



Today's Scholars. Tomorrow's Leaders.



Making a Difference on
Independent School Campuses

The ASSIST Class
of 2008/09

Special Moments
and Reflections

Countries Represented

Australia
Bulgaria
Austria
China
Croatia
Czech Republic
Germany
Hungary
Lithuania
Moldova
Slovakia
Spain
Sweden
Vietnam



The ASSIST Class of 2008/09
 The ASSIST Orientation
 Pomfret School • Pomfret, Connecticut

Michelle is one of the finest students I've encountered in 35 years in classrooms. There are simply no skills missing in her study regimen and in her ability to convey her command of European history. What's more, though, is that she is a wonderful young lady. She is kind, considerate, compassionate, and unassuming. The very best thing that I can say that may demonstrate how much I respect her is that I hope our five young granddaughters grow up to be just like her.... I wish her nothing but the best as she continues her education in Slovakia.

Sophie, what a joy it was to be your teacher this year! Not only are you articulate, thorough, comprehensive, and analytical, but also funny, approachable, and intellectually curious. In my years of teaching, few students have impressed me as you have. Although you were away from home, missing your routine, family, and friends, and despite the fact that you were working in a foreign language, you excelled in unparalleled ways. I am immensely proud of your work, and I am grateful that as I started my career at PDS, I encountered students like you who strengthened my commitment to teaching.

American Secondary Schools for International Students and Teachers

Our Mission

To promote mutual understanding, cultural interchange and a more peaceful world, ASSIST provides opportunities for outstanding international students to attend the finest American independent secondary schools on one-year scholarships, and for students and teachers from these schools to engage in educational experiences abroad.

We are pleased to share with you a selection of the insights and accomplishments of the ASSIST Class of 2008/09. This was a distinguished group of 130 students from 14 countries. They became important and contributing members of 86 independent school communities across America.

We are indebted to our member schools, who offered scholarships to these young people and made them part of their communities.

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Academic Profile

History of ASSIST Scholarship

A primary reason that member schools invest scholarships in ASSIST students is that they excel in the classroom. With no formal adaptation made for working in a second language, our students enroll in demanding courses and emerge as leaders in the academic program.

For 22 consecutive years, at least 75% of each ASSIST class has earned honors or high honors academic recognition for the year. Others do honors-level work in most of their courses. Over the last decade, the percentage of students achieving honors or high honors recognition has ranged between 85-93%.

Each year, students and schools notify us of special honors that are awarded to ASSIST scholars. Our students frequently win book prizes, are recognized as the best students in particular disciplines (including English literature and American History), and a number have been named the outstanding overall student in the junior class.



High Honors

During the 2008/09 academic year, **48%** of the class submitted **High Honors** work. Working at America's most demanding schools, they performed at a dazzling level.

Honors

In addition, **45%** of the class submitted work at the **Honors** level. Combined, **93%** of these scholars were **High Honors or Honors** level students during their American year.

Contributing Beyond the Classroom

In addition to being strong scholars, ASSIST students are selected because of their winning personalities and their ability to make contributions to multiple areas of community life. Each ASSIST student is encouraged to become immersed in the life of the school, and they will make contributions to artistic, athletic, musical, community service or other programs of importance to their schools. ASSIST scholars are placed in schools that are both good academic fits and that offer opportunities for which the students have special talents.

Reflections & Special Moments

Each year, we ask ASSIST students to give thought to their experiences and to complete a questionnaire. While the full benefits and impact of their experiences will be more fully appreciated over time, these students invariably share reflections that are startling and inspiring. We have collected a representation of these wonderful responses for your consideration and enjoyment. The text is unedited, save for length.

Social and Cultural Reflections

Before I came to America I could not understand how American society functions so smoothly, with such a mix of cultures, languages, and races. I was not exposed to so many differences in Bulgaria, and so I was not used to playing basketball or doing homework with Asian, white, and black boys. I have always been perplexed how exactly it feels to interact with people who are not quite like you. I was even a little afraid, not sure what to expect. But after a school year in America, I have learned that people are people, regardless of skin color, religion, or ethnicity. After all, one of the fundamental ideas on which the country was founded was the conviction that all are created equal and have an inalienable right to pursue happiness.

Making friends from around the world was extremely meaningful to me. I have very firm plans to continue in an international field of study, and talking with these people meant very much to me. I made very good friends with them and I will definitely keep in touch with them. This is one of the reasons why I think this program is so great. It does promote mutual understanding among nations.

The creation and constant pursuit of perfecting an ever-growing, "unfinished" nation is an outstanding and admirable endeavor, which can serve as an example to all other peoples, regardless of their past glory. It has been remarkable studying the past of a country whose citizens,

even though often engaged in conflicts, have always tried to elect the morally right.

I have noticed that Americans are very much into community service.... I like seeing how much they help the elderly, the poor, the disabled, and other people in a bad social situation. We do not have a whole day devoted to community service in my country. We hardly have that many soup kitchens and help centers. These things are good to have, and if you incorporate them into the school curriculum, students will get used to it, come to enjoy it, and will continue it when they grow up.

When I was leaving Prague, I expected that I would make friends here, but I wasn't anticipating lasting bonds. The thing I feel grateful for and astonished by is not that I have eighty friends here; it is that I have met five or six people with whom I want to be in close touch for the rest of my life.

My impression is that American society is young, open, bright, and full of passion. Before I came here, I thought people in America were so independent that they did not really care about others as much as we do in China. My experience has proved this to be wrong. I see the love they share with each other, and the responsibility they take for the society. They always love to share their happiness and sadness with you, and they are also willing to listen to your experience and get to know your culture. At the same time, Americans take responsibility for not only

American society, but also places all over the world. There are always donating activities in my school. The money and other stuff we donate go to the people whoever need them all over the world. It is really important for teenagers to understand the importance of being responsible for the society.

Reflections on Personal Growth

Being so far away from home taught me to ask for help, to trust people, and to let them help you. I became much more courageous and independent. I expanded my comfort zone by doing things I thought I would never be able to do (like dancing ballet) and I squeezed my personal zone by letting people know me as deep as no one has known me before.

I have discovered new fascinating activities this year, am gaining more and more strength in languages, academics, and above all, in social skills, and am amazed day by day at how interesting, helpful, and loving the people around me are.



I thought I would change this year, but I have changed more than I expected. I became independent, and I became stronger in every aspect (coping with things, but also physically from all the sports). I am a lot more aware now and more tolerant, and I really appreciate every thing in my life, because I saw in the beginning what it was like to be all alone. I came to realize what amazing relationships I have.... I appreciate true friends a lot more. I GREW and became a better person. It might sound conceited and I do not mean it that way, but I actually think I improved a lot.

I feel that the time I spent in America was very interesting and helpful. It was interesting in the way I got to know another culture, and I was able to share my own culture with people here. It was helpful in the way that I had the opportunity to make friends with many open-minded and amazing people – students as well as teachers – and that I was able to get to know myself better. I have the feeling that being put into an entirely different country and culture is a good way for teenagers like me to see many new views of the world, and therefore to be able to form one's own opinions on many issues. It is also a way of developing one's own personality and of building new friendships.

I think I have definitely changed.... This year I have managed to go to school in a foreign country, to live in families I did not know before, and to make friends. I have tried new things, and been involved in a lot of activities in my school. This has made me a more mature, self-confident, and happy person. ASSIST gave me an opportunity to do something very few young people in the world experience and I used it and grew with it. This journey will influence my whole life.

I feel that the experience I have had here away from my "normal" life, family, and friends in Australia has had a big impact on who I am as a

person. I have grown and changed as I am sure every ASSIST student does and I have learned to adapt and change according to the situation I am in and the people I am around.

If ever I was stereotyping, I will never be like that again. This year I have never had so many different friends with backgrounds so different from my own. I was an empty canvas when I arrived, and now I am painted in all these new, wonderful colors and so much more open to new ideas.

I have learned to judge people not by their appearance or their reputation but by their attitude toward me and their way of interacting. Now I pay more attention to others' ideas and statements rather than their looks and images. In addition, I have become much more independent. I have also appreciated the immense help and warm support I have received this year. Exactly because my parents have not been close to me, I have been able to realize how much "other people" have done for me and how these other people have acted as guardians. There are so many teachers, coaches, advisors, instructors, and of course all in the ASSIST office, who have helped me out and have taken care of me with their entire attention and love. Thank you all!

Representing My Culture

The experience that has meant the most to me was the presentation that I and the other German students made in front of the entire school a few weeks ago.... We spent a lot of time working on it, and we managed to give the students and faculty at our school a good overview of German culture and characteristics. It was a great feeling to be able to teach something to so many people. We were happy about the compliments that we got afterward.

The most unforgettable experience for me this year was my speech to the school about China. I made a power point and prepared for a long time before I made the speech. Finally I succeeded and all of my friends told me that it was wonderful. I was very glad to hear that my friends had learned a lot about China from my speech.

The American students at my school knew more about general issues and world history than I expected. Still, I also found that they knew less about the history of central Europe than I thought they would. Nevertheless, they were curious about what I had to say, so I always had chances to explain things. This way I learn, but I teach too, so others may learn.

A touching moment for me was when I had the honor of being one of the three students talking at the trustee dinner at my school. I had the chance to talk about my school experience, Slovakia, and ASSIST.

Academic Growth and Challenge

Quite interestingly, the required course in American history proved to be the most enthralling of the year. I had a wonderful teacher and the class was focused on how the US government is set up, and how the Constitution and the Supreme Court work in practice. It was a course full of lively discussions, with subjects ranging from the philosophies of Locke and Rousseau to controversial court cases to the Patriot Act and Henry Thoreau and civil disobedience. To be honest, I wasn't looking forward to this course, but it provided a truly fascinating peek into the way America works

My AP Environmental Science class may have been the most inspiring course in my school career. Learning about something I have always been interested in and passionate about, but

which has never had a place in the curriculum of my German school, was wonderful. The class fostered my love for protecting the environment and its inhabitants, maybe even enough to make it part of my future profession.

Biology is my favorite class at the moment – we are talking about evolution, cells, and everything that matters to keep us alive. It is so very interesting and my teacher really likes her subject, so it never gets boring! When she talks about it, she gets excited and I get excited too! However, I actually enjoy most of my classes most of the time because all of my teachers are so kind and understanding and they don't just want to teach us about their topic, but as well about life. They share their experiences and we as students get to know them very well. And because we know them so well, we want to do good in class and that provides a whole different atmosphere. In conclusion, I just really like school!

Very interesting and meaningful to me is my English class which concentrates on American literature. So far we have read *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner, and *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller. I have always loved to read and therefore it is very interesting to get to know American literature. The discussions provided a deep understanding of the books and I liked that my class related each book to the American Dream which is the overall topic of the class. This class helped me to understand American culture and society.

I must mention that during my year long math course I started to enjoy math. This is a huge deal for me, since I was the biggest anti-math person on the face of the earth before I came here. I love how my teacher approaches the subject and he has completely changed my attitude.

Chemistry, US History, and English are my three favorite courses. I come to chemistry class with alacrity looking forward to doing some new and fun experiments, bring the biggest textbook I have ever had in my life to US History learning about America and my teacher always has great lessons about life and colleges; and English is filled with joy and vibrant words. I absolutely love my classes, as they are all helpful not only academically but also because they give me a hand to look out for something better in life.

Of all my subjects I especially liked Economics, owing to a great combination of factors – a really able and student-friendly teacher, my interest in the subject, a thorough, yet really entertaining textbook, and a warm, almost indescribable atmosphere, where the subject was based on student-teacher conversations and class projects. I was mesmerized by the concept of acquiring the necessary knowledge while also having fun and a great time in class.

Extracurricular Activities

At the beginning of the year, I spent some time trying to find out what I wanted to do as extracurricular activities. I helped out at Habitat for Humanity, took part in our school's food bank group, and joined clubs such as the Spanish club,



international club, and the veggie club. I am also a founding member of the USO club at my school, providing for the support of the American troops abroad through things like donut and cookie sales.

I have been part of a peer mentoring group at my school which aims to help fellow students through sharing information about things like bullying and conflict management through forums with middle school students and in some cases elementary school students as well. We also help out students through tutoring – I have been tutoring an 8th and a 9th grader throughout the year. I also spent a day teaching eight grade global studies classes about Australia when they were doing the Oceania unit of study.

During the year I have really concentrated on the arts. I not only got a part in the fall play "Arsenic and Old Lace" (there were only three female parts), but during the spring performance I have the lead (Portia) in Shakespeare's play "The Merchant of Venice." For the spring dance program, I am not only performing in plenty of dances, but I am choreographing my own piece as well. I also have had solo opportunities in the performance of my school's a cappella group and the chapel choir.

Although I was not talented enough to be an actor in a school play, I could still help the drama club out by decorating the stage, making costumes, setting up the lights and loudspeakers, and selling tickets. On a couple of occasions I have also written stories for the school's literary magazine and yearbook.

I am a member of my school's Cross Culture club which is naturally the best club in the school. I just can't be impartial. Also, this fall a friend and I did a weekly community service project in Trenton. We helped little children do their homework and played with them. This experience

taught me a lot about another aspect of American life, and I gained very much from it.

I have had two gigs at school with a friend from Thailand on the drums and with me playing the electric guitar. Each time we played in front of more than three hundred people, which was an exciting and wonderful experience that I have never had before. It taught me how to deal with stage fright.

This winter I was an assistant coach of the Middle School Boys Basketball team at my school. I chose to do this because I did not make the varsity team and I wanted to stay with one of my favorite sports. It was an exceptional experience to teach and coach kids.

This year I am working with friends as a math tutor, earning money which at the end of the spring semester I will donate to KIVA, an organization dedicated to helping people through lending for the sake of alleviating poverty.

A friend and I have started the Political Review Dining Club, a weekly gathering of students who want to discuss global political issues. The club has been a great success, and its main idea is to give interested students a platform for expressing their opinions without rigorous rules or supervision, in a casual way, and amid a circle of friends. This is the main reason for the club's popularity – it is something different.

Finding A Home

Living with an American family has been one of the most wonderful experiences I have had. They have helped me to adjust to American life, and have treated me as one of their own family members, which makes me feel right at home. Still, I have found American family life to be different from my Chinese family life. Since I am an only child, life with brothers and sisters is entirely

new. Life is full of excitement with siblings. Though you have to consider more of others and learn to get along with them (which is easy for me), I enjoy having siblings around.

Speaking of my American family, a very touching moment occurred fifteen days after I arrived, the day of my birthday. I woke up that morning to the sound of their voices singing "Happy Birthday." I was so surprised and happy! They had brought with them an amazing piece of cake, milk, and juice, so that I could have breakfast in bed. Then they gave me an envelope with a huge poster that said I was invited to see the Broadway show *Mamma Mia* with them in NYC. I was so excited I nearly started crying. Later I saw that the entire kitchen was decorated for my birthday, and that they had organized a dinner for me and some friends at a fabulous restaurant. It was great!

A most memorable and touching moment for me was when my host family said that they loved having me live with them and that they would love for me to stay with them longer. It was so nice to know that they enjoyed having me around.... Now whenever the subject of me leaving comes up my younger "sister," who is eight, tells us all that she does not want to think about it and that we have to stop talking about it.

On "Family Weekend" at my boarding school, I was a little afraid of being alone and becoming homesick with all that family love around me. But that weekend maybe ten families offered to accept me as another daughter for the weekend. In the end I felt so safe and loved that it was a great time for me. That day even families who had just met me showed such sympathy and protective feelings toward this little European girl with no parents around that I felt really at home.

One time when I was out with my host family, they met some friends and when they were introducing me they called me their "third daughter." All I could do was to grin stupidly for the rest of the night.

I have had a really loving and caring host family.... The overall experience was great and invaluable. The loving and caring atmosphere made me feel welcome and I hope that I have shared something valuable with them too.



With Thanks

Thank you so much for the coolest, most amazing, most inspiring, and most important year of my life. It has had a great impact on me, will have an immense impact on my future decisions, and I think will make me a better person.

Thank you ASSIST for this opportunity. Words can not express my gratitude. This year has been one of the craziest, funniest, scariest, and toughest years of my life, and I wouldn't change any part of it for the world.

I just want to take the time to thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Stanley, for this irreplaceable and unforgettable experience. I feel so lucky and grateful for this wonderful opportunity. Thank you so much for improving the lives of so many people every year.

It is impossible to explain how much experience I gained and to express the gratitude I feel for such an amazing opportunity to live, to learn, and to enjoy.... The work along the way can be hard but the result in the end is worth everything. THANK YOU!

Thank you so much. I can't explain in words how much it means to me that I was one of the five students from Slovakia to have this chance. I really hope that I did my best to represent ASSIST and Slovakia well.

Thank you for everything! You honestly changed my life. I hope that someday I can give as much joy to a student as you gave to me.

I want to thank you very much for giving me this wonderful opportunity to spend one full school year at an independent school in America. This was one of the best experiences of my life!

This year has been one of the best things that has ever happened to me. Keep up your wonderful work and make other peoples' dreams also come true!

I can't find the right words. This has been an incredible experience, along with hard work, lots of fun, growing up a lot, becoming more responsible and mature, and learning a lot.... I can't imagine a better job than ASSIST did. You cared for us so much and I felt throughout the entire year the personal love and support you gave us. You really changed my life. Thank you so much!



Teacher and Advisor Comments

The staff of ASSIST follows the progress of each student throughout the academic year. We read with great interest the thoughtful comments offered by school faculty members. The following teacher and advisor comments were excerpted from year-end summary reports.

I wish I could write as well in Vietnamese as Quynh can write in English to be able to express to you what a joy it has been for us to have Quynh in our school. She has brought her special energy, cheerfulness, and determination to every area of school life.... Not only has Quynh been an outstanding student, but she has also been a dear friend to many, a dedicated sportswoman, a team player on every playing field. I know that Quynh's thirst to understand, probe, and learn about everything in this world will be untiring and that we are going to hear many amazing things in the future about this remarkable, dear girl. We will all be thinking of Quynh and missing her and we thank you for bringing such a dynamic force to our community.

Kristof, you have made the utmost of your year here at NMH. In academics, in sports, and in your work as an Ecoleader you have demonstrated passion, commitment, intelligence, drive, motivation, and self-discipline. Throughout it all, you have remained cheerful, cooperative, and hard-working. You react to setbacks and disappointments with characteristic acceptance and you respond to them with a strong willingness to quickly set things right and push onward to success. In the classroom, you have accumulated a sensational record. That A+ in Economics is a witness to your ability to attack challenges with concentration, work, good cheer, will, and native talent.... Congratulations on such a fine year, and all the best wishes for the future!

Elena had an outstanding year at Maret. She integrated into the community beautifully, and the respect and admiration she earned from her

peers was clear when they elected her as class speaker at Closing Ceremony. Elena gave a wonderful speech in front of the entire school, a simply amazing feat for someone who had never seen the event, who was speaking in her second language, and who had never had to write and give a speech previously.... She was a wonderful addition to the school community. Her cheerful spirit, can-do attitude, and willingness to engage in every aspect of the school ensured that she would take full advantage of her year. I wish her the very best of luck in the future and thank her for all that she has given us.

While the end of the school year is mostly cause for celebration, there is a touch of sadness associated with the arrival of summer this year, as Georgi's time with us at Woodberry draws to a close. In addition to being an exemplary chemistry student, Georgi had a positive impact on everyone he touched this year. He has been an inspiration in the classroom, a friendly and welcoming presence on dorm and around campus, and a wonderful ambassador for Bulgaria.

It was an honor to have Sara be a part of our school community this year and a true blessing to have her as a student. She is a very gifted and extraordinary young woman whose talents extend well beyond the classroom. It was refreshing and rewarding to have a student truly enjoy learning for the quest and acquisition of knowledge. Sara was eager to accept challenges, and faced them with fervor and determination. She was a most worthy recipient of the Mathematics Prize this year.

Harriet has been an outstanding member of this community and she should be very proud of all that she accomplished. She has received a sports award, been chosen student of the month, earned excellent grades, will soon participate in the Model UN, performed in the musical, and been an important member of the field hockey team, just a mention a few of her achievements!... I hope she will keep in touch and perhaps someday she will be able to make the long journey from Australia back to see us.

Martin has been an exceptional student by any standard, but he is especially impressive as an international one. His papers have been marvelous pieces of smooth, idiomatic prose, reflecting a thorough understanding of the literature and profound insights. I couldn't ask for better work from any student, and I am blown away at his ability as a non-native speaker. We will miss him as a superb classroom student and as an athlete on the basketball and water polo teams. Well done, Martin, and safe travels back to Germany.

With a 94.5 GPA and the title of "top scholar" by one of the toughest teachers in the school, Ugne is certainly on her way rejoicing upon com-



pletion of her studies at Episcopal. All her teachers underline Ugne's persistence and intense focus on the task at hand and her ebullient manner. What a combination of mind-power and personality!

Dear Ivona, You were a model student this year. You modeled a willingness to explore and try things you were unfamiliar with. Your experience with writing thesis-driven essays is a clear example of this. You had never done this before. Actually developing an argument based on evidence was difficult, new, and a little scary. You were unfazed by this prospect. You worked very hard, met with us, and rewrote, and rewrote, and rewrote. You achieved great success as a writer. All this, too, in a foreign language. Your immigration project was also beautifully done; it was filled with specific lively details about Croatian life, culture, and the political situation. Great job.

It was such a pleasure to be Gabe's adviser this year. He is an adventurous young man who challenged himself to come to the United States to school and overcame every obstacle to have a great year. Every teacher recognized Gabe's sincerity, thoughtfulness, and conscientiousness. He became an active member of our school community in the classroom, in sports, and in other activities. He was a great representative from his home country and I am sure that many here know much more about Lithuania than they did before Gabe's arrival. I want to thank him for all that he did here.

Vic, you are without a doubt one of the most special people I have ever met. I just couldn't be any more impressed than I am with you, your work, and your approach to life. Thank you for your OUTSTANDING efforts this year. You made the Concert Choir and the a cappella group better by your participation. Thank you for sharing your love of singing with us. You will be missed more than you can possibly know.

Throughout the year, Nina was always cheerful, and always willing to go back to the drawing board as she grappled with concepts that she found particularly difficult. As she noted in her year-end speech to the school, it was in Honors Physics that she first experienced a failing grade on a test. I'm sorry that I had to be part of that "first," but I think that Nina learned a great lesson from this experience. She did not give up, she did not dwell on the grade, and she did not pity herself. She just got to work and fixed things.... I have enjoyed teaching Nina tremendously.

Lilly, I've just about run out of superlatives for your work this year in English 11; day in and day out you've been among my most engaged students, you've been among my best prepared, you've been among my finest writers, and in class you've asked the kind of questions that show me an agile and dexterous mind. Thank you for caring so deeply, thank you for leading your classmates: you've had a terrific year.

Is it possible that this year with Nacho is now complete? He has been a wonderful addition to Christ School, and gave a wonderful farewell speech to the community on Friday evening. We will miss him, but wish him well as he returns to Spain. Christ School so appreciates the relationship with ASSIST and the wonderful boys we receive each year who so enrich our school.

Gongkai "Percy" ends his junior year at St. Albans with a fine record of achievement and the warm regard of all – teachers, coaches, fellow students – who have known and worked with him throughout the year. Percy has given much to our school in his time here, showing exemplary scholarship and promise in some of our most difficult classes, making many contributions to school activities, and living among us as a person of great talent, kindness, generosity, and humility.

What a privilege it has been for me to have known and worked with Percy.

Ana was an absolute joy to have in English III this year. She is so intelligent and worked so hard. I appreciated her consistent participation in class, as she always made insightful and thoughtful comments about the literature under discussion. I also appreciated her positive attitude.... I know that she will succeed in whatever she does in life, and I wish her all the best.

What a great spring term for Egle in American Studies. She should be so proud of the work that she did for this course and the impact that she's had on the Mercersburg community in general. Egle took advantage of every opportunity to learn and explore American life and I commend her for taking those chances. Egle is a wonderful young woman with incredible potential. I'm so happy that she was in this class.



All pictures were taken at the ASSIST Orientation at Pomfret School, Pomfret, Connecticut, and in Boston, Massachusetts, where each Class begins its ASSIST year.





Today's Scholars. Tomorrow's Leaders.

ASSIST is a non profit organization with tax exempt status and is incorporated in the state of Vermont. ASSIST is designated by the United States Department of State as an authorized Exchange Visitor Program. ASSIST is also able to facilitate the issuance of the J-1 visa under which our students study in the U.S. for one academic year on Exchange Visitor status.

ASSIST does not discriminate nor does it condone harassment on the basis of gender, race, color, religion, national or ethnic origin, disability, age, sexual orientation or any other basis proscribed by applicable policies or laws.



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