

BLENDING THE LINES

Seniors, juniors come together in residential setting

BY GRACE KIM AND MARY KOHLMANN

One of the many unique aspects of a two-year school is the constant turnaround the campus experiences with every Move-In Day. With only one year shared between each two classes, the dynamic of the Science and Math junior-senior relationship is very different than at other high schools.

"I think the classes here are closer [than those at normal high schools], but it's probably not comparable," said grandsenior Ben McMillan, now a freshman at the California Institute of Technology. "You don't live [at your home school], for one thing."

Senior Maggie Zhou agrees that the proximity contributes to this relationship.

"[Living together allows] more hang-out potential time, the ability to see people at their best and worst and opportunities to help [others] through their best and worst," she said. "There's a definite bond we all feel in this pressure cooker that we know as NCSSM."

But it takes some time for the pressure cooker to heat up.

"For me, it was hard to get past everything they went through [together] before I arrived," Zhou said.

However, Zhou said that she did manage to break through.

"It's more of a maturity thing," she said of the shift in understanding. "No one can deny that you change a lot your junior year."

At first, said senior Daphne Wang, "it was difficult to connect because [the seniors] had too many NCSSM memories. Being a senior seemed like a lot of status."

Grandsenior Emma Htun, who is starting her first semester at Georgetown University, recalled that she "envied their close friendships with one another."

This barrier, however, tends to fade over the course of the school year.

"As we got to the middle of the year, the classes blended," senior Elizabeth Cutrone said.

Senior Kelly Anderson felt her friendships deepen as the year went along.

"At the beginning of the year, I went to my seniors for advice and help," she said. "But later, I went to them to tell them about something exciting that happened or to hear about their day. The relationship became a friendship rather than a mentorship."

When students leave their families at home to venture into a residential school setting, they often build relationships to fill the void left by living away from home.

"I think there's more of a big brother/big sister feel at this school," Anderson said. "The students look out for one another. It's more of a family feeling."

The Residential Life Department uses such programs as sibling halls and senior brothers and sisters to encourage unity, although many students seem to find their own day-to-day experiences more helpful.

"I think it helps that most classes aren't all juniors or all seniors," Cutrone said. "I had a lot of senior friends."

Anderson agrees that most seniors are open to friendships with juniors.

"Other than the required things, like Student

Life 101 or Super Study, there aren't a lot of lines drawn between the seniors and the juniors," she said. "Most seniors don't make a choice to segregate themselves."

"I felt closer to my seniors [than my juniors]," said grandsenior James Winder, now a student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "But I think most of the cool juniors I found later. By the time the juniors' third trimester rolls around, they're practically first trimester seniors."

McMillan describes third trimester juniors as "like seniors, but smaller and a little more clueless." At year's end, the juniors have developed identities entirely independent of their grade level.

"At the end of the year, the friendship groups get mixed up a little," Cutrone said. "You can identify people more easily by who they're friends with than what class they're in."

Of course, the degree to which seniors reach out to their juniors varies by person and by experience.

"It's my Circle Theory," Zhou said. "If you were really close to your seniors, you won't go out of your way to make friends with your juniors."

Others believe the opposite.

"We had really amazing seniors, so we wanted to be great for [our juniors]," said grandsenior Anna Engelke, who enters UNC-Chapel Hill this fall. She cited the example set by the seniors on her junior hall as her source for the inspiration to connect with the Class of 2007.

And at the end of things, "it's hard leaving them," McMillan said. "Or maybe it's harder staying behind."



Photo by Amy Bryson