

# Judging by the books



I remember when my friend Dan first told me he loved Kurt Vonnegut, one of my favorite authors — ever. He quoted a passage from *Cat’s Cradle*, and I was sure we were soul mates. (We liked the same books; how couldn’t we be destined to be together?) In my mind’s eye, I could see us walking through Dresden and stopping by for some bokamaru, eternally united by Vonnegut’s literature.

As superficial as it may sound, I’m not the only one to judge people based on their reading preferences. According to a recent article in *The New York Times*, many people judge others and themselves based on their collections of favorite books. And, thanks to growing networking sites, it’s now easier to do so than ever.

With Facebook, we’re never more than one click away from finding out who else is obsessed with *The Catcher in the Rye* — or *Goosebumps*. Many a late-night Facebook stalker has looked at a friend’s favorite books on his or her profile to judge how well-read that person is. Listing *The Da Vinci Code*, for example, reads “poser,” while listing works by Voltaire or Baudelaire reads “pseudo-intellectual.”

Books are an easy way to evaluate someone’s personality. Literary interests can reveal one’s inclinations in politics, religion, and lifestyle. Online or in real

life, having a literary commonality brings two people closer. I myself have started conversations at parties comparing book tastes, and consider myself a refined first-hand analyst of how to judge someone based on his or her favorite books.

When it comes to dating, book choices can even be deal-breakers. People often hold their breaths before revealing their top choices: If a book is too academic or literary, you’re deemed a fake; too low and you’re considered a fool.

This is true of Carnegie Mellon as well. A friend of mine recently commented to me, “Sharing favorite books doesn’t necessarily mean you’re compatible, but it sparks a conversation. It’s this shared liking that may lead to another date.”

Immediately judging someone based on literary tastes can be limiting, but in the cut-throat worlds of dating and online networking sites, a little judgment can go a long way.

Perhaps it is as Vonnegut says: We create “granfaloons,” or groups who claim to have a shared identity when their mutual associations are actually meaningless. But doing so isn’t necessarily bad. Why not go on a date with someone who’s shared the same journey of books? You already shared those few hundred pages, why not a night out?

*Phyllis Kim (phyllisk@) hopes Vonnegut will come in handy during her six years at school.*

# Religion is not an independent entity



In a March 30 article in the Vatican’s newspaper, *L’Osservatore Romano*, Monsignor Vittorio Formenti stated that Catholicism is no longer the dominant religion in the world, and that this position is instead now held by Muslims. The projected number of Catholics is approximately 1.13 billion people, which, although by no means insignificant, falls short of the estimated 1.3 billion Muslims around the world.

Initially, I had to wonder about the potential bias present in this information, and, if the report was true, what the repercussions would be for world religion in the 21st century.

While this information was initially surprising, it became increasing less so as I thought about the data. My surprise was rooted in the fact that Catholicism is seemingly everywhere. The constant presence of the papacy in world news, the monumental cathedrals found in major cities, and the large number of Catholic groups I have encountered in both high school and college have together convinced me of the permanent nature and seeming dominance of the Catholic religion. In reality, however, such monuments are merely symbols of a cultural group that depends on something far less conspicuous than its ornate cathedrals,

but far more important in the long run: its followers. In this regard, it appears that the largely Eastern setting in which Islam is being taught has played a major role in its increasing dominance.

The outspokenness of the Vatican on this change in the field of religious dominance seems to be reflective of two things. First, this is not a shift which will immediately be reversed, but rather is a developing pattern that could continue for several decades. Second, this shift is of a large enough magnitude to spark unrest and force the Vatican to find ways to call out to and restore the followers that it seems to have lost.

So why does this growing gap between the number of Muslims and Catholics exist? According to the article, Formenti says Muslim families are increasingly larger than Christian ones, which is a driving force behind Islam’s growing world presence. In an interview with NBC, the monsignor said that it “is true that while Muslim families, as is well known, continue to make a lot of children, Christian ones on the contrary tend to have fewer and fewer.”

Islam’s presence is primarily found in Eastern societies. According to [www.islamicweb.com](http://www.islamicweb.com), close to 88 percent of the world’s Muslim population resides in Asia and Africa. In contrast, a report by BBC News estimates that the majority of the world’s Catholics resides in the Americas and Europe.

Generally speaking, these

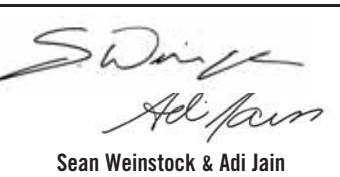
Western societies have a faster-paced and more technology-oriented framework than the Muslim-dominated Eastern societies do. Religion by nature is designed to be a reflective and lifelong journey, and can often demand more time than those of us constantly on the run are willing to give. While one could argue that it’s no more time-consuming than the scientific endeavors that currently appear to dominate our time, it is also undeniably true that the questions provoked by religion rarely provide the definite and immediately relevant answers offered by scientific studies. In contrast, Eastern cultures typically revolve around a slower pace of life, which is more conducive to religious teachings. The spiritual heritage of large families, then, is simply a magnification of the religiously favorable environment the surrounding culture creates.

It is important to realize that religion is not an independent entity. Rather, it is a small part of a society’s overarching structure and culture. If the scale on which Catholicism and Islam are practiced is to be changed, or the relations between different schools of thought are to be significantly improved, alterations in the fundamental aspects of the cultures themselves must first be made.

*Ellen Tworkoski (etworkos@) is a first-year CIT student.*

# Presidential Perspectives

## Participating in a ‘post-partisan’ politics



Sean Weinstock & Adi Jain

Hey Tartans, Hopefully you voted last week and know that campus elections came and went, and with that, my term as your student body president goes into that lame duck phase. What’s nice is that I don’t have to deal with foreign dignitaries who feel like there’s no more bite to what I say because I’m not going to be in office for that much longer. On the contrary, Adi and my administration and other parties are still very much open to your suggestions as we finish our terms in office.

Hopefully, you were among the 1800 people who voted. We saw a lot of participation, and both the CMUnity and Tartan Pride campaigns, along with Elections Board, should be credited with the fantastic turnout. As a result of the polling activities, my successor is Jared Itkowitz. In my opinion, he is very competent and will make a terrific president. Jared has lots of great ideas, and, due to his three years of experience in Student Senate, he understands how to go about implementing them. His vice president, Pooja Godbole, is equally talented and has demonstrated her leadership by chairing Mayur SASA’s incredibly successful Bhangra in the Burgh event. As with Adi and me, Jared and Pooja will need your help and suggestions to make sure they are on the right track, so keep reading this column and sending e-mails.

In other news, Senator John McCain will be on campus this Tuesday. He will speak about the current state of the economy and outline his plan on how to fix the current doldrums we find ourselves in. As I wrote in an earlier Presidential Perspectives column, I’ve been very inspired by all the conversation surrounding our national elections this year. Certainly, we can credit Senator Obama’s campaign for reaching out to and catalyzing our generation. However, in order to really participate in Senator Obama’s vision of a “post-partisan” politics, we should educate ourselves on what the other candidates have to say without paying much regard to party lines. We must judge each platform with few preconceived notions and decide what we truly believe is best for our country, rather than just listening to what the media, our friends, or other outside influences try to superficially convince us what is best. We all have brains and individual perspectives. We at Carnegie Mellon can prove that to ourselves by keeping an open mind, listening to all the candidates’ points, and engaging in further conversations with our peers, professors, parents, strangers — you name it.

# Michelle Kwan for president: Art unites, not divides



Think about this: Michelle Kwan, 2016.

2016 is not the cost of a Vera Wang dress Kwan skates in (that would be more); nor is it the year America’s ice queen should once again vie for her elusive Olympic gold. (It’s is a Summer Olympic year anyway.) 2016 is the first election year in which Michelle Kwan will be at least 35 years old — and thus eligible for the presidency of the United States.

I must say, I wholeheartedly support a Kwan candidacy, as speculative as it may seem, eight years into the future.

Sure, the prospect of a figure skating star running for or becoming president seems outlandish. But why? In the fight-to-the-death battle in politics that is going on today, Kwan’s charisma — as opposed to the bureaucracy in place now — could be the so-called “change” our country needs. Beauty knows no partisanship; art unites, not divides.

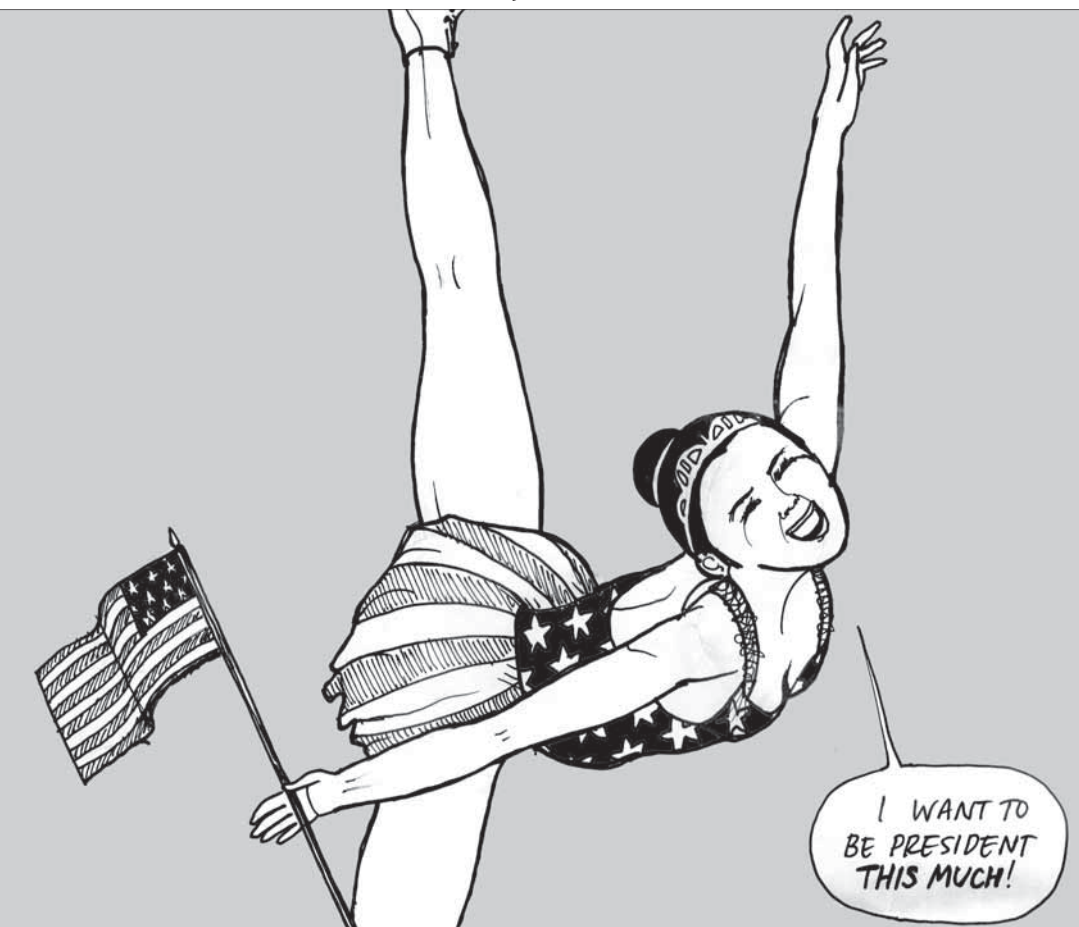
Kwan has been building up her political experience since she left the competitive skating circuit in 2006. In the fall of that year, she transferred to the University of Denver to major in political science and pursue a minor in international studies, both of which she is well equipped for. Kwan’s skating career has only furthered her education. For international studies, Kwan has trotted — or rather, glided — all over the globe. And concerning political science, the entire world of skating is one giant lesson in politics. You name it, it’s got it — the

politics of coaches, the politics of judges, the politics of how to wear one’s hair. It’s a tough world out there, but Kwan is clearly ready to handle it.

Additionally, in November of 2006, Michelle Kwan was named a Public Diplomacy Ambassador by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. In this position, Kwan has traveled abroad to encourage cross-cultural dialogue and to inspire young people to pursue sports. She has since journeyed to China, Russia, and Argentina to hold skating clinics and talk to athletes, coaches, youth, and entrepreneurs. (From what I’ve heard, she’s even a tad better at public speaking than Dubya, but we’ll give dear Dubya the benefit of the doubt, since it was unlikely Kwan had to use the word “nuclear” in her cross-cultural discussions — and therefore was not subject to his erroneous pronunciation of “nu-cu-lar.”)

Many may remember fellow skater Sasha Cohen’s stint at the opening ceremonies of the 2002 Salt Lake City Games, when she handed her cell phone to President Bush in a “Mom, I’m sitting next to the President!” moment, but Kwan’s political handlings go deeper. At the 1998 post-Olympic reception at the White House, for example, Kwan was chosen by her teammates to present to then-President Bill Clinton a commemorative Team USA jacket.

Who would be Kwan’s running partner? Hopefully, she would choose her longtime mentor and coach, Frank Carroll. Carroll’s rinkside manner is almost Reagan-esque: a little bit dapper, a little bit cuddly, an overall lovable figure. Plus, he has been there through thick and thin in Kwan’s career and is prominent



Lizzee Solomon/Art Editor

in the world of figure skating.

Moreover, the Kwan campaign has a better idea for a campaign activity. A posh hotel banquet room can only hold so many citizens. Wouldn’t it make more sense to have a Kwan fundraising skate-a-thon, where the star would perform in front of tens of thousands of people?

In this vein, Kwan will entertain her way through her presidency. Elton John concert? Please. Kwan will do her own performing. Though Hillary’s recent fundraiser with Rocket Man himself on April 9 at Radio

City Music Hall built up some good press (as well as an influx of much-needed campaign cash), Hill herself did not sing. If elected president, Kwan will skate, and audiences will swoon, as always.

Furthermore, Kwan won’t have to worry about the demographics of her voters. As Hillary has the rural votes and the older votes and Barack has the youth vote, they’re dueling over several demographic groups. Kwan’s got everyone. With figure skating dream Michelle Kwan as president, voters will not be broken down into dueling categories, but

will instead join hands and sing “Kumbaya” — ‘60s style. Kwan’s charisma is *that* uniting.

With all the technicalities of a Kwan campaign in place, the election could be a credible run in 2016. My only concern is the whole “3 a.m. phone call” situation. Sorry, economic vampires — Kwan can’t stay up all night. She has to get up early in the morning to train.

*Cynthia Peng (cynthiap@) is looking forward to the day that Michelle Kwan installs a skating rink in the White House.*

Last week, the student body elected Jared Itkowitz to be its next president. So we asked,

## If you were elected student body president, what would be the main tenet of your platform?



**Oretha Maru**  
First-year  
Economics

“Kick all the incoming freshmen off of campus. They’re taking all the housing!”



**Jasmine Friedrich**  
First-year  
Cognitive science

“Optimus Prime for our mascot — because honestly, I don’t think the SBP will do much.”



**Chris Wheelahan**  
First-year  
H&SS

“Sisqo for Carnival!”



**Mike Sheridan**  
Sophomore  
CivE

“Update our stock of free bikes.”



**Natasha Alejandro**  
Senior  
History

“Get rid of ‘Walking to the Sky!’”

# A PERSON’S OPINION

Compiled by Hannah Rosen