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HERE  
BUT  
NOT  
HEARD



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# HERE BUT NOT HEARD



While the Sexuality and Gender Alliance Club (SAGA) was working to designate new, gender-neutral bathrooms, the unaffiliated Gender Alliance Club was putting up signs on school bathrooms saying that anyone who identified as female could use the female bathrooms, and anyone who identified as male could use the male ones. “[SAGA was] not aware that another such club existed on campus,” senior and SAGA co-president Elodie Townsend said. “Obviously, having another supportive group is fantastic, but the fact that they did not reach out to us or communicate with us was worrisome. We have been working on getting gender neutral bathrooms for two years now, and the signs came as a shock for us; not a bad one, of course, but they diverted attention from our cause.”

This event highlighted that the progress of social movements and the acceptance of diversity at Tam is often hindered by a lack of communication.

Diversity can refer to ethnicity, wealth, sexuality, ideology, mental or physical health, and a hundred other classifications. Although diversity at Tam is being addressed on various levels, by site and Tamalpais Union High School District (TUHSD) administrators, as well as within targeted programs and clubs, concrete progress is restricted by a lack of communication between programs and throughout Tam as a whole, according to many students, teachers, administrators, counselors, and community advocates.

“I don’t know that we have [concrete plans to decrease discrimination]. I think there are things done in service of it...but this is an issue we need to address,” Assistant Principal Brian Lynch said. “I think we’ll have a greater outcome if it’s coming from the students...and working off of there.”

But because of the lack of correspondence, students don’t know that the administration wants them to lead the effort in addressing diversity, according to students interviewed. “There’s very poor communication [between the administration and students]... There’s basically no way to communicate,” junior Gwen Tosaris said. “If they do communicate [information], it’s over the speakers [during tutorial announcements], but no one listens to the speakers. My [tutorial] classroom doesn’t even have a working speaker, so I have no idea what’s going on in the real Tam community.”

In over 25 interviews with key community members, a reality of fractured efforts for social change emerged. Administrators have the jurisdiction but not the student-advocated ideas, programs have the resources but not the student engagement, and individuals have the ideas but not the authority or unified student body effort. Without active collaboration, each group can’t get farther than the indeterminate and eternal goal of “raising awareness”—rather than forming concrete solutions. Raising awareness is a respectable goal, but it isn’t enough to change the entire culture of a school, according to students interviewed.

“We need to decide as a com-

munity that equity is a priority for everyone because...it makes the whole community stronger when everyone is getting what they need to be successful,” Wesley Cedros, the TUHSD Senior Director of Student Services, said. “There are definitely pockets of this work going on. We just need to be more intentional about it to broaden the scope of influence.”

It’s important to consider what separations are present at Tam to understand the lack of communication in reducing them.

One of the most prominent gaps in the Tam community is wealth. The average income in Marin is \$92,000, while it’s \$61,000 in California and \$53,000 in the U.S, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Counselor Evelyn Dorsett stressed that the wealth of our society can ostracize those who aren’t as wealthy. “I think [the greatest division at Tam is]

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wealth, students feeling excluded because their friends use money as a bargaining tool or identity,” Dorsett said.

This division is reflected not only culturally but also academically. According to the Tamalpais Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) report, the percent of economically advantaged students at Tam who scored “proficient” or “advanced” on the 2013 California Standards Test (CST) was 85%. However, only 46% of economically disadvantaged students scored “proficient” or “advanced.” This indicates a significant and concerning achievement gap.

Another issue is the racial divide. Junior Harpreet Kaur, who immigrated from India her sophomore year, feels that while the Tam culture as a whole is very open to discussing social issues compared to India, in practice, students still self-segregate based on their differences.

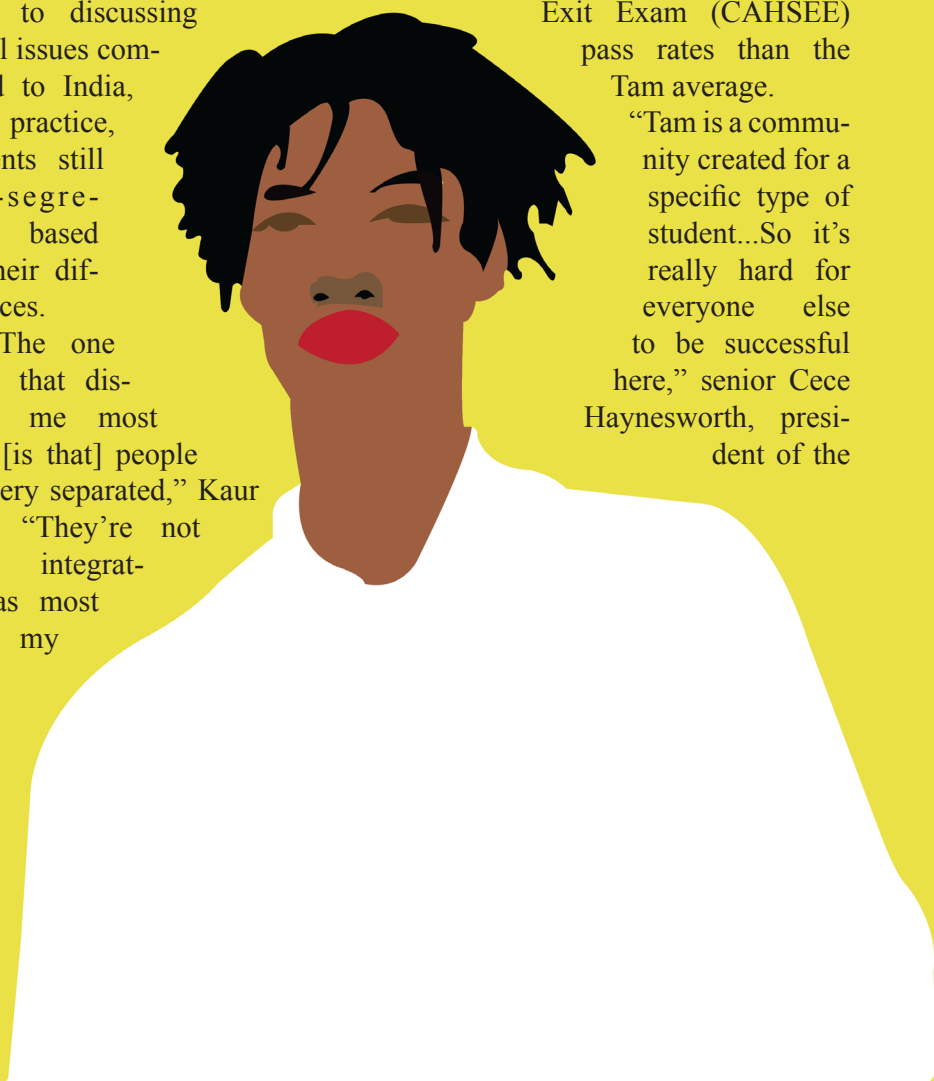
“The one thing that disturbs me most here [is that] people are very separated,” Kaur said. “They’re not very integrated, as most of my

friends [at Tam] are immigrants. I don’t have white friends or any other friends. They are like separated within their culture, within their race.”

The 2014 WASC report indicated that the population at Tam isn’t equally representative of different races. Tam’s 1332 students were 71% White, 10% Hispanic, 10% Asian, 5% African American, and 4% unknown.

Unequal representation isn’t inherently harmful, but it can lead to minorities being overlooked. From 2009 to 2014, Tam’s average AP passing rate of white students was 84%, Hispanic students was 82%, Asian students was 85%, and African American students was 59%, according to WASC data, and African American and Latino students have consistently lower test scores and California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) pass rates than the Tam average.

“Tam is a community created for a specific type of student...So it’s really hard for everyone else to be successful here,” senior Cece Haynesworth, president of the



Black Student Union, said. “[This type of student is] someone who doesn’t go through the same things as people of color go through...creating a space where we don’t talk about the issues that a lot of kids go through day by day.”

According to students, there is not only an achievement gap, but also a social one, which prevents minority students from addressing stereotypes that their peers may hold. “There are a lot of ways people discriminate not even knowing and a lot of people still use offensive stereotypes as jokes,” junior Jacob Nishimura said. “I’ve gotten the ‘you’re Asian so you must be good at math’ joke maybe a thousand times from sixth grade until now. So there definitely are...underlying tones of racism.”

These economic, racial, and social issues are already being addressed in programs available at Tam. The problem is that many students don’t know about them. “[The amount of students aware of these programs is] very small... We need to work on PR and marketing around what’s available for students,” Lynch said. “I think it would be presumptuous to assume that [everybody who could use these programs knows about them]. I think every student would benefit from accessing all of these things...I think they’re underutilized. So we can only increase support and services for our students.”

Tam programs include Peer Tu-

toring, 10,000 Degrees, Bay Area Community Resources (BACR), and Peer Mentoring. These programs, while greatly beneficial, cannot give more time to a student who needs to work to support his/her family or to afford college and cannot give students the childhood music lessons a wealthier family could buy. Greater opportunities can be given to disadvantaged students, but they should be assessed by what they’ve achieved within their constraints, not by how they compare with advantaged students, according to Lynch. “It’s important everybody’s held to the same standard but I think for different populations, we have to support the individual student, based on where they’re at, and where we want them to go,” he said.

Other divisions arise out of ideological, rather than cultural or racial differences, but respecting others’ ideas is just as important of an issue. Diversity is about more than just innate classifications. It also means allowing others to have their own beliefs. “There’s this stigma at Tam about people who are religious or conservative,” junior Joey Diaz said. “If I ever say that I am a conservative, people kind of give me a funny look, they have these [negative] assumptions. The majority of Tam is liberal...[Conservatism is] just something that is different to them that they’re not used to, that they don’t appreciate, I don’t think that they enjoy.”

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There are many separate social movements at Tam addressing race, wealth, sexuality, and ideological differences. But they all are working to promote the same idea: that on an academic and social level, students should be equal, integrated, and free to express who they are. “[We need] to see the bigger picture,” Counselor Sarah Gordon said. “To see ourselves as a bigger community, with different branches of the community. Not everybody’s going to be alike but all in all we’re definitely all in one place and we’re here for one reason.”

Bringing their programs together would further their collective success, according to TUHSD Superintendent David Yoshihara. “I think increasing the level of communication with our stakeholder groups and figuring out ways to empower our youth in meaningful ways would be a great first step [to increase acceptance],” he said.

A clear example of connecting the Tam community to promote awareness and acceptance is seen through the Special Education de-

partment. “Mr. Lovejoy’s group, the developmentally disabled kids here, that’s a huge, diverse part of our population,” Gordon said. “We have kids from drama and kids from the art area and they are embracing [Special Education students], developing programs for them. I have kids that love being a [teacher’s assistant] for Mr. Lovejoy’s class because they love working with [Special Education students]... Kids have really begun to embrace them and bring them in as part of this community and that has been just wonderful to see because 12 years ago I have to say they were very separate.”

Thus, a clear theme arises: communication needs to increase not just between administration, programs, and clubs, but also throughout the whole school. The best way to increase tolerance and celebrate diversity at Tam is to make it a targeted, school-wide effort that every student can contribute to. “[Students can] create relationships,” Haynesworth said. “And [students can be] trying to start conversations or wanting to be more inclusive and learning how to share this community and appreciate everyone who goes here.”

If Tam increases its communication, community members can take a multifaceted ap-

proach to increasing diversity. “I think we need to start dealing with the amount of racism that is day by day and trying to form relationships without trying to ignore the problems,” Haynesworth said. “[We should be] trying to figure out how we can be more successful day by day, not just some of us, but finding ways for all of us to actually learn in our classrooms and want to participate and feel like we’re part of this community instead of looking from the outside in.”

Another way to increase tolerance is to teach students about these issues. “[To promote acceptance we need] more education,” English teacher Abbey Levine said. “I have a friend who is transgender and he came into my AP Comp class last year and spoke to my students and it was really interesting for my students to again, bring down those myths...I think the more you learn, the better informed you are, the more accepting you are.”

Through administrations, departments, clubs, targeted programs, and individual initiatives, awareness and integration with the goal of acceptance at Tam is being addressed. But the impressive task of changing Tam’s culture will continue to be stunted if



## Peer Tutoring

Peer tutoring meets after school in the Tam library Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:45 to 5:15. Link Crew members (or other Tam students that sign up with Rebecca Henn), tutor students in all subjects. Tutoring is available to all students, and there is no need for appointments.

## 10000 Degrees

All students can attend tutoring and college counseling in the library during lunch on Thursdays. They offer a separate program which students can apply to the summer after their sophomore year, in which they attend a one week summer program at a college to learn about college life. They also provide access to mental health counseling and scholarships. Additional free tutoring is offered in their San Rafael office twice a week. Email [rgibson@10000degrees.org](mailto:rgibson@10000degrees.org) to find out more.

## Peer Mentoring

Peer Mentoring (which is different than Peer Resource, Peer Tutoring, and Peer Council) joins junior and senior mentors with mentees during tutorial to work on social and academic goals. Students can self-select to get a mentor.

## BACR

Bay Area Community Resources (BACR) is a free counseling program at Tam that offers more in-depth counseling than school counselors can offer. Students who utilize this program can determine how often they meet with their BACR counselor.

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“ [Teachers need to] pay attention. There’s a lot of things that go on in classrooms that [they] don’t know. ”

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all these movements work separately. Awareness can be raised until the end of time, but to make acceptance a reality, the entire school needs to take action and work together. “I want to see more school-wide diversity programs as well as more student involvement...I would love to see that it is a Tam-wide approach to Black History Month or gay-straight issues for gender equality or celebrating the Latino/Latina community,” Dorsett said. “I think we missed celebrating culture on this campus... the student body needs to look at how we build leaders for the future.”

If you’re a student, in a club, a member of the administration, or any other stakeholder in the community, consider reaching out to each other. Consider not only talking, but taking action, whether planning diversity rallies, petitioning to add more culture lessons in the classroom, devising a new system for administration to relay information, or even talking to someone who has strong ties to a culture or idea.

“It would have been wonderful for [SAGA and the Gender Alliance

Club] to collaborate and communicate with each other, especially since SAGA has been working with administration for quite a while,” Noah Radetsky, senior and co-president of SAGA, said. “Nevertheless, I am glad that there are so many people just here at Tam working towards the same goal. I feel hopeful that SAGA and the Gender Alliance [Club] can work together in the future to make Tam a more actively accepting community, and to bring it into the modern era of awareness around gender identity.”

People of different race, class, gender, sexuality, ideas, mental and physical health—they’re all here. In one category or another, we’re all minorities, and it’s our duty to make sure that they’re heard. It’s our duty to make sure that we’re heard.♦

