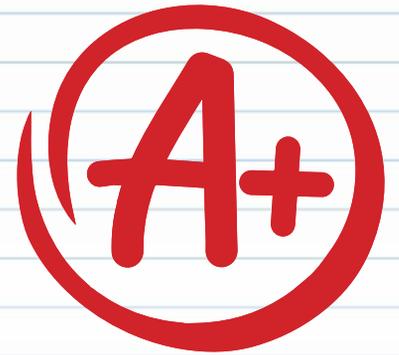


# Testing Positive For Perfection

## STUDENTS ACE

## ACT EXAM



By June Scharf

**T**hough the pandemic has cast a pall in many ways over students' plans this past semester, there was a bright spot for two smart students. BHS seniors Somin Jung and Jake Lawrence both earned perfect scores of 36 on the ACT, a national college entrance exam. The test was administered in February, before the government enacted any protocols, and results were delivered in March. With appropriate social distancing, each of these students shared with the Buzz their stories leading up to this monumental achievement.

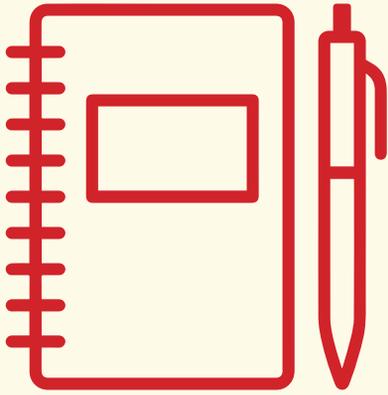
**Contrary to what one might imagine, Somin did not invest a great deal of time in her preparation for the 2020 ACT exam. In her typically light-hearted and loquacious style, she explained over a recent video call that she wasn't too worried about the test.**

Her confidence stemmed from having already earned a score of 34 in 2019, a feat accomplished by merely taking weekly practice tests – and repeatedly scoring 35 – for about a month prior to the real exam. Nonetheless, when she opened the envelope and saw her perfect score, she was very surprised and ran to tell her parents.

"I wasn't completely shocked, but I was more emotionally overwhelmed than I thought I'd be," she reports.

Although the test may have been easy for her, some experiences early in life challenged





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– Somin Jung

everything she understood and possibly shaped her to be the person she is today. Before arriving in Beachwood as a 4th grader, she was born in S. Korea and moved with her parents, Chihyang and Taehoon, to Singapore when she was in 1st grade. This proved to be a major culture shock.

She attended a Canadian international school where English was strictly spoken, but she only knew the Korean language. That created a huge social divide.

"I had a hard time because kids discriminated against me," she explains. "I was really frustrated by that, and it took me a long time to adjust to the environment."

She also was initially uncomfortable seeing people who didn't look like her.

"In Korea, everyone has brown eyes and black hair, but at school in Singapore, there were students with different ethnicities and nationalities. It felt very alienating at the time. I didn't know how to interact with other people then because I never previously had the chance. It was scary."

To assimilate, she needed to learn English quickly. Her strategy involved intense, "fervent" immersion.

"I watched English TV shows and read books again and again until I had the fluency I wanted." She says she knew her efforts had paid off when students started talking to her and treating her with respect which enabled her to form some solid friendships with children who had a range of ethnicities.

Ultimately, what she believes she drew from this experience is a mindset and some self-imposed high standards. She learned at a young age about the enormous return on hard work. Later in life, she began to feel that receiving 'A' grades in school well represented the efforts she dedicated to her pursuits. Top grades became a reliable source of validation.

Aside from her academic work, Somin is active in several extra-curricular activities. She runs 5k races with the cross-country team, plays violin in the orchestra, and is a member of the Science Olympiad team for which her events include forensics, water quality, and geography. She also participates in Model U.N. and Academic Challenge (arts and biology topics are her strengths).

In her free time, she likes to draw and paint. These skills might have been nurtured by early exposure to art museums which her parents made a habit of visiting frequently, she says. Over the quarantine, she added a new skill: longboarding. It's similar to a skateboard but meant for cruising, not tricks.

Why bother? To improve her balance, she says.

"I might want to ride an electric longboard at college, so this helps." She has been practicing in a nearby parking lot in The Village, unscathed so far.

Regarding college selection, she says she hasn't had enough time to reflect on her strengths and weaknesses to best determine what will be a good match. When she ponders her eventual career, however, she says biomedical engineering could feel right because she thinks she would like to get involved with work surrounding bio-mimicry, robotics, or organ replacement. Combining arts and physics would be ideal, she adds.

Though science is something that has interested her since a young age and "comes naturally," she fully appreciates what a difference her science teachers in Beachwood have made. "Every year they would motivate me to do something new." She notes that she feels fortunate to have conducted some "cool science experiments here," compared to students at other schools where they might not have the same opportunities.

One of the more memorable experiments occurred in a freshman biology class when students grew a strain of bacteria in a petri dish and genetically manipulated it to add a gene with a property that made it glow when examined under UV light. "It was mind-blowing to have had this experience."

When it comes to the pressures of handling high school life, she admits that sometimes she becomes stressed out. But her solution to addressing the condition came with journaling.

"It's extremely helpful with understanding who you are, and it allows you to reflect and organize your mind. It changed my life because it improved my mental health. It also gives me a record of how I'm feeling at certain times."

She also derives lots of positive energy from talking to thoughtful people and hearing their ideas. Communication goes both ways, too. "Friends can always depend on me if they need emotional support," she says. She traces this ability and inclination to her time in Singapore.

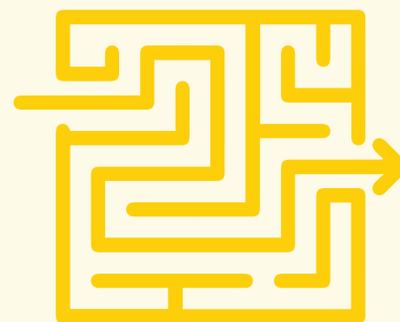
She has come a long way since then, but she will never forget those formative experiences. Fortunately, they seem to have propelled her in a positive direction.

**It is no accident that Jake achieved a perfect score on the ACT. He is a self-described perfectionist, and he believes this trait has helped him far more than hurt him.**

"I never back down from a challenge," he said during a recent conversation seated on his driveway at home.

Jake has a ready smile and a demeanor revealing contentment. But also present are traces of some restlessness that seem to drive much of his considerable ambition.

One example is the development of the YouTube series, "Everyday Physics with Jake Lawrence," under production during the preponderance of pandemic downtime. So far, three short episodes explore projectiles, rotational motion and torque, and circular motion. He obtained assistance with this project from his physics teacher, Michael Lerner, who also advertised the series to his students. The glee with which he describes the learning tool reveals a remarkable understanding of scientific principles and a clear delight in helping others.



"I never back down from a challenge."

– Jake Lawrence

This online presence actually represents his second foray into the digital space.

As a nine-year-old, he launched LetsBakeWithJake.com, a website on which he shares recipes that he either invented or tweaked. His range includes cookies, cakes, breads, and anything else that appeals to him. He credits his father for being a primary culinary influence.

During his free time, which he stretches to maximum effect, he is involved with quite a few activities. His primary non-academic focus is playing the bass guitar, something he calls his "main passion."

As a result of this interest, he formed the rock band, Splash Landing, with other BHS students. It functions as an extra-curricular club, so others can join, too. Last year, the group entered the Tri-C High School Rock Off competition. The members did not advance to the final round, "but it still was a great experience," Jake says. "We wrote three songs and had an awesome time performing them on-stage at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame."

In addition to playing originally composed songs, the group performs covers, such as music by Green Day ("Holiday"), the Scorpions ("Rock You Like A Hurricane") and Toto ("Hold the Line"). The group is considered BHS's "house band," and has performed in the annual student talent show, "White & Gold."

As a seventh grader, Jake became known for his bass skills after he auditioned and

was selected to perform on the KISS Kruiise, a cruise featuring onboard performances by the legendary rock band, along with amateurs assuming separate stage time. As a 9th grader, Jake was invited by AP US History teacher John Perse to play with the teachers' band in White & Gold and has performed with them annually. Jake says it has been "really fun getting to know my teachers on a personal level."

Jazz is an additional outlet for his musical acumen. Along this part of his musical journey, BHS music instructor David Luddington has been a highly supportive and encouraging role player. To indulge this interest, Jake attends a weekend program for students at The Music Settlement and has played a few gigs around town. One particularly memorable performance was participating in a jazz quartet that opened for the Cleveland Orchestra which was playing on Mall B last summer.

Even with all of these commitments, he is still able to enjoy his other extracurriculars: BHS Jazz Band, Speech and Debate Club, and Academic Challenge ("science, politics and sports are my main strengths"). He also tutors students in chemistry and math.

But does he play any video games? "No, they're a waste of time."

Recreationally speaking, however, he's a die-hard Browns fan, a scuba diver, and a white-water rafting enthusiast. He also closely follows politics and the stock market. As an extension of his interest in music, he taught

himself acoustic and electric guitar and drums, and he's working on composing and recording his own music, playing all the instruments. As study breaks, he often plays his bass or acoustic guitar on which he's currently learning songs by the Eagles and Jimmy Buffet.

He hasn't yet mapped out his career because he says he has lots of different interests and can see himself doing many different things. Regarding college, he's still exploring his options. His immediate plans include taking AP Chemistry, AP Psychology, and Multivariable Calculus in the fall. What he knows for certain, though, is that his diligence really paid off with the ACT exam.

"I studied months in advance. I spent hours and hours preparing by taking practice tests and analyzing what I did wrong and how I could improve. My aim was to achieve that perfect score."

His advice to others is to understand your test-taking style and learning style. He was aware that he excelled at math and science, but he was weaker with reading, so he dedicated himself to studying and practicing, particularly the speed and accuracy aspects of this part of the test.

After waiting four weeks for his results to arrive in the mailbox in March, he brought the envelope into the kitchen. Surrounded by his mom Donna, dad Ken, and brother Ben (a BHS freshman), he ripped open the envelope. "We were ecstatic!"

This test, similar to all of the other activities he uses to challenge himself, has unequivocally proven the formula that hard work = success.