Transcending From Middle School to High School
Easing into the high school experience
by Ashkan Ghiasi

The Freshman Academy is a recently instituted resource that is designed to help incoming first year students adjust to their new educational environment at high school, that will constitute the next four years of their lives. According to jfkcougars.org, “The Freshman Transition Program at Kennedy High School is designed to begin building a smaller community atmosphere within our larger school.”

This is the reason why most of the freshman classes have been moved to the K Building. By having the first year students bundled together, it creates an environment where camaraderie and a sense of unity can flourish. The freshmen also have tables and seating area outside of K Building. This is a good place for them to hang out during lunch if they aren’t comfortable going out into the bigger and busier parts of the campus.

“I think by allocating a specific building and seating area to the freshman, we create a comfort zone for the students that they can rely on until they feel confident enough to go off and explore the rest of the school. Then we may add a bit a braver day by day,” explained Freshman Counselor Daniel Lee.

By keeping the students from having to run all over campus to get to their classes and having to worry about where to sit for lunch, it makes their freshman year just a bit easier to handle. One program that is affiliated with the Freshman Academy is Link Crew; a student organization that sends several members to each freshman advisor every Monday morning. Link Crew Leader Melanie Quiroz stated, “We put on activities so that they can learn to be more comfortable with each other, and they can begin to speak more confidently. We play games and we do ice breakers, or we give them time to write about their goals and aspirations for the future.”

It seems as if their plan is working. Current sophomores are raving about the impact that both the Freshman Academy and Link Crew had on them. Nicholas Sharife expressed his initial confusion at the idea of a Freshman Academy, “To be honest, I didn’t really know what had a Freshman Academy, but now that I think about it, I realize how helpful it was for me last year.”

Sharife explained that although sometimes his fellow advisory students weren’t completely engaged in the Link Crew activities, it still helped him to become more familiar with the people around him and to get a good start to his week. “I think having someone there as an older figure, like a mentor, allows us to help them a lot just by showing them what we’ve learned in all our years at Kennedy,” Quiroz elaborated.

Chris Por, a current sophomore who transferred from North Hollywood High School at the beginning of this year, reacted very positively to the idea of having a Freshman Academy. “I wish my old school had something like that. Keeping the freshmen together is a really great idea, it makes them much more comfortable interacting with each other.” Perhaps the most important thing for freshmen to remember is to stay on track with their assignments, that way they won’t feel regretful once they become seniors, according to fellow Link Crew Leader Julie Temmerman.

Sharife’s attitude is the same as some of the others, such as Lizbeth Medellin, echoed the same message, “If I could go back in time, I would make sure to do all of my homework and get better grades.” Sophomore Jonathan Lucio expressed how much the Freshman Academy was to him last year. He thinks that without the Freshman Academy he would have been lost. “If I was going all of his peers together, he wouldn’t have been able to keep his grades as high as he did. By knowing that he was in a freshman class he was able to constantly be reminded of what homework was due and what projects he had to work on.”

Principal Richard Chavez stated, “The purpose of the 9th grade academy is to keep the incoming students aware that we can more easily track their progress.” Another facet of the Freshman Academy is starting the students out on their individual graduation plan early so that they aren’t perplexed during their senior year. “But why aren’t they where they aren’t where they want to be.”

One resource is going to benefit many students, the Freshman Academy’s choice to tell students about their individual plans as soon as they enter high school. “By doing this, students won’t be blindsided in their senior year. The plan is to offer students many resources in order to catch them up. By doing this, we prevent cracks before they get to their senior year. This will help students get a heads up on their progress and not be blindsided during their senior year.”

Getting Familiar with your College Criteria
A resource for your decisions after high school
by Marisa Lopez

The struggles that come with being a senior can sometimes get to be a bit overwhelming for some when it comes to college priorities, so that is why college counselor Lorin Abarr is here to assist. His job in the college center is to help students who have very little knowledge of what going into college (whether that is a community, Cal State, or UC college) is all about.

Abarr has been counseling at Kennedy since March of 2013. Because he hasn’t been at Kennedy as long as other staff members, some students still might not be aware of his position in the college center. Even though he’s fairly new, Abarr has already made a lot progress with the students here at Kennedy. The key factor to this success is due to his love and determination for the college counseling field.

I’ve always loved exploring colleges, like choosing the different career paths for yourself, or getting to know the college process. And I love working with students, so it’s kind of combining two of my passions.” Abarr’s passion has not only helped students, but it has also inspired students and their futures. Kennedy alumni Yancy Ochoa recently began her journey at San Francisco State University for the fall semester. She elaborates on how Abarr was a main factor in getting her to where she is today.

“I used to be a TA for Abarr back when I was a sophomore, becoming a TA because not only is it going to be super helpful when you’re filling out college apps, but it will also be the place to be when it comes to every thing ACT, SAT, AP and more.”

Abarr works well and firm to make sure his students are getting the support they need in order to make it to college. He recently began talking to senior classes and homerooms about the basics that everyone needs to be aware of for the college application to make sure that each and every student has access to as many opportunities as possible, including applying for scholarships and taking loans.

“Some of the challenges are in the financial aid process, making sure students have enough money to afford college. Some kids are hesitant to take on college because they think that it’s expensive, but I think that’s a part of your financial aid process so that’s probably the toughest issue that we have. Nonetheless, no matter how challenging the task at hand is, Abarr will help any student to the best of his ability to ensure that they are at a safe standpoint with their college struggles.

Abarr strives for his students to have the best options that best suit them when it comes to colleges, so he gives a few tips and tricks when it comes to looking for the ideal location for education. “I would tell students to apply broadly and to all of the different systems that are available for, so the CSU system, the UC system, etc. Also, look into out-of-state public colleges, look at private colleges. If you meet the minimal eligibility requirements, you give yourself a lot of choices.”

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