

# VIEWPOINTS



## Student Inquiry and Research course great asset to West

**Suhail Ansari**  
Viewpoints Editor

Many students have passed by room 3315 and have wondered what goes on inside with the clean, new lab tables and beakers. Based on a first hand account, I can say that the advanced lab facilities and creative minds make an atmosphere of scientific learning.

Currently, the room is utilized for a grade weight five class called Student Inquiry and Research (SIR). The great part about the class is that it is very student centered. SIR teacher JulieAnn Villa said students choose “a research project [that] it is completely their design. It is an area that they are interested in and a project they want to do.”

Projects can range from computer science to physics to microbiology. It really is the student’s choice what to study. Such an experience is not always readily available at West, and the independence given to students is definitely a reason why the class has flourished.

According to Villa, the goal of the class is twofold. “One, [students] develop their own project and get results and do their own experimentation. The other part is that they actually compete in a science fair where they present to their peers and other people in science.”

## The SIR program at West has only existed for this school year and next year will only prove to be more successful

As a student in the class, interacting with actual researchers has been very rewarding. Through Villa’s contacts, I was able to contact a chemistry professor, and he was able to give me useful advice as to where to take my project. Then, at the science fair the class attended, I was able to present to two other chemistry professors. It was really an eye opening experience because these professors knew exactly what I was talking about when I said I needed access to inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry or wanted to test for volatile organic compounds by precipitating the particulates.

Not only did meeting people in science help, but Villa herself was a great advocate, and the class is set up for a lot of one-on-one attention. Developing an entire procedure is not as easy as it sounds. However, with SIR, students get individual attention to help answer their questions and set up their own experiment.

Other West science, math and computer science teachers contributed their expertise to assist in the projects, for which Villa expressed her gratitude. She also cited lab assistant Susan Marcus as an invaluable resource.

Both West SIR classes recently presented at the Center for Mathematics, Science and Technology’s High School Research Symposium at Illinois State University (ISU) on Friday, April 16. Villa said, “I just was really impressed that every student had some data, results and working on something that they can present. I think that every student learned a ton.”

The students presenting at the symposium also did very well. I won third place in Best Exploratory/Job Shadow Project, junior Jason Kaatz won Outstanding Physics Project, sophomore Rishy Chacko won Outstanding Chemistry Project, sophomore Michael Nissan won the Director’s Blue Ribbon and sophomore Amy Sands won the Director’s Blue Ribbon Award and Edison Award. Nissan also presented at the Illinois Junior Academy of Science Region Six Fair in March and won the Office of Naval Research for Excellence in Science Award.

According to Villa, each student presented a poster, [which was] a summary about all their work, a written paper and an oral presentation. “The criterion [included] how well [students] presented the information and what kind of results and actual research they did.” Also, the judges looked at how scientifically each student thought by looking at the isolation of variables and the quality of their data analysis.

The strength of the SIR program and its instructors, Villa and biology teacher Ruth Gleicher (who designed the course with science director Lois Wisniewski) was shown at ISU and proved wrong early critics of the program. Even I was doubtful of the investment in the SIR class, but after learning so much about a specific field, I can honestly say that the investment was worth it.

Next year, West will probably compete in more science fairs, one of those including the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair. The SIR program at West has only existed for this school year and next year will only prove to be more successful.

## West Helps Others Club deserves applause for service

— Staff Editorial —

Many students visit warmer destinations during spring break, but the destination and actual activities at those destinations can differ greatly. This school year, 22 students of West Helps Others (WHO) Club spent their spring break in Albany, GA, working with Habitat for Humanity and volunteering their time.

Before the trip even started, the club started raising money at the beginning of the school year. Through several bake sales and candy fundraisers, the entire club pulled together to raise money.

A typical day in Georgia was very busy, according to counselor and WHO Club sponsor Andrew Johnson. The club would wake up around 6:30 a.m. each morning for a team meeting. After getting ready and eating breakfast, the club would take a bus to the build site to volunteer their day.

They would spend about eight hours working on the house, return for dinner, and then have free time until lights out and start the cycle again the next day.

According to senior WHO Club officer Daniel Kim, the club would split up into groups each day.

“There was the priming/painting crew, the foundation “mole-hole” crew and the dog house crew. We would all work on putting on multiple coats of primer and paint around the house and some of us [would work] underground [to fix] up the foundation,” Kim said.

Johnson expressed the belief that benefits gained from this trip are not limited to the eventual owners of the home. Johnson said that the trip really impacted the students.

“[The students] saw what they could put together. It is no small feat to organize people in such a trip.”

Kim agrees.

“This trip was very humbling for me and for everyone else as well. It opened my eyes to another dimension,” he said.

He added that other teenagers like him and fellow WHO Club members should give up their break because they can do something productive and “most importantly, make a difference in someone else’s life.”

Some might feel that doing nothing but hanging out with friends and waking up at noon is the best way to spend one’s free time. Others might consider a service trip to be a waste of free time when students might enjoy their time off. Kim disagrees.

“This was the best spring break I have had during my time in high school. Not only did we make a difference by building a house for a family in need, but all of us on the trip established such a close relationship with each other,” Kim said.

Sometimes teenagers are portrayed in a negative light, and that is not always fair according to Johnson.

“This is a clear example of compassion and generosity in teenagers and this is what they can accomplish when [those qualities are] put to work,” he added.

The *West Word* editorial board applauds WHO Club’s efforts, agrees that students should volunteer their time to such worthy causes and wishes to thank the WHO Club members who sacrificed their time for the benefit of others.

## Letter to the Editor

To the editor:

We are writing to express our gratitude to Mr. Michael Conroy, *West Word*’s faculty adviser. As former editors-in-chief and managing editors of *West Word*, we want to thank Mr. Conroy for his 10 years at the helm of Niles West’s award-winning publication.

Some of us have gone on to pursue careers in journalism, while others of us retired the reporting pad. For each of us, though, we have benefited from his guidance during our time on the paper. In order to maintain a professional-looking newspaper, Mr. Conroy instilled in us a sense of independence and treated us like adults. He challenged our thinking, taught us about everything from grammar to the inverted pyramid structure, and worked with us to ensure that the staffs finished before deadline every month. In writing and beyond, the lessons he taught us still resonate with us today.

Whether reporting on the 9/11 attacks or the potential teacher strike, *West Word* has served as an invaluable resource to the school community. Mr. Conroy has given his staffs full reign to investigate and report the news that has mattered to students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. Along the way, his constructive criticism guided us, and his defense of our freedom of speech empowered us.

During our time on *West Word*, each of us learned how to put together a newspaper, but we also gained so much more from Mr.

Conroy’s advising.

As we look forward to the next phase of student journalism, it is imperative that Niles West students have a resource by which to stay informed. We hope that the future staffs will continue to report the month’s events and to question authority when necessary.

Mr. Conroy, thank you for your relentless advocacy on the behalf of your student writers during the last 10 years. We appreciate all the time that you have invested in *West Word*. We are sure that Niles West will continue to benefit from the wisdom that you give to your students.

Signed: Mike Bregman, editor-in-chief, 2000-01; Maya Schenwar, managing editor, 2000-01; Amy Rainey, editor-in-chief, 2001-02; Alissa Catiis, managing editor, 2001-02; Becky Bloom, editor-in-chief, 2002-03; Brian Sandalow, managing editor, 2002-03; Dan Macsai, editor-in-chief, 2003-04; Amy Madhiwala, managing editor, 2003-04; Lia Lehrer, editor-in-chief, 2004-05; Jacob Rukin, managing editor, 2004-05; Sarah Duchaj, editor-in-chief, 2005-07; Seth Motel, editor-in-chief, 2005-07; Ali Bhanpuri, managing editor, 2005-06; Jared Delmar, managing editor, 2006-07; Jenna Temkin, editor-in-chief, 2007-08; Aatifa Sadiq, managing editor, 2007-08; Zoe Ljubic, editor-in-chief, 2008-10; Rexly Penafloreda II, managing editor, 2008-09; editor-in-chief, 2009-10; Hillary Lindwall, managing editor, 2009-10

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# WestWord

## west opinions

### Prom possible without pointless pressures



**Zoe Ljubic**  
Editor in Chief

Four hundred dollar ball gown, \$200 tuxedo, \$100 luxurious dinner and \$50 to show up in a stylish ride...all one night. Yes, it prom time again. For years, students have looked forward to this one night. The idea of shopping for the right dress, getting the perfect date and having a fun night with friends seems impossible to turn down.

### Many students sit around and complain about how expensive prom is, but in reality, it is not

Girls start the preparation months in advance. As the second semester begins, girls begin posting possible options on their Facebook™ pages and talk about them during lunch, study halls and down time in class. By spring break, it is normal for girls to have a dress sitting in their closets waiting to be donned on prom night. I have a friend that bought her dress back in October.

Then, the planning of the night itself begins. Whom are you going to take? With what group are you going? How are you getting to prom? What are you doing after the dance? Each group spends hours on the Internet trying to find a nice limousine and hangout spot for after prom. The time spent looking for these accommodations (hours that could have been put toward school work or social interaction) and the money put forth by each person is ridiculous. While I recognize the inherent social status of rolling up in a Hummer limousine, dining at the Signature Room on the 95<sup>th</sup> floor of the Hancock Center or spending the night in a hotel room, are these opulent trappings really necessary, especially when

tickets are \$160 per couple? The answer is no.

What many students fail to realize is that the thrill of prom is, well, prom. All the additional expenses don't really make the night any more or less special. So, as a public service, I volunteer to be the frugal voice of reason amidst the madness.

Let us begin with the obvious. While \$80 per student or \$160 per couple seems to be a steep ticket price, consider what is included in that cost. The school provides a package that includes many of the elements on which most students spend extra money. According to the prom article featured on page six of this issue, the ticket includes transportation, dinner, entertainment and a post-prom event. The extra expenses that students take time and money to plan and attend are not necessary and do nothing to enhance the evening.

Those who wish to enjoy prom without breaking the bank should follow these guidelines:

- Dress shopping: dresses may be purchased for under \$100 on websites such as www.ebay.com and at local department stores and vintage clothing shops. For girls with similarly framed friends from another school whose prom is on a different night, it would be smart to buy one dress and split the cost. This would enable each to wear a dress unique to each prom and would allow the girls to spend a little more on their dress.
- Tuxedo rental: rent, don't buy and take advantage of the promotions and discounts advertised on video announcements and in this issue.
- Transportation: tickets include a luxury coach (not a school bus) to and from Niles West to the Marriot to save students at least \$40 on limousine rental.
- Post-prom plans: the school has rented ESPN Zone for the entire evening for students to hang out with friends and enjoy a 2 a.m. breakfast buffet, all covered in the ticket price.
- Hair/Makeup/Nails: have a friend or family member provide these services, rather than paying a separate fee (and separate tip) for a stylist, a makeup artist, a manicurist and a pedicurist. This will not only save at least \$200, it is also much less stressful, and no one will be the wiser.

While I recognize the allure of renting a limousine, eating at a swanky restaurant and painting the town after prom, dressed to impress, without the supervision of Principal Kaine Osburn or student activities director Jessica Ogulnik, is all that worth up to \$1000 per couple? I think not.

### E-reading is future, but presents difficult technology decision



**Hillary Lindwall**  
Managing Editor

On Jan. 27, 2010, Apple announced the release of the iPad™, the newest addition to the Apple family. Some suggest that the development of the iPad™ was implemented in order to oppose the Amazon Kindle™, and now Barnes and Noble has developed its own e-reader known as the Nook™. All of this new technology and development is confusing for a consumer who is on the market for an e-reader, not to mention the fact that in a few years something completely different will probably come out that is better than electronics purchased today.

The consumer might wonder (as the front cover of the April 5 issue of *Newsweek* asked), "What's So Great About the iPad™?"—or the Kindle™ or the Nook™, for that matter? The deck headline of the *Newsweek* read, "How Steve Jobs will Revolutionize Reading, Watching, Computing, Gaming and Silicon Valley."

While Steve Jobs is probably one of the most influential men of our time, I do not think that the iPad™ will revolutionize anything at all. Having gone to the Apple store and having tested an iPad™, I feel confident in saying that buying an iPad™ is a waste of money. The iPad™ is really just a larger version of the iPod Touch™. As Saturday Night Live's Seth Meyers reported, "This week, Apple introduced a thing that does stuff that its other stuff already does." Exactly. Games can be played, apps can be purchased, e-mails can be sent, books can be read, music can be enjoyed, the Internet can be surfed and that is about it. In response to *Newsweek's* self-posed cover question, *Newsweek* said "Everything." I, on the other hand, say "nothing." There is nothing "so great" about the iPad™.

For consumers in the market for an e-reader, two great options are available—other than the iPad™. Although books can be read on the iPad™ and the touch screen makes it look as if you are really turning a page (oooooh), the backlight of the iPad™ screen makes the page difficult to look at for long periods of time. This is where Amazon and Barnes and Noble come into the picture. With

their revolutionary E Ink™, both the Amazon Kindle™ and the Barnes and Noble Nook™ look like actual paper. After reading Kindle™ or Nook™ for awhile, one's eyes do not hurt, and one does not suffer from any sort of tension headache.

While both of these options are preferable to the iPad™, having two e-readers on the market makes consumers wonder, "Which is better?" This depends on the individual reader.

The Kindle™ has a keyboard at the bottom of the device so that books, newspaper articles, and other reading material can be annotated. Also, it is equipped with 3G wireless so that books can be downloaded in 60 seconds without having to search for a Wi-Fi hotspot. Additionally, the Kindle™ can be used globally, and there is a text-to-speech feature that allows the reader to switch between reading and listening.

With such high standards with which to compete, how has the Barnes and Noble Nook™ taken on this challenge? For one thing, the keyboard has been replaced with a touch screen that can be used to browse one's library or that can become a keyboard to search for specific titles. Also, readers can sample books before they buy them. Additionally, books can be shared with friends or read on a Blackberry™ or iPhone™ with Nook eReader™ software that will be available early in 2010, according to www.bn.com. Another perk of the Nook™ is that when reading the Nook™ inside a Barnes and Noble bookstore, countless freebies can be downloaded. Also, the Nook™ is equipped with both a 3G Wireless network and Wi-Fi so that book titles can be browsed anywhere.

Why are e-readers the next big thing? The answer is simple. They are more environmentally sound; using e-readers would save a lot of paper and would also reduce the number of factories releasing toxins into the air. Also, as people mature and the world changes, so must technology.

To summarize, those thinking of purchasing an e-reader should first rule out the iPad™. The iPad™ starts at \$610 (both the Kindle™ and Nook™ cost \$259). If one already has an iPod Touch™ or smart phone and just wants an e-reader, the extra \$300 plus would be a waste. Therefore, I would suggest focusing on the Kindle™ or the Nook™ and decide which features are more important. Both boast long battery life and revolutionary E Ink™ screen, so the choice is up to the consumer. One thing is for sure: e-reading is the future, and purchasing a Nook™ or a Kindle™ (but please not the iPad™) would help to make e-reading the present.

### Would you consider spending a school break volunteering like the West Helps Others Club?

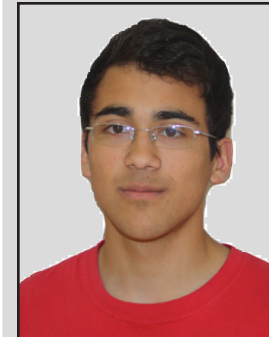
#### Staff



Steve Ramseyer

Yes, if I could bring my family.

#### Senior



Jorge Quiroz

Yes, because it is a great way to make friends.

#### Junior



Haylee Kessler

Yes, because I would be doing a great thing by helping others, and I like to help out those who need it.

#### Sophomore



Emmanuel Ahams

No, because I spend my breaks with family.

#### Freshman



James Williams

Yes, because I have nothing else to do, and it could really help out the community and benefit me later on.