

Ten Minute T(ea) with Mr. Grant Gonzalez

*Interview conducted by Victoria Woo
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Q) What inspired you to teach The Islamic Middle East course at NMH?

A) I was a junior in high school during 9/11. I was interested in history and world affairs, and I realized I knew absolutely nothing of Islam or the Middle East. I had no information to process what was happening during 9/11. That made me question what we taught in schools and what I was learning, and made me more interested in learning about parts of the world that are not presented regularly despite having all that access. That put me on a path to studying Islam and the Middle East in college and grad school. That combined with my existing interest in teaching, the desire to create change, and the desire to be part of that change made me want to help people navigate topics that are sometimes underrepresented and misrepresented.

Q) What is your opinion on the International Ambassador (IA) program?

A) I was asked to take on the IA program a couple years ago, and I see it as not just a unique leadership opportunity on our campus, but something that is ingrained in our culture here. Our school, as early as its founding, had students from all around the world, and our school has always had this global mission. Having students central to building and continuously developing that global community is important. I cherish the opportunity to take on the role of facilitating the program. I see it as a major responsibility, and it's something I don't take lightly. I think it's integral to our school.

Q) How much has NMH “popped the bubble”? Are a lot of us still unaware? How effective is NMH in trying to inform its students about race?

A) In some ways, I think that bubble idea is a myth and something that is reinforced by what we say. That's not to say that it's incorrect, but it's longstanding; it's something that has been said for a while in campuses, high school or college. Are we protected from some realities? Yes, because we're an elective and selective community. But do some of those realities come into our campus, either through digital information or through the experiences of our lives? Absolutely! Look at, for example, the recent immigration ban. Does that reality of an immigration ban affect the people in our community? Absolutely. So does an NMH bubble prevent us from knowing about that? No. Does an NMH bubble prevent some of the members of our community from the consequences of it? No. Does an NMH bubble prevent potential change of our community as a whole? No. As the world becomes smaller, I think we can't afford to remain insulated, or to believe that we're insulated, from these issues. This idea of being in a bubble is rooted in this sense of privilege, that not all of us have, and we'd be better off being mindful that not all of us have that.

Q) How can the NMH community become more aware and active about racism?

A) Let's start with acknowledging that this is a fact of our lives and the lives of all of our community members. We have to start there. It's what we face. So you start with that acknowledgment, and you build towards awareness of others' experiences of that reality and empathizing with others' experiences of that reality. And then you move into ideas of engagement and action. How do you want to see change? What do you envision that change looking like? How will we move forward as communities of acting with humanity towards one another?

Q) As a teacher, coach, dorm parent, and member of this community, what is your goal in terms of race?

A) Race is an integral part of my purpose and who I am. As a teacher, I think ground zero is the opportunities to engage in important conversations about discovering others' realities and growing together. Race, racism, and racial issues are a reality. To not acknowledge that is to miss an important mark of how we relate to one another. Going back to my purpose as a teacher, it's to help us relate to one another better; to make sure that we all have the opportunities and access to relate to one another, to learn from one another, and to grow together.

Mr. Grant Gonzalez is a history and social sciences teacher at NMH. He is committed to a diverse education; in addition to teaching courses like The Islamic Middle East, he is also the Director of Social Entrepreneurship and in charge of the International Ambassador program. He is also very involved outside the classroom as a coach for both the Cross Country and Track & Field teams and as a dorm parent.