

## Privacy or Censorship?

*Written by Ella Capen, Groton School Editor  
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At Groton, students are constantly encouraged to discuss and thus improve issues of diversity, inclusion, and social matters. We hold diversity and inclusion workshop days where we discuss hypothetical situations and stories outside of Groton School, and we have fascinating and important conversations with our teachers about the news. When an issue presents itself on campus, however, it seems as though the faculty purposely shield us from knowing and understanding information about our campus' own problems. For instance, when students withdraw from the school, dorm heads never have conversations with the dorm. When \*DCs occur, everything is kept silent. While some may argue this may be for privacy reasons, I argue that it can be extremely valuable to be able to openly, calmly, and respectfully discuss these issues Groton "encourages" us to speak of, even—especially—when they occur on our own campus.

A student's leaving campus affects everyone and everything, especially at a school like Groton, where there are so few students and where students call their dorms their homes. Once in a while, a student "disappears" from classes, sports, and dorm life, and no one knows why. Weeks later, word spreads that the student has withdrawn from school.

Because Groton is a boarding school surrounded by farms, cow pastures, and meadows, it becomes incredibly difficult, if not sometimes impossible, to see students once they leave. Often when students withdraw, they do not return, causing a ripple effect across campus. So much goes unknown, people talk, rumors spread, misunderstandings erupt, and there is always confusion. When faculty members overhear students talking about things like this, they often tell students that it is none of their business, to quiet down, to be silent.

While it is true that everyone must treat each other's personal lives with respect and we all deserve privacy, it is also true that important conversations must be held, not avoided. "Did he leave because of the way other students were treating him? Did he leave because he felt uncomfortable? Did he leave because he couldn't handle the stress?" These are questions we must not only ask ourselves, but also address within our community. It is through answering these questions that we can learn more about the Groton community as well as how to improve it.

The same idea applies to the Disciplinary Committee. When a student gets DCed, everyone talks about it. Everyone wants to know who got DCed, what they did, and what their punishment will be. Obviously this is nosy and disrespectful, so how can we prevent this gossip? Is there something valuable to be learned from each DC case? The answer is obviously yes, but how can this be achieved when faculty members advise us to avoid all talk about DCs? In fact, before last year, I had no idea what the Disciplinary Committee was like until I sat on its board.

I've been told that, before my time at Groton, the headmaster used to announce DC statements in front of the whole school at roll call, explaining what had happened and how we can learn from it. We stopped doing this to respect the privacy of students being DCed, but at a school the size of Groton, where everyone knows everyone and word spreads faster than I can say "what's the gossip?", it is backwards and ineffective to restrict discussion about the mistakes we make within our community to lunch tables, text messages, and dorm rooms.

I am not arguing to reveal all the details about people's lives, personal situations, and mistakes. Nonetheless, there are times in which lots of drama and gossip can be eliminated by the simple statement: "he decided to leave school today because he was homesick" or "there was a case of drinking last night in one of the girls' dorms. We must all understand that underage drinking has very serious consequences and it can hurt you both mentally and physically because. . ." So while privacy, dignity, and respect are virtues we must always keep at heart, it can be just as valuable to speak openly, calmly, and respectfully of Groton School's issues and thus, issues in the greater world.

\*DC: Abbreviation for Discipline Committee, a disciplinary system used by many New England boarding schools.