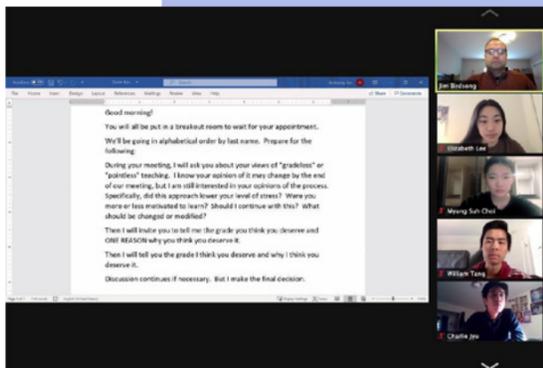


zoom of the week

During the AP Physics C winter finals period, Jim Birdsong begins the class by explaining the basic structure of the individual meetings and what questions will be asked. Birdsong also used this time to gauge his student's opinion of the "gradeless" system he implemented.



grades or no grades

How do you feel about the "no grading" system?



Physics C is usually a lot more competitive between students but the way his grading system works makes it so that students are more willing to help each other and alleviate some of the pressure, especially in an online environment.

CHARLES ZHU (11)



There are pros and cons... I found that it has helped me concentrate on how I'm doing in the class and not how I'm doing in the context of other students. While that's often easier said than done, this is definitely a good thing.

RITU ATREYAS (12)



I think the no grading system lowers stress levels when preparing for tests, even though grades are way less certain.

JOSEPH LI (12)

looking beyond the mark

Physics teacher Jim Birdsong dives into how he adapted his AP Physics C grading system to better fit the remote learning environment and student wellness

Using distance learning as an opportunity, AP Physics C teacher Jim Birdsong implemented a "gradeless" system for his students, an endeavor he has been contemplating for a while. The purpose of the new system is to relieve the constant pressure on students from grades by providing various non-traditional mediums in which they can show mastery.

"If they know that there's not always going to be a grade attached to what they're doing, they're willing to take more risks and try things that are new, instead of being really conservative in their approach and doing what they always have done," Birdsong said.

Students still had to study for tests and finish their homework, but instead of receiving grades, they had the chance to correct their mistakes with resources provided by Birdsong. Instead of a final, Birdsong held individual meetings with his students where they assessed their progress.

"They're going to give me their Google Doc — collections of

questions they've worked on, improvements to test problems, evidence they've helped other people and reached out for help," Birdsong said. "If they can back up their awesomeness and it agrees with my perception of their performance, then I can give them an A."

Permitting his students to have a direct influence over their grades through retakes, corrections and later evidence seems to have had positive effects and results. Birdsong emphasizes that this method doesn't ensure A's for everyone, but rather a voice to advocate for themselves.

"We're going to have to talk, but at least they feel like they have input to it — they're not powerless," Birdsong said. "They may leave the meeting unhappy, but they left the meeting having put in their best effort to change. So that's a big difference."

—Sue Kim & Mukta Uparkar

timeline of their lives

'94

Birdsong graduated from UCLA with an Engineering degree and began working towards his teaching credentials at UC Berkeley.



In 1995, Birdsong started his first teaching job as a Physics Honors and Chemistry teacher at Monta Vista High School. **Photo by Alyssa Umino**

'05

Nava earned her bachelor's degree as an English major with a minor in Creative Writing from San Jose State University.



In 2008, Nava graduated from a master's and credentialing program at UCSC. **Photo by Julia Satterthwaite**

'20

This year is Birdsong's 25th year and Nava's 12th year at Monta Vista.

inhale and exhale

English teacher Venessa Nava reflects on the impact that the outbreak of COVID-19 had on her weekly teacher yoga sessions

Over the past four years, literature teacher Venessa Nava has consistently held weekly teacher yoga sessions, even through summer break. Nava initially started hosting the sessions during lunch in preparation for her yoga teacher training program, something she began to deepen her personal practice.

"The year before I got my certification and ever since I've been running the once a week yoga with teachers. Over COVID-19 it's been very different and in some ways I think better because during lunch it was crunched," Nava said. "There would be people coming in the door all frantic trying to rush to my classroom for this limited amount of time before a bell cut us off that's not the most conducive to the relaxing atmosphere there."

Although the sessions are on Zoom when air quality, weather or COVID-19 restrictions require it, the rest of the sessions take place at a park in Cupertino. They have not only been a way to relieve increased anxiety and stress caused by the outbreak of COVID-19, but also a way to get outside and safely see other people.

"It's been a nice way to still see people's faces in person with being safe and socially distanced and going outside which I'm always encouraged," Nava said. "It's easy to just get stuck in your little, you know, school day rut."

Yoga has also helped Nava through mental health struggles through distance learning, as it provides a space to focus on herself instead of outside stress, something she believes is essential to maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

"Creating spaces that allow you to practice and sustain something nourishing, whatever that might be, I think are really, really powerful," Nava said. "It isn't a fix all it's not a silver bullet, but often when we get busy we just shed away the things that we feel like are extra even though they actually are quite essential."

—Sue Kim & Mukta Uparkar



[A] deep breath in Venessa Nava demonstrates the Vrikshana pose during her outdoor yoga session at Memorial Park. **Photo by Sharmila Bhatt**

core practices

Why do you enjoy attending weekly yoga classes?

“

Originally it was when we were in person learning it was just a great break from the school day to get out of your classroom and go in. It [was] good to get out of that place of being in work and having 100 things spinning through your head to get into that place where you kind of think about your movements and quiet those thoughts. She is really great at leading you through that and just her calming voice and presence and thoughts I find really refreshing."



MOLLY GUADAMOS, spanish teacher

“

I [have been] a regular yogi for the last five or six years with a different yoga studio. Mrs. Nava just happened to have this yoga session so I was interested and signed up. I only get to attend the outdoor yoga when there is no school [but] I really enjoy the outdoor yoga. I didn't know how great it felt to be able to do yoga outdoors, with the good air and the beautiful sky. I felt really refreshed and also a lot more calm and peaceful being able to do this outdoor yoga with Nava so I love it a lot."



I-CHU CHANG, chinese teacher