

Adviser, ENFORCER, *Friend*

MICHELLE AZU PATROLS DEFOE HALL AT appointed times, just as resident advisers always have—enforcing rules, jingling keys, evicting the opposite sex, shushing loud-talkers in the hall. She's developed a thick skin in such matters, which has always been part of the job description. But these days, that's just the beginning.

The enforcer role is perhaps the easiest part of Azu's job, now called community adviser. Today's CAs are chosen and schooled as role models. This is in line with recent research showing that students are influenced more by other students than by any other group—even the faculty. Students spend so much time in dorms that savvy administrators are trying to transform what were mere bunkhouses into locales of learning. The CA is key.

CAs learn to bring hall residents together as a group. They strive to be one of the first places struggling students turn for help. CAs train in counseling and learn to recognize alcohol abuse, eating disorders and more. Ideally, this new breed of campus leader demonstrates daily how to juggle academic and social pressure in what can be a pressure-packed college environment.

Azu, 22, of Chesterfield, Mo., is one such Jacqueline of all trades, says Frankie Minor, director of residential life. This med-school-bound Honors College student is a member of Mystical Seven and Mortar Board honorary societies. And a socialite: She's president of Delta Sigma Theta sorority and was one of five Homecoming queen finalists in 1998. She volunteers at University Hospital and Clinics' pediatric playground and mentors MU students in MAP, an achievement program for minorities.

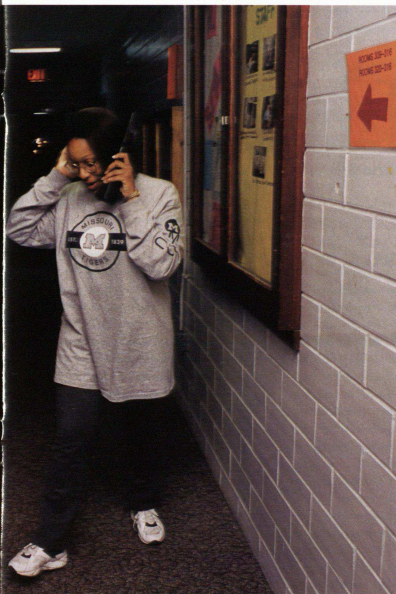
All that's great for Azu's resume, but there's something more—an intangible quality that makes her approachable and draws other students in. "She is always positive," Minor says. "She genuinely cares about people. I can't train that." ❁



During the third week of classes, CAs take a test: List all the dorm residents and something fun or unusual about each. A cinch for Michelle Azu, who makes friends quickly during hall patrol and at other times. But she also spots the occasional violation on these sweeps, and matters can get sticky when disciplining pals. "You always have to see them the next day," Azu says. "They don't want to look at you. They think you are mad at them. But you're not mad; you're just doing your job."

STORY BY JENNIFER GREEN

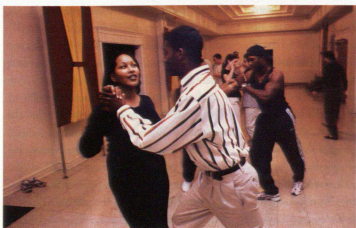
PHOTOS BY ROB HILL



Azu, a pre-med student, tutors physics students. She plans to give up her CA position if accepted to medical school. She says it would take too much time away from her studies. She goes to sleep around 1 a.m. most nights after finally closing her books.



Although CAs spend about 20 hours a week on the job, less formal advising moments aren't on the clock. A student might see Azu walking across campus and run up to talk about difficulties with her math class, for instance. And there's always dinnertime.



Balance in dance. Balance in life. Azu squeezes in 30 minutes of swing dancing "just for fun" into a day of classes, study and work.