AFFINITY GROUPS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is an “affinity group” vs an “alliance”?
Lovett uses the phrase “affinity group” to describe a gathering of people who share an important identifier, such as race, gender, orientation, religious heritage, or ethnic background. An affinity group is only for those who directly belong to, or identify with, that group. And by “alliance” we mean a gathering of people who might or might not share one of these identifiers but who have a genuine interest in the issues facing a particular identity group who want to support it and to serve as allies for members of it.

Who can someone contact if they have questions?
- Dan Alig, Upper School Principal
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Why have these groups in the Upper School (US) now?
We have students who have created pseudo affinity groups at the lunch tables and in friendship groups. Beverly Daniel Tatum wrote a book about this common question that schools ask: Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria? These groups naturally form out of a deep desire to connect across similarities and understand identity. The difference with these unstructured groups is that there aren’t any adult facilitators, norms, or privacy. These unguided conversations can easily devolve into stereotype reinforcement, in-group chauvinism, or identity play that misleads or alienates others. They also often do not always meet the needs of identity development and thus become a stagnant place where youth gather, feeling both the relief of not having to explain their experience and the dissatisfaction of a desire unfulfilled.

Affinity groups allow for a school sponsored and facilitated space where youth can explore identity, celebrate shared identity, and debrief common challenges and experiences that members of the identity group face. Having this need met, they are psychologically more ready to seek relationships outside the group. Shored up with the self-confidence that comes from healthy identity development, youth engage more in healthy risk-taking like making
new friends.

**How do students become members or get involved with an affinity group or alliance?**
Students will be introduced to the formation of affinity groups and alliances and be given the opportunity to voluntarily join a self-selected group(s).

**Will affinity groups engender resentment towards other groups?**
Affinity groups do sometimes discuss shared challenges and struggles, and it is true that we experience mistreatment from members of other groups at times. However, a well-run affinity space resists labeling of other groups and blanket assumptions of other groups. After all, if we are experiencing negative effects of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, why would we want to do that to other.

**How will these groups help the US community?**
Having conversations in affinity groups allows us to examine some of the roots of why we see the world the way we do, allowing us to acknowledge that we may experience the world differently than someone else. This understanding engenders greater acceptance of other perspectives, allowing for more fruitful cross-cultural dialogues.

**What will a typical meeting look like?**
We will meet to get to know each other and share stories about our experiences, hobbies, cultures and more. The affinity group meetings are a great way for students who share experiences based on their racial identity and cultural background to find support and camaraderie with one another. The meetings also provide an opportunity for students to further explore their own identity. Our gathering together allows us to realize and celebrate these differences as well as experience solidarity and support for our shared experiences as people who are defined as belonging to a same group. Celebration and solidarity of identity can extend homeward, too, and we encourage parents and guardians to be a part of that learning and joy!

**How are affinity groups or alliances formed?**
To form an affinity group or alliance, a student leader must identify a faculty sponsor and then submit a proposal to TAP’s faculty and student leaders outlining the group’s identifier, its structure as an affinity group or an alliance, the sorts of conversations he or she hopes to foster, and the benefits to the Upper School. The group’s formation will depend upon the spirit of its proposal and the larger community’s needs.

**When will these groups meet and will they ever meet together?**
Student and faculty leaders of affinity groups and alliances commit themselves to at least one meeting every three academic rotations. Each of these groups must also send one student leader to TAP leadership meetings, which will take place every third or fourth rotation and to
periodic open TAP meetings. Affinity groups must also hold one open meeting each semester, at which they welcome all Lovett community members who might or might not share that identifier.

**How will these groups help Lovett achieve its mission?**

“We celebrate the uniqueness of each individual within an intentionally inclusive, diverse, and welcoming environment.” - Character from Mission Statement

We are always looking for ways to enhance students overall experiences while preparing them to be Leaders of the World!

**Will non-minority groups feel excluded?**

No, affinity groups are open to be formed anyone that feels there is a need. We will also have periodic open meeting for those interested allies. Alliances will provide a regular meeting space for those that are interested in being allies as well.

**Will training be provided for student leaders and faculty advisors?**

Yes, training will be provided for all student leaders and faculty advisors each year before student meet. They will also be provided with updated training and best practices throughout the year.