don’t have to—in Poly’s hookup culture.