Coordination: A Joint Venture

At nearly 50 years old, the GA/Brunswick Coordination Program brings benefits to all aspects of student life.

Visitors to Greenwich Academy may do a double take upon first arrival to this all-girls school: male students stand on the cafeteria line, walk the halls, and sit on sunny benches outside the Upper School entrance. Greenwich Academy's coordinated program with the all-boys Brunswick School dates back to 1971, nearly 50 years, affording GA and Brunswick Upper School students the opportunity to take classes at either campus, thus doubling the number of course options and providing a co-ed dynamic within a single-sex school. A leafy footpath ("The Path") joins the two campuses, busy with students during the 10-minute passing period between classes.

Pictured right: Andrea Jemiolo, Susanna Warne, Jose Riera, Nicole Surgent




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The benefits of coordination extend far beyond the classroom, too. In the opening days of September, GA School President Annabel Thrasher '19 and Brunswick School President Christian Farricker '19 planned a joint GA-Brunswick cookout: freshmen and sophomores from both schools enjoyed a barbecue at GA, while juniors and seniors held their cookout at Brunswick. This particular event took considerable planning from the two student leaders, who worked with the administrators and dining halls at each school to make the day happen. "We wanted to find a way for people to hang out with their whole grade, boys and girls, at the beginning of the year," said Thrasher. "People sat outside in big circles, talking and playing music. It helped that it was a really sunny day."

The coordinated activities extend to the performing arts as well. In addition to two co-ed musicals and two co-ed plays produced each year between the two schools, the annual Arts Assembly is also a fall highlight: freshmen and sophomores from both schools head into GA's Massey Theater, while all juniors and seniors fill Brunswick's Baker Theater. Each group watches a selection of that school's music, song, art, film, and theater offerings (this year's assembly included scenes from GA's fall musical *Mamma Mia!* and Brunswick's fall play *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*). The grades then switch locations to watch the performance at the other school (the path is never so busy).

Sophomores and juniors enjoyed an additional coordination moment in the fall: for the first time, the orientation days in the opening week of school were co-ed for 10th and 11th graders courtesy of Grit 'N Wit, an outdoor obstacle course that combined physical challenges, mental puzzles, and the teamwork of paired GA/Brunswick advisories. It was a day filled with activities and physical challenges—as well as plenty of water breaks to contend with the lingering summer heat. "I saw a whole lot of positive interactions between students as well as between students and faculty," says Kent Motland, GA's Group XI dean and Upper School English teacher, "and the 'downtime' was as useful as the time actually doing the course. There was a good bit of milling around, and there's a lot to be said for some unmanaged time before and after more intentional, structured activity."

GA's Group X Dean and Upper School English teacher Sarah Maliakel agrees. "Aside from being just plain fun, the joint GA-Brunswick Grit 'N Wit day totally exceeded my hopes of setting a positive tone for the school year and laying the groundwork for sustained relationships," she notes.

"I've always felt that GA offers the small-school experience of a place where you're *known* along with the big-school experience of coordination—a two-campus, two-culture reality."

TOM SULLIVAN
GA'S HEAD OF UPPER SCHOOL AND ASSISTANT HEAD OF SCHOOL

Left: Scene from the fall 2018 Upper School play
Bottom: A challenge from Grit 'n Wit

"I watched students who'd never met before hoisting one another over wooden hurdles and solving giant Sudoku puzzles together and—just as meaningfully—colleagues cheering them on and connecting with each other for the first time. The chance for casual conversation, low-stakes activities, and unstructured time to just hang out was so valuable."

The GA/Brunswick paired advisories from those orientation days remained a team throughout the year, meeting as schedules allowed. One success story comes from the paired advisories of Andrew Ghobrial, GA's assistant director of technology, and Kristina Norrgard, Brunswick Upper School science teacher, who have managed to arrange numerous meetings throughout the school year over pizza, waffles, and Dunkin' Donuts. "People feel safe in familiarity so we try to meet regularly," notes Andrew Ghobrial. "We call ourselves the Norrbrials." He's observed a shift toward inclusion in his advisees' mindset. "Their instinct is to ask if the Brunswick students can be included in an activity," he observes, "and they also feel comfortable on the Brunswick campus when they see a Norrgard advisee, someone they know and can say 'hi' to."

Freshmen and seniors enjoyed coordination this fall, too, through the ongoing Peer Program, a co-ed freshman orientation led by 18 GA seniors and 18 Brunswick seniors that extends throughout the fall and early winter. The program kicks off every year with an off-campus retreat for the seniors as they embark on this leadership program. "Both the Brunswick and GA students show up a bit tentative and nervous, but they so appreciate the ability to get to know each other in a nonacademic, noncompetitive setting," notes Edwina Foster, a Peer faculty advisor and GA's English Department chair. "Within minutes of arriving at our retreat in August, they're laughing and becoming fast friends with people they never expected to. We faculty members love to be a part of a program that encourages unaffected and honest relationships between the two schools—Peer is coordination at its best."

Those senior Peer leaders then lead a freshman Orientation Day as school opens—and continue to meet with co-ed groups of freshmen throughout the fall, each led by one GA senior and one Brunswick senior. "It's a good way to connect with seniors," says freshmen Annie Carey '22. "It's nice to have seniors that you know and can say 'hi' to." Another freshman, Caroline Cowin '22, enjoys the camaraderie of Peer. "In class you don't always get to talk to people that much," she notes. "In Peer, we can all just talk. I love hanging out with my group."

The two schools come together not only through orientation activities but through that most reliable and sustaining of all media: books. Brunswick and GA have a coordinated summer reading book for all Upper Schoolers—culminating in a visit from the book's author. The schools alternate hosting the authors, with all GA and Brunswick students and faculty attending the author talk. Recent authors and summer reads have included Hannah Tinti (*The Good Thief*), Colson Whitehead (*The Underground Railroad*), and Emily St. John Mandel (*Station Eleven)*.

This year, the two schools heard from an additional author together. Anthony Ray Hinton, author of *The Sun Does Shine: How I Found Life and Freedom on Death Row*, spoke to students and faculty in a joint assembly about the 30 years he spent on death row for a crime he didn't commit. Gloria Fernández-Tearte, GA's director of diversity and staff development, had the chance to hear Mr. Hinton speak last year at the Equal Justice Initiative in Selma, Alabama, to GA and Brunswick students in the U.S. History of Civil Rights expedition course. "Mr. Hinton managed to become a social justice leader in solitary confinement—while wrongfully imprisoned," she notes. "When I think of Dr. King's message of peace and nonviolence, I think of Anthony Ray Hinton." Along with Kyna Shine, Brunswick's director of diversity and inclusion, Ms. Fernández-Tearte invited Mr. Hinton to speak in a joint assembly to both Upper Schools.

Coordination also carries the students out of the day-to-day schedule and into the future. "I've always felt that GA offers the small-school experience of a place where you're *known* along with the big-school experience of coordination—a two-campus, two-culture reality," observes Tom Sullivan, GA's head of Upper School and assistant head of school. "Most of our students will attend a co-ed college, and the coordinated experience really helps to prepare them for that and life beyond." ■

