

“Epic”: An Interview with Melody Jue

by Mara Hodges

I interviewed Melody Jue, an Integrated Studies (IS) student from 2004-2005, in the Segundo Dining Commons to discover what IS was like when she was a freshman. As a member of the birthday committee and participator in IM sports, Melody Jue had many enriching experiences through IS.

Why did you choose to be in IS?

There were many reasons. One was being offered a Regent scholarship. I was trying to choose between UC Berkeley, UC San Diego, Scripps College, and Davis, and I wasn't sure which one I wanted. When I visited Davis with my mom the day before Picnic Day I found it had a nice sense of ambiance. I arranged to tour Miller Hall with a guy named Mark. He was really nice and answered all my questions while showing me around the dorms. I was struck by how nice the new buildings were. My decision for coming to Davis and being in IS was a combination of being offered the scholarship and wanting to live in Miller. Davis also had a nice campus where things weren't too rushed. It wasn't in the middle of a city. Instead, it was in a beautiful, landscaped area.

How did your parents feel about your choice to join IS and come to Davis?

I chose Davis despite my parents' background. Both of them are Davis alumni and my grandmother as well. I was not interested in coming to Davis at first because I didn't want to repeat what they did. I wanted to have my own unique experience, so Davis was not high on the priority list. I wanted to go to San Diego for a while because of the beach, but when I visited I didn't feel that it was a place where I could actually study. I'd lived in San Diego before and it had more of a vacation feel. It wasn't a place where I could sit down and focus. That's another reason why I chose Davis. My parents were perfectly happy that I came here.

I noticed that you're wearing your IS shirt today.

Yes, my roommate designed it. I wore it so that I could show you. It has a picture of the element Nerdium. There were 114 people, in IS my year so that's the atomic number. IS is the abbreviation for Nerdium. We were 2005, so that's why it says weight 200.5. On the back there's a picture of a cow molecule which we actually built for a Picnic Day float. About 12 people worked on it. We had a lot

of fun doing that during our year.

Were IS kids really as “nerdy” as you expected?

The nerdiness was hidden underneath and didn't show through at first. It wasn't until you got to know them later that you realized they're taking Math 21C or they'd come in with 50 credits already from community college. Something unique about IS is that most people don't wear their nerdiness as their identity; it's just something that's part of them.

Who was the most interesting person you met in IS?

I don't think there was a most interesting person because we behaved differently as a collective than as individuals. However, there are a lot of people who stand out for me. The first one is my roommate Angela. She's a design major. I was thinking about design for a little while, so we got along well because of our shared interest in art. She's also one of the sweetest people I have ever met. I still consider her one of my best friends. She made the transition to Davis nice because I got along well with her. I got to know most of the dorm by the end of the year. I don't have time to name them all because there are 114 people and they all stand out for me. My friend Angela spoke Mandarin because her parents are from Taiwan. I started learning Mandarin my freshman year, so it was nice having someone to practice with. I've met so many people and they're all at the school for different and interesting reasons.

Did you eat in the DC in “herds” like we do now?

We used to eat in that building over there [*points to red brick building*] and it was a lot more crowded. It was difficult, but we always went in a group. I ate with other people as much as I could. It was sometimes hard because we'd want to go even though we weren't hungry and if we were hungry we'd have to wait for everyone. That's usually what we did and we would block off these whole long tables. That was definitely a tradition.

What about your classes?

My first quarter I had a good load. In retrospect, it set the standard for what I pursued later in my college career. In terms of IS classes, I took Professor Fletcher's consciousness class and the seminar on the 2004 election. They'll be doing that election class next year! It was helpful in a lot of ways. The excitement about the election was intense, and I remember us all sitting in front of the TV together

watching who was going to win. There was a lot of discussion because of it.

I was also taking a seminar by taught by Professor Mechling called the freshman documentary project. He asked five people to keep a journal for the whole year and take lots of pictures and keep an audio journal too. The idea was to document the transition from high school to college because it is a very active time in life. I'm grateful for that because it's a habit that I've kept up and I've had a consistent journal since then.

The consciousness class was probably my favorite 4-unit IS class. I still keep in touch with Professor Fletcher, and he's been a good mentor. IS provides excellent opportunities for faculty interaction because the professors are built for it. They are there because they are interested in teaching an interesting class to freshman students and that takes a lot of patience. If I were a professor teaching freshman, I'd have to understand that half the kids coming to class are sleep deprived because they've stayed up until 1:00 in the morning. In a lot of ways I'm appreciative of the faculty interaction in IS.

How has the initial stuff from your freshman year with IS benefited you throughout the rest of your college career?

It has paid off in a lot of ways. A lot of opportunities opened up for me. Some of those include special Mondavi events. Some of the speakers who come will offer a Q&A session before their talk. John Edwards and Bob Dole invited IS students to come talk to them at the Mondavi for an hour before their lecture. There's a lot of networking that goes on. Everyone's motivated so they'll talk to each other. My senior thesis has to do with issues of literature in consciousness, so taking that class was on par with what I was interested in later. It's not the kind of class you can find anywhere else in the university. IS classes tend to be on eclectic subjects that don't fit into a particular department and push from a lot of different angles. They offer variety.

How did your relationship with your high school classmates change as a result of IS?

I became more outgoing in college. IS had a positive influence. I don't think friendships were replaced at all. Gradually you make a new set of friends because you have to establish life here. I wouldn't say that my relationship with my high school friends was replaced in any way, but it was complemented by the new friendships I made in IS.

Did you have any “adoptees” during your year?

We had one girl and she had a closet that she put her sleeping bag in so she could stay the night. She lived with IS people all last year. She got herself one of these shirts and she had the word isotope embroidered on the bottom because even though she wasn't in IS she was an adoptee member and she called herself Isotope. She was on all our IM sports teams and she really wanted to be in IS. Often, the significant others of IS students were adoptees. There are a handful of adoptees for every IS class because there are a lot of things that happen in the dorm, and it establishes its own culture.

I was about to ask you about IS love.

There were around 8 to 10 couples. Not all those are still together. I know two people who are still going out, but that's not a high count compared to other years. There was a lot of dormcest. Usually it was people between floors.

How often did people find boyfriends and girlfriends outside of IS compared to within IS?

More often. That might just be a phenomenon that happened my year. There were a lot of long-term friendships established in IS. Most people found significant others outside of IS, and then they got adopted in or had to meet all the IS people that that person knew. You find this to a certain extent with other dorms as well.

Were there any musicians in your dorm?

There were a lot of people who played piano and about 8 people in Banda. We had a talent show once and all the Banda played together. My friend Susan plays flute in band. Toby played trumpet in band. He and Kim would whistle all the time going up the staircase. My friend Sarah is majoring in voice and she performed too. We liked to play the piano in the first floor lounge of Miller quite a bit. Often the janitors would be downstairs and if someone was playing piano, they would come by and sit down and listen for a while. We liked our janitors. I played piano and it was nice having one downstairs. The music network is a sub-culture of IS.

What were the most common songs they played?

The first week my friend Gary was blasting “Barbie Doll” and that was funny. There's a compilation of 311 songs that I listen to over and over. That brings back memories of freshman year. I got excited when 311 came to campus.

How about your favorite IS experience?

I've got a couple stories. One of them was making birthday posters. I was head of the Birthday committee, so it was a good way to relax and do artwork. IM sports were also a big part of my freshman year. I loved going to play Frisbee and soccer. I enjoyed being outside because a lot of personality comes out on the field so you get to know people really well. In the building, we often decorated things in creative ways. Fourth floor made origami pieces and hung them on the ceiling in their lounge. That was neat to discover. My friend Jason had gone to a race around Chinese New Year and there were some table cloths that were up for grabs, so he brought them home with him. They were all red. He hung them outside the windows in front of Miller so they looked like big red banners in honor of Chinese New Year. My favorite memories had to do with IM sports, decorating, and tagging people's white boards.

What stuff did you put on people's white boards?

Mostly we drew pictures of animals. Angela, Julie, and I tagged all of third floor's white boards at 5AM once. That was our version of a prank. We drew pictures penguins, turtles, people, and Chinese characters. White board communication became a central part of the college experience.

What about facebook?

Facebook had come out fairly recently when I was a freshman. Not everyone had it, but eventually most people got it. Now it's a central form of communication, but it wasn't back then. Most of the communication about upcoming things came mostly through E-mails instead of facebook.

Do you have any regrets in relation to IS?

I try not to have regrets in general. I learned a lot of what I needed to learn through IS, both the good and not so enjoyable parts of my year, so I would not say I have any regrets. I enjoyed all the surprises.

Is there anything else you'd like to say?

I took two major field trips. One of them was to L.A. for the IS art class that was taught by Robin Hill. That was an amazing field trip because I got to know my friends pretty well. Imagine first year college students carpooling down to L.A.,

getting lost, and looking at art exhibits. Professor Hill is a very interesting teacher. She set up a great sequence of places for us to visit. There was one about music and art. Some of my favorite paintings like Georgia O' Keefe resonated with me because lot of what I did as a freshman was doodle geometric designs and play piano. There were also a lot of smaller galleries. One was full of sculptures with buttons. My favorite one was a bunch of Styrofoam cups. The artist took these and turned them upside-down and attached them in such a way that they looked like clouds. She put them all over the ceiling. It was in a big room larger than this section of the DC we're in right now. Everyone was lying down on the ground and looking up at the clouds. It's hard to describe unless you were actually there. People responded in different ways to the art class. That was one cool trip.

The other field trip was organized by Toby. We were going to go to Lake Solano and camp there for a weekend. We decided to bike there and one of our friends was going to drive all our camping stuff there, so all ten people who were going were going to bike to this place. We left on a Friday and it was windy. It was a line of about 10 people from Miller, and we started going West down Russell. It was very cold. We got there and they told us, "We won't let you camp here unless you all have valid ID, and student ID's don't count." Some of us forgot to bring our California ID, so we were like, "Oh no! We just biked 18 miles out to Lake Solano and it is getting dark out. What are we going to do?" So the guy tells us, "There's a campsite at Lake Berryessa. If you just bike another seven miles up to Lake Berryessa then you can probably find a place to camp there." So we were like, "OK, let's do it!" It turned out to be a fishing resort. No one was there, but there was a pay-phone. By this time we'd gone up a huge hill and stars were coming out, so we parked our bikes—chained them all together—and called our ride Jason. He came up with all our stuff and took all the stuff out of his car and squished people in so we could go to the campsite which was another seven miles. It took about two trips, but we did it. We set up camp, and it was about 10:00 at night by the time we cooked spaghetti and crashed. It was definitely epic.

Thank you for sharing your experiences and time.

Thanks for swiping me into the DC.