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FHN 11th Grade

### United by Ramen

Steam curls into the air as long, wavy noodles bubble at a rolling boil, their sizzle nearly drowned out by the hum of animated conversation. The recognizable aroma of 신라면 Nongshim Shin Ramyun Noodle Soup fills the room, its rich spice tingling everyone's noses. Gluten-free noodles simmer alongside, adding a unique scent and ensures that everyone is accommodated. There's something magical about a bowl of ramen. It's not just soup—it's a culmination of ingredients all contributing to its unique flavor: broth, noodles, seasoning, and garnishings.

Like a ramen bowl, Asian Student Association (ASA) isn't defined by one culture; instead, it's a home to a blend of students from multiple school districts, all of varied interests, cultures, and ethnicities including Caucasian, Asian, African-American, and biracial.

All people are kindly welcomed by Mr. Gillette, who willingly allowed spicy noodle challenge participants to take over his classroom. Everybody helps rearrange desks to form a stage at the front of class while united in laughter and conversation, including discussions on the newest anime episode and debates who is most likely to win the title of Spicy Noodle Champion. Celina announces practically jumping up and down: "Who's ready for the spicy ramen noodle challenge?" Cheers echo off the classroom walls as everybody's voices rise collectively in excitement.

As founder of ASA, Celina is like an omakase chef, craftily blending ingredients of a multicultural community and inclusivity at school. She preemptively believed I could

contribute substantially to ASA and recognized me as ASA's mascot for representing kindness, collaboration, and inclusiveness. To me, it already felt rewarding to be a member; intuitively, Celina furthered my ambitions: Seb, everyone looks up to you, you should apply to be on the board!

Inspired by Celina, I applied to ASA's club board to foster a greater sense of belonging to a community and global perspective at school. My passion to contribute showed through my application: enthusiasm to bring my unique cultural background as a biracial Filipino and Vietnamese student, determination to amplify ASA's presence and interconnection throughout Forest Hills Northern, and eagerness to broaden our club's impact by helping to launch the International Fair.

Inducted as vice president, I collaborated with the school board, scheduling meetings with our vice principal to set up International Fair for the first time in many years. My ultimate goal was to bring the experience of differing backgrounds and cultures to all students at Northern. The event included student-led booths with informational posters, traditional music, and interactive activities—including henna drawing, fortune-telling, and board games—as well as a school-wide spicy noodle challenge where teachers and students would ardently participate. Our community stretched beyond ASA participants: it now encompassed all FHN students and staff.

Through my experiences at ASA, I discovered the true meaning of belonging: being able to add distinct flavors to a community by participating and contributing. The moment I stepped into ASA, I instantly felt welcomed and accepted, my differences and ideas embraced by a unique group of students. Being able to contribute to something larger than myself—whether through planning events, leading initiatives, or simply

sharing ramen—showed me the importance of belonging by fostering a greater community. ASA is more than a club; it's a microcosm of Northern's multiculturalism, accentuating our school's nexus between unity and collaboration.

At Northern, I'm more than a student—I'm part of a family, belonging to the same warmth and inclusivity that makes a shared bowl of ramen more than just a meal: an invitation of togetherness.