

When at NCSSM, do as the SMathers do

By LIZ BALL

NCSSM is a unique environment, filled with opportunities (but we know that). Everybody has been or will be told to be social, to try this, to go to that. While I am a strong advocate for trying everything at least once, it is hard to do everything and even harder to decide how to divide your time. Here, I've tried to highlight some of the must-do's that aren't as talked about.

See the town

Explore 9th Street – The shops and restaurants on 9th Street are great for escaping the monotony of schoolwork or trying some new flavors. Be sure to explore. Attack a Vermonster with some friends, or browse a comic book store. Senior Alyssa Rabel recommends Ox & Rabbit: "I bought both of my brothers' Christmas presents there - a chess set and a T-shirt that said Durham on it and had a picture of a ham." Whether you're a junior, a senior, or even a faculty member, you never know what you'll find.

Go on a Loop – Loops are a great way to explore off campus and visit places too far to walk to. There are loops to Southpoint, Wal-Mart, and Target, and a few other places where students like to spend their weekends. And the bus rides there and back are great for bonding. In the words of Senior Wendy Bartlett, "All I can remember is coming back to school from Wal-Mart, and the radio was on. Taylor Swift came on, and the whole bus started singing along."

Go on a Bus Trip – Durham is a lot larger than just 9th Street and Northgate, so hop on a bus and find out. You can buy a day's worth of adventures for only two dollars. Go visit all those places that interest you but that you've never had a chance, or find somewhere new to make your own. According to Senior Evan Strother, "It's a day-long thing, but it's definitely worth it, especially if you have the right company." So go break out of the NCSSM bubble, and don't forget your camera.

Visit Duke Gardens – We all need a break every once in a while and a chance to be immersed in nature. Visiting Duke Gardens is a wonderful way to do this. With a small lake and plenty of flowers and trees, Duke Gardens provide a nature sanctuary for souls being consumed by the terrors of schoolwork. And according to Strother, it's "basically the most gorgeous scenery you'll find within the Triangle."

Visit the Quarry – The Eno River State Park is wonderful if you ever want to explore a nature trail, but the coolest part is the old rock quarry, which is filled with water. On the way to the quarry, you'll see a sign advising you not to swim, but rules are for bending. Make sure you go with someone who's been there before or get directions. Most people take the bus (\$2.00 for an all-day ticket), but it is possible to bike there.

Visit Bulkogi – Usually parked near the end of 9th Street, Bulkogi (otherwise known as the "Korean Taco Truck") is a tasty and incredibly different PFM alternative. The food is cheap, and you get a lot for what you pay. You can follow NCBulkogi on twitter to know the changing hours and locations of the truck. Bulkogi is not for everyone but is definitely something to try at least once. After all, who wouldn't want to claim that they've had Korean barbeque?

Socialize

Talk With a Teacher Outside of Class – NCSSM teachers aren't here just to lecture and assign homework; they truly care about students and want students to do well, even if they each express it in their own way. Whether it's saying hello to Mr. Gann on 9th Street (Walter Vaughan), learning about Ms. Wiley's adventures in Costa Rica (Paula Gordon), or discussing stereotypical sappy teen poetry with Dr. Miller, make a point of talking to the wonderful teachers around school. They have years of experience and many stories to tell, and it is our job as youth to open our ears and our minds.

Bond with Your Roommate – Roommate bonding is important, even if you find that you don't have much in common with your roommate(s). My ex-roommate Lucy Goodwin-Johansson and I found that we were quite different, yet we had many wonderful movie nights and cooking adventures. Senior Cole Finney shared his experience: "My roommate and I bonded pretty much all year over two-player online flash games. We'd just play silly little games once in a while. He beat me, mostly." It doesn't matter what you do, but bonding must be done!

Embrace new experiences

Perform at Koffeehaus – Getting up in front of your peers can be a little nerve-wracking, but Koffeehaus is a friendly environment. You can sing, play an instrument (Guitar is popular, but a guy last year played accordion a few times.), do a comedy routine, read a poem, act out a skit – pretty much anything you want. Hearing the applause afterward makes this totally worth it.

Go to (and Participate in) Shows of All Kinds – The music and drama departments, as well as movie and culture clubs, do a remarkable job of putting on great shows to look forward to. With orchestra concerts, plays, fests, and frequent movies (some of them outdoors), there is always something to see. Be sure to check them out and participate every once in a while, whether through acting, helping behind the scenes, or even voting on which movie should be shown. Get involved and customize your NCSSM experience.

Watch the Sunrise – When faced with a workload such as NCSSM's, it is important to remember to find beauty in the small things. The sunrise is one such beautiful thing. Most swear by the top of the North Watts staircase, but the sunrise can be enjoyed anywhere. Hopefully you'll watch it by choice instead of during a work-induced all-nighter, but beauty can be appreciated either way. But, if you can't be bothered to get up early, sunsets on the Watts staircase are beautiful too.