Letter to the Editor

My expectations walking into the room are quite low. I had been selected by Amherst, because of my interest in “political issues,” to participate in a student discussion with Bob Woodward that would precede the main event in Johnson Chapel. Since Amherst awarded an honorary degree last spring to David Brooks, a paragon of establishment journalism and repetitive ‘thinkpieces,’ I have questioned Amherst’s judgment and ability to develop critical and politically engaged minds. Through a combination of the administration’s probable ignorance and/or naiveté, they contribute to the rampant political conformity among our student body that will inevitably fail to make the world a better place. Especially after attending a prep school that was equal parts political apathy and conservatism, I was ready to move on from what is called, for good or bad, a mini-Dartmouth. Little did I know that Amherst would suffer from a similar affliction.

Early in our hour-long discussion, we go around the room and share our opinions on the state of journalism. One student draws a distinction between journalists who “feed lines” versus those who “dismantle facts” and challenge narratives. He puts Bob Woodward in the latter category in his comment-cum-circle jerk, and laughter fills the room. All of this seemingly without any awareness of Woodward’s reputation as a “stenographer of the stars,” as phrased in a wonderfully acerbic essay by Chris Hitchens. In short, Woodward (beyond his achievements in uncovering the Watergate scandal decades ago) built his career by exchanging special access to politicians for publishing their favored narratives. His books are little more than establishment-friendly fluff, yet the giggles continue as more students awkwardly praise Woodward in their questions and comments. We Amherst students, unwittingly or not, are participating in the celebritization of our political and media elite. This is in no small part because of the expectations and political environment Amherst College creates when they laud his “unique access to several American heads of state” with a painfully unintentional irony. Chris Hitchens, Joan Didion, and Glenn Greenwald all have powerfully explained the corrosive influence Woodward and his journalistic style have had on our political environment, but Amherst only has room to compliment him as a “fascinating conversationalist” and a “skilled interviewer.”

The remainder of my hour consists of Bob Woodward being himself par excellence. He provides the most banal and introductory analysis of ISIS, citing any poli sci class that explains a political phenomenon with ‘Obama didn’t have the heart,’ and see how any truly serious person will accept your argument. Despite its utter inanity, this discourse nevertheless flourishes in our country thanks to the journalism of Bob Woodward, much of the establishment, and now Amherst. Perhaps we could learn from him as a primary source incarnate, or a perplexing sociological phenomenon, demonstrating the need for an adversarial and independent press, but his value extends no further.

Assertions of toughness and serious leadership allow politicians to outmaneuver their opponents in the circus of campaigns and debates, saying they’ll act ‘tougher’ or ‘more seriously’ without specifying any actual differences in policies. It allows us to ignore the hegemonic ideologies and institutional constraints that better explain America’s ineffectual foreign policy, unchecked inequality, and other dire issues. Try submitting a paper to any poli sci class that explains a political phenomenon with ‘Obama didn’t have the heart,’ and see how any truly serious person will accept your argument. Despite its utter inanity, this discourse nevertheless flourishes in our country thanks to the journalism of Bob Woodward, much of the establishment, and now Amherst. Our schools endorsement is implicit but certainly real when they suggest any value whatsoever with Woodward speaking at Amherst. Perhaps we could learn from him as a primary source incarnate, or a perplexing sociological phenomenon, demonstrating the need for an adversarial and independent press, but his value extends no further.

Back at the start of the discussion, Woodward asks that we introduce ourselves with our names, majors, and thoughts about Amherst. This led to the first of many rounds of circle jerking, each of us describing what we love about the College. This included me, and I wish I had the courage to tell him, “Amherst is a pretty great place, but I hate most that we breed much more political ignorance, elitism, conformity, and apathy than any revolutionary idealism.” That would be one icebreaker that Amherst could learn a lot from.

David Keith ’17
The Indicator  October 2014

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The Indicator is a journal of social and political thought at Amherst College. Originally founded in 1848, it was resurrected in the spring of 1996 after a 145-year hiatus. The Indicator’s primary mission is to provide a medium for discussion of local, national, and international issues within the college community. The journal appears four times during the fall and spring semesters.

The opinions and ideas expressed in The Indicator are those of the individual writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Indicator or of Amherst College. The editorials are a product of the opinions of the current Editors-in-Chief of The Indicator. The Indicator does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or age.

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“Yes—what everyone says is true: You will regret not taking every class with me.”
 ~ Adam Sitze
Orientation Madness

The Class of 2018 faced a markedly different welcome to Amherst College than first-years did in the past. Drastic changes were made to programming and policy. In remembrance of all of our first days of college, here’s a collection of perspectives from current and previous freshies of their experience of orientation.

Similarly, CAP had an open mic night, Marsh Coffee Haus style, in which students “revealed their hidden talents”—this was a favorite part of the program for my friends who participated. It’s getting to know people on a more honest level, beyond the “Hi, I’m _____, I’m from _____” script that dominates orientation discussions, which creates a greater sense of security and community within the school. This is the ultimate goal of any orientation program. Even though students voiced many complaints about the programs, I’m sure that even the most jaded participant had some memorable experiences similar to the ones I discussed above. The college should continue working to make the programs, especially the new ones, even more meaningful, so that orientation week can be reflected on not just with nostalgia for our wide-eyed younger selves, but as a significant and helpful start to their school year.

On a positive note, a handful of the programs activated, participate”—program, necessitating new participants had some memorable experiences

First Year Outdoor Orientation Trip (FOOT) or Community Engagement Orientation Trip (CEOT) trips came back with fun stories and a satisfying sense of time well spent, some students who participated in the new programs felt that their programs were too unstructured. They complained that they were not given enough guidance with the projects and that the daily schedule was poorly planned in a way that made them have to do almost all of the work at night. Others complained that their program was simply boring. It’s disappointing that these students did not have as valuable an experience to start their year as those who were fortunate enough to be in the established programs. This problem should be resolved if the program requirement remains for next year’s orientation.

On a positive note, a handful of the programs encouraged students to get to know each other on a deeper level. The CEOT groups had one night of people shared interesting things about themselves, issues that they had grappled with in the past, or problems they continue to struggle with. I thought that this was the most valuable activity of the program. Discussing the almost inconceivable things that some have overcome in their lives made me realize that every person walking around Amherst has difficulties in his or her own life, and nobody possesses unfailing confidence or a natural sense of belonging.

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“Come on in, freshmen!” With a broad grin on his face, my friend’s squad leader thrust open the doorway to his second-floor Crossett suite, motioning us inside. Trendy pop music blared in the background as my newly formed crew of orientation besties and I scurried in to join the growing crowd forming around the pong table. Within minutes, there were Keystones pressed into our outstretched hands, handles extended from seemingly all directions. People milled about, seasoned upperclassmen and nervous underclassmen like myself, laughing, drinking, extending introductions, and greeting old friends. As the room and my cognition began to blur, I thought to myself, “This is college.”

If I had to summarize my orientation experience in one word, it would be this one: alcohol. I learned a great deal about alcohol in the week and a half that was freshmen orientation—its corrosive effects on the liver, its impact on judgment and motor skills, the consequences of overconsumption. I learned who to call when you’ve drunk too much of it (542-2111!) the “safety position” to place your friends in when they’ve vomited because of it, and that I should never, EVER cross Route 9 with an open container of it. But more importantly, I learned where to find it, who to get it from, which flavors of Rubinoff were the least repulsive, and of course, how many nights in a row I could get away with drinking it without wanting to recede under my covers and never reemerge.

My older brothers had assured me that, regardless of any official-sounding emails proclaiming a “dry orientation,” the nine days preceding classes would provide an adequate introduction to college drinking. As someone who made most of my high school friends through a combination of AP Biology and the cross-country team, and could probably have counted the number of drinks consumed in the past four years on one hand, the prospect was intimidating. But true to their words, I found that as I became more comfortable with alcohol and my own limits, orientation life fell into a comfortable routine. Roll out of bed, attend whatever the day’s speech/lecture/presentation was, eat, and start drinking.

Alcohol became a way of orientation life, and it provided a preliminary social distinction, separating the new freshman class into those who were “tryna get turnt” and those who opted not to. The biggest shock was just how free flowing the booze was, how willing upperclassmen were to include freshmen in their drunken revelry and indoctrinate them into college culture.

I have not undergone nine consecutive nights of drinking in a row since then, nor do I plan to again. But I can safely say that my orientation crash course in college drinking has proven far more useful and applicable than nearly any other orientation presentation.
When reading Amherst police reports over the summer before orientation and imagining myself in such an environment, I felt more scared than excited about beginning college. There were occasional cases of theft and public drunkenness, but what really stood out were the egregious incidents of sexual misconduct. After spending hours reading AC Voice articles and familiarizing myself with the campus’s concerns and the scandals of the past year, I played scenario after scenario in my mind, rehearsing protective moves, considering what I might have to do to remain safe yet adventurous, secure yet fun, autonomous yet trusting.

I knew about the significance of rape culture, the import of consent, and the intricacies of related concepts from my time in online social-justice-esque circles, and I was very hesitant to be part of a community whose members weren’t as knowledgeable as I. Spending my high school years in this virtual environment gave me a security blanket: no matter what happens in the real world, I know that, from far away, a loving community will support me. Where would that support be at college?

Fortunately, the orientation schedule dissipated my worries. The lecture on sexual respect was certainly comprehensive. I appreciated that the Bystander Intervention sessions, while assuming many things about the decency of the student body, helped work out the scenarios I’d been imagining over the summer. During her speech, Amherst’s Title IX Coordinator Laurie Frankl’s voice cracked as she fought back tears. In that moment, I felt the presence of the online community flesh itself out in the thoughts and emotions of real people in front of me.

I discussed these orientation sessions with my female friends and found they were thinking the same things as me. None of us had seen such a supportive community outside the context of a computer screen. This was a powerful and relieving realization. I considered the generations of college students before me and before these orientation programs existed, experiencing college without the underlying comfort that their troubles and concerns will be heard and respected, that their problems will be solved by experienced administrators, that their lives and dignity matter to the college.

The thing that most people don’t realize is that these orientation sessions do, in a way, work. During a game of Cards Against Humanity I was playing with friends, one guy put his arm around a girl and immediately retracted it, laughing, “Oops, I didn’t ask consent!” It was funny, it was harmless, and because he joked about it, consent was clearly on his mind. As long as students remember that, the long, didactic sexual respect educational part of orientation has its use. People are now conscious, and I am glad and so very relieved that other students and I don’t have to spend four years in fear.

I played scenario after scenario in my mind, rehearsing protective moves, considering what I might have to do to remain safe yet adventurous, secure yet fun....

This is to say I can barely remember any of the students who were in my squad and have kept in touch with essentially none of the kids who were on my FOOT trip, but I can vividly remember bonding with classmates over the stupidity of it all. The weird semi-sexual tension between my two squad leaders (“That’s so you” “Stahhhhp”), the awkwardness of dorm life small talk (“Which of these kids will be my new best friend?”) young Ryland thought to himself excitedly), and the never-ending chain of “mandatory” extended orientation meetings were all trending topics during the Val conversations I had those first couple weeks. I’m actually a little curious whether I’d still have some of the friends I do today had I enjoyed those mandatory Extended Orientation meetings. I got invited to my first college party while whispering to the kid next to me about how tiresome the presentation was (I ended up rooming with that kid the following year), and I met another kid I’d come to regard as one of my best friends when he fell asleep next to me at one of those meetings a week later.

When I first showed up at Amherst I saw soccer players walking around with soccer players and football players walking around with football players, and I felt an incredible need to define and compartmentalize myself into some sort of clique by the end of that ten-day period. In retrospect, this was idiotic. I didn’t figure out what my life and schedule on this campus would be by the end of orientation. I can’t say I had it figured out by the end of freshman year either, but I will say orientation was successful in introducing me to a lot of new students who were just as nervous about moving to this new place as I was—it just came at the cost of me shit-talking the EO events.

ADDENDUM: I should note that there were a number of aspects of orientation I actually really liked. My FOOT trip was so enjoyable it inspired me to put my name on the Outing Club’s email list and read a couple Jon Krakauer books. I attended a grand total of zero Outing Club meetings that year and every year since, but that’s because I’m lazy and horrible at following through on things, not because the FOOT trip wasn’t fun.
Performance and Personality

Impressions is a new section that intends to capture concise perspectives on the issues and events that have all (or none) of campus buzz.

Double Edge Theatre Brings Strange World to Amherst

Double Edge Theatre’s visit to the college on Sunday, September 28th provided a jolt of variety to the campus arts scene, surprising students with an outdoor show strung together from a mix of seminal works such as Don Quixote, the Odyssey, and Sharazad’s Arabian Nights.

Part of the appeal may be that Double Edge is a fairly unusual theatre company. The performers live together on a place they call “The Farm,” in Asheville MA. “Double Edge acquired the Farm with the idea of creating a self-sufficient artists’ haven, in which the concept of ‘living culture’ could be pursued,” they say on their webpage. The artists live together, farm together, and perform together in the evenings. According to Matthew Glassman and Carlos Urina, two of Double Edge’s frontmen who came as guest speakers for my Don Quixote class last semester, the goal is to fully embody their characters by understanding themselves and their stage partners as deeply as possible. In realizing this goal, Glassman, Urina, and the rest of the company create characters that derive vitality from the performer’s personality, (and not just their acting talent). Accordingly, the relationships we observe on stage between characters like Don Quixote and Sancho—Urina plays Quixote and Glassman plays Sancho—are meant to embody some variant of a real-life relationship between Urina and Glassman.

Whereas most productions at the College take place in some kind of theatre or in-door common space, Double Edge—presumably having double-checked the weather report—designed their performance around the architecture of the Amherst quad. For the scenes from Don Quijote, the steps outside Frost Library served as a makeshift stage. During scenes from the Odyssey and Arabian Nights, performers dangled from trees and weaved around large, portable scene constructions. But the contrast between the familiar, 2014 Amherst quad and the strange worlds of the past added to the experience: It felt as those Don Quixote and Odysseus had somehow traipsed their way to Western Massachusetts, and were eager to engage the small community in which they found themselves.

Perhaps the performers’ direct interaction with the audience strengthened this effect. A crowd of students, town residents, and professors followed the performers across the quad as they transitioned from scene to scene, shouting things like: “Come with me! Let me show you what else we have in store!”

Making eye contact with the performers was refreshing. If you’re anything like me, you occasionally fall into a kind of passivity as you watch a performance from the back row of a dark theater. This passivity can make your experience of the production a one-way street; your reactions to particular events do not inform the show, or even your own experience of the show, as you begin to simply observe and wait until after the production to figure out what it meant to you. The Double Edge approach, through direct contact with the audience, made the crowd’s facial expressions, laughter, looks of surprise, and physical movement a part of the theatrical experience. In this sense, the performance felt like a community effort—one that epitomized the values of the Double Edge Theatre’s unusual methodology.

Please Type Yourself with Strange Letters!

Allow me to explain my love affair with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.* I’ve read countless books and articles on the MBTI origins and its implications. I know all of my friends’ types (mostly ESFJs, ENFPs, and ENTJs), I know which type I’d prefer as a romantic partner (ENFP), and I have a list of the types I don’t get along with (I’ll keep those to myself for now) Sometimes (read: every time), when I meet someone, I try to type them in my head.

But why? Why care so deeply about somebody’s type, especially when modern science has declared the Myers-Briggs system an inaccurate psychological assessment? Though I do firmly believe that there is merit in the test, that line of argument is tangential to its importance. Instead, I contend that you should love the Myers-Briggs, irrespective of its validity. Put more bluntly: even if the test is horoscope-level bullshit, you should take it and talk about it!

Let me explain why.

The MBTI requires a great deal of introspection. The very act of taking the test forces you to grapple with important questions about your nature. What moves you more: logical reasoning or appeals to the heart? Are you more open to new experiences, or are you a creature of habit? Do you look at life conceptually or concretely? These are questions which most have not thought about on such a binary level. The Myers-Briggs test does pigeonhole you, but your response to that pigeonholing is telling. Often, the amount of time it takes you to answer a question is more telling than the answer you give because it indicates that you do not define yourself as existing on a spectrum. Similarly, when reading the description of your type, you must decide whether or not you find the template appealing or accurate. The test requires you to form a personal identity, whether or not it fits in with your Myers-Briggs type.

Next, and maybe most importantly, the Myers-Briggs test is a wonderful excuse to have a great conversation. What do you think will end in a more fruitful conversation: one that starts with “How was your day?” or one that starts with “Have you heard of the Myers-Briggs test?” In my (very unscientific) research, the MBTI lead-in is more successful, and it’s not even close. Even more impressive, you can ask this question to relative strangers and actually have a meaningful conversation with them. Though asking someone to take the Myers-Briggs test is a proxy to asking someone “Hey stranger, tell me a lot of really personal stuff about yourself,” it comes across as way less creepy. Knowing about the Myers-Briggs test affords you one of the best conversational cheat codes possible.

So please: TAKE THE TEST!

Jesse Pagliuca ’16

*Ricky Altieri ’15

The MBTI requires a great deal of introspection. The very act of taking the test forces you to grapple with important questions about your nature. What moves you more: logical reasoning or appeals to the heart? Are you more open to new experiences, or are you a creature of habit? Do you look at life conceptually or concretely? These are questions which most have not thought about on such a binary level. The Myers-Briggs test does pigeonhole you, but your response to that pigeonholing is telling. Often, the amount of time it takes you to answer a question is more telling than the answer you give because it indicates that you do not define yourself as existing on a spectrum. Similarly, when reading the description of your type, you must decide whether or not you find the template appealing or accurate. The test requires you to form a personal identity, whether or not it fits in with your Myers-Briggs type.

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So please: TAKE THE TEST!
When Aztec Chili is the only option left.

“Is there anything wheat-free available?” I inquired of the impatient-looking chef in charge of the cafeteria at the hotel I worked at this past summer. “You mean gluten-free?” he grumbled, his tone indicating exactly how he felt about gluten-freeness. “I have celiac disease and I’ll get really sick if I eat anything with gluten in it,” I added, feeling, like so often before, the need to justify myself in order to be taken seriously. “The soup should be fine,” he said before striking up a conversation with the baker to avoid further questioning on the matter. As I turned to leave, he announced loudly to the rest of the kitchen how “this gluten-free thing is so overrated.”

A little over a year ago I was diagnosed with celiac disease, an autoimmune disorder of the small intestine that affects up to one percent of the US population. When someone with celiac disease ingests gluten, a protein found in grains such as wheat, barley, and rye, even in microscopic amounts, the immune system misidentifies it as a toxin and attacks the lining of the intestine. Over time this results in serious nutritional deficiencies which carry with them a host of other problems. The disease runs in my family—my mother, my sister, my aunt and my cousin all have it, as well as various members of my extended family. There is no drug available for celiac, so the only way to stay healthy is to follow a strict gluten-free diet. In addition to those with celiac, about six percent of Americans are affected by either gluten sensitivity or wheat allergies. If you aren’t affected by any of these, a gluten-free diet probably won’t do much for you. It might, in fact, have a negative effect, at least as far as gluten-free substitutes are concerned. Gluten-free versions of bread and cake actually tend to have a higher calorie density than their gluten-containing counterparts and since they are marketed to a smaller demographic, these products are usually pumped with unhealthy, not to mention unappetizing, preservatives. It’s also gluten that makes bread, well, bready, what gives it that elasticity and holds it together, so it’s a challenge to find gluten-free products that truly compare to the regular variety.

Avoiding gluten is no longer universally seen as a serious medical necessity for a small group of people, but rather as a trend in the same vein as the Atkins and Paleo diets. But ultimately, the cost is much greater. Untreated celiac disease ingests gluten, a protein found in grains such as wheat, barley, and rye, even in microscopic amounts, the immune system misidentifies it as a toxin and attacks the lining of the intestine. Over time this results in serious nutritional deficiencies which carry with them a host of other problems. The disease runs in my family—my mother, my sister, my aunt and my cousin all have it, as well as various members of my extended family. There is no drug available for celiac, so the only way to stay healthy is to follow a strict gluten-free diet. In addition to those with celiac, about six percent of Americans are affected by either gluten sensitivity or wheat allergies. If you aren’t affected by any of these, a gluten-free diet probably won’t do much for you. It might, in fact, have a negative effect, at least as far as gluten-free substitutes are concerned. Gluten-free versions of bread and cake actually tend to have a higher calorie density than their gluten-containing counterparts and since they are marketed to a smaller demographic, these products are usually pumped with unhealthy, not to mention unappetizing, preservatives. It’s also gluten that makes bread, well, bready, what gives it that elasticity and holds it together, so it’s a challenge to find gluten-free products that truly compare to the regular variety.

Even so, as you’ve probably noticed, gluten-free living has recently enjoyed a surge of popularity. Just in the year or so that I’ve been gluten free, the range of products to choose from, and the array of venues that serve them, has expanded exponentially. And while I do enjoy being able to grab a gluten-free chocolate chip cookie at Rao’s, and a gluten-free ice cream cone at Flavorys, there is a darker side to this newfound awareness. Avoiding gluten is no longer universally seen as a serious medical necessity for a small group of people, but rather as a trend in the same vein as the Atkins and Paleo diets. From the waitress who innocently suggested I replace the pasta in my chicken dish with couscous, to Colorado chef Damian Cardone, who bragged about serving gluten-containing meals to unsuspecting gluten-free diners, because, he claimed, it’s “all in their disturbed little heads,” many people believe they know a lot more about gluten than they actually do. This is not a problem exclusive to ignorant, and possibly sociopathic, restaurateurs. You don’t have to look any further than Val to see the effects of misinformation. Being gluten-free at a school with a single dining hall is no easy task and the lack of understanding of what that entails by administrators and the general population makes it even harder. The anxiety of having to navigate a space as easily cross-contaminated as a dining hall is further elevated by the knowledge that the brown rice is sometimes boiled in the same pots as the regular pasta without being properly cleaned in-between. And walking into Val on Asian Tuesday to find that the only thing you can safely eat is the Aztec Chili with Ancient Grains that you already had for lunch, with a side of defrosted Udi’s white sandwich bread, isn’t something I’d wish on my worst enemy. Some strides have been made; for instance, the soy sauce used at every level of cooking has been entirely switched out for a gluten- and wheat-free brand. Yet other simple measures could be taken that would have very little effect on taste, such as replacing the various gluten-containing soup bases for gluten-free ones. The people who work in Val are also to be commended for their responsiveness to any inquiry into whether or not a dish is OK for someone with a particular restriction. It is however neither safe nor acceptable that it so often comes down to an individual to determine whether or not that is the case. A universal system of accountability needs to be instituted, one that is actually accurate, unlike the notoriously unreliable AC Nutrition which, for instance, categorized Froot Loops as gluten-free despite their being mostly made of wheat.

Val has to serve an entire college population with various dietary needs, and although improvements are necessary on their part, you can also help. Please do not spread the pesto on your sandwich directly with the serving spoon. Please don’t use the gluten-free toaster or microwave for products that aren’t gluten-free. Please don’t take the specifically gluten-free items if you don’t need to. Please, because for you it is an easy adjustment, but for those of us that need to worry about these things, the consequences are not so easy to deal with. For me, the most serious immediate effects of accidentally ingesting gluten are a stomach ache, a feeling of intense hunger no matter how much I eat, which can last up to several days, migraines, dry skin and hair loss. But ultimately, the cost is much greater. Untreated celiac disease often leads to various cancers, particularly of the intestines and stomach, as well as non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, and an increased risk for other autoimmune diseases like diabetes. For me and many others in my position, being gluten-free isn’t something that can be done halfheartedly or part-time, but is a matter of life and untimely death.

Mia Kaaber ’17 is a Contributing Editor for The Indicator.
Will Savino won’t get out of our office.

If I were to write another article for The Indicator these days, I’d start with a broad idea, something about campus life that you could relate to, something uncontroversial like “the Powerhouse is a thing that is good.” I’d get you on my side early, because you’re an Amherst student, and I know how to appeal to you. I’d bring up arguments about social life at Amherst that are hard to disagree with because they oversimplify complicated issues. I’d feel okay doing that because the cutting social commentary of my argument would justify such underhanded rhetorical devices.

I’d try to make my conclusion logical: a simple claim that follows from simple premises, something like “the Powerhouse is good because it allows for new ways to hang out, party, and host events.” Since you obviously buy that argument, I’d take it a step further and try to make a claim about our social scene in general, something like “the Powerhouse will therefore help broaden social circles and minimize the divide between disparate groups on campus.” And since you already accepted my first premise, it would be hard for you to disagree with this one.

I’d use self-deprecating humor along the way to make you laugh, to prove my humility, and to demonstrate my self-awareness. I’d reveal far too much about my drinking habits or sexual experiences, partially to prove my broad knowledge of campus social life, but mostly just for the shock factor. I’d say “I’m only speaking for myself,” and “I don’t necessarily believe this applies to everyone,” but I would believe it applies to mostly everyone. Otherwise, I wouldn’t write an article about it.

And the thing is, my argument probably would address the concerns of most Amherst students, because with four full years of experience, I’d be an expert at being an Amherst student. I might only sit in the front room and mezzanine in Val, but I’d have my finger on the campus pulse at large. I’d have read every unnecessary news piece in The Student and every tired think piece on AC Voice. I’d know the overarching consensus and the fringe stances on campus issues.

I’d feel so satisfied with myself for distilling “pressing” campus issues like “will the Powerhouse be a panacea for the Amherst Awkward?” into diatribes about backwards Amherst relationships, egregious administrative missteps, and unjustified social faux-pas.

I’d certainly try to avoid the convoluted similes, cultural references, and LJST-speak in which many of my fellow Amherst journalists indulge. That just wouldn’t be my style. I’d even use some vulgarity to give the article a conversational fucking tone. I’d use lists to outline my argument and avoid having it look too “pretentious New Yorker essay-esque.” I’d close with a paragraph that frames my argument in a personal light, and then my final line would be something short and pithy that you’d hopefully remember.

The Indicator is important to me. I devoted myself to it through its renaissance. Granted, back in those days I was mostly making masturbation jokes and photoshopping Biddy’s face onto robots, but every young journalist has to start somewhere. I found my editorial voice by writing for The Indicator, so I’d have to make sure that this article (like every other) flaunted that voice. I’d have aspirations that this article would be popular on campus, that it would help shape campus discourse, and that every pretty girl would fantasize about what handsome bachelor could have written such a thought-provoking tour de force.

I would take it so seriously that there would only be two people in the entire school that I’d trust to edit my latest masterpiece. I’d agonize about every little quip, making sure it served its purpose as a mood lightener without detracting from the point I was trying to make. “This is the one,” I’d think. “This is the one that will prove that I’m not just some clown in God’s. I may not be the AAS President, but I am a thoughtful man.”

And then, after penning my latest piece of mildly entertaining social commentary, the reality of the situation would strike me. These days, I probably wouldn’t be able to relate to students in the way I once could. “I’m not a student anymore,” I’d realize, “I graduated.”

“I don’t drink in the socials anymore. What do I know about how the Powerhouse will affect social life at Amherst?”

But my misgivings about the article would run deeper than that. Shouldn’t I want to distance myself from the life I had as a student? Shouldn’t I want to make friends outside of college, have grownup experiences, and work towards my future instead of meddling around in my past? But then again, I wouldn’t know what postgrad life in the Valley was supposed to look like. I wouldn’t know how to craft a new adult identity for myself, given that I still hadn’t left my college town. I’d be torn between opposing worlds. I wouldn’t be both a student and an adult, I’d be neither.

Inevitably I’d give up trying to write an article that was really about the Powerhouse, because I’d finally admit that I’m not the person for that job anymore. I’d let other Indicator columnists, or Craig Campbell, or the folks at The Student take care of it. I wouldn’t have anything meaningful to say anyway. I’d come to terms with that. I swear I’d come to terms with that.

And maybe at this point in my life, I’d be mature enough to avoid the moralizing and generalizations that I was once so privy to. I wouldn’t try to beat you over the head with my argument, I wouldn’t try to win you over with thinly veiled appeals to your sympathy, and I wouldn’t have unrealistic expectations for the article. Old habits die hard, I suppose.

Will Savino ’14 is an Editor Emeritus of The Indicator.
The College presents a hazy view of a serious problem.

Early this September, Amherst required all varsity athletes to attend the hour-long “Amherst Hazing Program”—which was not, as the title implies, a school-sponsored mass hazing exercise, but was instead a lecture composed primarily of hazing-related anecdotes and long explanations of their legal and social ramifications. Almost all stories provided by the speaker, a former employee of the Brown University Police Department, involved death or an excessively crude act of debasement. The talk was marred by a fixation with the extreme; it felt bizarrely disengaged from the discourse about student life typically expected at Amherst.

“If a freshman on your team is killed by hazing, no more games for the rest of the season,” said the speaker—as if this was disquieting information for someone toying with the idea of pushing their teammate past the brink of death. He proceeded to list other punishments, all predictable and expected—lawsuit, fines, expulsion, “disgracing your family name,” living with eternal guilt—and other stuff that left me thinking “sure, that sounds right.” But throughout the talk I wondered why he was telling us this; his target audience seemed to be “unapologetic murderers.” I didn’t need to be told this; his target audience seemed to be “elephant walks”?

It was revealed, through what seemed to be a former employee of the Brown University Police Department, involved death or an excessively crude act of debasement. The talk was marred by a fixation with the extreme; it felt bizarrely disengaged from the discourse about student life typically expected at Amherst.

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I doubt it. There have been no recent hazing-related incidents that merit this kind of attention. And, from an athlete’s perspective, there seems to be little evidence that hazing exists at all on this campus. So why did we need to squeeze into Merrill and listen to stories about dead freshmen and—Google at your own risk—"elephant walks"?

It was revealed, through what seemed to be an unintentional confession by the speaker, that Amherst was holding this meeting to protect themselves against any legal liability in the event of a hazing incident. By “discouraging hazing” this program, Amherst legally divorced itself from blame for hazing cases. Cornell University used a similar tactic to avoid being sued over the death of a student in 2011.

It’s difficult to determine if this event was actually conceived only as a PR stunt or if it was an actual response to a campus issue, but by holding this event, Amherst has implied that there is a real possibility of danger from hazing. But, they have failed to take any real measures to ensure that it doesn’t happen. Instead of discussing strategies for hazing prevention and initiating dialogue about why it happens, the speaker talked about what will happen after a hazing incident and issued vague insults at hypothetical perpetrators. At one point, a PowerPoint slide was displayed that called people who haze “weak bullies with low self-esteem.” These insults and scare tactics entirely underserved the issue, leaving students unsettled and without any real grasp for what hazing is and how to prevent it.

If the Amherst administration feels the need to address hazing, their approach needs to be drastically altered. When the school began their sexual assault initiative, they didn’t round up every student, say “don’t assault anyone or you’ll get in trouble,” and then dismiss them to never discuss it again. They saw that issues of campus culture and student safety are complex and require a multifaceted approach. But with this hazing event, they have failed to establish that. They demonstrated a genuine concern for their reputation, but a half-hearted one for the safety of their students.

A more constructive approach would first feature a clear definition of hazing—or at least a dialogue about what it can be. This was almost broached during the program, but was quickly abandoned when the speaker got confused by his own examples. He began discussing an instance where an entire team sang a song together and asked the room “Is that hazing?” Silence. “Yes. Hazing is anything, anything that—nevermind. You know what it is.” Do we?

Athletic teams at this school, like it or not, have a distinct position in the structure of campus social life. They spend a lot of time in large groups, and sometimes have parties, mixers, formal dances, and the like. In situations like these, it is easy for an underlying, unintentional element of peer pressure to form—which seems to be a primary driver of hazing. Younger athletes may have a difficult time saying “no” to an activity if they are trying to find acceptance among their teammates. When entire teams do an event together, even one that doesn’t involve drinking or health hazards (such as singing a song), there is a possibility that a member of the team will feel uncomfortable participating but will do so anyway. At a party, the mere presence of drinking upperclassmen could create pressure for underclassmen to drink, even if it isn’t explicitly encouraged. Is that hazing?

I wouldn’t call it hazing, but I might be wrong. This is why, if we are going to talk about this issue, a dialogue is necessary. If something as simple as singing a song together can be hazing, maybe all people who haze won’t break rules with low self-esteem. Maybe they are student athletes who attended a presentation about hazing where it was defined in an impossibly broad sense but was discussed only in terms of a freshman’s death.

Considering the amount of time and money Amherst dedicates to improving leadership in athletics, it seems that diverting some attention to off-court aspects of organized sports would be feasible. But this year’s captain’s symposium, a 48-hour event during orientation, had nothing designed to address hazing and no discussion of preventative actions that team leaders could use. The symposium, using small group activities, was aimed at helping captains to develop leadership, support, and cooperation skills, but it did not engage us in a discussion about how team size and alcohol consumption can complicate a group dynamic. I left the symposium having learned how build a fire and climb a tree blindfolded, but without any direction as to how to recognize and respond to a situation where teammates are uncomfortable or at risk.

Integrating dialogue about hazing into athletic programs that is constructive, rather than accusatory and extreme, is an important measure. But this issue requires awareness and initiative from students as well. We are all ultimately responsible for the effects of our collective actions and we are capable of developing solutions to the issues we create. I know that all athletes on this campus want their teammates to be safe. So, in the absence of direction from the school, let’s talk about it.

Ben Grimes ’15 is a Contributing Writer for The Indicator.
Organicism and organization in Amherst’s landscape.

In September of 2011, I arrived at Amherst College just ahead of Hurricane Irene, a storm that made local headlines in southern New York before barreling up the Connecticut River Valley, felling trees and flooding erstwhile dry stream beds. As first-years typically do, we wandered around campus in large packs of 10 to 20 people, the one difference being that we had been cautioned not to go outside due to the high wind speed and the perceived dangers of falling tree limbs. Under the dizzyingly swift gray skies, branches whipped about and a few snapped and fell, and some trees did as well, and I thought it was a shame to lose these valuable ambassadors of nature.

Later that same year, Amherst was hit by a strong ice storm on Halloween. It was bitterly cold, and the wind howled. The trees still had some of their leaves and this added both mass and surface area for ice accumulation, contributing to the large number of trees that fell. In addition to trees, power lines were downed and transformers blew—many parts of the Pioneer Valley went without electricity for about a week. Again, I thought that it was a shame to lose so many trees on campus, our vestigial connections to nature. I felt that these trees, normally bastions of permanence, should be impervious to the destructive forces that cause the demise of shorter-lived entities that we have come to acknowledge as humans, animals, and buildings, but the destruction of nature by nature seemed a tragedy.

In 2012, Hurricane Sandy did just what many had predicted. It decimated the coastal communities of New Jersey that had not seen a large storm in quite some time. Many said that the region was overdue, and it was likely complacency and lack of environmental preparedness that lead to the destruction. Going home for Thanksgiving that year was a shock. Entire towns were utterly devastated. Power lines were downed and roads were rendered impassable, but the forests of the region remained relatively unchanged. Save for a few trees, the intricate amalgam of forest life seemed to impel itself to continue to stand. This is not to say that natural destruction does not serve the purpose of renewing ecosystems and facilitating natural cycles of growth and decay, but it does seem that certain natural communities have more resilience especially when compared to humans. So what causes the wanton destruction of the trees on our campus, why are they so vulnerable compared to their sylvan counterparts?

Perhaps, we must conceptually divide trees into two categories. The first are trees existing in a natural setting such as a forest. These trees and ecosystems demonstrate the resilience that would be the envy of any human community. The second category would be trees that are intentionally placed by humans for the purpose of enhancing the aesthetics of their locality. It is conceivable that nearly all the trees that fell on the Amherst College campus in my time here belong to this category—those planted because we feel it looks nice to bring a bit of nature to our “civilization.”

This has not always been the case. In September of 1938, one of the largest storms in New England’s history ripped through Amherst at breakneck speed. The storm changed the face of the campus over the course of hours, knocking down many of the oldest and most recognizable trees on campus, not to mention the roof got ripped off of Morrow. To get an idea of the scope of the destruction, I highly recommend looking at the photos furnished by the Archives and Special Collections page on the subject. This storm, to my understanding, eliminated the last vestiges of natural growth on campus and created an opportunity to turn the Amherst arboreal landscape into a completely intentional entity designed to maximize the interplay between controlled plant growth and architecture.

The landscaper Fredrick Law Olmstead Jr. says as much in a correspondence with the trustees from 1925. He suggested that the campus could be further beautified if the old, thick trees of what is now the first-year quad were allowed to be removed and the area landscaped and replanted. However, he seems to have understood that there was some level of sentimentality and affection (akin to that which I felt) for the older trees that would preclude large-scale landscaping changes, save for an event of mass destruction such as the one provided by the storm of 1938. The College seized upon this opportunity to landscape the quad.

The oaks of the quad are simultaneously manicured and natural-seeming in their timeless, knotty bark. The shade they cast is like that of a cool forest floor where otherwise there would be an exposed and barren hilltop. But despite the strong influence of the forest, the trees form a grand, cathedral-like aisle, opening the landscape to the radiance of the south-facing Memorial Hill, which lends much needed light to the New England winter. I am convinced that although the topography of the hill is rather serendipitous, the various landscapers and architects that have worked in this area have taken advantage of the natural light and the placement of trees on the quad, revealing a level of expertise that I suspect goes unnoticed by the vast majority of people passing through.

We can go through our days unaware of the beauty and balance engendered by the engineered interplay of human-made space and nature harnessed as an aesthetic tool. The landscapes we occupy at Amherst are not natural, and that is what is amazing about them. All of those trees I mourned, I mourned because I thought we were losing something natural and ancient from the campus, when in reality we lost a carefully maintained and selected tree. The triumph of the landscaper is convincing people that they are indeed in nature, when in reality the space is of humanity. Although elements of nature are introduced, and it may seem as if an equilibrium is being struck, the space remains firmly in the human realm. The brilliance of this artistic concept is a trompe-l’œil on a massive scale, wherein an artist has successfully moved the artificial barrier separating the natural and the man-made world. In this misdirection, the architect cleverly disguises human constructs like intentional plantings as natural elements, and the fact that we see landscape as an equilibrium between humanity and nature is a falsehood born out of the utter success of this understated artistic brilliance.

Bob Gaffey ’15 is an Associate Editor for The Indicator.
A Stroll Through Manhattan

Amherst College goes to the People’s Climate March

All a thousand buses converge on Manhattan. All across Central Park West, just along Eighth Avenue, 400,000 people pour out of vehicles, step off of bikes, emerge from underground via subway exits stretching across twenty blocks, all trying to squeeze themselves into a one-mile-long, seventy-foot-wide stretch of space: the mass is coalescing into a march. Groups, organized and assigned into specific sections of the procession, make their way to their assigned street. Six blocks for students and the elderly marching together. Five blocks for environmental organizations. Four blocks for anti-corporate campaigns and peace and justice advocates. More blocks for scientists and teachers; community and interfaith groups; anti-nuclear activists and vegans and labor unions—it’s a logistical miracle.

We, the Amherst contingent, are assigned a spot relatively close to the front of the march—just a couple blocks away from the “Frontlines of Crisis,” led by indigenous communities most impacted by climate change. But the march, an hour before its official start time, is already fully packed and flowing out into the side streets. We’re stuck before we even get on to the main avenue, squeezed between compacted bodies.

“Just move!” someone yells out. A friend standing beside me, looks unamused.

A lady in a floral shirt, stuck between two shoulders, five heads away, strains her neck up. “Just. Move.” Another guy, from even further back, makes a noise sounding like a mix between a growl and a groan. A marching band tries to push through to the front, instruments held over their heads. Everyone gets pushed around, squeezed and even further compacted.

“Sir, you can’t do this. You can’t fucking do this. I’m going to pass out.”

Tempers flare; impatience grows. People try to leave, but there’s no way out. What are we all doing here anyways? We stand around, will eventually walk down a street... but what will we have accomplished at the end? Crushed and unable to breathe or think, I can only see an image of the Socials wavering in front of my eyes...

A trail of people emerges from a subway exit nearby, and find themselves stuck before they’re even out. “Yo, make a pass-ge. Come on. Make a pa-sage.” Plenty of helpful suggestions and unique advice to go around. “Can’t we just move?”

Meanwhile, as we witness the throng of people attempting to make their way out of the subway exit for the next half hour, we are blessed with an old man’s constant commentary and updates about the status of our standstill. “We’re not moving... Nope, not at all... Yep, we’re still not moving.”

Thankfully, with his help, we finally come to terms with the fact that—surprise—we’re not moving. Half an hour of worming our way has brought us no closer. We remain at the edge of the crowd, on the margins of the march, far away from where we’re supposed to be. We give up, realizing that we’ll never get anywhere until the march starts.

Gradually, our limbs begin to have room to unfold, and we start moving, haltingly, like a traffic jam, stopping, and going.

At exactly 12:58 p.m.—we’re walking now, finally—there’s a moment of silence. It spreads like falling dominoes; you hear it from far up ahead, a wave coursing through the crowd. The march comes to a halt, the stillness eerie in a crowd so large. One hand after another rise into the air, palms open, signifying some sort of solidarity. The moment seems to end as soon as it begins, and a second wave of rumbling takes over. It starts with a faint, whispering thunder in the distance, and it grows and grows until the cacophony fills the entire marching mile.

We start marching again.

To be in the middle of that crowd creates a feeling of unparalleled empowerment—that, plus the fact that traffic in New York City is being held back for you. I feel I’m doing something useful once again, that maybe something will end up changing.

But minutes later, it becomes just another illusion of grandeur. And so it goes for the rest of the march, back and forth between optimism and cynicism.

Some hours later we end up falling back a bit, surrounded by a band of middle-aged musicians and anti-nuclear activists. Their melody is catchy; we hum along. Other marchers merge into our spontaneous coalition. The sound of our voices unite under the rhythm of the drums, trumpet, and horn. Again and again, the melody repeats like a chant, but with more grace. And when the instruments stop, our combined voices carry on, alone, their unaccompanied, off-key rawness adding all the more to its power.

I realize then that the march will have achieved something even if it achieves nothing. Viewed as a protest, a call for action aimed at politicians and the UN, you might call it practically pointless, at worst, or, at best, symbolically significant. Yet the power of the march was not in its potential in protest, but rather in its function as a moment of collective action. Whether you are for nuclear or against it, vegan or vegetarian, militant activist or Quaker, the possibility of actual and substantial collective action. Whether you are for nuclear or against it, vegan or vegetarian, militant activist or Quaker, there exists a space for unity, to express a common concern for the place we inhabit.

As our chant goes: The people, united, will never be defeated. The people, united, will never be defeated.

John He ’16 is an Editor-in-Chief of The Indicator.
A meditation on the crisis of student governance.

Late last spring as I was procrastinating on writing final papers, numerous emails from the AAS flooded my inbox. I would hear the alert sound in my headphones, switch to my Amherst Outlook tab, see a subject line like “JC Complaint Regarding 4/25 Referendum,” and ignore with prejudice. I’m sure I was not alone in consigning this email and others of its ilk to the vast majority of mail in my inbox: read and forgotten. Most of Amherst had to have been similarly apathetic, for we had more important things to talk about than dense legalistic emails and the AAS’s inner turmoil. Looking back, I wish I had paid closer attention to the catastrophe that was the AAS of last spring. Interviewing some people involved in the crisis, I uncovered a drama more salacious than the official AAS account of the situation emailed to the student body on September 6th would have you believe. The usual politics of student government had turned uncomfortably personal, as recounted to me by more than one student involved. Josh Ferrer ’17, one of the original complainants, called the April 28th meeting of the AAS “acrimonious,” and Amani Ahmed ’15, the would-have-been president, is quoted in the Student as saying “I can say with great sincerity that I think I was treated very unfairly last semester by my peers.”

In interviewing Amani for this piece, her reasons for feeling betrayed and disappointed became apparent. From her perspective, the presidency was taken out from underneath her by a few overly ambitious students who manipulated the group politics of the AAS and the ambiguities of the AAS Constitution as well as any real-life Frank Underwood. (In a darkly humorous development, unconfirmed reports hold one involved party as actually comparing their role in the AAS succession debacle to Underwood’s in House of Cards). In her view, she was merely following the precedent of past AAS Presidents in construing campaign spending limits as including only those posters actually put up in public. To others, her interpretation—even if it was the traditional one—was just wrong, and the language in the Constitution dealing with campaign-spending clearly prohibited her expenditures. The matter could have ended on April 15th, if the Judiciary Council had ruled against Amani, as they are constitutionally allowed to do, paving the way for either sanctions against Amani, or possibly outright disqualification. It could also have been put to rest during the subsequent Senate meeting, when the vote to overturn the JC’s decision failed by a single vote. Instead, the students received a referendum, the interpretation of which led to yet more legislative fumbling by AAS and the JC. It took two more weeks, exhausting the school year and our patience, for our student government to come to a definitive conclusion. Much of the obfuscation can be traced to the fact that the Senate kept behaving as if nothing had gone wrong, even though they had a constitutional crisis on their hands. Nowhere in the Constitution did it prescribe what should have happened when the JC reconsidered the original complaint for the second time, and it certainly did not say what should have happened after Amani was sworn in and then attempted to veto the motion that proved to be her ouster.

Should Amani have remained President? Should we have had a new election? These may be important questions, but they are not nearly as relevant to the future of the AAS as the larger questions raised by the causes of the crisis. I am confident in sourcing the crises from two places: constitutional vagueness and rank professional incompetence on the part of the AAS. The first problem is easily remedied, and the AAS, to its credit, is working on fixing undefined areas of the Constitution. One main cause of the crisis was the ease of proposing and submitting a referendum, by which Servet Bayimli forced the continuation of the crisis. By making it harder to submit referendums, the AAS hopes to prevent future disputes from spiraling into large-scale crises. Furthermore, it should limit the damage to student confidence that referendums regarding internal AAS and JC procedures cause, since they imply that the people we elected have proved unfit to do the job we elected them to do.

However, this does not get to the heart of the matter. The people we elected to represent us simply did not do so. Many times throughout the crisis, members of Senate as well as outsiders...
Four reasons why we’re all secretly eight years old.

Freshman year was one of exploration: discovering the limits of my alcohol tolerance (RIP Sara at fall crew formal), establishing an appropriate productivity-procrastination balance in order to maximize results with minimal effort (my five-page paper will write itself while I nap, right?), determining the threshold at which it’s absolutely essential to do laundry (because socks worn for the fifth day in a row lack that crisp, fresh feeling), and other such collegiate expediencies. As my first year drew to a close, I realized that despite my newfound knowledge and independence, I had few responsibilities throughout the year to anyone other than myself. Which was problematic, because I’d agreed to return to the overnight camp that I’d grown up at that summer, and spend eight weeks acting as a surrogate mother for eight- and nine-year-old girls. Although this was to be my second summer spent as a counselor, I was apprehensive about the transition from “college life” to “camp life.” After a year of bonding with peers, forging connections, gaining insight, and tackling problems that could only occur as a by-product of cohabitation with large numbers of other 18- to 22-year-olds, could I effectively transition from adolescent to authority and find common ground with these children?

Fortunately, I quickly discovered that college kids and eight-year-olds aren’t that different after all. The following comprise my list of the top cross-overs between camper and collegiate.

I quickly discovered that college kids and eight-year-olds aren’t that different

Free food incites anarchy. Two times a week, campers visit the canteen, where they’re each given a watered-down, artificially-flavored slushie and a candy bar. To say that these visits are the highlights of my campers’ week, much less their existence, is an understatement. The promise of sugar incites mania within the delicate eight-year-old brain. As we prepare to dismiss the campers from dining hall to canteen, our largest, college-rugby-playing counselors must bar the door to prevent the frantic swarm from ripping it off its hinges. In a textbook display of natural selection, the fittest children stampede to the front and claim the choicest treats, trampling the weaker cohort, which must then scavenge through cast-off Zours and melted lemon slush. The only other occasions on which I’ve observed such a scene include: Antonio’s on a Friday night (where it’s questionable whether anyone makes it “up front” alive), the Powerhouse once the wings and party pizzas arrive, or anywhere offering free Sugar Jones.

No one knows how to dress for a theme. Everyone hates receiving that notorious invitation to a dressy-casual-semi-formal-morningwear-but-also-evening-appropriate gathering. Camp and college are probably the two places on earth with the highest percentage of themed events per year. Some themes seem intuitive: tight and bright, blackout, or at camp, color war and ninja night. But even the easy ones come with challenges. College students and eight-year-olds alike stress over whether a shirt qualifies as red or verges on coral, if the lei is “too much” with the Hawaiian shirt, and if anyone will notice that these black leggings are secretly very-dark-intense-specialty-midnight-hued navy. Others themes are even less clear. There are fraught moments spent wondering what in the world to wear to a “Yolo Swaggin’s and Komodo Dragons”-themed mixer or perhaps an evening activity entitled “face night.” Compiling an outfit for themed events takes a village. Or a floor. Or a bunk. Luckily, the combined wardrobes of camp attendees and college students serve as an overcloset of themed articles. Nine times out of ten, somebody has the periodic table footie pajamas you need for this weekend’s “Ions and Bygones” mixer.

Ask big questions, think big thoughts. Face it: Amherst students love to hear the sound of their own voices. The typical Amherst student always has some injustice to protest, some complaint to lobby with the strategic planning committee du jour, or some watertight argument poised to topple an existing norm. We are the innovators of tomorrow, goshdarnit! My campers harbored similarly strong convictions, and they never hesitated to voice the ways in which they felt they were being wronged. “You expect me to participate in swim lessons today?” an eight-year-old in my swim class would fume. “This is a violation of my most basic right as a member of this community. Being compelled into action that I find distasteful forces me to refuse on principle.” Sometimes, they would fume over bureaucracy, proclaiming that if a bunk majority preferred arts and crafts to soccer, then their constitution obligated them to overthrow the counselor oligarchy via peaceful protest, say, a demonstration involving kicking the soccer ball into the woods and refusing to retrieve it. And the demonstrations didn’t stop there. Didn’t like what was for dinner? Go on a mass hunger strike. Wanted more flashlight time? Demand a referendum. Needless to say, I don’t think I’ve ever appreciated autocricy more.

Vomit. It is sometime after midnight, and you’re trudging home. It’s been an exhausting evening, and you’re ready to sink into a blessed one-and-a-half sleep cycles before the inevitable start of tomorrow’s workday. As you’re about to collapse into bed, simultaneously thanking the almighty for safe deliverance, you hear a horrific noise. The distinctive retch and splash of reverse peristalsis; and although every fiber of your being urges you to ignore the moans and go to sleep, you know that it’s your duty to help. Clutching a flashlight, you approach the scene to inspect the damage and are greeted by a veritable Armageddon of upchuck. Vomit, soaking through piles of clothes, drenching shoes and pooling on the floor—and one morning girl trapped under a mound of contaminated linens. You rush to her side, asking how you can help, attempting to extricate her from the self-inflicted biohazard pit and guide her to the nearest toilet. She groans in protest, mumbling incoherently that she’s totally fine and doesn’t want to move, thank you very much. It’s in that moment when you realize that you can’t do this alone, that you need professional backup. Lunging for your phone, you dial the number that’s been emblazoned into your brain since your first week here…

…And your co-counselor, receiving your plea, comes running to your side with a spill kit. “Damn stomach bug,” she grumbles. “Been hitting all the campers.” I’m sure that all of you have encountered stories like these since coming to college. And I’m sure they all involved helping under-the-weather eight-year-olds, too (wink wink).

It was a long eight weeks; it was a great eight weeks. I came out incredibly sleep deprived, but with renewed confidence in my ability to both take care of and relate to others. In sum, it appears that eight- and nine-year-olds aren’t so unlike us, and can be thought of as mature, miniature college kids. Or maybe we college students are just overgrown children. (∞)

Sara Schulwolf ’17 is a Contributing Writer for The Indicator.

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Why Are You in College?

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Reflecting back on two years of college.

Every year gives us a new opportunity for pause and reflection. We can reminisce about the previous year: the good, the bad, the legends and stories—the notes about what to do this time around. As a junior I feel that I should have excellent notes. Notes good enough to pass down and benefit the first-years. And sure, I have plenty of them: I could suggest what food combinations will inspire your friends in Val, what courses to take and which ones to avoid, how to successfully navigate the socials, where to get free food... you know—“Amherst Hacks.” But I won’t. Because it’ll probably be better, and more fun, for you, first-years, to discover all these secrets for yourself.

And more importantly, it just doesn’t seem quite sufficient. In my two years at Amherst, I have realized that these are not the questions that keep you up at night. Every day I learn new facts and hear different perspectives that often contradict ones I’ve previously held. Is it healthy to be gluten-free? Is it good or bad to go to an elite private school? Should I not care what other people think or should I try to be fashionable? These are just the common questions. Then there are larger, more personal battles we face, which we overcome in one moment only to meet again the next day. It’s a lot for anyone to handle in this epoch of info-glut (is the internet our savior or the devil?) but especially burdensome for us, at our age, to “find” ourselves. But this is what college is about, right? Is it not an environment in which we are encouraged to discover our various identities, purposes, questions and ideas? I certainly assumed so. What I have learned, however, (and mind you, as prefaced above, my conclusion may be upset or reinforced tomorrow) is that college is not about finding oneself as much as it is about creating oneself.

So instead of handing down all my notes, I am going to pose a question: Why did you come to college? Let me be clear: not why did you come to Amherst, why a small liberal arts school, or why the east coast, but why do you seek a post-secondary education? I wish someone had asked me this before I graduated from high school, but I realize now, after examining this question for the past few weeks, that it could not have come at a better time for me personally. Sure, I tend to change my major, career, and life purpose every other week. (Okay, sometimes every few days.) But I’m not “finding” myself. I already know who I am: I am Rachael Lenore Abernethy. A student, an African American, an athlete, a sister, a daughter, an optimist, a strong proponent of social justice, a hardworking, passionate, eager, inquisitive individual, a writer, a terrible but persistent singer, a part-introvert, part-extrovert. I’ve spent 20 years in my own head: I’d say I know myself pretty well. I change my major and goals so often because I am in an environment in which I am encouraged to create multiple identities, purposes, questions and ideas. I am not lost. I’ll take a semester’s worth of piano lessons because I love music and have always wanted to learn, because Amherst has a music building with beautiful, free pianos, and because there is no time like the present. I sit and talk to Val workers because they have fascinating stories and are genuinely interested in what I am doing, because they support my creative outbursts. I play soccer because it pushes me to overcome little impossibilities, like training over the summer, even on those days that are so damn hot and all I want to do is nap. With everything I do—auditing “Intro to Psychology,” sitting at Spanish tables on Fridays and totally messing up basic conjugations; studying abroad—I am engineering, crafting, shaping, molding, creating—choose your word for it—a Rachael Lenore Abernethy.

Of course, I know this opportunity is not available to everyone. I was born into privilege; even before I was conceived, I was going to go to college. It was just the next thing after high school. For many, though, it is an ultimate goal and measure of success. But one of my favorite things about college was that once I arrived on campus, I felt as lost as everybody else. We were all thrown into the confusing, information-packed mess that is orientation. Completely overwhelmed and sleep deprived, we jumped into the first day of school. And since that day, I have not stopped inventing myself. What an extraordinary opportunity. College has been and will continue to be a place for me to develop as an individual and as a citizen.

So friends, new and old, first-years and upper classmen and women: I ask that we all pause and think for a second. Why are we here? What do we want out of it? It should not be “just the next thing.” It is too special of a time in our lives. Be proud of the work that you do every day to make the most of yourself, because that is all you have. But what do I know? I’m just a junior. <3

Rachael Abernethy ’16 is a Contributing Writer for The Indicator.
Boyhood

IFC Films
2014

A REVIEW BY
Jeffrey Feldman
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In a world whose primary reflection on the past is the Buzzfeed list — “50 Pictures That Perfectly Sum Up Your Childhood” — Boyhood seems like a quaint, anachronistic project. Of course, where the listicle condenses, Boyhood expands: in twelve, roughly 12-minute acts, writer-director Richard Linklater closely examines key moments in the life of a boy, Mason, as he grows up. The movie was filmed over twelve years, and we watch Ellar Coltrane, the actor who plays Mason, grow up alongside his character. Boyhood enacts a simultaneous compression and expansion of time—it's all in front of us. The moments Linklater chooses to explore, however, are purposefully quotidian, “the little things that don’t have a place in a movie,” as he told The Dissolve.

Linklater is fascinated with film’s temporally transgressive nature. In his previous works Slacker and Dazed and Confused, he limited each film’s action to the events of a single day. The films of the Before series build on this conceit: each of the three films follows a single couple, Jesse and Celine, over the period of a few hours, and each was filmed nine years after the previous one.

In July, I attended a screening of Boyhood at which Linklater and Coltrane were present. An audience member asked: Why stop here? Why not make Adulthood? Linklater joked that we would have to wait another twelve years for that movie, but I couldn’t help but think the question failed to capture something crucial about the film. Boyhood is as much about adulthood—how we prepare for it, how we live through it—as it is about youth. We see potential trajectories for Mason in the wildly different life paths of the adults in his life. His forward-looking mother, Olivia, aims for stability, and she inflicts on herself a prudent and painful present to achieve it. His father, Mason Sr., takes the opposite approach, following his whims from moment to moment, at the cost of having abandoned his wife and children when they needed him most.

At the end of the film, a friend Mason meets at college sums up the open question of how to guide one’s life with a bit of stoner philosophy: “You know how everyone’s always saying seize the moment? I don’t know, I’m kind of thinking it’s the other way around, like the moment seizes us.” Mason’s response never failed to elicit a laugh from the audience: “It’s like it’s always right now, ya know?” This earnest quip captures something about the power of the film—it draws you into a perpetual present, such that the two and a half hours go by in a flash while, at the same time, every second is full of meaning to be explored. Boyhood asserts that paradox of temporality: every moment in its fullness is infinite, yet each is only a fleeting fraction, of the unfathomable totality.

It is in emphasizing the fullness of these moments that Linklater reinterprets those elements of our lives that seem too trivial to examine critically: lasciviously ogling a Victoria’s Secret catalog, digging up a dead animal in the backyard, discussing which Jedi is the best, back-talking a parent, watching a Funny or Die video over and over and over again. It’s no accident that many of these moments involve our relationship with the mass culture and the media.

In his classic 1936 essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin argues that the increasingly reproducible nature of art has, over time, led to the decline of the conception of art objects as being “authentic” or “unique.” “From a photographic negative, for example,” Benjamin explains, “one can make any number of prints; to ask for the ‘authentic’ print makes no sense.” (Or, as Mason’s photography teacher puts it: “Any dipshit can take pictures, Mason. Art—that’s special.”) Thus, each individual who encounters a work of art, like a photograph or a film, feels closer to it. For the unique art object has a mystical quality about it, an “aura” that separates us from it—this is not the case with art we can encounter anywhere, any time. Film is the ne plus ultra of mechanically reproducible art in that it uses the camera to provide a vantage point for a pure reality “free of all equipment.” After all, it’s only through the camera that we do not see the equipment involved in a film’s production. And, by way of editing, the technology of film allows us to stitch together myriad such perspectives. In a striking metaphor, Benjamin compares the filmmaker to a surgeon whose technology penetrates into the patient that is reality.

What film is able to reveal about reality—the “orchid in the land of technology”—is what Benjamin calls the “unconscious optics” of our everyday lives: “by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action.”

What is it, if not this “immense and unexpected field of action,” that disquiet us about the mention of alcoholism in the Funny or Die video that Mason watches after his stepfather’s violent, alcoholic rage? Or in Mason’s sister singing Britney Spears’s confession, “I’m not that innocent,” as she hits him with a pillow? With the kind of expansion of time that Boyhood performs—pushing the temporal artifice of film to its maximum—we are given the opportunity to “[focus] on hidden details of familiar objects.” But what makes Boyhood so fascinating is that the “familiar object” that the film as a mechanically reproduced art allows us to critically engage with is itself our “mechanically reproducible” culture: popular books (Harry Potter), music (from Coldplay to Vampire Weekend to Arcade Fire), the internet.

Is it ironic, then, that Mason professes a deep skepticism about technology? Toward the end of the film, he heps scorn on those who “live their lives through a screen”—though, of course, it’s through a screen that we see him live his life. Is this really the same kid who played Xbox with religious devotion only an hour earlier? Now he’s afraid the NSA “will scan your digital ghost” and download your personality. Boyhood failed to include the Buzzfeed list in its archive of embarrassing, strange, yet beloved contemporary pastimes, but we don’t have to wonder too hard about what Mason would think of it. It’s in capturing our deep-seated ambivalence toward technology that Linklater realizes the potential for film to “extend our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives.” He compels us to examine a world that quickly passes us by, in a deluge of moments that forcefully “seize us.” Benjamin ends his essay hopefully, with a paean to art’s revolutionary potential: We can make art to understand reality—to “politicize art.” “Every moment is right now,” and the future is always ahead of us: Boyhood helps us understand what we are to make of it all.

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FICTION

My Name is Sandra Perez

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Despite whatever they may write in the New York Times, I’m not an artist. I spend eight hours a day in a tollbooth by the GW Bridge. I work. It’s not right for all of you to keep writing about me as somebody that I’m not. Haven’t I been humiliated enough already? That horrible video has millions of views, and my whole Facebook page is just a replay of the worst moment of my life. On top of all that, my daughter won’t even speak to me anymore. Please, stop. None of this was ever supposed to happen.

It should have been my daughter’s big day. It was the first time one of her paintings was going to be in a gallery, so I took off work that Monday to head out to Brooklyn and be there for her. Since it was my first day off in a while, I’d also scheduled an eye doctor appointment for that morning. I didn’t realize my eyes would still be dilated while I made my way over from the doctor’s office down in Midtown. It was one of the hottest days of the summer, and the light was overwhelming, even through my sunglasses. The sun was reflected in the glass and steel of Manhattan, but over in Brooklyn it still bore down on me, like the sun itself was of the subway, I was already feeling sick. I had to make that trip, I spent well over an hour-and-a-half underground. By the time I got out of the subway, I was feeling so sick that I couldn’t even eat a bite of my tuna sandwich. Not only that, but between the constant delays and the three connections I had to make, I spent well over an hour-and-a-half underground. By the time I got out of the subway, I was already feeling sick.

The 6 was packed and the air was thick and musty. I could practically taste it between bites of my tuna sandwich. It was disgusting to eat in such a hot and crowded car, but I just had no time that day. My face and hands were sweating, and the bread felt a little damp. I was too hungry, stressed, and tired to be really concerned about the quality of the sandwich. Not only that, but between the constant delays and the three connections I had to make, I spent well over an hour-and-a-half underground. By the time I got out of the subway, I was already feeling sick.

The light was no longer as piercing as it was holding a dark amber beer bottle with one of the rolled-up legs. Each person was wearing denim overalls with a velvet teddy bear patch sewn onto one of the rolled-up legs. Each person was wearing denim overalls with a velvet teddy bear patch sewn onto one of the rolled-up legs. Each person was holding a dark amber beer bottle without a label. In my blouse and slacks, I felt overdressed and old. Apparently, I gave off a very specific energy, because The Philadelphian had this to say: “At ease with being ill-at-ease, performance artist Sandra Perez of Inwood Heights charged the atmosphere around her with a sense of otherworldliness, an electricity that hummed from the generative genius inside her, a more natural intelligence than that which any of us can claim. The homely artist asserts that maybe things don’t have to be the way they are.”

Every day it seems, someone sends me a clipping from one of the over twenty publications where someone who is not an artist is writing about me. I’m someone I’m not. When I tell them I won’t be interviewed, they call me “reclusive.” I’m not angry, I’m “passionate.” They say I’m still performing. I swear, I never was.

I felt terrible as I picked my way through the gallery. My stomach was gurgling, my eyes hurt, and an inexplicable anxiety was welling up, cold and needly in my chest. But I had to look around for a while, even though I had no idea what I was looking at. A few of the paintings were just blank canvases. When I felt I’d looked enough, I asked a tall man where I could find my daughter’s painting. He looked down at me for a second with something closer to pity than sympathy before pointing to a doorway. My daughter was supposed to be a featured artist in the gallery, so her painting was on the other side of a brightly-lit hallway that Bookbinder Magazine called a “visual palette-cleansing that Ms. Perez had prepared before her visceral performance piece.” The hallway disoriented me before I got to the featured artists’ room and had to face the painting.

I saw it before I saw her. It stood out because it was me, somehow. It was a painted portrait of a woman seated against a dirt-brown background whose skin was a net of chicken wire. She’d painted the woman to look realistically 3D, like there was space inside the chicken wire, which she filled with things I recognized. My things. There was a thin novelty Yankees baseball bat across her collar, my dark purple cellphone along the flat side of her wrist, my Evil Eye necklace on her forehead, and, worst of all, the vibrator I didn’t know my daughter knew I had down by the navel. The longer I looked, the more things of mine I saw inside the woman. I felt ashamed. I didn’t look away until my daughter suddenly appeared in front of me for a hug and kiss.

After our greeting, she immediately put a distance between us. She kept glancing over my shoulder at other people in the room. Here, she was an artist before she was my daughter. I didn’t feel totally welcomed by her, as if she hadn’t expected me to actually show up. Not only that, she now had to prepare herself for my response to what she did to me. She knew I’d be upset—I could see the quiver of fear in her eyes. I can’t even remember our conversation. I only remember watching her fear turn to anger as she became increasingly defensive of her painting. We got into an argument as a chill spread across my arms and back. Upset, she turned to leave the room. As I watched her walk away, everything in the room became brighter and brighter, her dark figure eventually losing its shape to the whiteness that was filling my vision. Eventually, I couldn’t see anything but white, and I
POETRY

Sayulita

I
My goggles leaked.
Water seeped into the bottom half
of my vision every few seconds,
affording only fragmented glimpses
of ocean shadow vignettes.
I looked briefly into a world below me
and found a fish in a rocky nook.
She—female for her elegance—shone
in the algal murk, perfectly blue.
Her fins weren’t fins, but rather skirts,
billowed, twirling to music I couldn’t hear.
Bits of splintered sunlight wavered
in the puddled water below my eyes.
I raised my head to take a breath.
I wondered what she thought of me:
flailing limbs that almost eclipsed the sun.
When I returned to that shadowed world,
she was gone.

II
My sandals dully slapped dirt roads
that looked like rippled, russet water
in the light cast from homes.
Palm fronds pierced the evening sky.
I passed other sunburnt tourists who sought
massages, margaritas, karaoke.
Through an open door—a photo frame—
I saw a boy, nine years old or so,
sitting on a sandbag, arms around his knees.
His face, tinted green by the game on TV,
showed, in that moment, a tempered joy.
The room next door was roofless, vacant,
and the boy never knew I’d gone by.

III
A newly-hatched turtle faced the ocean,
knowing, even before tasting it,
that this is where she belongs
and this is where she will die.
A red lantern, impatient flame beating inside,
rose into the night, tracing a sea-salt breeze.
The expanding sky reduced the lantern to a star—
a distant sun—before extinguishing the light.

Joely DeSimone
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Elias Baez ’15 is Editor-in-Chief of and Joely DeSimone ’15 is an Associate Editor for The Indicator.
The freshman seminar. For some students, it’s the hallmark of their freshman year, a class that ultimately determines what they choose to major in and pursue as a career. For others, the class is meaningless; the one constraint in an otherwise open curriculum. Regardless of what you did or did not learn in your seminar, I bet you did NOT know that there are thousands of seminars each year that the school rejects. That’s right, THOUSANDS! Here at The Indicator, we have obtained a highly exclusive and secretive copy of that list. We have picked the five best rejected seminars to share with you. We demand that Amherst College offer these to incoming students in the coming years! Terras Irradient!!

The Rejected Seminar Course List:
1. Pessimism
   - In this class, students learn to accept the bleak reality that awaits them. To pass the course, students must embrace the abyss, lose all faith in mankind, and apply to six investment banking firms. At the end of the course, students are informed that they failed the course.

2. Consent Consent Consent
   - In this class, the professor says “consent” for the duration of class. For the final project, students must say the word “consent” one time.

3. Juxtaposing Juxtaposition in Just Positions: How to Create Meaningless Titles That Sound Nice

4. The Art of the Word Count: From “Yes” to “I must answer this question in the affirmative.”
   - Why say something simply, when it’s 1:30 am and I have to fill up this page of The Indicator, and also fill up this page of The Indicator?

5. Amherst Dining: All the Cafeterias You Can Go to at Amherst
   - This is the one class that is actually harder if taken at UMass.
The Report Card

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theatre/Farm collective performs on the Freshman quad</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Still less confusing than our alcohol policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAS elections end</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Senators ready to get back to doing nothing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyhood wows audiences across the nation</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>“That was so unrealistic!” -Benjamin Button</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redskins owner vows to keep controversial logo and name</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>“Shame on them supporting an obviously racist and insensitive mascot!” -Biddy Martin</td>
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<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
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<tr>
<td>Powerhouse earns rave reviews across campus</td>
<td>A+</td>
<td>Hampshire students protest use of Power.</td>
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<tr>
<td>400,000 people participate in NYC climate march</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>I flew in from across the country to march but had to fly right back because I left the stove on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India successfully sends a satellite to orbit around Mars</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>NASA mistakes the Indian satellite for a Native American one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator has funding problems, debuts weeks late</td>
<td>:( We may not be the most timely magazine on campus, but we are the least timely one.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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INDICAPTION CONTEST

Submit a caption to theindicator@amherst.edu
Think about how great it would be if you won!
Biddy’s New JC Complaint Hotline!

1-800-BRKN-SENATE
Please, please do not call