

# SAC looks to refashion uniform policy, promote gender inclusivity

By Annie Jones

When Prefect Anna Center was sorting through the Student Affairs Council suggestion box last year, she found that the most common requests involved changing the uniform guidelines.

Last year, former Head Prefect Mark Trautner ('20) asked which SAC members were interested in "messaging with the uniform." To that point, Center had only been involved in the "day-to-day" responsibilities of a SAC officer, but she was excited to learn that SAC had the power to push for uniform policy reform.

SAC did not want to rewrite the uniform policy without input from students, so SAC asked what changes they wanted. The fall semester's weekly infographics, sent to Upper School students, included a link to the survey.

"I have certain things I want to change, but my priorities might not be the most important," Center said. "We don't want to be bringing forward suggestions that the student body doesn't care about."

Prefect Lauren Fulghum sees greater liberties in clothing policy as conducive to a comfortable learning environment. She is focused on making the uniform inclusive because she has heard complaints about its "restrictiveness."

"The uniform guidelines are very gender normative," Fulghum said. "If people want to wear shorts and pants, why isn't there an option for them to be comfortable in them? They're not made to fit every individual."

While girls can wear Sue Mills shorts, they are tailored for traditionally male bodies, which leaves some students with traditionally female bodies the option of either wearing an unwanted skirt or ill-fitting pants. Yet amending the school's contract with Sue Mills to buy more or different garments is beyond SAC's sphere of influence.

"Everyone should be able to wear what makes them comfortable," Prism board member Liv Rubenstein said. "At the end of the day, [wearing gender non-conforming clothes] isn't a distraction if you don't make it into a distraction."

Prism leader Romit Kundagrami says "rigid" guidelines prevent many people from expressing their gender identity, even though the rules on male hair length and earrings have changed. Skirts are not allowed for assigned-male students, no matter their gender identity, and shorts lengths are only regulated for assigned-female students.

"We have definitely made a lot of progress in the last couple of years," Kundagrami said. "Before, my length of hair would not have been allowed."

The perception among students like freshman Anya Yalamanchili is that there are "twice as many" uniform regulations for girls as there are for boys.

piercings and hair dye, because the definition of what is acceptable has softened.

Finally, students frequently suggested more leniency with wearing non-school outerwear on cold days, which Center says will likely be one of the first rules to change since it is already loosely enforced.

Center expects new regulations to take effect next school year.

"The administration has been super helpful," Center said. "Most of the work is just getting people's opinions."

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 — LAUREN FULGHUM —

The St. John's Statement on Community and Inclusion pledges that every student will be known and loved and that it will provide an environment "in which everyone can feel comfortable, heard and included."

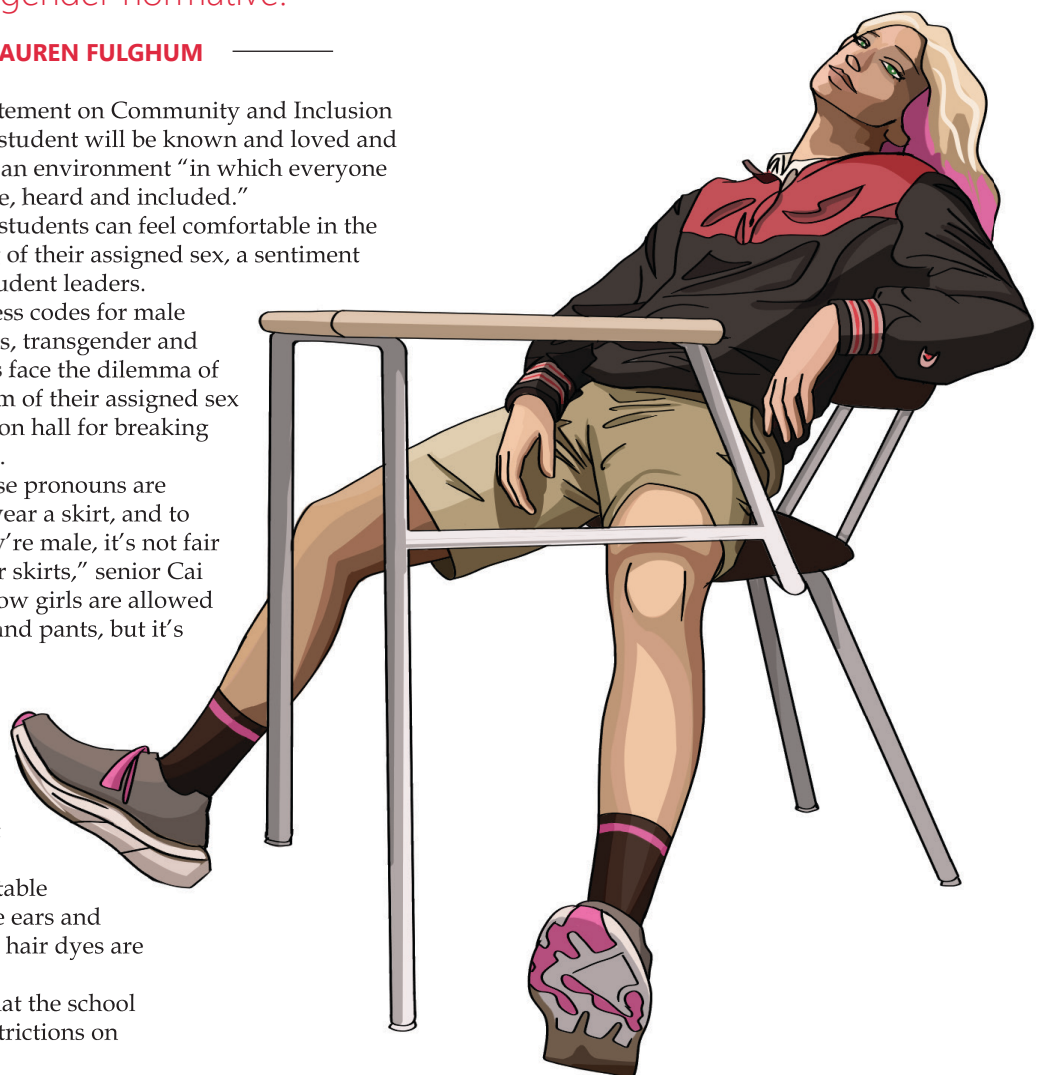
However, not all students can feel comfortable in the traditional clothing of their assigned sex, a sentiment echoed by many student leaders.

With separate dress codes for male and female students, transgender and nonbinary students face the dilemma of wearing the uniform of their assigned sex or getting a detention hall for breaking uniform guidelines.

"If someone whose pronouns are she/her wants to wear a skirt, and to administration they're male, it's not fair that they can't wear skirts," senior Cai Flowers said. "I know girls are allowed to wear the shorts and pants, but it's not encouraged."

The next most common requests were for laxer rules on piercings and hair dye. The Student and Parent Handbook states that the only acceptable piercings are on the ears and the only acceptable hair dyes are "natural" colors.

SAC is hopeful that the school will also loosen restrictions on



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