



The Prairie

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Recognizing top ten Class of 2020 graduates

Valedictorian Wesley Halstead



"My study habits were something that I did for myself. My parents only wanted me to try my hardest, so I mostly studied for my own sake. I'm currently planning on going to Texas A&M where I'm majoring in statistics. I'm extremely lucky to have a pretty good memory so passing was never as much as an issue as it was trying to get as high of a grade as possible. I've also been extremely lucky to have a lot of great teachers who've fostered a love in learning so it was usually more fun than hard," senior Valedictorian Wesley Halstead said.

"I've truly had a lot of amazing teachers at OC. Mr. Stanley was such an amazing and fun person to have as a teacher. You could really tell he loved what he was teaching and he's my biggest inspiration for going into statistics. Mr. Vettters and Mr. Westbrook were my Academic Decathlon teachers who really made learning some of the most brutal material really fun to do. I really enjoyed that class and the opportunity it provided to explore things that were more interdisciplinary than typical classes. Mr. Edwards was my Latin teacher, and every time I go in to talk to him he has some new amazing story about what he's done to make a difference in the world. You can tell he loves learning and I hope I can experience a fraction of the things that he's had the chance to. Coach Haidin was my swim coach for the past four years and he's been an amazing influence. He truly cares about me and the rest of the athletes. Although he sometimes yells and screams,

"Studying hard is the last shred of Indian culture that I can hold on to," senior Ryan Jacob said. "Keep vibing and find out what happens," Jacob said. He plans to attend University of Texas at Austin in the fall and is in the Business Honors school. "School has been pretty easy for me, mainly because I feel that every teacher that I've had was genuinely interested in ensuring that their class succeeded," Jacob said. He shared he will always remember, "Mrs. Potter, just because 'All you can do is all you can do' will stick with me forever." For the future, "I predict that I will die before Queen Elizabeth II, like she outlived Kobe and I am not even on his level."



Ryan Jacob



Grace Arulanandam

"It's hardwired in my brain to study, I love learning and I couldn't help but push myself to do the best I could," senior Grace Arulanandam said. She plans to, "Either become a lawyer or get my PhD in Art History and become a museum curator," Arulanandam said. She will attend the University of Texas at Austin in the fall and major in Art History and Government. "School has been easy for me because I am always able to put it in perspective, and how each challenge is just a small piece of my education. School is easier when you look at the big picture," Arulanandam said. Her favorite teacher was, "Mr. Edwards because he was the first teacher to welcome me when I transferred to O'Connor and having his class freshman year reaffirmed that I made the right decision to go to OC." For the future she predicts, "Everything will be alright in the end."

"I studied hard in high school in order to give myself the best opportunities I could. I kept myself at a high standard in order to challenge my abilities and find what I wanted to do in the future. After college, I plan to either work for the government or find a job with a security company," senior Victoria Chevallier said. She plans to attend The University of Texas at Austin and major in Computer Science with a minor in Mandarin Chinese.

"I am only fluent in English, however, I have been learning French and Mandarin for several years.

"School varied in difficulty for me throughout the years because of my interest in the classes I took. If I was interested in the subject, I usually found the class to be easier, and vice-versa. Mr. Haltom, the computer science teacher, inspired me to choose computer science as my major in college. Mr. Haltom garnered my interest in the subject and helped me get involved with introducing more girls to programming."

For the future, "I predict the future will be great as everyone adapts to the changes we're experiencing now. People will be able to value the small things that we are missing out on such as going outside and hanging out with friends."



Victoria Chevallier



FAITH COLLINS
CO-EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

"you know he only wants the best for/from you," Halstead said. "I could really go on and on about all the amazing teachers I've had and all the wonderful things they've taught me: Mr. Howells, Ms. Stevens, Ms. Cain, Mrs. Potter, Ms. Weber, Mr. Davern, Ms. Coony, Mr. Williams, and Mr. Taylor have all been inspiring role models in their own unique ways." His predictions for the future are, "I'm not really sure what to think of the future. I like to go with the flow and see where it takes me, but I hope I never stop learning."

"Studying was a way for me to push myself and reach academic goals that I wouldn't have been able to achieve without it. Especially now, I don't have a clear idea what the future holds for me, but wherever I end up I plan to maintain dedication and focus on my endeavors," senior James Dalton said. He plans to attend University of Texas at Austin this fall and major in Physics "with additional studies in core texts and ideas," Dalton said. "School is and will always be as hard as you make it. Forcing myself into a mindset to meet high goals is challenging, and even when it eases up, I then find ways that I can raise these standards. (In) Physics C with Mr. Westbrook, I struggled in Physics I, but taking Physics C with the mathematical integration really helped solidify the concepts for me. With this, the class has been very challenging, but Mr. Westbrook does a great job at helping everyone learn the rigorous content," Dalton said. He predicts, "Given the resurging interest in space exploration with the rise of new companies, some type of extraterrestrial carbon-based life, most likely a microorganism, will be discovered by 2069, the 100th year anniversary of the moon landing."



James Dalton

"I studied because I wasn't ever happy unless I felt like I knew a concept well. It wasn't enough to get good grades because I always wanted to have a deeper understanding," senior Sebastian Garcia said. "I plan to go to Harvard University and possibly major in Biology on a pre-med tract with a secondary in either government or music," Garcia said. "School has been a rollercoaster of difficulty for me. Sometimes, I wasn't able to keep up with extracurriculars, AP Classes, and not having lunch (I dropped lunch junior and senior years so I could take graduate with 13 AP credits), but I was always able to manage by taking deep breaths and learning that it's okay to just go to sleep and not worry sometimes. Davern's English class really inspired me to come out of my comfort zone academically and throw my ideas out into the open. He cares more about us understanding and actually learning than just getting grades in, so it gave the freedom for me to really grow as a writer and thinker. It was a really fun environment for me, and I'm glad that I had the chance to be in a class that goes so much deeper into material than any other. It was a privilege, and I think this is what an Ivy League Education is going to be like."



Sebastian Garcia

"I studied so hard because I wanted to make my parents proud of me. I will attend A&M College Station, with my major being Animal Science," senior Heather Pfeiffer said.

"School is easy for me in that it is very structured, and teachers will tell you upfront what they expect of you. That doesn't mean the actual coursework is easy- I'm good at math and science, but social studies and English have always been difficult for me. I'm not good at memorizing dates and names or writing essays," Pfeiffer said. "I've had so many amazing teachers over these past four years it's hard to choose a favorite. Awesome classes like physics and environmental science inspired me to learn more about the world and how it works, and many of my teachers from freshman year and beyond have pushed me higher and inspired me to work harder."

For the future she predicts, "Someone is going to invent a washer/dryer combo that doesn't disappear socks, because surely someone out there is as tired of wearing mismatching socks as I am."



Heather Pfeiffer

Salutatorian Warren Burrus

"I studied hard because I didn't want the college workload to come as a shock once I entered college, so I prepared for it early on," senior Salutatorian Warren Burrus said. "My future plans are to get a programming job with a tech company like Google or Amazon." He plans to attend Baylor University in Waco, Texas and major in Computer Science. "School was easy up to and including my freshman year. After that, school started to get more challenging because of AP classes," Burrus said. He found his passion in Computer Science class, "AP Computer Science inspired me because it introduced me to what I'm passionate about," Burrus said. He predicts, "The future will bring many changes and innovations that will make life easier but also more fun."



"I worked hard in high school because I want to be successful in life. I understand that how I approach work now is how I'm going to approach work forever. It's a skill that you build. I had many challenges and failures, but I have succeeded despite them because I worked hard. It's what showed me that I was capable, and it gave me confidence in life," senior Daniel Fitzgerald said. "I'm going to go to college to learn chemical engineering so that I can pursue my dream of finding ways to develop cleaner and safer energy." He plans to attend Texas A&M at College Station and major in chemical engineering. Fitzgerald is fluent in English and Portuguese and shared that, "School was definitely not easy. A lot of the classes I took were challenging, but I was able to learn a lot from them. I developed a lot better time management and diligence in studying, which helped me stay focused and succeed."

"It is so difficult to say a favorite teacher since I have had so many favorites. For my junior year, my favorite teacher was Mr. Justin Stephens. His class was challenging, but I learned a lot from him. He always taught us to push ourselves beyond what we thought we were capable of, because he knew that we could. And on top of that, he is kind, funny, relatable, and always willing to help you improve." For the future he predicts, "that people will look back and see our senior class as legendary. It is unfortunate that we might be the only class without a prom, but we did not let our circumstances define us. We learned, we had fun, and we stayed awesome. And there's a lot to respect about that."



Daniel Fitzgerald

Isabella Villalon



"I have a very good career in mind and the way to achieve that goal is to work hard towards a good education. I am planning on becoming a Pediatric Nurse. I am planning on going to UTSA for the next few years and then a nursing school once I graduate, I will major in Health Science," senior Isabella Villalon said. "School has always been a combination of hard work and dedication, but my journey has been made easier with the help of good friends and teachers. I've had the privilege of having so many inspirational teachers throughout my High School career and wouldn't be able to credit just one teacher for my growth. A few teachers who I believe helped me

the most grow as an individual would be Mr. Garza (freshman Geometry teacher), Mrs. Hoffer (Student Council Sponsor), Mr. Gomez (senior Calculus AB teacher), Mr. Stephens (junior English teacher) and Sgt. Perez (ROTC instructor). All of these teachers have helped me when I struggled in the classroom or with problems at home and have all pushed me to become a better person by presenting me with opportunities to further my education as well as help my community," Villalon said.

For the future, "I will have lots of debt in the future since I'm planning on getting extra schooling, but hopefully I will have a job that I love and am able to help others in need. At the very least I'm looking forward to being able to go outside without a mask on - specifically roaming the aisles of Target whenever I please."

Images courtesy of each student.

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