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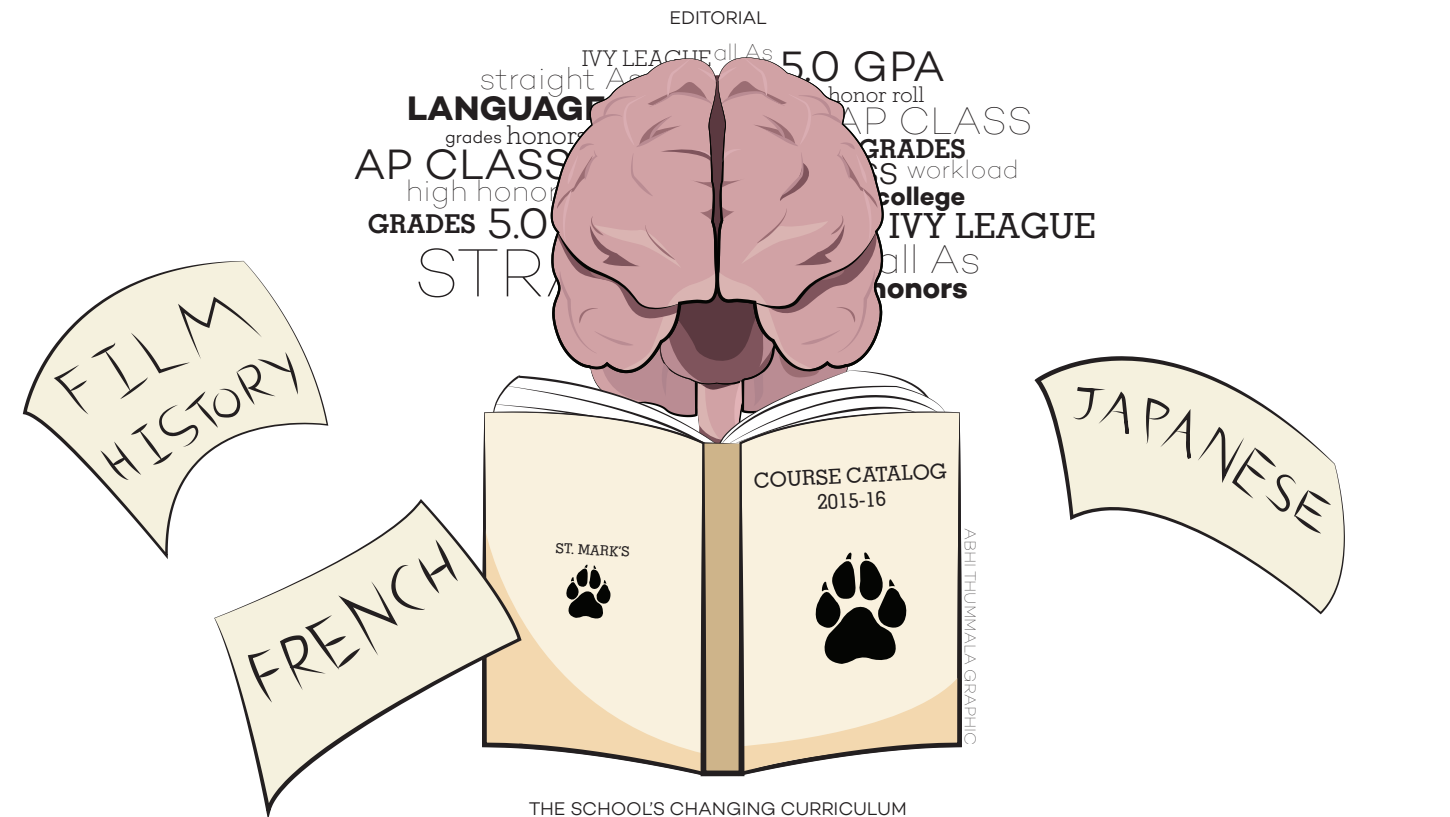
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DISTRIBUTION Press run is 3,800 copies. Copies are provided free of charge to students, faculty and staff at various distribution sites on campus. More than 2,600 copies are mailed out to alumni courtesy of the school's offices of External Affairs, Development and Alumni divisions.

MEMBERSHIP *The ReMarker* maintains membership in the Columbia Scholastic Press Association, New York City, NY; National Scholastic Press Association, Minneapolis, MN; and the Interscholastic League Press Conference, Austin.

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Choosing classes for the right reasons

Over many years, the curriculum at St. Mark's has downsized. The school has lost Russian, German, French and, by next year, Japanese. Many specialized classes have come and gone — history of film, history of jazz, the making of the atomic bomb and many others. It begs the question: why is the school ending these classes?

The most obvious response is that students aren't signing up for these classes. As AP offerings become available, the number of students choosing non-AP options deteriorates rapidly. With a college-minded student body who, for the most part, is looking for the highest GPA possible rather than the most enjoyable class experience, these offerings cannot compete with their AP and honors counterparts with a GPA-boost.

The process of creating a new class is straightforward, while thorough. A teacher comes to the Committee on the Academic Program with a proposal for a class, the committee reviews the concept for its necessity and usefulness, and either accepts, modifies, or rejects the proposal. Then, the teacher provides a short description for the course catalog, and the class becomes an option for students.

Still, there are many AP classes that exist at other schools that don't exist here. Many schools have classes such as AP human geography and AP United States government, but our curriculum does not include those options. We believe it would be beneficial to have a more varied history curriculum, considering students currently don't have multiple options for history classes: two years of world history, American history, then European history.

However, the question remains: would new options survive if they were offered? The real problem is that students tend to be focused on their résumé and transcript attempting to look more appealing to colleges, filling their schedules with AP classes until the more niche, non-AP options can't make. However, this mindset is unacceptable. Is it really good to focus entirely on what a college wants instead of getting what you want out of a St. Mark's education?

The most direct solution to this would be to offer niche classes with honors-level grade boosts, but only in situations where they would solely compete with AP classes, or only if the students passed a curriculum proficiency examination. However, this would be addressing the problem without addressing the cause.

Another means of offering these classes would be outside of school, such as during the summer or ninth period. Hockaday offers students classes such as United States government, health and history of art and music. Offering optional classes outside of the normal schedule would present another way for students to enroll in classes they actually desire to take, and increase the flexibility of one's course load.

Still, there exists a certain culture surrounding selecting classes each year; typically, students follow the same general schedule as the students of the year before, leading to the same classes making and the same classes struggling year after year. It is on the students to examine the whole breadth of scheduling options, as the graduation requirements provide considerable flexibility.

While teachers are responsible for creating new classes for us, it is not their fault if students don't sign up for them. Still, founding teachers could do a better job of raising awareness for their new classes, as the most common means of disseminating information about the details of available courses for the next year is by the teachers, mostly limiting a student's knowledge of their options to what they've been told in their classes.

Ultimately, it is important to choose classes based on what they teach rather than their effect on one's GPA, as with that attitude, the school can maintain a course catalog built around breadth rather than collegiate competitiveness.

what comes to mind?

There are different things we wish we had on campus. Here are some examples of those things.

next month

Here's a topic that will hopefully provoke real thought and insight.

I really wish St.Mark's had...

"A bigger pool."
— Senior Daniyaal Kamran

"A better robotics lab."
— Junior Rex Northcut

"Indian food. Sike, it's the best."
— Senior Kent Broom

"A hockey team."
— Math instructor Amy Pool

"Better technology."
— Sixth grader Lars Oaks

"A gaming room."
— Junior Evan Baker

The weirdest thing I own is...

email submissions to 17crawfordj@smtexas.org