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THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

By Amanda '25

Growing up, I used to sing my heart out to Hannah Montana's 'Best of Both Worlds,' imagining what it would be like to live two completely different lives. Now, as an international student, I know exactly what it's like—but it's not quite as glamorous as Disney made it seem to be.

Where I Am From

The clock strikes midnight. It's my fourth birthday away from home, and I find myself lying in bed, staring at the ceiling, whispering a quiet *Happy Birthday* to myself. My phone lights up with messages, but I silence it, unable to shake the inexplicable mix of emotions—homesickness, loneliness, and a sense of detachment.

Today, I feel their absence more than ever: my family's slightly off-key Happy Birthday chorus, my mom's warm hugs and home-cooked meals, the playful fights with my siblings, the heat of the sun, the roosters crowing in the morning, the lively holiday celebrations, the beaches just a drive away, the sound of my native tongue spoken all around me, and the neighbors singing their hearts out on the karaoke machine. More than anything, I miss the unspoken understanding of home—the ability to share life's moments without the need for a text or call.

Where I am Now

It's 9:00 PM. My phone is still on silent, the notifications piling up. A knock at the door pulls me back to reality. My friends stand there... holding gifts. I hesitate, feeling the familiar lump in my throat.

In longing for home, I sometimes overlook the one I have built here. The friends I have made at Bentley

have become my support system. We've navigated the highs and lows of transitioning to college life together. From late-night study sessions, morning walks, job hunting, interview preps, stress-induced baking sessions, to epic fails in the kitchen. Through laughter, frustration, stress, and tears, we've built something more than friendship—we've built our family.

The Struggles of Being In-Between

Flying between two countries is a privilege, but it also comes with its own struggles. Every time I board a plane, I leave behind a part of myself—one life traded for another, never fully belonging to either. When I return to my home country, I miss the independence and the conveniences of my life in the U.S. When I fly back here, I leave behind my family, my culture, and the comfort of home.

And yet, I never quite feel "at home" in either place. Back home, I get teased for my "American" accent and the way I sometimes struggle to find the right words in my own language. In the U.S., I am constantly asked, *Where are you from?*—showing that my "American" accent isn't "American enough," and is a small but constant reminder that I don't completely fit in here either.

I've missed birthdays, holidays, and countless milestones back home while trying to create a future elsewhere. I can no longer walk into my family's living room to hang out or to announce a personal achievement. Now, I wait for our weekly calls to share my life updates. And then there's the uncertainty—the weight of being on a student visa, not knowing where life will take me next. It's a constant struggle for someone like me—a Type A planner. I plan years ahead, yet my future remains a big question mark.



Coming to Terms with Two Homes

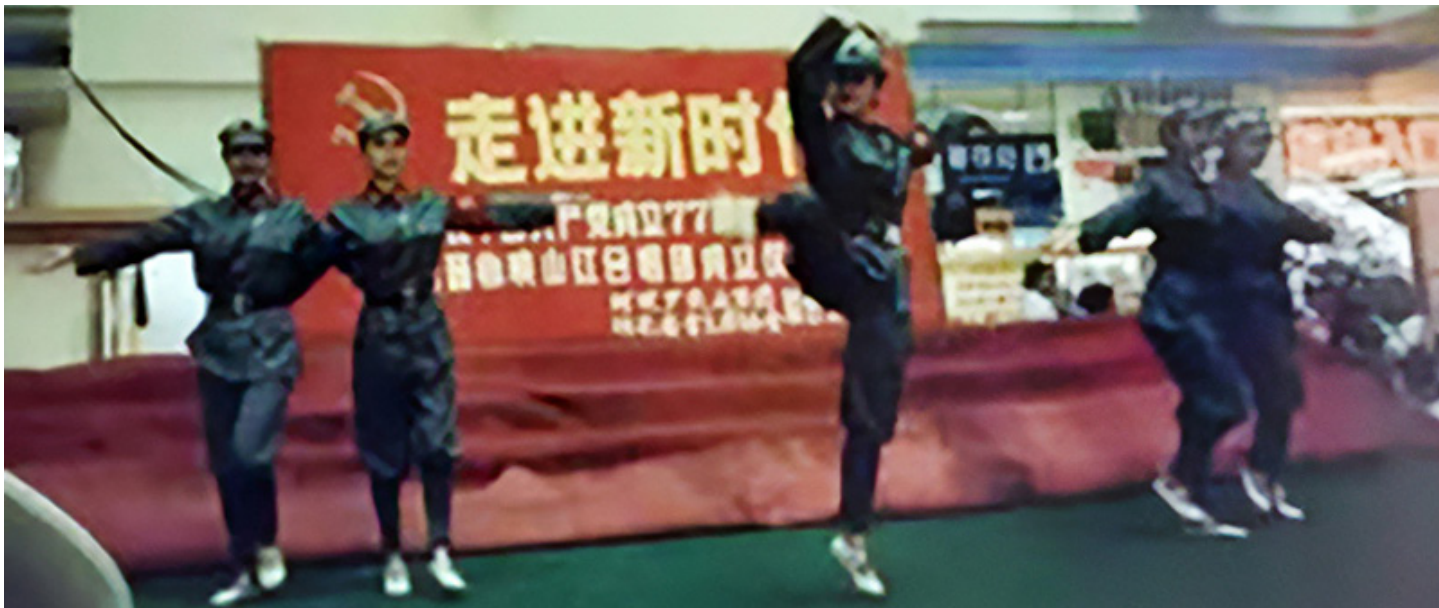
It has taken me my entire undergraduate experience to come to terms with this reality. I won't lie; the homesickness hasn't gone away, but it has evolved. At first, it was just homesickness for my home country. Now, it's homesickness for whichever of the two countries I'm not in. The difference is that I've learned to manage it—to see my situation for what it is rather than drowning in my emotions.

If I had the chance to go back, would I choose a different path? No. Because while the struggle of living between two worlds is real, so is the privilege. And I wouldn't trade that for anything.

So, to my fellow international students: it's okay. It's okay to feel lost, to not know where you want to be, to struggle with homesickness and uncertainty. These feelings exist because we are fortunate—fortunate to belong to two places, even if we never fully belong to just one.

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HOW BENTLEY HAS CHANGED MY LIFE

By Yun Song '25 (Shown above, second from left)

On my desk in my apartment in Watertown, Massachusetts, there is a faded photo of five girls. All decked out in Communist Chinese Red Army costumes, these girls dance enthusiastically, with their heads held high and arms raised straight as if holding weapons against hypothetical enemies. Every time I look at the photo, I cannot believe one of them is me. The photo's date at the right-hand corner indicates it was June 28, 1998. I was 19 years old.

When my daughter was 19 years old, she was already a sophomore at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, studying electrical and computer engineering. When I became a sophomore at Bentley University last year, she was already a senior. Jokingly, she said to me, "Mom, you must listen to me now, because I hold seniority over you!" Yes, my daughter will graduate from college before I do; however, nothing else in my life makes me prouder than becoming a college student at the age of 45.

Coming to the US from China shortly before the pandemic began, I found myself stuck and unable to go back to my promising career as a financial professional in China. How I went from a professional dancer in a propaganda machine to an investment banker – that is a long story that warrants another essay. No matter how successful I became in China, however, I couldn't shed the feeling of being treated as a beautiful "flower vase" – a mere decoration with no substance. I also had to be prepared for retirement. After all, women in China retire earlier than men. My mother, a steel worker, was forced to retire at the age of 45.

Studying Economics at Bentley, I became convinced that I could take my education one step further and pursue a college degree in the U.S. I did not have a college diploma, nor did my parents. But I had always wanted to go to college. Getting into Bentley and being set to graduate as an honors student this spring made me realize that nothing could stand between

me and my educational dreams. Age, personal background, gender, or race: none of these should be a deterrent to achieving one's goals in life.

To say that Bentley has changed my life is an understatement. I have gained confidence, possessed knowledge I never knew I could learn, developed logical thinking skills, and, most importantly, found a strong sense of belonging: despite my advanced age or lack of educational background, I belong to college and belong to this great country that does everything for its residents.

Walking up and down the mountainous campus, I see my professors, colleagues, and peers who would always smile at me as if they had known me for years. They probably don't know how comforting their friendliness is to me, and how it has made me more determined than ever to achieve success in and beyond college.

FROM THE ANDES TO BOSTON

By Gabriel E. Mendoza Hanco '28

Redefining Success as a Peruvian Student

I was born in the Southeastern part of Peru, in one of the country's poorest regions, full of inequality and conflicts. Growing up in this challenging environment shaped how I defined success, which relied on financial stability, security, and academic excellence. My reality conditioned how big my dreams could be. However, since I arrived at Bentley, my view of success has changed dramatically—I've come to realize that success is not what I thought it was; instead, it is now a journey of adaptation, growth, and self-discovery.

I am from Puno, a small city in the South American Andean mountains, 12,300 ft above sea level, on the coast of the highest navigable lake in the world, Lake Titicaca. Peru is a centralized country, which means that the capital, Lima, attracts most of the country's wealth and business opportunities. Puno is an isolated part of Peru, full of massive inequality and social unrest. As mentioned earlier, Puno has faced many social problems during its history, leading to political divisions and economic disparities. While this reality has conditioned the way I see the world, it has not conditioned my deep love for my roots and traditions, including the ancient dances and the Quechua language of the Inca. I am proud of being from Puno, and I never hesitate to share my culture.

During my life in Puno, I have faced clashing realities. During my first five years of life, I grew up poor. Taking these factors into account, my concept of success was defined by achieving financial stability at any cost. As a child, this meant excelling academically and athletically. Moreover, as both my family's financial situation and the region's economy improved, new challenges emerged—such as taking

care of the family and striving to provide a better quality of life, became new milestones to pursue.

However, attending Bentley drastically changed my perspective; the new environment, the new academic system I was facing, and the cultural shock were a great part of it, but I strongly believe what truly changed my perspective and prior beliefs, was the exposure to new ideas and perspectives on the world in classes and outside of them.

I met people not only with the burning desire to fight for their dreams but also a genuine and sincere willingness to care for others. This made me realize that success means more than making money—it is also providing care and respect for the people who surround you.

Despite the social challenges, Puno boasts a rich culture filled with traditions rooted in Inca heritage that endures in the region. Additionally, the stunning landscape has also played a significant role. I firmly believe that art has been pivotal in shaping my beliefs. Being in touch with nature and blending it with the vibrant art of my region has made me more sensitive and aware of what life truly is and, therefore, what I should define as success.

Overall, I realized that I have the power to shape my future. However, I still must care for those who are back home while working for my future. Once, during a short break between classes, I remembered a concept that I had read on Instagram. The concept was simple: the only thing that we should pay attention to in life is change. Our lives are constantly changing; as my ambitions change every day, my definition of success might change once again as new challenges and lessons are going to be emerging in my life.

Even though my definition of success evolves, I know I am on the right path to becoming a person of value

and purpose. Success is no longer just about financial stability or achievements—it is about personal growth, meaningful relationships, and contributing positively to others. As I continue my journey at Bentley, I want to use my knowledge and experiences to help my community back home and inspire others to redefine success in their own way. Life is an ever-changing process, and embracing this change allows us to keep growing. No matter where I go, I will carry this lesson, my roots, and my traditions with me.

NAVIGATING IMPOSTER SYNDROME: A FIRST-GENERATION ETHIOPIAN STUDENT'S JOURNEY

By Meklit Abel '28

When I first stepped onto Bentley University's campus, it felt like I was entering a world that wasn't meant for me. I had attended a predominantly white institution (PWI) in middle school, but back then, I was too young to grasp the weight of that reality. I navigated the environment without questioning my place because I didn't know any different. However, coming to Bentley, a space that felt far more intense and unfamiliar, the weight of being an Ethiopian first-generation student became undeniable. The doubt crept in: *Do I really belong here?*

In high school, things were different. I was surrounded by diversity, immersed in a community where I could proudly be myself without feeling the need to prove my belonging. I walked the halls knowing that my identity wasn't something I had to justify. But at Bentley, returning to an environment that lacked that same level of representation and familiarity left me feeling isolated, like I had to force myself into a mold that wasn't made for me.

Making friends was another challenge. In high school, friendships came naturally, surrounded by people who understood me, my culture, and my experiences. At Bentley, I struggled to find connections that felt as deep and effortless. I often wondered if people truly saw me or if I was just another face blending into the crowd. It was hard to reach out, unsure of whether I would be accepted or if I would always feel like an outsider.

I sought refuge in student organizations like the African Student Association (ASA) and Black United Body (BUB), hoping to find a sense of belonging. Yet, at first, these spaces only magnified my insecurities. I found

myself questioning whether I truly fit in, even among those who shared aspects of my cultural background. The contrast between my past and present experiences made it difficult to find my footing. I missed high school, I missed all of my friends, and I missed my home.

The struggle wasn't just about being Ethiopian in a PWI, rather, it was about realizing that belonging wasn't automatic. Despite the welcoming nature of some spaces, I had to actively work to carve out a place for myself. In classrooms, meeting rooms, or even just walking across campus, I felt like I had to prove that I deserved to be here. I questioned whether my voice, shaped by my heritage and personal journey, carried the same weight as those around me. *Do they really see me? Or am I just trying to blend in?*

But slowly, I began to shift my perspective. I wasn't here to conform to a predefined mold but here to redefine what belonging looked like. My experiences as a first-generation Ethiopian student, my struggles with doubt, and my moments of discomfort were not signs of weakness. They were the very things that made me stronger. I started embracing my identity instead of letting it feel like a burden. Yes, the journey was difficult. Yes, the feeling of being an outsider lingered, but the more I leaned into my truth, the more I realized I wasn't alone in these struggles.

Bentley is filled with students who come from backgrounds that are not always reflected in the majority. We each carry stories that deserve to be heard, and we are actively shaping a space that was not necessarily built with us in mind. Even on sunny days, imposter syndrome may always

whisper doubts, but I refuse to let it dictate my narrative. I am not here because I tricked my way in—I am here because I earned my place. My story, my perspective, and my contributions are valuable. Joining organizations that celebrate my culture, like ASA and BUB, provided the community I was searching for. But the true turning point came when I stopped trying to force myself to fit in and instead embraced who I am—an Ethiopian, first-generation student navigating a PWI on my own terms.

This journey isn't over, and imposter syndrome doesn't vanish overnight. But I now understand that it is not a reflection of my worth, it is a challenge I am learning to overcome. I belong here, my story matters, and with every step forward, I am proving that my presence at Bentley is not just valid, but necessary.

THE TIKTOK BAN

By Khussam Mohamed '28

What Americans Experience in the Tech Race

As the clock was ticking to January 19th, the day when TikTok was expected to be under nationwide ban due to the US government's security concerns with one of its biggest economic rivals, China, many users of the app were trying to find a solution or an alternative platform. The ban created a lose-lose situation, causing TikTok to forfeit over 170 million U.S. users while depriving those users of a valuable platform for marketing their businesses, pushing their content, learning, and connecting with people globally.

Based on the [2024 TikTok Statistics](#), the platform has over 1 billion active monthly users who are mostly between the ages of 16 and 24, and is growing faster than any other social media site. Since about 90% of its users access the app daily, TikTok videos have a higher engagement rate than Instagram or Twitter, cementing its dominance as the influencer hotspot. In addition, TikTok Shop has created a platform for people to buy, sell, and advertise products, transforming how brands reach a broader younger audience.

The only way to stop the ban was to convince the Chinese-based company ByteDance to sell it to a non-Chinese company, something as simple as microwaving ice to make it hotter—sounds doable, but it just melts into a whole different problem. This is because it would escalate the [cold war between the US and China](#) over critical technology control. For the general public, the only possible route was to find another TikTok-like app to get the same experience. A Chinese app, XiaoHongShu, also known as Red Note, has become popular, as the so-called “TikTok refugees” joined. People shared on TikTok how to change the language on Red Note from Mandarin to English. Other people even

started to learn Mandarin, just to get the best of the app and connect well with the hosting community. However, the language barrier isn't actually a barrier on platforms like these; people can still comment using emojis, GIFs, and stickers.

Among the first shocks to the former TikTok users were how welcoming the Chinese are, and more importantly, their lifestyle, economy, and technology. “Our government has been lying about them, they are living in the future,” said the Americans. Red Note gave Americans an opportunity to get first-hand information from China, sparking interest among its users to explore the country and its products. Navigating the culture on the app has been an interesting learning experience for many Americans.

Grocery Haul in China

One of the first shocks was the grocery shopping posted by the Chinese on the Red Note app. Not only were the goods cheaper, but also, they looked so fresh and as organic as they can be. Even when considering the Chinese average income, food prices still seem very affordable. In contrast, Groceries Prices in the United States are 111.9% higher than in China while Local Purchasing Power in the United States is 82.5% higher than in China, [according to Numbeo](#).

Technology in China

Many Americans were also surprised by common Chinese technology. Huawei phones that were banned from being sold in the US had unique surprising features that most phones do not have. For instance, the knuckle gestures allow faster and more intuitive navigation, intelligent battery management helps you get the most out of your battery life, while the customizable Always-On Display (AOD) keeps important information just a glance away. The dual app feature allows you to run two separate

app profiles on the same device, making it easy to manage work and personal use. Also, with HiSilicon's turbocharging technology, your battery gets a quick boost when you need it most. For those who love capturing moments, extreme slow-motion videography lets you record stunning, ultra-slow-motion footage. Face unlock is made even more secure with added privacy filters, and the secure data locker ensures your sensitive information is always protected.

Moreover, Americans found a Chinese-made EV [BYD Dolphin](#), one of the most affordable and well-built electric vehicles in the global market. Its price is roughly \$16,000 in China and \$31,000 in Mexico. However, these vehicles can't be imported to America because of U.S. tariffs on Chinese-made EVs.

Cities in China

For years, many Americans imagined China as a place frozen in time, sealed off by the Great Wall and steeped in tradition. The TikTok algorithms weren't good enough to show them much of the outer world, but when they opened the Red Note app, their perception was shattered. Instead of China painted by American narratives, they saw towering skyscrapers, neon-lit streets, and a cityscape so sleek and futuristic that it rivaled what they had seen in the West. Shanghai, with its dizzying skyline, high-speed trains, and tech-infused lifestyle, wasn't just modern—it was what they had always believed New York to be. The shock was instant, The realization unsettling. China wasn't catching up; in many ways, it had already surged ahead.

Deep Seek AI

A Chinese AI startup recently grasped worldwide attention after its app soared to the top of download charts, triggering a significant dip in U.S. tech stocks, particularly affecting Nvidia,

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MY HAPHAZARD (YET STEADILY IMPROVING) RELATIONSHIP WITH AI AS A LIFELONG WRITER

By Sahil Raut '27

My hands hovered over the keys of my laptop—frozen with hesitation. All I had was a half-baked idea, an intimidatingly vast void of white paper, backdropping an impatient cursor pulsating aggressively at me. The edition's deadline was coming up fast, but it felt as if all my ideas for a new article were strung up on a kite caught in a hurricane of unrelated thoughts, and I was futilely pulling at the other end of the line. My kite was escaping my grasp, and trying as I might, I could sense that it was submitting to the gravity of the tempest. *snap* The string broke off, and I watched helplessly as my kite was sucked into the eye of the storm. Defeated, I closed my laptop screen. The writer's block had struck again.

With the advancement of generative artificial intelligence, it has become possible to produce eloquent, powerful writing in a matter of seconds. Being heavily involved in literary clubs and organizations in both high school and college, I take great pride in my penmanship, so I wanted to see how my skills stacked up to the capabilities of this new technology. I sat at my screen slack-jawed as I watched ChatGPT pump out lines of articulate, intelligent speech, effortlessly transposing the ideas in my head into text better than I could have. Initially, I felt scammed. I put a great deal of effort and time into my craft, and it was disheartening to see this machine produce work of equal or greater quality with such ease. How could I compete?

Yet, I thought back to the countless times I had been stricken with writer's block and how triumphant I felt when I conquered it. Nothing can compare to the feeling of accomplishment and

pride I experience when I finally think of the perfect word that captures what I am trying to say, or the immense satisfaction I get from translating wordless constructs in my head into written language, victories I would not have had if I were spoon-fed all the answers.

The struggle I encounter while writing has also helped me develop critical thinking skills, enhance my vocabulary, and exercise my creativity. Across the multiple internships and research opportunities I have interviewed for, I have always received feedback regarding how articulate I was or have been commended for the innovative vision I promised to bring to the experience. I have no doubt that the praise and offers I have received from my interviews are products of the hard work and dedication I put into my literary craft. In a sense, my success and growth were only possible because of my previous failures and efforts. Instead of viewing that which requires effort as adversity, going forward, I will view it as an opportunity for self-enhancement and learning.

There are standard rules of grammar in writing, but no such limitations bind my attitude toward change. There will be times when I make a typo, and that is just part of the process. What matters in the end is that I fully invest myself in anything I undertake and learn from my mistakes. Artificial intelligence cannot write my own story for me, for I am my own author.

HACK YOUR HAPPINESS

By Sadie Fitzpatrick '28

The Science-Backed Guide to a More Joyful Life

Happiness isn't just an emotion; it's a skill, something we can strengthen and refine. In our fast-paced world, it's easy to forget that we hold control over our happiness and well-being. Cultivating happiness is a journey and practice of self-discovery, and certain approaches can significantly boost academic performance and stress management. Factors like genetics, environment, lifestyle, thoughts, and beliefs all play a role, and understanding their influence on our happiness can change our way of living. To simply put the truth, you create your happiness. Through practice you can unlock a life full of joy and positivity.

Let's clarify what happiness truly is—and, perhaps more importantly, what it isn't. Happiness is a subjective experience, shaped by positive emotions and overall life satisfaction. It's not about accumulating material wealth. After all, money can't buy happiness. Nor is happiness our natural state—it's something we actively pursue. Finally, happiness is not mere pleasure.

Recognizing these distinctions allows us to better understand the true nature of happiness and what genuinely contributes to it. By defining these parameters, we can develop a more realistic, personal understanding of what happiness means to each of us. Because happiness isn't one-size-fits-all. Given the complexity of human experience and the many components of happiness, its expression will inevitably vary from person to person.

The self-determination theory suggests we have a greater impact on our happiness than we often realize. Through self-awareness and genuine self-knowledge, we can



create an environment where we thrive and enhance our life satisfaction. The key elements are establishing healthy habits and prioritizing both our mental and physical well-being. This age-old advice rings true because it works. While the idea of running might not be thrilling to everyone, there are countless ways to cultivate physical wellness. Dancing, swimming, yoga, there's an activity for everyone. Remarkably, research published in JAMA Psychiatry indicates that individuals who walk between 8,000 and 12,000 steps daily experience lower levels of anxiety and depression which automatically promotes mental wellness through this correlation. Nurturing our mental well-being can be as simple as practicing mindfulness, acknowledging our emotions and

needs, or engaging in meditation. Regular mental reflection cultivates self-awareness and improves mental health, leading to a significant boost in overall happiness and well-being.

Let's dive into the science of happiness. It's estimated that approximately 30% of our happiness levels are influenced by our genetic makeup. However, this figure is not static; it fluctuates throughout our lives. It's essential to dispel the myth that our genetic predisposition to happiness is fixed. As we mature, the structure of our happiness evolves, with our environment becoming the dominant factor.

Furthermore, happiness isn't a singular sensation. Our brains produce four primary "happy chemicals"

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DON'T WAIT

By Sinead Keyes '27

I've spent a lot of my life waiting: waiting for plans with friends to come through, waiting until the very last minute to do my homework, waiting until my last alarm goes off in the morning to roll out of bed. Throughout my life, I feel like I've waited for my life to start. I thought that once I moved to college, that's when everything in my dream life would begin. But, after I got to Bentley I thought, well, once I get a group of friends, then everything would click into place. After that, I mean, I couldn't embark on the beginning of my best life without new clothes, or learning how to style my hair, getting my grades up, and the list goes on and on. There always seemed to be some sort of hurdle I had to overcome before I could start truly living, or whatever that meant. It wasn't until I stopped and looked back at everything I had accomplished that I realized how foolish I had been. My life had already started, and I was oblivious to letting it pass me by.

Now, to be clear, there's nothing wrong with setting milestones for yourself and reaching them. In fact, I just happen to believe in just the opposite. The problem with it all, or the problem I had with how I was dealing with setting goals is that I let myself be held back by it. I had thought that because I was missing one thing or another that I wasn't ready to be the person who I wanted to be. But looking back at it, this concept made no sense at all. I didn't need to reach every single goal I had in mind for myself to start being the person who I wanted to be. It was also a completely unrealistic standard for myself because every time I achieved anything, I would set another goal to continue working towards. I realized that this never ending ambition had its benefits, but it also became a mental block that was preventing me from enjoying all the experiences and opportunities in my



life, which was unfair to me and my accomplishments.

I wish I could go back in time and shake myself by the shoulders, not just to my freshman year at Bentley, or high school, or even my middle school self, but rather to as early an age that I could understand the meaning of the phrase; "Carpe diem!" or "Seize the day!". I wish I knew the preciousness of each day, and how much potential there was, much sooner than I actually did. It took me too long to understand that my life had already started, and I have a responsibility to myself to live it to the fullest. The truth is, time only moves forwards, and you can either adapt to it or let it pass you by. But while you don't have control over time, you do have control over what you do,

and how you choose to experience it. You don't have to wait to start your life or live passively because you don't think you're at your peak yet. Stop waiting and start living, right now at this very moment, exactly how you want to. Stop waiting until you have the right job, or friends or any other factor. How exactly to reach that type of person depends on you.

It can be hard to understand what you want, or what that looks like, but I've figured out some questions to help narrow it down. When you think of the ideal version of yourself or your life, what do they look like? How do they act? Who do they surround themselves with? How would a close friend describe them? Once you figure those things out, start living like it, one

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PUBLIC SPEAKING: THE VALUE OF OUR MOST COMMON FEAR

By Matt Bannell '28

Picture yourself standing on stage in front of an audience that seems to span forever. The lights in the back dim, leaving you the only figure left illuminated—the undeniable center of attention. You fumble through your notes and pray that your voice doesn't crack as you step up to the podium to begin your 30-minute speech. Statistically, there's a good chance that the majority of the people reading this article would fear a situation like this (to some degree). In fact, it may even be frightening to some just to think about their words reaching an audience, even if they are not present (almost like how I'm communicating with you now).

Public speaking is frequently cited as one of the most significant and widespread fears in the world, often ranked above the fear of death. There is just something about getting up to speak in front of an audience that we seem to be wired to dislike or shy away from. The environment does not always need to be as visceral as the one I described for this fright to kick in. It could be as unassuming as

a classroom or office; still, the fear persists. However, public speaking is often a professional necessity and something that will likely arise in your personal life as well. As much as you may not like it, I want to argue that not only should you not be afraid of speaking publicly, but that it may even become something you look forward to with a little practice and all the benefits it can provide.

To understand why you shouldn't fear public speaking, it would be helpful to first understand why so many people do. The origins of this phobia can be traced back to our primitive roots as a species. Back well before we had stages, microphones, or even words to mispronounce, we lived in tribes. In these tribes, each member relied on all the other members. Interdependency was necessary for survival. As a result, it was of the utmost importance that each member of the tribe trusted all the others fully. Though I obviously can't speak from experience, it seems that one social misstep would have been the difference between life and death. Back in the day, if I interrupted my tribe's beloved cave-painting time with a false "danger" grunt, they would no longer be able to trust me, and they'd be forced to exile me from the group. With no tribe to rely on and no Fruity Pebbles to sustain me, I would have been unable to fend for myself and left to die. This resulted in an evolutionary adaptation for us to pass down genes that made us afraid of making social mistakes. Despite any creative liberties I may have taken to embellish "my" story, there is actual evidence that supports how social rejection could lead to isolation and death in times of old (Maner & Kenrick, 2010).

If you hop on the Flintmobile and fast-forward to today, remnants of

these genes remain in our DNA. This worry about being socially outcasted is the driving force of our public speaking anxiety today. Even though your survival no longer depends on your ability to speak in front of a crowd, there are still social implications to the all-too-common situation that make it such a difficult task. People tend to care about the opinions of others inherently, but social and professional aspects of a situation may compound the importance these outside opinions are given. This is where the fear of public speaking comes in. The speaker often feels that they have so much invested in the speech that they cannot afford to mess it up. In my opinion, the fear of public speaking is a specific manifestation of the fear of failure. Whether it's failing to deliver an effective message or failure to present a socially acceptable version of ourselves, I believe this is what the fear of public speaking can be boiled down to.

There are many things you can do to mitigate the risk of failing on that stage and therefore lessen the fear that you have while stepping up. The first I'd like to mention, and arguably the most important, is to stop focusing on what could go wrong. In theory, yes, you could trip and fall, losing all your notes and be left to improv your speech. However, the much more likely outcome, as well as the one that is much more productive to focus on, is that you'll get up there, deliver an incredible speech, and walk off the stage smiling to a round of applause. As cliché as it sounds, things like these tend to be self-fulfilling prophecies. Thinking about how well your speech could go only increases the likelihood that it will turn out that way. The next would be to manage your emotions beforehand. You may be feeling some nerves, that's

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WHEN IT COMES TO TOXIC ENVIRONMENTS, YOU MAY HAVE MORE POWER THAN YOU THINK

By Eloise Weintraub '28

"Culture coordinates people's identities and interactions across institutions, organizations, and groups through policies, practices, and norms, serving as an existential rubric." (Hamedani et al., 2023)

A toxic culture directly impacts the well-being and productivity of its members, whether it be a college organization, a job after graduation, or even a social group. In this article, we will explore what a toxic culture is, its effects, and, finally, what you can do at any status level to help create a more inclusive and positive environment.

A toxic culture can stem from many facets, with the main contributors being untrustworthy leadership, poor communication, lack of appreciation, and absence of perceived fairness. A toxic environment can be characterized by members experiencing "... negativity, lack of trust, low morale, fear of retribution, and an absence of collaborative spirit" (Bloetner, 2023). This results in lower rates of productivity and innovation, higher rates of turnover, and produces a stressful atmosphere. Put simply, if members of an organization feel unsupported by leadership, they, in turn, tend to be less satisfied with their jobs, which reduces their effectiveness in the organization.

Now that we have identified how a toxic organizational culture presents itself, let's examine what can be done to transform an existing culture into a positive one. To change an organizational climate, it's imperative to acknowledge that culture is a feedback loop. When a new employee enters an environment with toxic coworkers and unsupportive policies that create an unpleasant or hostile work place they

are more likely to match the behaviors of their environment thus continuing the cycle. However, if you are intentional about creating a healthier environment, you can begin to dismantle the issues from within. With that said, humans, by nature, tend to resist changes for a multitude of reasons: fear of the unknown, identity threats, and generational divides, to name a few. While you can't stop people from feeling this fear, you can help alleviate it by being transparent throughout the entire process and trying to incorporate as many viewpoints as you can into a decision. Don't just assume you know what your peers or coworkers want, ask them what they want.

Another key principle of intentional change is identifying the varying parts of an organization and the process by which it functions. You can't begin to fix the wheel if you don't understand how it rolls. You need to figure out what is essential to the organization's members, what current policies and practices an institution has, and what frameworks are in place to implement change. Change can come in two different directions: top-down which refers to workers in higher status positions such as managers and supervisors and bottom-up which refers to lower status position such as clerical assistants or interns. A member at any level of power has the potential to influence the workplace atmosphere. Top-down tends to be more effective since it is likely to be accomplished through tangible, company-wide policy adjustments. Bottom-up change tends to have more impact in terms of creating an inclusive environment since its being shaped by the majority of employees. For bottom-up to occur,

it typically involves more members of the group working together and is perceived as being in the interest of those members. In contrast, top-down can be seen as an elite creating a new policy to keep themselves in power regardless of the actual intention (Hamedani et al., 2023).

With that said, culture is constantly changing, for better or worse. Therefore, it's crucial to anticipate setbacks and backlash when trying to create a new and inclusive environment. When issues arise, try to focus on why people are resisting the change rather than doubling down and continuing to push ahead. You may find that they don't fully understand a new policy or that the policy itself is flawed and needs revising. Institutional change doesn't happen overnight, and convincing employees that a new leader or policy will improve their situation, especially after a long period of stress and burnout, occurs gradually. However, if you put in the work and genuinely have everyone's best intentions in mind, change is possible you just have patience and empathy.

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CAMPUS SPLIT: THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

By Marisa Rayhill '28

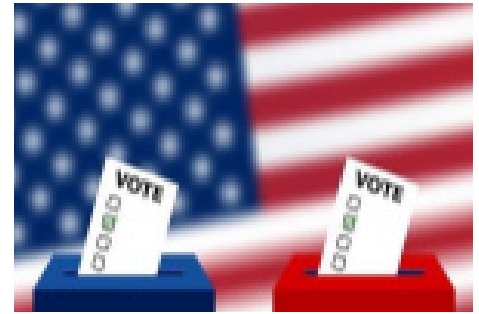
The recent Presidential election hasn't just been a blip on the radar here at Bentley University. The results have resonated throughout various corners of our campus life. A whirlwind of emotions and actions has been stirred among students and organizations, revealing aspects of our community that many of us hadn't seen before. The responses from students, faculty, and staff have shown details about our small campus landscape that provide insight into the broader environment we live in. This article explores how the election divided and impacted campus life at Bentley University, touching on the surge in political engagement, the emotional and social effects, and how the community came together, and at times, was challenged by these divisions.

In the days leading up to the election, the campus was already buzzing with conversation. Students from all walks of life and political affiliations came together to share their views. Many of these discussions in dorms, classrooms, dining halls, and across campus remained respectful, with students appreciating diverse perspectives and keeping a culture of empathy and respect. However, on the flip side, some conversations grew more close-minded. Late-night shouting matches and heated debates about political beliefs and candidates—both preferred and unwanted—took place. These outbursts, from both sides of the political spectrum, lasted from days before the election to well after, stirring emotions like annoyance, anger, sorrow, and frustration. These mixed conversations highlight the divide the election caused on campus.

On a positive note, this division offered a chance to reflect and grow. Faculty members took the moment, and incorporated election-related topics into their teaching and encouraged students to engage with a range of perspectives. This not only enriched our academic experience by deepening our understanding of differing views but also taught us how to respectfully navigate political differences. These exchanges helped bridge divisions, promoting empathy and inclusivity. Ultimately, they strengthened the sense of community solidarity, creating a more supportive campus environment for all.

The spread of misinformation and fake news during the election posed another significant challenge for the Bentley community. Students were bombarded with a constant stream of information from various sources, making it difficult to separate fact from fiction. Social media was flooded with misleading headlines, AI-generated images, and baseless rumors. This only deepened the existing divide, as students argued over false information, using it as ammunition in their discussions. Yet, in this environment, students also learned to question what they saw online and take a more critical approach to the information presented to them.

As Bentley University moves forward after the election, the focus remains on keeping an environment that values diversity, inclusion, and respectful dialogue. The challenges posed by a polarized climate were fought with increased political engagement, thoughtful conversations, and a renewed commitment to emotional well-being. While the political split created tension, it also sparked



educational opportunities that enriched the student experience. We were able to express our own views, learn to respect others' perspectives, and better navigate our differences. The presidential election has left a lasting legacy at Bentley University, reminding us of the power of civic participation and the importance of fostering a supportive and engaged campus community.

THE TIKTOK BAN *(Continued from page 6)*

according to a BBC News report. In January, the company launched DeepSeek R1, an AI model positioned as a competitor to OpenAI's offerings, but with a much lower development cost—just \$6 million compared to the \$100 million reportedly spent on GPT-4. DeepSeek's combination of efficiency and affordability has shaken the belief in U.S. dominance in the AI field, showing that cutting-edge technology can be created without relying on the most advanced American chips.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the potential TikTok ban not only sparked uncertainty for millions of users but also led to unexpected discoveries about Chinese culture, technology, and lifestyle. The ban didn't push Americans away from Chinese products but increased their interests; consequently, they were introduced to a whole new world—both technologically and socially. The contrast between the affordability and innovation found in China compared

to the U.S. was eye-opening, from the low-cost yet high-quality groceries to the advanced technology like Huawei phones and BYD electric vehicles. Furthermore, the rise of Chinese AI startups like DeepSeek is shaking the foundation of America's tech dominance, proving that innovation can thrive outside of the U.S. These experiences have challenged traditional narratives and offered new perspectives.

HACK YOUR HAPPINESS *(Continued from page 8)*

that we can influence to enhance our well-being. Dopamine, the “reward” chemical, is associated with motivation and pleasure. Often referred as the survival chemical, it's linked to our ancestors' drive to complete tasks essential for survival. Dopamine is released when an electrical signal reaches the end of a neuron, triggering the release of dopamine into the synapse. While science is complex, promoting dopamine is straightforward: exercise, pursue activities you love, and accomplish goals. Serotonin, the “mood stabilizer,” is connected to social bonding. To boost serotonin levels, cultivate positive relationships, and spend time with loved ones. Oxytocin, the “love chemical,” is

released from the pituitary gland into the bloodstream—the only one of these chemicals to be released in such a way. Oxytocin can be promoted through acts of physical touch, kindness, and building trust. Finally, endorphins, the “pain relievers,” are produced in the pituitary gland and hypothalamus. We can stimulate their release through laughter, listening to music, and even consuming spicy foods.

In conclusion, happiness is a multifaceted skill, not a mere feeling. While our genetic makeup plays a role, our environment, habits, thoughts, and actions have a profound impact. By understanding the science of happiness, nurturing our mental and physical well-being, and actively

cultivating positive emotions, relationships, and a sense of purpose, we can all become architects of our own joy. It's a journey of self-discovery, consistent effort, and mindful practice, but the rewards are immeasurable.

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DON'T WAIT *(Continued from page 9)*

change at a time. You may feel different at first, as it's a complete lifestyle change. It may be easier to just go back and passively wait for your time to come. But you've got to stick with it.

If you consistently act and behave like the person you want to be, you'll become that person. Take it from me, once I started trying to become better, I started being better. The lines of trying and being are very much blurred.

Once I decided to make the switch, I started to be more confident in myself.

I reached out to old friends and new and made plans together. I smiled at strangers. I put more effort into my appearance. I started engaging more in class and connecting with the community here. I secured part time jobs, gained leadership positions, and joined the honors program. I went outside more, and I started appreciating things in the moment rather than looking back and regretting what I did or didn't do. I've learned that you've just got to stop holding

yourself back from doing things that'll make you happy. At the end of the day, you only have so much time; you're only this age once, and you won't be in college forever. Your time is too precious to be stuck waiting for your life to get better to start living to the fullest. By giving yourself permission to live as your best self, you'll be so much happier and satisfied with your life. So, stop waiting and live, right now, the life that you want to live.

PUBLIC SPEAKING *(Continued from page 10)*

completely normal. There's a good chance that you can turn these nerves into excitement when you realize that you're about to get an opportunity to impress a room full of people. If you can't seem to feel it, fake it 'till you make it. The same part of the brain responsible for nerves is responsible for excitement, so they are closer than you'd think. Lastly, practice your speech. The difference between perfecting your speech and stumbling on your words can be as simple as rereading the script or practicing in front of your mirror. It's hard to be nervous when you are so confident in your subject matter that you know it like the back of your hand. This will be

noticed by the audience as well.

Once you do kill that speech, there are benefits that can arise from it. Maybe your product proposal passes with flying colors, and you get a raise. Maybe you bring the wedding party to tears and secure your spot as best 'best-man'. Maybe you're selected to represent your school or job at an important conference. Personally, public speaking has benefited me greatly. I've been put in positions where I needed to speak in public and they've opened doors I didn't even previously know existed. And it's not like I loved it or was good at it at first. I've given bad presentations,

told jokes no one laughed at (they were really funny though, you would have laughed if you were there), even taken the stage at an open-mic night to deliver what had to have been one of the worst renditions of Miley Cyrus' "Party in the USA" you've ever heard. And look, I'm still here to write about it today! They were all invaluable experiences for me; I've made friends and unlocked potential career paths that I otherwise would have completely missed out on. But that's enough about me, it's almost your call time! Break a leg, all thirty minutes will be great. I'll be watching from somewhere in the 5th row, and I promise to laugh at all your jokes!

Honors students, keep an eye out for the opportunity to write for the Fall 2025 Issue of *Columnas*.

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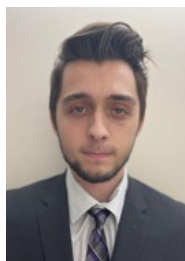
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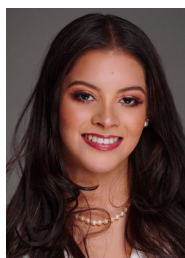
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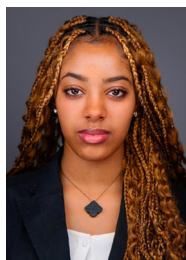
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Minor: Business
Administration

(He/Him/His)



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Major: Psychology

Minor: Business
Administration

(She/Her/Hers)



Sinead Keyes '27

Major: Finance

(She/Her/Hers)



Gabriel E. Mendoza Hanco '28

Major: Business
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Minor: Management

(He/Him/His)



Khussam Mohamed '28

Major: Computer
Information Systems

Minor: Business
Administration

(He/Him/His)



Sahil Raut '27

Major: Economics-
Finance

Minor: Mathematical
Perspectives

(He/Him/His)



Marisa Rayhill '28

Major: Finance &
Accounting

Minor: Law

(She/Her/Hers)



Yun Song '25

Major: Business
Economics

Minor: Business
Administration

(She/Her/Hers)



Eloise Weintraub '28

Major: Professional Sales
Management

(She/Her/Hers)



Amanda '25

Major: ISAC

Minor: CIS, Psychology

(She/Her/Hers)