



“Lead with your heart”: Seniors Speak on Dorm Leadership

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Senior Residential Leaders (RLs) live alongside and lead freshmen, sophomores, and juniors on dorm. But Saints say RLs' influence isn't

contained to one year of leadership.

A crucial part of dorm life at St. Andrew's is building family connections even if you're far from home—something senior Residential Leaders (RLs) facilitate by looking back at impactful alumni.

Seniors do not have dorms of their own, instead living in smaller senior dorm teams—captained by RLs—across underform housing. Dean of Residential Life Stacey Duprey '85 P'04'10'13 says senior leadership is fundamental to campus culture, with seniors modeling St. Andrew's values in everyday dorm life and showing younger students what strong leadership looks like.

“Some of the first and most impactful people new students meet are the seniors who will be living alongside them, modeling what it means to welcome and care for others,” Duprey says. “Living with these seniors, they see what it means to work hard academically, athletically, and artistically, and to work collaboratively with caring adults. Even if they are not fully cognizant of it, they are learning what will be expected of them [senior year].”

RLs have chosen to add increased responsibilities on dorm to the already-busy schedule of a first-semester senior. Drew Merriman '26, like many RLs, is fueled by a desire to pay forward the support he received.

“There was a senior my freshman year, Jayson Rivera ['23] ... a fantastic leader. He knew how to prioritize our needs,” Merriman says. “It takes a lot to find friends as a freshman, and Jason did a great job of building a close-knit community. I'm on a sophomore dorm now, so I'm trying to apply that sense of community, and also make sure they have support to branch out.”

Each dorm has a theme, and sometimes Merriman enters his Bahama vacation-decorated common room as a cruise director, encouraging camaraderie

with snacks and activities. Other times, he's like a lifeguard, working proactively so he can help if waters grow choppy.

"[Each night] I try to talk to the guys about their days, and make sure they feel like they can talk to me," Merriman says. "That's big for creating a safe, supportive, and fun culture."

For Tanner Caldwell '26, being an RL for freshmen means helping students build support systems in a brand-new environment, as well as helping with dorm-life staples like laundry and cooking.

"I think the biggest thing about St. Andrews is you're able to be yourself and to push what you're interested in and who you want to be," she says. "Freshman year, you're still trying to figure it out. It's important to find your people. Being open to change and growth is hard and vulnerable. And getting them to that point is my goal."

Caldwell's confidence in helping lead younger peers is often drawn from the advice of her last RL, Isabela Hernandez '25.

"I remember asking her, 'How do you make it look so effortless and graceful?' And she was like, 'That's so funny that you think that, because I did not think that was graceful at all. I felt like I had no idea what it was doing, I just led with my heart,'" Caldwell says. "Sometimes I might feel like I don't know what I'm doing or like I'm not doing the right thing, but it meant a lot for her to say, 'lead with your heart.' That goes a long way, that you can trust that what you have to do, that it's the right thing to do, based on how you feel about the community on dorm."