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## The History of Christmas

Jatin Taploo

It's that time of year again, when we experience the lovely gifts, the warm laughter, the jolly atmosphere, and the tasty hot chocolate! Christmas is one of the most anticipated holidays of the Winter Break, whether it be because of the exciting gift shopping, time spent with loved ones, or fun decorations. However, despite its popularity, most people don't know about its history and cultural impact.

First, let's rewind time, all the way to around 336 CE. Long before Christmas was celebrated, the Romans had a similar holiday on December 25, dedicated to the birth of Sol Invictus, “the Unconquered Sun”. That day marked the winter solstice when days began to get longer. Later, they introduced another festival called Saturnalia, when people would feast and exchange gifts in honour of the god Saturn. This festival was one of the first celebrations that resembled our modern-day Christmas.

Ever since the late 19th century, Christmas in Canada has been recognized as a national holiday. Students receive a two-week break towards the end of the year, colloquially known as the “Christmas Break”. The break was originally intended to celebrate Christmas; however, as Canada became more culturally diverse, the modern “Winter Break” aimed to include people of all cultural backgrounds who may celebrate holidays during this time. Both students and staff often look forward to this break, as it is the longest break during the school year and offers a wonderful opportunity to relax and spend time with family.

Some of our fellow students are eager to rest and celebrate Christmas and the New Year. Arian Seddighpour, a Grade 12 student, said, “I am celebrating Christmas by hanging out with my friends and family. I plan to completely take a break from school and instead work on my biggest programming project.” Another student, Yaman Radwan in Grade 9 said, “Over the break, I will be celebrating with my family and I will be sledding on the ice. I will be celebrating my birthday on the break too, which will be fun as well.”

Not only are the students excited, so are members of the staff! Ms. Reeder, a music teacher at Mac, said, “Over the holidays, I plan to spend quality time with my family [at] the Distillery Winter Village and see all of the lights and small shops with local vendors. We usually bring hot chocolate and go to the Greenwood Conservation Area and enjoy the beauty of winter as a family.” Clearly, both students and teachers hope to enjoy and relax during the Winter Break.

Christmas is a delightful holiday and is loved by billions. The history of Christmas is rich and wonderful, combining various cultures and peoples. To the Blackscots who celebrate Christmas, have a very Merry Christmas! And to all, Happy Holidays and enjoy the cherished Winter Break!

Source: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christmas>



Photo Credits: Aaron Prince Anu (top), Saralyn Guo (bottom)

**JANUARY**

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		Holiday Break				1
2	3 Return to School	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19 Late Start	20	21	22
23	24	25	26 School Council Meeting - 7pm	27	28 Credit Rescue Day	29
30	31 Credit Rescue Day					

## Student Winter Break Plans!

Selena Sarwari

Winter Break is much anticipated by students and teachers alike. The two-week break is an opportunity to rest and unwind after the constant stresses of school. Whether it means doing nothing all day or celebrating festive holidays, Winter Break is a valuable time for friends and families to reconnect and create great memories!

Due to COVID-19, things like travelling and visiting extended family may be quite difficult to do. But, that won't stop Blackscots from enjoying their break! I interviewed four Mac students to learn about their plans, about what they would have liked to do if there were no pandemic, and about what they hope to accomplish during this break.

My first interview was with Meghan Chao who is in Grade 9. Her plans for the coming Winter Break include “staying at home and spending time watching shows and movies, and staying in contact with friends.” Although COVID-19 doesn't affect her plans to a large degree, she would have definitely liked to be able to go to more public places. Meghan said that she hopes this break will give her a chance to catch her breath, sleep, and take a break from the pressures of life — a sentiment shared by students everywhere!

Next, I interviewed Sumedha Ghosh, a Grade 9 student. In connection to what she hopes to do during the holidays, she shared that she plans on going out with her friends and intends to spend lots of time reading. Like Meghan, COVID-19 will not have much of an effect on her plans as she prefers to stay home to read and to binge-watch shows. However, if COVID-19 were not an issue, she would have liked to see her friends more often and she would have probably travelled to India during the break.

Emma Parkinson, a Grade 12 student, said that she plans to finish her university applications, visit her extended family, and go ice skating with her friends! If it were not for COVID-19, she would definitely have travelled over the break. Seeing that this school year has been quite stressful, Emma hopes that this Winter Break will give her some time to start culminating assignments, help her catch up on sleep, and relax at last!

Grade 9 student Oviya Ajanthan explained that her plans for the holidays include spending quality time with family as well as indulging in Christmas books and movies to get into the holiday spirit! She also said that if the pandemic were not a factor, she would have liked to travel outside of Canada to visit her cousins. Oviya explained that she hopes that this break will help her catch up in math, understand herself better, and work on her mental health.

After hearing from your peers, perhaps you have new Winter Break activities in mind for yourself! What about you, Mac? What do you want to do over the Winter Break?

## Interviewing Teachers about the Simultaneous-Learning System

Selena Sarwari

Simultaneous-learning is a newly incorporated learning system at TDSB secondary schools, defined as a class with a mix of virtual and in-person students learning at the same time. Created in response to COVID-19, this concept has had a notable impact on both students and educators. After four months into the school year, I was curious to know what Mac thought of this system. We sought the perspectives of two of Mac's very own teachers: Mr. Montague and Mrs. Armstrong.

Mr. Montague is Mac's Integrated Technologies teacher. His classes involve practical and hands-on learning. He shared his struggles with the new system, saying, "The simultaneous-learning system is very hard to manage, especially when teaching a course that includes quite a lot of hands-on activities. It's almost impossible for the online students to stay on the same page as the in-person students since they don't have the same tools and materials they need to learn."

Although Mr. Montague has taught the same course for over a decade, this year has definitely been one of the most complicated. He also stated, "It's already difficult to stay attentive and be ready to address the concerns of 25 students, not to mention the 5 online students. It puts the online students at a disadvantage, seeing as how they are sometimes unknowingly left behind." Naturally, Mr. Montague hopes to return to the usual school system soon.

Next, I interviewed Mrs. Armstrong, one of Mac's French teachers. Although her classes do not involve as much hands-on learning as Mr. Montague's, she still experiences the many disadvantages of simultaneous-learning.

Like Mr. Montague, she struggled to pay attention to both online and in-person students: "As a teacher, there is a constant feeling that I can't meet everyone's needs when we have split into a group in front of me and a group on the other side of the camera." Accommodating every student's needs is made much more difficult in the simultaneous-learning system.

When it comes to the biggest advantages and disadvantages of simultaneous-learning for virtual students, Mrs. Armstrong replied, "The most obvious advantage is engaging in learning while staying home and feeling safe. But there are quite a few disadvantages. First of all, we have to rely on Zoom chats to address [sometimes private] concerns or questions. Secondly, it is difficult to tell virtual students' level of understanding as they rarely participate in class. Sometimes, I can't address the virtual students' questions on time, due to my focus on in-person students. Lastly, the unstable wifi makes it very difficult for the virtual students, as it disrupts their learning experience and delays class time."

To summarize, although simultaneous-learning allows both in-person and online students to be part of the same class, it has its many disadvantages.

## Candy-Grams

Corina Neculau



## Fab-Lab Toy Factory

Corina Neculau



## Post-Secondary Application Process

Brandon Feng

For many students, the post-secondary application process can seem confusing and difficult to work through. As Winter Break rolls around, so do application deadlines! Navigating your way to your dream program or school is an intimidating process; however, please keep in mind that doing proper research will clear up many questions and give you an advantage in the application process.

Before taking the big step towards post-secondary education, building connections with students older than you is a great idea. Along with the senior students at Mac, Mac alumni are always a great and familiar source of guidance. Networking with those who have already completed the application process allows you to receive advice from experienced individuals. Try to make as many connections as possible for a more varied insight during the post-secondary application process.

Many students may also consider delaying their post-secondary education by taking a gap year. This means they choose to take a year off between graduating from high school and beginning their post-secondary education. For some, taking a gap year may allow time to further develop existing interests, to discover new interests, to assess one's options and goals, and to become more self-reliant. After all, it's much less stressful to take extra time to consider and decide on a career than to switch paths in the midst of one's studies. However, a gap year is not for everyone, so it's important to consider this option very carefully.

Our very own Guidance Department also provides students with many useful resources such as official forms, research sources and other types of assistance. Senior students, be sure to check the Guidance Department's Google Classroom for a variety of resources ranging from step-by-step tutorials about how to apply, to details regarding information nights to scholarship opportunities! If you have not joined the classroom, the code is posted outside the Guidance Office. Please contact the Guidance Office for more one-on-one help regarding the process.

Applying to post-secondary schools can be scary. Making a huge decision at such a young age is downright terrifying. It is always good to remember that you can change your intended career path if the current one just isn't the right fit. It is more common than you think! Your 'future self' who will graduate from a post-secondary institution will likely be a lot different from your 'current self'. Change is inevitable, so don't feel that you have to stick with your initial plan if it proves not to be for you. As mentioned earlier, there are always people willing to give you advice and help; and there are always pathways open for exploration!

Make sure to get those applications in, Grade 12s at Mac! Mac News wishes the best of luck to you all during the application process!

## Art Council's Winter Display

Jalan Bayram



## Interviewing Mac's Class of 2021: Vivian Guo at the University of Waterloo's Computing and Financial Management (CFM)

Karen Mitro & Nancy Zou

Welcome back to our Interviewing Mac's Class of 2021 series! This month, we feature Vivian Guo, a former Editor-In-Chief for Mac News, and her experiences as a student at Waterloo's *Computing and Financial Management (CFM)* program. Learn about the conferences, extracurriculars, and research that led her — and may perhaps lead you — to *CFM* at Waterloo!

### What university and program do you go to? How did you decide?

I am studying *Computing Financial Management* at the University of Waterloo. In Grade 9 and 10, I found a passion for business and computer science through my courses and extracurricular involvements. During the summer before Grade 11, I participated in a career development conference held by the *School of Accounting and Finance at Waterloo*. The conference gave me an in-depth perspective on the advantages of Waterloo's co-op program and the strong support of the student community. From then on, I knew *CFM* would be the best next step in my academic career.

### What advice would you give to Blackscots interested in your field?

On the computer science side, I recommend taking part in competitive programming through contests and project-based programming through hackathons. Both are relevant extracurriculars that will help your application stand out. Competitive programming teaches you concepts that will be helpful for university course content, while project programming builds you a toolkit of industry programming languages to display on your resume. Examples are the *CCC (Canadian Computing Competition)* and *Hack the North* (Canada's largest Hackathon), both hosted by Waterloo.

For students interested in business, case competitions and entrepreneurship programs are great ways to get exposure outside of the classroom. Competing in *DECA* allowed me to learn about different business topics based on my competitive event. Also, taking part in the entrepreneurship program's Junior Achievement taught me the inner workings of a company that turns ideation to profit. A significant portion of my current business course is familiar due to these past extracurricular involvements.

### How would you describe the atmosphere of your university community?

Living in residence has been great for meeting new people as everyone is eager to talk. I have found it easy to connect with students in all my classes due to shared interests. Clubs and faculties also regularly host social events for the student community. At times, the academic atmosphere can be intense from heavy workloads. However, students are extremely supportive of each other, and staff and teaching assistants are always available to help during office hours.

### Tell us about your transition to university so far.

The transition has been mostly smooth, though a significant difference is that there is much less time to absorb course content. The pacing is much more similar to the quadmester system than to the semestered or non-semestered systems. The time management I developed from balancing academics with extracurriculars in high school has been monumental in managing my workload so far. One thing I have struggled with is the stark contrast of material for my math courses. University math is a lot more theoretical than high school.

### What have you done or recommend doing to help finance your education?

My program includes co-op, meaning I will be alternating between study and paid work terms over the next five years. I plan to use earnings from these work terms to finance my studies.

For scholarships, I recommend researching scholarship criteria and application questions specific to universities you are interested in. Universities generally offer scholarships based on academic performance or extra-curricular involvements. For example, my *OUAC* application average automatically qualified me for average-based awards such as Waterloo's *President's Scholarship of Distinction* and Western's *Scholarship of Excellence*. From researching, I found that Waterloo also has scholarships for achievements in math and computing; I did not apply for any because I knew my involvements had little relevance.

### Could you describe your application process?

I applied to *CFM (Computing and Financial Management)*, *AFM (Accounting Financial Management)*, and *Math* at Waterloo, and *BMOS* with *IVEY AEO* at Western. For Waterloo, I completed the *AIF (Activities Information Form)*. The form consisted of short answers specific to faculty and requested information on extra-curricular and participation and scores on Waterloo's math or computing contests. As well, I had to record an interview with pre-given questions for my application to *AFM*. Western *IVEY's* supplementary material took far longer as I had to write descriptions for my extracurriculars and contact references for each. Once submitted, emails were sent out to all references; they had to confirm the request for my application to be complete. In general, business programs tend to have lengthier applications than *STEM*.

### What advice would you give to Mac students applying to post-secondary in general?

Be conscious of deadlines and make contingency plans. There may be unexpected delays as you discover supplemental material requirements or wait for someone to respond to an email. Starting your applications early will ensure you are not overwhelmed on top of schoolwork when submission deadlines roll around.

### Anything else to add?

Don't be intimidated to reach out to upper years! Chances are, they have gone through the same confusion and would be more than happy to share their experiences. Make use of all the resources available to you and best of luck!

Thank you, Vivian — it was fascinating to gain insight into a program that extends beyond one field! For more interviews from our Mac graduates, be sure to keep up with our future issues!

## Pyjama Day!

YiLin Luan

