

Student Activities Fee: *An Editorial Debate*

A Small Price to Pay

IGOR GORODEZKY

As NCSSM students living out our lives in the proverbial 'bubble', we can frequently become victims of dangerous misconceptions relating to events in the world outside our school. But even beyond that, our ivory tower-like milieu lulls us into security and clouds our perception of aspects of our own institution that are not deemed immediately relevant. Administrative duties and budget-related concerns are either ignored or taken for granted, conveniently assigned to authorities. And so in this new fiscal year, these authorities in the General Assembly, along with our Executive Director, have waxed ominous about inevitable budget shortfalls, inflexibility and, ultimately, cuts.

The grim reality is hard to ignore. The US economy has begun to shrink after years of expansion, and our own state government is cutting a plethora of programs, including funding for other educational institutions. Though they have been persuaded to refrain from cutting NCSSM's funds, our financial troubles are serious.

After giving so little thought to the amount the state spends per student, now might be the time to accept a share of the fiscal responsibility through a student activity fee. The school must continue with much needed renovations. It must continue feeding and sheltering us. And cutting the academic budget should not be an option even in the worst of worst-case scenarios. It seems our luxuries, such as school functions and van loops, can only be supported through a student fee. Other consortium schools who have instituted this fee can afford to spend more on academics, and the magnitude of the fee, around \$800-\$1000 a year,

seems much less menacing when compared to college tuition and the money usually spent on luxuries at home.

For middle class families, it might mean one fewer vacation, or waiting a year to get that new car; hardly a fiscal travesty. Economically disadvantaged families will be able to exempt the fee, so that no student will be forced to turn down admission due to strictly financial reasons. And if a prospective student whose family is fully capable of paying the fee would turn down admission on purely ideological grounds, so be it. There will always be someone more than happy to take his or her place; someone who realizes that this fee is negligible compared to what an NCSSM education is truly worth.

This placing of things into perspective by NCSSM students is key to the betterment, and ultimate survival, of this school. Having student activities supported by a source independent of regular funds from alumni and the state would surely streamline our budget and add flexibility in implementing future student activities. As long as we set aside our petty bourgeois outrage and adopt a long-term view, this school can become an integral part of North Carolina's, and the entire nation's, future.

A Matter of Principle

KITTY FROMSON

Helping with November 10th's Open House for prospective students reminded me why I love NCSSM. In telling sophomores why attending Science and Math could be the best decision they've made in a long time, I remembered how I felt when I was applying. I remembered what impressed me about the school and why I felt I could belong here. On Saturday, I heard Tom

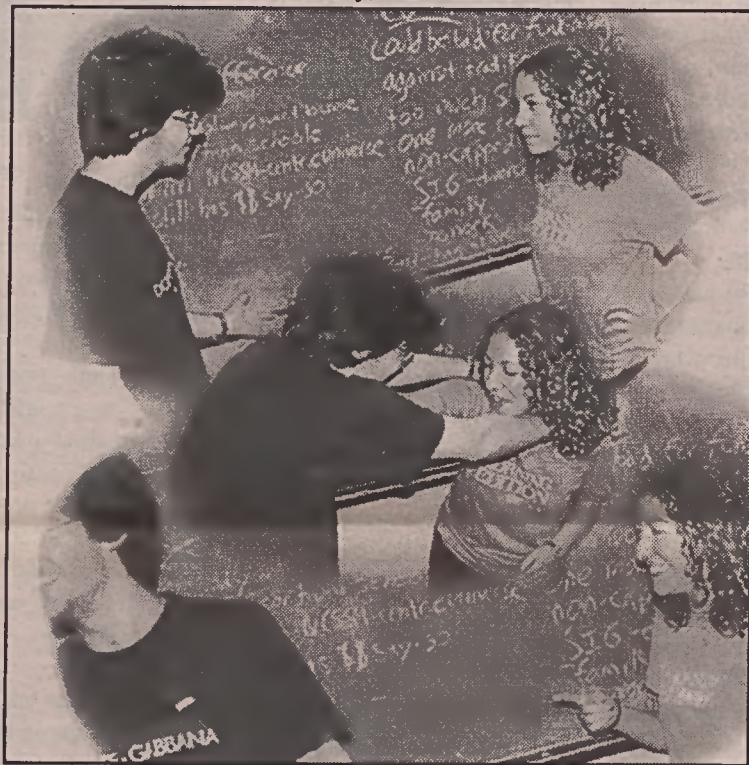
socially invigorating environment for the state's best and brightest students. Our classes are advanced, our teachers are amazing, and our equipment is as good as most colleges and universities. We give students the opportunity to learn from each other by living together. We provide the backdrop for the formation of lifelong friendships between vastly different people. We are proud of our diversity and proud of our accessibility to all students. We exist because North

Carolina thought it was worth giving a phenomenal education to her phenomenal students. We represent equal opportunity at its best. NCSSM was built on a tradition of academic excellence, but also on the idea that the best and the brightest don't all have the money to afford a \$20,000 tuition for private school. We are happy to create an opportunity for all who will seize it and make good use of it. I, and many of my fellow students, do not want to see those values eroded by the implementation of a Student Activity Fee.

The decision to leave home two years early is difficult for both students and parents. Putting an \$850 obstacle in the path from home to here creates one more reason why many of North Carolina's best students will refuse to attend, or even apply. The monetary amount may seem small in comparison with college tuition, but it is still a hefty sum, and most students

at Science and Math incur large living expenses as well. Some families will not be able to afford to send their children; some will simply refuse to. Even if the fee is waived for lower-income families, we risk losing valuable applicants who are not interested in the machinations of yet another economic barrier to be hurdled. For the students who do get their fee waived, there are bound to be subtle, but still harmful stratifications in the social groups at NCSSM. There will be haves and have-nots, and the close-knit, non-discriminatory community that so many of us value could be destroyed. Also, our school's economic and racial diversity will be endangered by the addition of the fee, directly contrary to the School Improvement Group's goal to increase diversity. In short, the equal opportunity we have been striving for would cease to exist.

We are all aware that the school needs money if it is to maintain and improve its current programs. There must be, however, other and better ways to generate revenue than a Student Activities Fee. Besides all the other considerations, wouldn't such a fee drastically decrease the amount parents give to the Annual Fund, and potentially hurt the school's income? I am proud to be a student at NCSSM, but not just because I gained admission. I am proud that I am part of a welcoming, educational community that is largely free from the discrimination of ethnicity, background, and money that exists elsewhere. I am proud that our state legislature has deemed our advanced education a worthy cause. I am afraid, though, that this Student Activity Fee could change what NCSSM stands for. I am afraid of a betrayal of principle.



Jamie Shin

Clayton and Letita Mason telling sophomores and their parents the same things they told me two years ago: all the reasons why our school is fantastic. And those reasons are the core principles of Science and Math.

We are a public, residential high school for juniors and seniors with a high aptitude and interest in science and mathematics. Our admissions process is open to all North Carolina sophomores. We are the first residential magnet school of our kind and other residential consortium schools were modeled after us. We provide an academically challenging and

Super Study

A's than B's, excluding Mentorship which is our one all senior class." The improvement is not confined to the sciences, but appears to be across the board. "[Teachers] have noticed an increase in homework being turned in," said Dr. Barber. Many have "already volunteered to supervise and assist for the second quarter."

The second quarter of

Super Study will be different than the first in some ways. The students will be treated on a more individualized basis, and will be located in smaller settings. A plan to rotate supervisors by department is being considered, as a sort of extended tutorial.

The program did have some unanticipated side effects, both positive and negative. Many seniors did

find it easier to complete their own homework on the quieter, calmer halls during Super Study hours. "One concern I have that I heard a lot [was that] some students procrastinated in beginning their homework into Super Study," says Dr. Barber. There was also trouble arranging group study for projects and getting access to computers. Nevertheless,

these are small kinks to be worked out of a much larger, effective system.

What of Super Study's future? "We really hope that this program, modified and revised to address all concerns, will continue," says Dr. Barber, "and provide an infrastructure for students in a living and learning environment to study." There you have it: Super Study is here to stay.

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Department, "I do know that the grade distribution in science for the first quarter had more A's given than B's, which reverses the usual pattern of more B's than A's that we see in science at the end of first quarter. This increase is probably significant since it is approximately 100 more