

# Respecting others' religious beliefs

## Mass emails were just the surface of a widespread problem

jillian green

I'm sure every student has been aware of the abuses of the "all students" address. Two forwards describing an explicitly Christian doctrine were sent before the address was canceled: Mass Emails telling of the wonders of Jesus Christ.

These emails have understandably caused a lot of anger and controversy in the school: If I were a devout Muslim, Jew, Hindu, Taoist, Buddhist, Bahai, Agnostic, Atheist or any other religion I would not appreciate receiving this email. In fact, I

would be offended to the point of anger.

I would like to believe that the religious tension and intolerance at NCSSM is limited to these two emails. But it is not.

Last year I could not ignore the underlying of tension at NCSSM over the issue of religious tolerance: And I don't just mean Christians spouting dogma to non-Christians (which personally I see as a common misnotation when the words "religious tolerance" are used.)

I am Christian and many times last year I was scared to assert that fact in class. Far too often Christians are assumed to be brainless followers who simply believe everything that they read in the Bible. I strongly resent this stereotype. Personally, I have participated in numerous organizations that tackle with serious theological issues, such as "what is the nature of God,"

"why is there evil if God is good," "is there even really a God," "what is the Bible really, and how can I use it in my life?"

Additionally, I research historical on the validity of the Bible, sometimes even going over to Duke's Divinity school to use their library. Many other Christians really have a need to research the validity of the Bible, looking at the book both from the viewpoint of a follower and scientist. The assumption that there is no place for Christianity (when there is a place for other religions and agnosticism) in the scientific method is a form of religious intolerance.

Here at NCSSM, I see the need for two main improvements. First, respect other people's views. As strongly as you may disagree with people for their views, don't assume that they are stupid, or that there

is something wrong with them because they don't believe what you believe. If you really are curious how on earth someone can believe what they believe, engage in a discussion with that person, but be respectful.

Secondly, don't judge people by their religious affiliation, but as Martin Luther King would say, judge them by the content of their character. Judging is wrong; however, recognizing that it is inevitable, judge people on how they live, and how well they carry out the doctrine to which they prescribe.

Religion is such a beautiful expression of a human struggling to understand the outside world. Let's not make the rite of passage of searching for the joy one has in finding a theology that speaks truth to them) a burden to bear. After all, don't we have enough to worry about?

# Making the most of NCSSM

heather fried

This year, the student body has made many complaints about the administration, the rules, and changes in the school. Unfortunately, because of these frustrated sentiments about things we do not like about the school, we have lost sight of the positive things about the school. There are reasons that we are all here. The school has characteristics that we love and value enough to remain here, though at times we wonder why we did not leave a long time ago. What truly makes NCSSM a great place to be, and distinguishes it from other high schools, goes further than the academics, the administration, and the structure, and lies within the students themselves.

At my old school, many of the students were very provincial. If you wanted to feel like a part of the group you had to conform to the views of the group, which were biased and superficial at best. Furthermore, cliques dominated the school. If you were lucky enough to make yourself acceptable to a group of people you wanted to be "friends" with, those were the only people you associated with. While I had friends, many of whom belonged to different cliques, I felt the tension between them and other students. I lacked intellectually stimulating conversation with my peers while I was there, and felt I rarely had the chance to be myself and let others know the real me.

When I came to NCSSM I noticed a distinct difference in the atmosphere here from that of my old school. One of the greatest things about the school, one of the traits that distinguishes it from other high schools, is the openness and ex-

pressiveness of the student body. People here are not afraid to be exactly who they are, and because of that students have mutual respect. They are willing to respect anyone's beliefs and lifestyle, and are not afraid to share their own, no matter how different theirs may be. They are more open and accepting than students at other schools tend to be. Things that the teenage society condemns everywhere else are normal here.

Students are not just open about diversity at this school, but tend to celebrate it. This not only applies racially or culturally, but to diversity of character. Everyone here is a distinct person, with unique views and qualities. Yet these distinctions are never a basis for exclusion, or the forming of cliques. We all have something different to offer the school, and unlike other schools, this fact is appreciated here. I have learned so much from the other students just by getting to know who they are.

Such an astonishingly diverse group of people is not unique to Science and Math. Student bodies everywhere have people every bit as original as here. However, NCSSM has an amazing ambiance of comfort that does not exist at other schools. The pressure to conform is not felt. Students can be absolutely comfortable being whoever they want to be, and have the peace of mind that comes from knowing that no one will judge them for it. In this sense, the students here are probably happier than at any other school I have ever seen.

The result of this variety gives us another benefit. With so many people here interested in so many different things, ev-

eryone has someone here to talk to. It is impossible to not find a single person here with whom you can have a good conversation. I have found that not only do I have more friends here than at my old school, but I know them better, on a much more personal level. We often hear older people tell us that we will not make friendships that will last forever until we are in college, but I, along with many others, have found those friendships at Science and Math. I know that I never want to lose touch with my friends, and that I want them to still be there the way they are now when I go through experiences later in life. We do not realize how close we get to others living in this bubble together, but it happens. We depend on each other, and have fun together. I find myself staying up later than I need to many nights, not to pull all-nighters, but to talk with friends.

NCSSM has many things to offer its students. However, sometimes we are so caught up with academics, extracurriculars, and complaints, we ignore some of the greatest benefits we are getting from attending the school. Nowhere else could we live in a setting so conducive to individualism. We should embrace the knowledge and relationships made possible by this atmosphere, and appreciate the contrast from our former schools. We may not walk away at graduation with the best grades, a sports record, or the knowledge that we have forever changed the school. We will leave with a better sense of ourselves and others, security and confidence in ourselves, and friendships that will last a lifetime, all things we may never have gotten from our old schools.



## Ditch the Fitch

jonathan raxter

Many of you have probably noticed a large volume of designer clothes walking on campus this year. Names such as Tommy Hilfiger and Abercrombie and Fitch should be familiar to you. I, along with many other people on campus, am a little disturbed by this clothing craze.

First, I would not pay \$50 for a pair of blue jeans, or \$40 for a shirt with a big name on the front. Wearing these clothes just shows how foolish a person is with his/her money.

Second, these clothes sometimes lead to assumptions about the owner. I, for one, try not to assume anything about anyone before I get to know them well. However, when people are wearing clothing of a grossly over priced name printed on the front in large letters, such as Abercrombie and Fitch, it is difficult not to assume that they are fairly wealthy and enjoy flaunting this wealth. As one junior put it, "Those shirts make you look like a walking billboard."

Now, when large groups of people begin to wear these clothes, as has happened in the first few weeks of school here, the clothes become sort of a "coolness" symbol. I actually did a little experimenting during

2nd West I-viz on the first weekend after classes began. I walked down the hall and back dressed as I was, and then again about thirty minutes later wearing an Abercrombie and Fitch hat (don't say anything...the hat was a gift). Both times I did not initiate conversation with anyone. The first trip no one spoke to me, and on the second trip three junior girls (two were walking together) introduced themselves to me, and the group of two gave me compliments on the hat. I realize this is not a great experiment as far as the scientific method is concerned, but the results speak for themselves.

Some students also seem to have the same type of feelings. Everyone I talked with about this issue said they didn't care or had negative opinions about the clothing craze. Alex White, a senior, said, "People sometimes make assumptions based on clothing and create their own cliques based on these assumptions; they limit their interactions with the rest of the student body."

In short, I challenge everyone to wear clothing that is unassuming and makes everyone get to know you before they conjure up biases. I challenge everyone to ditch the Fitch. If you already own some Fitch, donate it to Goodwill. Well, at least don't wear it too often.

