

THE INDICATOR

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Farewell from the Editor

During China's warring states period, Zou Ji was an important minister in the Qi Empire. Taller than most, he had fine, sharp features, and was among the most beautiful men in the kingdom. But Zou Ji worried that Xu Gong, a man from the city of Cheng Bei, was handsomer than he. One day he asked his wife, "Who is more handsome, Xu Gong or I?" His wife said, "Xu Gong? He is not nearly as handsome as you." Still, Zou Ji had his doubts. He turned to his concubine and asked, "Who is more handsome, Xu Gong or I?" And she said, "How could Xu Gong ever be as handsome as you?" As it happened, a visitor came to see Zou Ji the following day. As they sat and talked Zou Ji could not help but ask once more: "Who is more handsome, Xu Gong or I?" and the visitor said, "You are far more handsome than Xu Gong."

The next day, Xu Gong himself came to visit. Zou Ji carefully examined Xu Gong from head to toe, and he could not find a single flaw. Then, Zou Ji looked into the mirror and examined himself. As he compared his own reflection to the man standing before him, he could not help but conclude that, clearly, Xu Gong was the more handsome of the two.

Zou Ji spent that night tossing and turning in bed. The next morning, he visited the king of the Qi Empire. He said, "Sir, Xu Gong is much handsomer than I. But my wife, my concubine, and my visitors say otherwise. My wife says so because she loves me; my concubine because she fears me; and my visitors because they need me." Zou Ji paused.

—
My friend Andrew (let's call him Andrew), calls me on a Friday night. "I just picked up a sandwich in town," he says. "I was wondering if maybe you were around, if I could stop by and eat it with you."

I'm alone in my room and not unhappy about that. But I sense in his voice that he needs to say more, and I'd rather talk than wander through the internet anyway.

He sits in the chair at the desk in my room. I prop up a pillow on my bed and fidget until I'm both comfortable and upright, in the sort of way that indicates I'm listening. He unwraps the Subway paper from his sandwich.

"Want a beer?" I ask.

"No thanks. I've got a lot to do tomorrow, so I shouldn't drink anything." He takes another bite.

"What's on your mind?" I ask.

He chews for a moment. "The other day, I took Professor Sampson out for dinner with a few classmates," he says. "And we were talking and having a nice time, and at some point Professor Sampson asked each of us how we were doing." He pauses. "I

told him I was mostly pretty good, but that I would be perfectly happy if I got one more good email."

"What kind of email?"

"I'm waiting to hear back from a few positions I applied for over the summer, doing research." Andrew's a good candidate for these positions. He works hard and writes well.

"Well that's great," I say.

"Yeah." He thinks for a moment. "I'm not even sure how to say this, because I'm identifying it for the first time as I'm telling it to you. But I'm worried. I'm worried that, since I got to Amherst, I'm becoming the kind of person I need to be, instead of the kind of person I want to be."

I nod. I'm listening carefully—*consciously* listening carefully.

I have a hard time fully focusing when I'm listening and even when I'm speaking. My mind wanders until it stumbles upon the thought that I should be listening more carefully or paying more attention to what I'm saying. So then I consciously do so, which makes me think about how consciously I'm talking and listening, which starts the wandering all over again.

In this moment, I'm tired, so I'm struggling to pull myself out of this loop. I continue thinking for a moment about the kind of attention I'm paying and then remember I should be paying attention. I ask, "What kind of person do you want to be? What's the difference between that and the person you *need* to be?"

He glances at the floor for a moment, chewing slowly. He looks back at me. "The summer after freshman year, I went abroad to teach English," he says. "I really wanted to be doing that, I really wanted to be there. But since then, I don't know. I'm taking care of things that need to be taken care of."

"And you *don't* want to be doing research this summer?"

He looks at me for a moment, then back at the floor.

"What do you *want* to be doing this summer?" I said.

I can almost see him thinking, see his thoughts stretch out, fold back together, crumple and rise. "I guess this is going to sound strange," he says, "but I don't even know how to answer that question."

"How do you mean?" I say.

"I've never really failed at anything. I've always been able to do well. I guess I worry about having an Icarus complex," he says. "Like, when I got to school, people kept saying to do the things I love. But I always felt like I could sort of do anything over my summers, during breaks, with my time, and still just end up exactly in the right place. Like, I could do whatever and



then still end up doing what I loved. I never felt doors could close on me. So, to answer your question, I guess I really don't know what I want to do this summer."

"I see." I'm not really sure what to say. But I don't want to fall into the trap of asking vague questions and getting lost in abstractions. So I try something simple. "Are you happy?"

"I guess moment to moment I am. I'm comfortable. I know how to get the grades I want, I'm in a happy relationship, but I feel like my happiness has a shaky foundation. Like, at any moment, I could lose it. Or that I'm missing something."

"Do you feel as though your relationship might not work in the long run? Or you might not be able to always get the grades you want?"

"No, that's not it. I don't mean a shaky foundation in that sense. Like, the things that are making me happy are reliable. But maybe it's the feeling *itself* that seems shaky."

My tendency to guess takes hold here, and maybe it should, anyway. "Maybe you think about it like this? Maybe, moment to moment, there are things you want to do and places you want to be, and you know that you can keep doing things that way. But maybe, on a higher level, you're not quite sure what projects you find meaningful. In other words, maybe you're happy, but not satisfied. Is that what you're thinking?"

"Maybe." He pauses and I hear the crackling of my heater.

I have a hard time fully waiting. I wait in the sense of not saying or doing. But I can't help but press forward in my thinking, in my own narrative of the conversation the two of us are having. Even as I watch Andrew furrow his brow, I imagine a few responses he might be considering to my question. I let each of them take shape and develop a voice in my head, and I try to anticipate what I might say next depending on his reply. I quickly weave a web of potential conversational threads, and I am now finding connections between this conversation and others I have had. And of course the problem is that when he actually decides what he'll say, I can't stop myself from filtering it through one of the threads of thought I've already created.

I don't think I can wait in the sense of completely stopping; none of us ever really stops thinking. But I suppose a better kind of waiting involves a careful review on what has already been said or done. In other words, I think waiting is about allowing yourself to remain in the past until the other person is ready to take you into the present. I am thinking about whether this makes sense, and Andrew says,

"I think I need a challenge. I think when I felt satisfied, it had to do with a sense of challenge. And right now, I don't have much of that."

And (maybe I am mapping out a dialogue I have structured in my head) I say, "I have a challenge for you." Then I pause, realizing that what I want to say next could easily serve as the inspirational turn of a cheap movie. But it feels entirely right. And I think about how this moment is a good reason why "avoid clichés" is poor advice for writing and living. And then I decide to say it: "Here's my challenge for you: Figure out who it is you want to be."

—
Zou Ji said to the king, "Sir, the Qi Empire controls thousands of miles of territory. And, in an empire so large, can there be a single person who does not love, fear, or need the king?"

"I see," the king said.

The next day, the king issued a proclamation: anyone who had the courage to criticize the king in person would receive the empire's highest honor. Anyone who wrote a letter criticizing the king would receive the empire's next highest honor. And anyone who spoke of the king's faults to others would receive the empire's third highest honor.

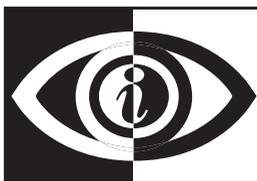
As news of the proclamation spread, people from across the kingdom raced to the emperor's palace. For weeks, the doors were flooded with visitors, waiting their turn to air grievances and discuss the king's past mistakes.

After a few months, the crowds began to thin. Visitors came, but the lines were always shorter. After a year, visitors came rarely. There was almost never a line. And after a few years, visitors stopped coming. There were still many who wanted to win the empire's highest honors, but there were no grievances to air and no complaints to make.

—
Andrew has left for the night and I am awake in bed. I am thinking about how time passes too quickly unless I stop to think about the passing of time. And then I am also thinking about how, when I think about the passing of time, I am undermining the whole reason that time passing quickly is a problem, which is that getting lost in passing time is the sweetest thing I know and there can't be enough of it. I am thinking about how then I should just stop thinking about it, which of course means it's too late since I'm already thinking about it. I am thinking too about how the person I am and the person I need to be and the person I want to be are maybe just different names for the same thing, since I cannot help but become myself. But then I am wondering if this is just the easy way out, thinking in circles until everything evaporates.

My phone buzzes. Andrew has sent me a text: "I won't forget the homework you gave me. I'll get back to you. Though not sure when." As I look back at his text, I realize I am finally having a conversation I should have had with myself a long time ago.

-Ricky Altieri '15



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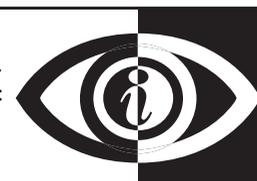


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Impressions

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

On Chloe McKenzie's *Penetrate*

Chloe McKenzie '14 closed out her thesis discussion about rape in the military between students, professors, and several high-ranking officers in the Marine Corps by asking each participant to reflect on what they would remember most about the event. The uniformed woman sitting ramrod-straight next to me immediately raised a hand and offered a definitive answer: she would remember "that thing about castration anxiety." That, she said, would "stick with me." Professor Amelie Hastie, sitting on the couch on the opposite side of the Women and Gender Center, smiled in acknowledgement of the brief introduction she had given of the Freudian concept, a way of explaining, among other things, the relationship between violent behavior and a certain insecurity over masculine identity.

The exchange, though a bit bizarre, was polite and seemingly sincere, but there was a wariness lingering in the room leftover from a tense conversation about hyper-masculine culture moments earlier. When a student asked whether military culture could ever avoid being imbued with misogyny when it, for example, glorifies aggression, the in-uniform Victim's Rights Advocate countered sharply that traits she was labeling "hyper-masculine" were necessary components of combat readiness, and were tied to gender-neutral values like honor and desire to serve one's country. In moments like these, the academic framing of most of the questions clashed noticeably with the fact of our guests' service, and it was difficult to sustain a line of critical questioning about military culture against the strength of the narrative that the military constitutes an exceptional space that civilians cannot understand and probably should not criticize.

McKenzie, however, unapologetically owns the fact that her thesis, titled *Penetrate*, constitutes a radical feminist critique of the military, even and especially while understanding that the relevance of such a critique is in many ways an open question. Feminist thinker-of-violence Catherine MacKinnon appears in her bibliography and was mentioned at least once during the event. Like MacKinnon does in her own writing, McKenzie used her thesis to throw into question the jurisdiction of academic discourse. When

she uses phrases like "hyper-masculinity" and what she calls "extra-legal legality, the point is not that the terms and the arguments they put forward are directly applicable to discussions about the actual functioning of the military. Quite the opposite—the point is precisely that they are out of place, that they are jarring, and that the audacity of their use makes listeners uncomfortable. Writing that hopes to perform activism on any issue cannot take for granted any easy relationship between theory and practice. The question is what role the discomfort generated by the mismatch might serve, a set of questions those of us who attended this event had a chance to consider when the stakes of violence were clear.

Nica Siegel '14

On the NARPs

On this campus, access to social events on weekends is a form of power. Those who host or are invited to mixers, pre-games, and formals have several advantages: the opportunity to make social connections with other students, to encounter a selection of potential sexual/romantic partners, and to document with photo evidence all of the fun they're having. My freshman year, it seemed like the only students wielding this power were athletes. Perhaps my perception was inaccurate; regardless, there has been an upswing lately of groups of all kinds hosting parties or mixers, and trekking to Panda once a semester. This has been an encouraging step towards a more inclusive social scene.

Yet if you accept the premise that meeting an attractive sexual partner is desirable and that the easiest way to do this is at a party, many students are at a disadvantage—especially women. Amherst women who aren't part of an athletic team or an extroverted extracurricular organization, such as an *a cappella* group, don't have the power of choosing with whom they'll socialize on a given night. Nor do they have the option to join a sorority the way men here can join fraternities. Instead, they—let's call them the Untethered Women—are left to hunt for open parties, trusting that their lady outfits and awesome personalities will grant them entrance. As if that weren't already a shitty situation, Amherst women must also compete with women from Mount Holyoke and Smith for the attention of potential romantic partners at Amherst. Until it's normal for a random group of friends to call up the men's lax team and say, "hey, let's all get together tonight for some sexy overlap wink



wink," then the Untethered Women are at the mercy of party-hosting men for social inclusion.

As it turns out, though, there is such a group of friends on campus who have taken the reins of their social calendar by uniting: the NARPs. This acronym stands for Non-Athlete Regular People and has in some cases been used as a slur against non-athletes, but in this case I'm referring to a group, composed of Amherst women of all class years and not united by a common activity, that regularly plans social events. Though some have raised criticisms regarding the group's exclusivity and its alleged standards of beauty and popularity for its members, one could argue that fraternities are equally exclusive. These women understand that there is power in numbers.

I am not a NARP, nor do I wish to join. But, as I see it, the group has formed in reaction to a social scene which, for the Untethered Women, can be dissatisfying at best. By uniting, they've taken control of meeting and interacting with the people, men and women alike, they want to spend time around. And while I'm not an advocate for a more clique-y Amherst, if more non-athletic social groups realized that they too can do things like host mixers, we just might end up with a more integrated and inclusive campus culture.

Liz Mutter '15

Departmental Bonding

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Aligning our social and academic experiences.

First, a question to the reader: if you were to go out to dinner with the people in one of your classes, would the conversation seem perfunctory and shallow, or would it proceed with all the gusto of Sunday brunch at Val with friends? I argue that it can and should be the latter, if we adopt the right attitude towards what it means to take advantage of the liberal arts. That is, we should learn not just for information, but for personal growth, intellectual and emotional.

In Tony Marx's 2003 Convocation address, he all but declared Amherst College to be a Socratic institution. He called on professors to act as gadflies to students and for the college itself to be a gadfly for the world, stinging people to awaken them from their dogmatic paradigms. But before we can sting the world, we must learn to stop stinging ourselves for our perceived deficiencies. In other words, we must come to respect ourselves and know ourselves in the Platonic sense before we can embody the purpose and challenges of the college. Part of knowing the self is certainly learning, both academic and social. At the most basic level this mode of self-recognition can be rendered as who and what you choose to associate with, namely classes, friends, and ideas.

Amherst College provides a rare platform for this type of learning that allows students to begin to know themselves through curiosity. Being able to take what classes we want, if chosen rigorously, can teach us just as much about the subject matter as it can about ourselves. So that when we emerge from our liberal arts education, we are prepared not only to work, but also to come to understand and respect ourselves. Imagine how stifling it would be to be told what classes to take. College would feel very rote and uninspiring, and perhaps we would lose sight of ourselves before we learned anything about the classes, let alone ourselves. This would be the equivalent of chaining a lion to the floor. Yes, we are as curious and ferocious as lions in our quest for radical self-

understanding.

I hope that everyone agrees that these academic freedoms are among the chief virtues of an Amherst education, but is this attitude towards self-realization adopted in other arenas of college life? I would argue that the College does not remain consistent in letting the student body engage themselves. For all the free rein we are given in academics, we are constantly told that we aren't doing enough to bridge social boundaries, we are engendering an incomplete community, and we are creating a "problem" when we erect social divisions. In response to this perceived deficiency, administrators and students alike have dished out idea after idea on how to regiment how we interact. There were the social cups, there were whole campus events, there was and still is the ever-present discourse on the "athlete/non-athlete divide," but what have we achieved?

We are creatures of curiosity, not just in the realm of academics, but also in how we socialize. I sincerely believe that, if left to our own devices, we will seek meaningful relationships with the same fervor as we seek knowledge from our classes. The exact same thing is at stake in each of these searches, self-understanding, the crown jewel of the liberal arts. We are subjects, and if we feel a void in ourselves we will seek to fill it of our own accord, without the culling and prodding of contrived institutions. To do this though, we must be given space to think and reflect on what we must be in our community and in our own minds. Fundamentally, I believe we should be given the same latitude with choosing our social circles as with choosing our classes.

That being said, the one constraint on what classes we do take is the major. I am a geology major and we are known to have a tight-knit community. This community is

based on a shared desire for knowledge of a certain subject as well as the large amount of time spent together either on field trips or on collaborative assignments. In many other classes, I go through the motions and come away with some knowledge, but very few help me to grow emotionally. But my geology classes are different. There is an attitude of collaboration that insists not only on sharing academic experience, but also sharing personal experience. All I can say is we are not friends by any agenda of the department. We are friends by a shared desire and a common goal. This is the way to make friendships. Many of my friends who majored in the sciences say that they feel more emotional attachment to their fellow majors, citing the shared work and time involved in the collaborative sciences. In contrast, other majors that have a lesser focus on collaboration fail to engender this type of community precisely because they lack the media to create relationships that go deeper than the academic.

I am no expert on education, but perhaps the College can achieve the cohesion it seems so hell-bent on attaining through preexisting institutions rather than contrived schemes. The college is first and foremost an academy with robust departments. If given the opportunity for collaboration and coherence, new social circles will form. They will not represent an all-Amherst, perfunctory sort of social relation, but rather smaller, individuated groups within

a larger community, and membership in them is not guaranteed. Membership is conditional on the individual's willingness to open up to those with whom he or she shares an experience. These groups would, to me, represent a further step in the success of the liberal arts, contributing not only to

our learning academically about ourselves, but emotionally as well.

I would encourage everyone to take advantage of collaboration to grow both academically and emotionally, to try to know one's self better. 

Robert Gaffey '15 is an Associate Editor for The Indicator.



When we emerge from our liberal arts education, we are prepared not only to work, but also to come to understand and respect ourselves.

Bubbles within the Bubble

Ethan Corey

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Challenging the notion of community.

Amherst College has an obsession with community. From “community-building” initiatives like social cups and Ask Big Questions to talk of “bridging the athlete/non-athlete divide” and “combating the Amherst Awkward” to a strategic planning committee devoted to diversity and community, Amherst spends a lot of time thinking about how to make its community stronger.

Yet, despite all this talk, there doesn't seem to be a lot of action. Social cups tend to function more like back-up cups for when Val runs short on regular ones than as catalysts for social interaction, and just because we don't like the Amherst Awkward doesn't mean we're going to say “hi” to that annoying kid from class who talks too much and never does the reading. As much as we like to bemoan

thing. The fact that the Magic Card club isn't having mixers with the lacrosse team doesn't seem like a matter of huge public concern.

That's not to say there isn't a problem with the status quo. Clearly, many students are dissatisfied with the lack of community on campus and, according to data on the College's website, it's actually getting worse: since 2010, the average level of satisfaction with the sense of community on campus reported by students has decreased by over fifteen percent. But that doesn't mean that the way to solve the problem is more social cups and serendipitous encounters.

I don't think we even really know what we mean when we say we want more community. Do we want to make a new friend every time we sit down for a meal in Val? Do we want to greet our classmates with enthusiastic high-fives and chipper hellos every time we see them on the way to Keefe? That sounds exhausting. It seems like what we're actually trying to say is that we want more people to be like us, which defeats the purpose of diversity and education.

The real problem seems to be not a lack of community *per se*, but rather a lack of support for different groups within the College. Amherst has made great strides in bringing together students from all backgrounds, but it has a long way to go in terms of making sure all students feel safe and welcome once they're here. Fifty years ago, when most students were privileged white men, fraternities helped knit together the social fabric and provided students with social support and the opportunity to build close, lasting relationships. Today, fraternities are largely a relic of the past, but nothing has taken their place.

Perhaps what we really need is not more

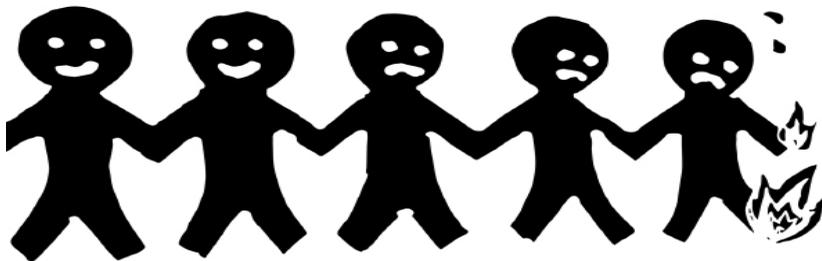
community, but more communities. That is, instead of embracing a fantasy in which everybody is BFFs (Best Friends For Life) with everybody, we should work to strengthen institutions that bring people together around common needs and interests. Affinity groups like the BSU or Pride Alliance, organizations like the Women's and Gender Center or the Multicultural Resource Center,

theme houses like La Casa or the Arts House, and even varsity athletic teams all do this to some extent already. But there's so much room for improvement. Imagine if every dorm were centered on a shared interest or set of interests that changed each year—the Computer Science House or the Comics Floor or the Barbeque Theme House—or if our resource centers had their own buildings and larger staffs. While this might increase segmentation on campus, it would also go a long way towards combatting the feeling of isolation behind our yearning for community.

We can also work to make the College more inclusive. If we want people to feel at home, we have to make them feel included. This means initiatives like creating gender-inclusive restrooms and making buildings more accessible for persons with disabilities, but it also means more events like Farm Fest and City Streets that create opportunities for the whole campus to bond over an interest we all share—filling our stomachs. Additionally, making it easier to start new clubs and organizations would improve students' ability to meet others who share their hobbies and interests.

The need for human connection expressed in our collective desire for community is real. College should be a time for building lasting and meaningful relationships. But that doesn't mean everybody needs to be close with everybody. Intimacy requires making choices about who we spend time with, privileging some relationships over others. If we want to create conditions that foster the kinds of friendships that last a lifetime, we should be working to encourage deep conversations and the pursuit of shared interests rather than random encounters and superficial fun. 

Ethan Corey '15 is a Contributing Writer for The Indicator.



the lack of community on campus, we don't seem too interested in actually changing our behavior. We feel safe inside our bubbles, so why take the risk of venturing out? Perhaps, when we really get down to it, we like the idea of building community more than building community itself.

Besides, community is never an end in itself. Communities come from a sense of commonality—a shared set of interests, desires, beliefs, etc. that bind people together in an organic fashion. At Amherst, however, the only real commonality we all share is the fact that we're all students: we share classes, meals, dorms, and subpar social events, but the similarities often end there. We're a diverse bunch (in every sense of the word) and that's a good

Thesis Writers Should Die

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Exposing the problems with thesis culture at Amherst.

You know as well as I the “cult of the thesis.” Its initiation rite? Talking about the thesis to everyone, all of the time. Facebook statuses are hijacked. Twitter updates are monopolized. In surrealist fashion, the college systematically accommodates these sanctimonious cognoscenti. Professors, in a nod to this insanity, shift deadlines for thesis writers. Club leaders shake their heads ruefully when their seniors cease to participate. The external obligations so assiduously acquired over three years of over-achievement are collectively and simultaneously shirked. Coursework, clubs, and friends are but the most obvious casualties. Sleep, sanity, and self-care are sacrificed too.

Let me let you in on a little secret. “Thesis” is used as a code word for “I don’t want to.” As in: “Will you come to my orchestra concert on Sunday?” And the reply, with head shaking: “Thesis.”

Another example: “Can you get that email to me sometime soon?” And the reply, “Oh, sorry. I’ve been bogged down in thesis.”

Let me let you in on another secret. *They do have time.* Every. Single. Amherst. Student. Has. Time. When your friend says, “I can’t make it, I’m working on my thesis,” what he is really saying is, “I chose not to make time for you.” The senior honors thesis is an institutionalized mechanism for abdicating responsibility. It is an on-demand get-out-of-jail-free card. It is a practicum in becoming exactly the type of professor we least like to see on this campus: one who prioritizes his research over his students.

Don’t get me wrong—not every thesis writer is an asshole. Just most of them. Just the vast overweening majority of self-important eggheads who for six long months entreat others to indulge their self-important navel-gazing. They offer nothing in the form of mutually accessible conversation, instead “chatting” about that which only they can speak: 17th century Philadelphia-area land use laws, or moral-philosophical perspectives on euthanasia upon canines, or radical feminist

criticism of disabled access iconography.

At times like these, I like to quote everyone’s favorite senior administrator, who, in reference to senior honors theses, stated, “It’s an undergraduate thesis, it’s not like it really matters.”

One more quotation. This time, Dan Brown ’86: “What did I write my thesis about...I think it was in the Spanish Department...?” Bingo.

Like every cult, the thesis cult employs rituals to induct new members. Rituals such as the “handing in of the thesis,” the “agony of the thesis defense,” and the prediction, tearfully wrought, of getting no honors at all. Like hooded initiates, thesis writers pretend to be terrified of being judged inadequate. At the same time, they grovel before their thesis readers, desperate for the external validation that a few Latin words will provide.

If it weren’t for the stench of desperation, the thesis writer might actually evoke pity. He wants so badly to belong. If only his surname was ornamented by three small letters to whom all fealty is owed: a big P, a little h, a big D. Perhaps then he might possess ample self-confidence not to engage in the project at all. But alas, the thesis writer plays make-believe. And for six glorious months in the prime of his senior year, he pretends that he too is one of the big kids. Don’t let’s take it away from him. Don’t let’s shatter his dream.

You may argue that I omit the good parts of thesis-writing—deep engagement with an academic issue, perseverance, discovering new knowledge, countenancing uncertainty, blah blah blah—and you know what? You’re right: Maybe there are good things. But to the pedant who disputes the negative effects of thesis writing upon this college, I say:

First, you’re wrong. Open your eyes.

Second, I wrote a thesis. And if there’s

anything I’ve learned at Amherst, it’s that experience-based claims are inviolable. QED: you lose.

And third, *it doesn’t have to be this way.*

We have established a norm at this college where thesis writers are held to no standards of conduct outside the quality of their engagement with their thesis. The cult of the thesis creates the type of student who believes he is obligated only to a word document. Ew.

It is possible to write a thesis while maintaining one’s obligations to one’s friends, clubs, and other classes. It is possible to delve deeply into a topic without inflicting it upon everyone you know. Basic math: Sharing curiosity ≠ inflicting your thesis. How you are doing in

life ≠ how your thesis is going. Life exists outside Philadelphian land use laws. Our professors are often exemplars of the coexistence between academic life and other obligations. Professors being the paragons of the thesis writer’s world, the thesis writer could take note.

This being an *Indicator* article, and also my last, I must of course offer some kind of earnest exhortation to conclude my argument. Here goes:

I believe we should take seriously the rhetoric about self-care that RCs, SHEs, and PAs so doggedly churn out. We owe far more to our friends and our clubs and our other classes than the cult of the thesis would have us allow. The thesis writer lends himself to easy caricature because he forgets that the world around him has claims upon him too.

I would love to say, “You don’t need to write a thesis,” but you, being the type of person who reads *The Indicator*, will surely ignore me and write a thesis anyway. So instead I say:

Write a thesis, but don’t be a thesis-writer. Writing a thesis is an action you take. Thesis-writer is a person you become. There is a difference. Study it. And for Christ’s sake please don’t answer “thesis” to any question ever asked of you. I promise, we all hate you. 

Matt DeButts ’14 is a Contributing Writer for *The Indicator*.



The cult of the thesis creates the type of student who believes he is obligated only to a word document.

(Re)thinking Orientation

Siraj Sindhu

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Designing Orientation 2014.

Picture yourself as a first-year. You've just arrived at Amherst College, and after you find a place to park and figure out where Converse is, you're handed your room key and Orientation schedule. You look down the long list of activities and programs that are scheduled for the next week or so, and several items, printed in bright orange text and labeled "MANDATORY," catch your eye. You read descriptions of panel discussions and lectures on academic integrity and sexual respect, as well as three-day small-group immersion programs. You don't know it yet, but over the course of Orientation, you'll feel the overwhelming time commitments and stress of college already beginning to wash over you. Sound familiar?

The goals of Orientation are pretty obvious and prioritized: to ensure the health and safety of all students, to introduce students to Amherst's academic atmosphere, and to give all new students opportunities to socialize and meet each other, in that order. But my Orientation in the fall of 2013 wasn't received all that well by the incoming class. First-year students were burned out by the hours of panels and lectures they sat through and were dissatisfied with how issues like sexual respect, mental health, and academic support were discussed. Attrition rates spiked at events toward the latter end of Orientation.

This year, though, I was fortunate enough to serve on the Orientation Committee, helping to restructure Orientation from the ground up. We hit some roadblocks along the way, but I'm hopeful that Orientation 2014 will be an improvement over my class's Orientation. Among the many things the Committee worked on, there were four major changes to Orientation: its duration, its new programs, the new policy with regards to athletics, and the Orientation Leader contract.

The Committee started by reviewing the surveys that the Class of 2017 took shortly after Orientation. Here, we ran into our first roadblock: only about half of the class actually filled out a survey, so our decisions were fundamentally underinformed. The surveys we did receive, though, overwhelmingly told us one thing: make Orientation shorter! We were unsurprised. Orientation 2013 stretched for nine days of panels, lectures,

and skits. (If only we knew how blessed we were when we didn't have classes or work.) Shortening Orientation was therefore our top priority.

Naturally, shortening Orientation was also the goal at which the Committee failed the most spectacularly. Orientation 2014 will still be nine days long, for a couple reasons. First, the three-day trips augment Orientation and make it hard to substantially shorten it. Also, there are just so many events to fit in! When you start thinking about what to cut, the value judgments involved become extremely difficult, and so the roadblocks mounted. How could we justify getting rid of the RC Show? or Voices of the Class? It's even harder to add an event to an already packed schedule. But those dissatisfied surveys told us that something had to give, so this year we added a few events and cut a few others:

- Everyone's favorite initiative of the spring is back for Orientation. That's right: Ask Big Questions will be part of Orientation 2014! Current students and staff will facilitate group conversations that revolve around the question, "What do you need to learn?"

- "Faces of the Community" is a new comprehensive diversity awareness event that replaces the beloved Queer Queries. It features students and staff giving testimonies about intersectionality and diversity at the College. While I'm heartbroken to see Queer Queries go, I think Faces of the Community will integrate queer identity with other identifiers, such as those pertaining to race, gender, class, and religious identity.

- After the success of TEDxAmherstCollege, we started thinking about how to apply the TED model in Orientation. This birthed the new Academic TEDx, which will comprise several 15-20 minute talks on academic departments, fields of study, and self-care.

- There will be several new three-day event options alongside CEOT and FOOT. These include Mindfulness and Meditation, Entrepreneurship, Theater, a sustainability program at Book & Plow, and an art program at the Mead.

The Committee thought long and hard about how to get students to sign up for these programs.

We learned that about 15% of students don't sign up for any of the trips and have nothing to do during those three days; many spend their time drinking and partying. We preferred to have all students participate together in these immersive programs, partially because having first-years sit around campus for days at a time with nothing to do is a recipe for social isolation and ACEMS calls. In the end, we simply decided to require first-years to pick one of the three-day events to participate in.

In the past, fall athletes have often been pulled out of "mandatory" events to attend practices, captain's practices, or team meetings. With respect to our third goal for Orientation—to give first-years opportunities to socialize and meet each other—we decided to limit fall athletic practices to the three days during which the immersive programs take place. Fall athletes will now be expected to participate in practice for half of each of these days and to choose a three-day program to participate in for the other half of each day.

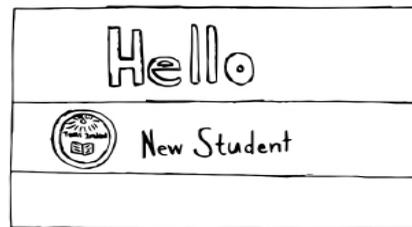
The last issue to hammer out was the Orientation Leader contract, especially with regards to alcohol, since Orientation Leaders endlessly decried last year's "dry orientation" policy. I advocated for a common sense approach. Now that the College has instituted a trusting, liberal party policy, why not extend that same trust to Orientation? For returning students, Orientation isn't fundamentally different from the rest of the academic year—why treat it so gingerly? For Orientation 2014, Orientation Leaders will be expected not to serve alcohol to first-years, but will be allowed to drink while off the job. I'm thrilled that the College has chosen to trust current students to model responsible behavior without contractually obligating complete sobriety.

Despite suffering our fair share of setbacks, I'm confident that we've planned an improved Orientation, one that can make this theme a reality for next year's class. Queer Queries will be missed, Ask Big Questions will be tested at Orientation for the first time, and first-years will still have little unstructured time for nine whole days. That is to say, there's still a lot to be done. But to close, I leave you with Orientation 2014's theme: "When You're Here, You're Home." When it's all said and done, as long as new students feel comfortable and welcome at Amherst, we've succeeded—at least until next year. 

Siraj Sindhu '17 is a Contributing Writer for The Indicator.

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On Fulfillment

Will Savino

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Understanding what it means to be fulfilled.

At the end of every semester I take a late night stroll from my dorm room to the top of Memorial Hill. I bask in the blue light of the never-used emergency beacon and reflect on the semester that was: the successes, the failures, the earnest mistakes, the romances, the missed connections. And at the end of each of the past seven semesters I've arrived at the same conclusion.

"No. That wasn't enough."

Despite my fruitful and active college experience, despite all I've accomplished, I'm not fulfilled. I'm often happy, but never content. You might doubt the sincerity of this realization because most of my end-of-semester Memorial Hill visits are primed with rum and Dr. Pepper, but trust me when I say these are some of my most honest moments of self-reflection.

Before I came to Amherst, before I even knew about Amherst, and certainly well before I knew who Alexander George was, I read a book called *What Would Socrates Say*, a collection of Q&As with philosophers curated by A. George himself. One question that always stuck with me was, "If no one ever loves me during my lifetime—if I don't have a relationship—will I have not lived a good life?" It's a good question. Bleak, but worth considering. However, the question shouldn't be limited to love. I can think of a multitude of experiences that I'd need to have in order to be satisfied with my life. We are constantly surrounded by people enjoying and appreciating the various facets of their lives. Everyone else has hobbies, friends, and memories that make their lives indisputably richer. If I fail to experience those same delights, isn't my life objectively lacking?

Everyone is gifted and privileged in one capacity or another. Everyone has had moments that make his or her life meaningful. I

certainly have. But there are so many meaningful things I've failed to achieve, things that I will most likely never do, and things that I just cannot have. I will never be a collegiate athlete. I will never be AAS President. There are people I love who will never feel the same for me. I

At the end of each of the past seven semesters I've arrived at the same conclusion: "No. That wasn't enough."

am surrounded by reminders that no matter how hard I try, I cannot have all that I want.

But fuck, that's obviously not the problem. It's true that no matter how hard I work I can't have everything, but it's not like I'm working so hard that I feel like I *deserve* everything. Rather, the reason I'm not content is that I'm upset with myself. I can't blame the cruel world for a missed opportunity because a missed opportunity is simply an opportunity that I have missed. All of the women I never asked out, all of the studying I neglected, all of the fun I could have been having. Maybe there is a threshold of satiation, but I haven't even come close to reaching that point. I have not lived my life to the fullest and I only have myself to blame.

But doing it all is clearly an impossible goal. Who can truly say he's lived his life to the fullest? I may not have won a prestigious international fellowship or found true love yet, but I have accomplished so much for which I am proud. I'm not going to list my successes in *The Indicator* (that's a bit self-indulgent even for me), but I'm also not going to let my shortcomings spoil my triumphs.

It's hard at Amherst. I'm blinded by those who have succeeded where I have failed: people whose studies have taken them all over the world, people who have already found the person with whom they might spend the rest of their lives, and George Tepe. It's not jealousy that brings me down, but reminders of what I could have done or could have had—living ex-

amples of the gap between the Will Savino that I am and the Will Savino that I want to be. How am I supposed to "bring light to the world" if I'm not even content with the light in my own fucking life? Amherst has a culture of winning. It's not okay to just be okay. We're told that if you don't bring home the gold, you get the shame of knowing that someone else did. Here at

Amherst, we believe that it's not okay to stop until we're the best.

There's a reason why Amherst never puts our failures on the front page. "Amherst junior drinks milk out of the gallon while browsing reddit and regretting every word he said to his crush." "Amherst freshman pretends that dancing with his friends in the socials is fun, but really just doesn't get it." "Amherst senior gets turned down for every consulting job he applied for and reconsiders his entire economics major." No, we only see our peers' highlight reels.

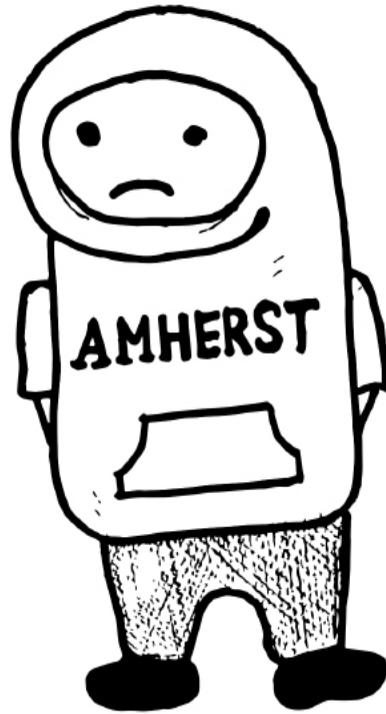
I'm not leaving Amherst next year. I'm graduating, but I took a job working in the Admissions Department. I'm thrilled about the job, and I think

it's a great stepping stone for my career, but I worry that a part of me took it because it gives me one last chance to obtain the *full* Amherst experience. But what would that possibly look like, and how would I possibly know? In truth, there is no definitive Amherst experience. Amherst means something different for everyone. The most we can hope to do is decide what we personally find meaningful and use our time here accordingly.

Right before I graduate, I'll make my final trek to Memorial Hill as an Amherst student. I'll look out on the Holyoke Range and reflect upon eight semesters worth of college life. I might say "not enough" for an eighth time. I might be relieved I get one more year in this town and a final chance to do a few of the things I missed out on as a student. But something tells me this semester will be different. Something tells me I'll look out and say something else.

"Yeah. That was plenty." 

Will Savino '14 is a Contributing Editor for The Indicator.



“Socially Liberal”

Ben Grimes

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“Fiscal conservatives” still vote Republican.

“I’m fiscally conservative, but socially liberal,” is a fairly common refrain among Amherst students. “I’m completely socially liberal. Socially liberal all the way,” they might add, just in case you didn’t catch it the first time. “Socially liberal” always seems to be an important qualifier; without it you might get the wrong idea.

While in some situations this distinction may be important to make, I have come to resent its casual invocation for a number of reasons. Primarily, it troubles me that almost every time someone identifies in this manner, he or she is a conservative with liberal social views, never a liberal with conservative fiscal views. I have yet to meet someone at Amherst who is “fiscally conservative” and votes as a Democrat. So, after repeated exposure to this phenomenon, I have begun to hear “socially liberal” as some sort of excuse for being a Republican, rather than an earnest commitment to liberal social causes. It usually means something along the lines of: “I’m a Republican, but I’m alright with gay people.” Or, “I’m a Republican, but I should still be able to smoke weed.” But most often, “socially liberal” is essentially saying, “I’m a Republican, but I’m still a good person.”

The impulse to identify in this manner may be born out of a political climate at Amherst that is unreceptive to conservatives. Our fairly liberal student body could end up pressuring conservatives into making concessions or qualifications, such as “socially liberal,” to their views. And I’ve found that students here are often eager to accept liberal social views as common ground; it’s a nice way to feel optimistic about progress. However, by accepting this ideological commonality without further examination, we run a dangerous risk. This distinction between fiscal and social politics creates a number of problems—beyond the simple truth that these self-proclaimed socially liberal thinkers are not voting in ways that advance liberal social causes. When people passively support or co-opt liberal ideology in a self-serving manner, using it to shape their own appearance without following through as a political actor, they depoliticize, oversimplify, and stifle dialogue around important issues. We should not be so quick to assume that shared liberal social views mean we are working towards the same solutions.

Social and fiscal politics are often separated

because of a tendency to believe that social politics transcend party affiliations. Many view gun control, sexual rights, gender equality, and racial equality as issues of basic human rights, and therefore consider them as separate from partisan politics. It is not readily apparent why issues revolving around simple morals should have to go hand-in-hand with opinions on the size of government. But, despite appearances, viewing social issues in this manner is problematic because these issues, in reality, are not isolated from the complex political landscape we navigate as democratic actors. Social issues are deeply embedded in a political and economic system, both in the ways that policy is constructed at the top and in the ways that it plays out at the bottom.

Falsely segregating issues into social and economic realms limits our ability to address them in a meaningful way. It separates various aspects of the same problem into different discussions, making solutions seem simpler than they are. When



we address gun violence, it is not adequate to say that because everyone deserves to be safe, we should remove guns from areas with high crime rates. Gun control is not an answer by itself. To actually tackle this issue and address the causes rather than the symptoms, one has to look at the roots of violence. Poverty, racial marginalization, prejudice in the justice system, the shortcomings of our welfare system, and our broken education system are just some of the things that are deeply connected to the issue of gun control. Neglecting these important components, even though some may be considered “fiscal politics,” drastically underserves this issue and impedes progress. The same is true for many other issues we label as “social politics”—they do not function independently of the greater political body and accordingly, they cannot be addressed independently.

At Amherst, where half the students come from incredible privilege and many others are

on the brink of attaining new levels of privilege, it is easy to forget the circumstances that have made it possible for us to inhabit these positions. It is not merely abstract meritocratic ideals that have brought us here; it is an all-encompassing political and economic system, structuring our experiences and opportunities, that gave this particular student body the ability to reach this place. We cannot afford to solely consider politics in the world of ideals; politics is about realities. Identifying as “socially liberal” doesn’t absolve us of the responsibility to make sacrifices in order to bring our own opportunities to the less privileged. Let’s not pretend that by saying, “I support gay marriage, I am not a racist, and I support gender equality,” we are doing enough to create change. At the end of the day, if you identify with any real social justice ideal you are going to need to support economic policy that will further it.

Furthermore, when we divide ourselves between two competing forces, inertly supporting progressive efforts without acting in a manner that aids them, we imply that these causes are not worthy of political action. Continuing to vote for conservatives and turning a blind eye to their social views sacrifices our ability to make politicians acknowledge these issues. A half-hearted (or decidedly less than half) commitment to social justice strips these causes of their ability to be effective mobilizing points, erasing their influence and depoliticizing them entirely. In the lexicon of American politics, there is no substantial representation for fiscal conservatism and social liberalism. Politicians overwhelmingly vote with their party, even politicians like John McCain or Rand Paul who may appear to have more liberal elements. With this in mind, a conscious consideration of how we exercise democracy must be made. To shift public opinion and create progress, we must signal that social issues are important enough to inform our political actions. Otherwise, we allow concerns about social justice to continue to be marginalized by the party system.

Liberal social policy cannot be the nice little side salad that you use to convince yourself that your burger and fries are a healthy meal. It is an ideology of vital importance to the health and well-being of people across the country. Evoking liberal social views in a non-committal manner undercuts all of these people. It’s damaging to the cause. And it’s irresponsible. 

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Interloping at Hampshire

Elias Baez

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A trip to an alternative spring concert.

It was 10:09 when we learned that the bus to Hampshire was leaving at 10:15. We'd been sitting in my room, eating my friend Sam's birthday cake while talking about what we thought it meant when someone is considered "crazy." It was Sam, Maria, and I. The cake was perfect: it had a smooth, fudgy chocolate coat and an absurdly soft chocolate body, with layers of something like a light raspberry cream running throughout. It was the Platonic ideal of chocolate cake.

So we boxed it up and ran to Lipton so Sam could store it in his room before we caught the bus. The air had that fuzzy, vaguely misty quality that shrouds everything after it rains, and it wasn't cold for the first time in a very long time. Golden streetlamp light was pooling in the wet pavement and along the currents of rainwater rippling beside the sidewalk. Running with a boxed cake was really troubling—I couldn't stop imagining the cake tumbling inside the box, smearing against the walls and generally coming apart. We managed to deposit it safely and catch the bus as it pulled up, though. It was full, so we stood in a row by the front.

A crowded bus heading to Hampshire is an interesting place. The PVTAs have this strange party bus atmosphere at night, suffused with hazy red and blue neon lighting and the expectant energy of densely-packed young substance users going off into the night. One guy was sitting directly beneath a white light in the far back, breaching the colorful glow. He was perfectly aligned with the aisle, with his hands clasped between his knees and his back straight as a ruler. I thought he must have felt awkward about his strangely-central positioning, but then I figured he probably didn't notice or care.

Seated a few feet from me was a 20-something guy with long, strawy hair, droopy eyes, and a black velvet eyepatch functioning as a headband. Tucked be-

neath his arm was a girl with thick and wavy hair, a comfortably overlarge sweater, and sharp eyes. The guy was proudly divulging a slew of intense substance experiences he'd had.

"I took 23 shots once and didn't black out. I stood in the middle of my hallway, completely fucked up, but I knew exactly where I was. I remember everything. I told everybody that I was *invincible*."

She gradually dislodged from him as he spoke, moving closer to the window. At one point, her friend (I assume—they kept making meaningful eye contact throughout his stories) remarked that he could literally die from what he was doing. He replied that he knew that he could die, and his tone sharpened and elevated defensively. He suddenly broke from his carefree front and declared his self-awareness, mythologizing himself through his darkness and his voluntary proximity to his own death. By the end of the bus ride, the girl beside him had moved back under his arm. I couldn't tell if it was because she was attracted to that idea of him or if he'd nudged her to move back beneath him.

Across from me, a girl with bright blue eyes and dark brown hair was traveling with a few of her friends. They were quietly discussing the guy and his stories, but she kept breaking

from them to look up at me. She'd turn her head and glance up and make eye contact with me, not smiling, but with intensity, perceptivity, and some layer of privacy. I have no idea who she was, but she had soft features and an apparent intelligence. She occupied the world of her friends' conversation, but she was seated in her gaze.

The bus deposited us. Hampshire looks like a campground somebody half-developed

The campus can be creepy in that sense, especially at night, but it's also pretty close to the atmosphere of a dream.

into a college campus. The buildings are large but unimposing, and spaced very far apart. Between them are dark trees and open expanses of grass, with unhelpful streetlamps that somehow only light the area immediately beneath them. It can be creepy in that sense, especially at night, but it's also pretty close to the atmosphere of a dream. The air is textured with something different. We found the concert beneath a tent that must have been purchased from the same company that Amherst uses.

The concert was awesome. Well, the opener was. They were called The Skins. Their music was grungy and aggressive. The lead singer had a powerful voice that matched the intensity of the grimy guitars and bass. It sounded stretched and



full at the same time. The ground was uncovered and wet. Beside us was a huge swampy mud puddle that was mostly cordoned off by people caring for their shoes, but one guy stomped and splashed in it for a while during the intermission. Looking up, the tent screened a projection of two pixilated characters from *The Regular Show* dancing and bobbing their heads. A bubble machine affixed to the central pole was dribbling out little pockets of soap and light. The pastel pink and blue lighting filled the space, punctuated by a strobe light aimed at the crowd.

When I was younger, one of my favorite book series was about a girl named Cam. I think she was a child detective or something, but the conceit of the series was that she had an eidetic memory. She narrated her experience of that by simply saying “click” when she saw something she’d want to remember. The shutter was a blink. At a concert like this, when the music is intense and the moshpit is swelling, the strobe light acts like a camera flash. The film reel of seeing is chopped into its frames. That’s what’s best about these concerts. People engage with the aggressive parts of themselves with a smile, knocking into each other but clearing a space when anyone falls down. A guy was crowdsurfing. The lighting and the chaos make every image seem louder, and it’s an immensely present mode of being. Most concerts are like that, but I really dig when people acknowledge and enact their darker sides. That’s lacking at Amherst. It would be too unreserved—too contrary to Amherst’s conception of itself. It’s built into our motto: “Let them give light to the world.” There’s no room for darkness there.

The actual act wasn’t as great. It was Zion I, who is apparently a huge deal, but Sam knew him better than I did and he didn’t like the performance. Maria found some friends, so Sam and I wandered off to hang out with a guy Sam knew from a philosophy class. On the way, we listened to Zion I from his iPod. He sounded a lot better there.

We met Andreas and Milo in a Hampshire dorm named Merrill. We hung out in Milo’s room. A purple, patterned tapestry bound his closet, and the walls were covered with posters. One was of Alice talking to the Caterpillar, and it said “free your mind” or something weed-y like that. There was a Ralph Steadman print from *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and a copy of Hieronymus Bosch’s *Garden of Earthly Delights*. I liked the idea of Milo as he represented himself through his posters, so while Sam and Andreas started talking about philosophy, I started trying to make conversation with the guy.

He had black tortoise-shell glasses, a neat

haircut, over-expressive eyes, and generally dark features. As we talked, his floormates wandered into and out of the room. One of them was turning 21 that night, and everybody was recording their “Happy Birthday” for him. I could hear the loud playback from down the hall while we were talking. It was a pretty cool idea, and everybody involved was very evidently joyful about it all. Despite the fact that no one seemed to like the dorm, there was a warm, connected note to everybody’s interactions with one another. It was an easy community.

At one point, one of them came to the door

Milo never failed to mention that Sam and I were from Amherst. It was alienating and annoying.

and said hello. Milo introduced Sam and me, and then another person appeared, and Milo introduced us to him as well. This happened over and over again until the door was full of faces to whom Sam and I had been individually introduced. It was funny, but it exposed a weird dissonance to everything: Milo never failed to mention that Sam and I were from Amherst. It was alienating and annoying. To many of them, he didn’t even say our names, but included that we had come from Amherst. When he said it, the name seemed loaded with connotations: wealth, privilege, elitism—“otherness,” basically. It was hard having a conversation with someone when he was evidently imagining an idea of me that I did not like. I laughed about it, but there was a huge distance unnecessarily built into the experience. We were less guests than interlopers. It was obnoxious, but Amherst students do precisely the same thing, so I mostly forgave it.

A very pretty girl entered in a black dress with white polka dots. Her name was Izzy, and Milo introduced me as Amherst Kid. I asked what her concentration was (Hampshire uses the term “concentration” in place of “major”) and she said film. As she responded, she leaned over slightly and she and Milo grasped each other’s hands. They looked at each other and talked about their nights for a second. They mentioned a bunch of mutual friends. It was actually really nice. To get a better sense of her and her interests and to maybe connect over some movies, I asked what kinds of films she liked. It was a vague question because I wanted a general answer.

She and Milo immediately turned and laughed with each other at the question, and Milo told me how vague it was. She said she’d watch whatever. Izzy then brought up her film class at Amherst, so I asked who the professor was. She withdrew and remarked on how uncomfortable she was with the term “professor.” I got bored of them and began waiting to leave.

The dynamic between Hampshire and

Amherst is such that both schools compose their identities partially as diametrical opposites of one another. Neither school is very self-aware as a whole, but I guess most communities aren’t. At Amherst, it’s absurd that Hampshire students like to walk around barefoot. Stories of exotic sights from Hampshire are common. From the Amherst perspective, they take artsiness to an uncomfortable extreme. In judging them this way, one doesn’t question what about a person makes them behave in different ways. In laughing and shrugging it all off, there’s no attempt to understand a different perspective. It’s a casual close-mindedness.

At Hampshire, Amherst is just super pretentious and self-involved. There’s an artificiality invoked when one talks about Amherst there, as if

sincerity cannot exist on a foundation of privilege. This ignores the important fact that Amherst averages \$47,000 in financial aid awards while Hampshire clocks in at \$35,000 (figures taken from the websites of both schools). At about the same total cost, those \$12,000 dollars make all the difference. I could never afford to go to Hampshire. To dismiss the Amherst experience as unreal, superficial, and mostly empty due to our student body and our resources ignores Amherst’s commitment to aid. This is a shallow redefinition of Amherst according to Hampshire values, and it’s as pointless as what we do to Hampshire.

At one point between the concert and this kid’s room, I had to pee. I went down to the bathroom in the Hampshire campus center, and the doors were simply labeled as “Bathroom With Urinals” and “Bathroom Without Urinals,” along with a brief description of why gender-neutral bathrooms are important. This is a beautiful thing, and it’s casually built into the Hampshire experience at an institutional level. That’s one of my favorite things about Hampshire. There’s an easy regard for social issues, quite unlike Amherst. By the urinal, however, someone had scrawled “Abolish Private Property” in blue pen on the divider. It was strikingly empty of meaning. The person who wrote that probably felt very strongly, but the move lacked context, self-awareness, or any sort of thrust. It reminded me of the first floor men’s bathroom of Frost, which is a real hotbed of debate. The worlds behind every image are more complicated than we ever regard. We compose abstractions of ourselves and of others that are simple, smoothed-out, and easily handled. It’s easier to deal with ideas than actualities. The nature of Hampshire and the nature of Amherst are both much more complex than any person could fully grasp. What’s important, then, is only that you try. 

Elias Baez ’15 is a Junior Editor-in-Chief for The Indicator.

Sports, Cynicism, and Naïveté

Dan Adler

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How I navigated the divide.

There's a cliché out there, a prevailing narrative of how the college story arc tends to work, that puts naïveté at the beginning and cynicism at the end. This narrative gives shows like *Girls* some of their force: We're used to the vision of the recent college graduate as jaded and world-weary. It also gives the term "SWUG" ("Senior Washed Up Girl," if you hadn't heard) its currency.

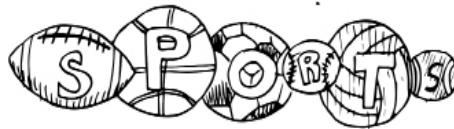
In the twilight of these college days, I'm beginning to feel like my arc worked in the opposite way. By this, I mean that I'm somewhat more at peace with the massiveness of varsity athletics' presence on campus. Then again, I realize, how could I not be? For better or for worse, some of my most vivid memories of freshman year take place late at night in the common room of South, which is not where I lived but was where other people who liked complaining about varsity sports lived. You see, if you looked closely enough, you could tell that the social or romantic failure *du jour* was not about us, but about the social structure of campus.

If I may give myself some credit, though, I did end up formulating an actual argument about the matter. I don't think we should eliminate varsity athletics, but I think we should have less of it. My basic premise is that varsity teams' presence is too out-sized when they can create a mostly self-contained social world. The back room of Val and the socials are only two examples, but they are important ones. Yes, non-varsity athletes occupy these spaces (it's not lost on me that I'm writing this at my desk in Pond), but they are—here it comes—the exceptions that prove the rule. Hence the apparent necessity of a term like "Non-Athletic Regular Person" and hence the fact that, according to the most recent Student Housing Patterns report, Stone (~85% varsity athletes), Crossett (a little over 70%), and Pond (a little under 70%) constitute three of the five most sports-centric dorms on campus.

There are of course benefits to having varsity teams on campus, and that's why I'm advocating for reducing their presence rather than eliminating it. I don't doubt, for instance, that having teams to root for is good for campus community, or that sports are a worthy investment of students' time in the first place. But I also don't doubt that we could achieve these benefits even with a vastly downsized athletic culture. Not every team is a team that attracts a fan base; we could have fewer teams. Our teams also don't need to be as good as they are; I don't know anyone whose attendance record at football or men's basketball games turns decisively

on those teams' sterling performances of late. I'm suggesting that we could reduce the number of athletes who receive a significant admissions boost via recruiting, and that we could supplement that policy shift with a recommitment to junior varsity teams and the encouragement of athletic participation by non-recruited walk-ons (believe it or not, this is something that actually used to happen at Amherst and our peer institutions).

I think there would even be benefits for athletes themselves, who are demonized more often than any other group on campus. (I hope it's clear that I mean to demonize athletic policies rather than athletes. In particular, I feel compelled to trot out that nasty defense, "some of my best friends are athletes!" Not least because they really are.) Should athletics occupy a smaller place in the College's culture, it'd be tougher to so sweepingly condemn the athletes. Similarly, the famed athlete/non-athlete division for which athletes are more often criticized (unfairly, I think—it's a two-way street) would be less of a problem if there weren't such a visible mass to be divided from.



I've been writing in the present tense because although this was the argument I cooked up freshman year, it's mostly the argument I stand by now. The problem then, though, was that the bitterness and the argument were entirely wrapped up together. And I still do get, "you really like making fun of this sports thing, huh?" sometimes. But more often, I get, "you must not even notice the divide." That might be because my room group finally moved into the socials, or it might be because someone out there is tracking my movements enough to see that this year, I've been systematically alternating my meals between the front room and the back room. I guess there's truth to both accusations. Because my and my friends' social failures are now, thanks to the wisdom acquired by four years of this game, marginally less frequent. I've started to feel less bitter about Amherst's social structures. It turned out that living in the socials was exactly the anticlimax it should've been. I'm surrounded on all sides by varsity athletes, but the main difference from previous years is just that instead of my room group joking around about a dumb party theme, we can actually follow through on it.

I've also become more naïve about the role of athletics because I've become more cynical about cynicism. The Amherst world is a strange one, but it's the one we live in, so my impulse has more and

more been to try to come to terms with it (clearly, I'd be a terrible activist). Nonetheless, there's still something eminently laughable about the emphasis Amherst—particularly Amherst social life—lays on sports. I can't think of a way that it wouldn't be hilarious to me that there is a varsity sports room in Val. I can't think of a reason why it's not funny to call that room "The Arena." I can't wrap my head around how the average description of a night out in the socials goes, "baseball...lacrosse...hockey." (Those describe social destinations, mind you, not athletic activities.) "Forget heroin," Edward St Aubyn writes in his novel *At Last*. "Just try giving up irony."

It's massively difficult, in other words, to approach these social divisions without feeling frustrated that they exist in the first place. For me, at least. The thing about this being my last *Indicator* article (and the thing about going to such a small college) is that you, faithful reader, likely already know something about me and how I talk about and navigate Amherst social dynamics. And it's possible that you think I haven't done a very good job at it. So I won't try to pass judgment on the moral worth of my own actions; I'll leave it to you. But I will say that it doesn't mean you can't do a better job.

So I'll also say that there's something particularly American about the problem I've been discussing: "In no other country in the world is athletics so embedded within the institutional structure of higher education as in the United States," write William Bowen and Sarah Levin in *Reclaiming the Game*. One more literary quotation, then, if you'll indulge me: One of David Foster Wallace's fundamental literary impulses—he explicitly invokes it no fewer than three times in his novels and essays—was to explode "that queerly persistent American myth that cynicism and naïveté are mutually exclusive." "American as apple pie" might well be replaced as "American as college athletics and college cynicism."

It's naïve not to be critical of the role of athletics on campus. But it's equally naïve to be totally cynical about it. After all, the policy changes I suggested earlier have little chance of actually occurring in the foreseeable future. But maybe there's an opportunity born from that reality. It's conceivable that you might not even care about the athlete/non-athlete divide, especially if you're a senior. You might simply not feel the need to interact with more athletes, or with more non-athletes. But we're here regardless, and if there's one thing college is good for, it's learning to understand others' lived experience. As cynical as I feel about varsity athletics, it's hard to feel bitter about that. 

Dan Adler '14 is an Associate Editor for *The Indicator*.

The Opposite of Loneliness

Marina Keegan
Scribner 2014

A REVIEW BY

Laurence Pevsner
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For almost two years, I have been haunted by a girl I've never met. I see her often when I'm reading or writing, looking at me with her auburn-brown hair and rounded, smiling face. She looks striking but soft, like the kind of person whose presence you feel when she enters a room. She wears her distinctive yellow pea coat, with big black buttons and a white Yale sweatshirt underneath. Her hands are snugly concealed by the sweatshirt, her long legs only covered by a short floral skirt. But when you look at her the thing you notice the most is her eyes. They are neither piercing nor sharp. Instead they are warm and open, slightly obscured by her bangs, fully taking you in. It's Marina Keegan's eyes that draw me in when I gaze at the cover of *The Opposite of Loneliness*.

Marina's story is simultaneously tragic and beautiful. She had just graduated from Yale *magna cum laude*, with numerous short stories, plays, essays, and friends to her name. She was a rising star, with a job lined up at *The New Yorker* and two plays slated to be performed in the city. And then, a few days after her graduation in 2012, she was killed in a car crash. She was twenty-two.

I became obsessed with Marina's work after her death. Articles she wrote for the *Yale Daily News*, poems she performed recorded on YouTube, a short story published posthumously on *The New Yorker's* website. Her work spoke to me, and she started to become a part of my life. I shared "Cold Pastoral" with ten different people, "Even Artichokes Have Doubts" with at least twenty. She found her way into every article I wrote for *The Indicator* thereafter and into many of my most meaningful late night conversations. I couldn't stop returning to her pieces. Reading her felt like listening to a friend, a very bright friend, one whose phrasing I admired, whose observations stuck with me and popped into my head just when I thought I'd forgotten them. Marina wrote about the American college experience better than anyone else I'd known before or since.



I had all of this in mind when I tore the cardboard Amazon packaging off and cracked open a collection of her short stories and essays two weeks ago. But I shouldn't have. *The Opposite of Loneliness* shouldn't be read because its author died in a tragic car crash, or because she was going to work for *The New Yorker*, or because her plays were put on in New York, or because her bright-yellow pea coat and warm gray eyes draw you in. Marina's work deserves to be read because it is really, really, really good.

The book has a surprising amount of material. Packed with nine short stories and eight non-fiction pieces, a detailed and moving introduction from her professor Anne Fadiman, and, of course, the eponymous essay, I was worried that there would be a dip in quality as her parents and supporters dug back further into her teenage years to find enough material to publish. And it's true, the book could use a little editing, which comes as no surprise since the stories were perhaps not meant to be published. But it turns out her work has remarkable consistency. Her voice is natural and her writing smooth. She doesn't fool around too much with form (although one story, "The Emerald City," is told entirely through email). Rather, Marina's strength is in her ability to create relatable and potent situations through thick and fresh characters, with narrators that are at once intimate and bold.

While Marina's settings and subjects are diverse, (one story brings us inside a submarine stuck at the depths of the ocean, while another centers around an elderly woman who strips naked when she reads to a young blind man), her fiction is at its best when she gives voice to people our age. "Cold Pastoral," for example, wonders what it would be like if the guy you were hooking up with suddenly died. The narrator finds the former hookup's personal diary, which releases a world of honesty that spills out and explodes the rest of the story. Another piece deals with a college-aged daughter whose new relationship is happier than her mother's. The story somehow manages to avoid the pitfalls of cliché and sentimentality, while providing little observations that can send

you spinning: "I rolled down my window and felt a flood of cold air on my face," the narrator says. "My dog let out a small howl, twigs cracked in the woods, and something about the stillness or my state of mind reminded me of the world's remarkable capacity to carry on in every place at once." And in my favorite story, "The Ingénue," an envious girlfriend thinks through her relationship troubles on a trip to visit her boyfriend in Cape Cod. There's a moment in the story—and I refuse to spoil it beyond that—that is so real, and so simple, and so ingenious, that you can't help but be a bit jealous of Marina's talent.

As if aware of those thoughts, Marina tackles her own jealousy in one of her non-fiction pieces, "Song for the Special." By the way, the breadth and depth of her non-fiction does not disappoint. "Save the Whales" is one of the most thoughtful essays I've read (and it's not about what you think), and "I Kill for Money," which picks apart the psyche of an insect exterminator, reveals a fascinating portrait of a sad man. Marina also manages to write about the storied history of her car, what it's like to have Celiac's disease and a mother who cares too much about it, what will happen when the sun blows up, and her thoughts on finance and consulting recruitment. Each essay is a pleasure.

But it was that final piece of the book, "Song for the Special," that brought me to tears. "Vaguely, quietly, we know we'll be famous," she says at one point. Marina Keegan is famous now. Perhaps you think that's because she's dead. And you might be right. But she deserved to be famous anyway. She deserves—no, needs—to be read by twenty-two year olds across the country. Her book should be read by all of us who, as she would say, still stumble home to our computers—tired, partner-less, awake.

Reading *The Opposite of Loneliness* is a crazy experience. It can make you feel happy, and confused, upset and delighted. Some pieces make you laugh, others send sad shivers up your spine. But the one experience that ties these short stories and thoughtful essays together is that throughout you never, ever feel lonely. You feel exactly the opposite. 

Laurence Pevsner '14 is a Senior Editor for *The Indicator*.

FICTION

Lessons Learned From My First Bike Ride

By Griffin Harris
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The following is a college application essay in response to the prompt: "Our university is a patchwork of unique, creative, and inspired individuals. Discuss an important experience you have had and explain what you will bring to our university because of it."

It was a quintessential fall day. The trees were bright with fiery leaves, the wind was cool and crisp, and the sun, meek but stubborn, cast a subtle warmth upon the land. All was silent but the birds and the occasional clanking of hammers coming from the workmen at my neighbor's house. My father's hands gripped my shoulders firmly, helping to stabilize me. I was still, however, quite wobbly and awkward on my newly de-training-wheeled bicycle. I stared down the length of the driveway as a gust of wind sent a cascade of leaves showering from the heavens. My breaths became rapid and short. This was it.

By the time I was eight, most of my friends had already learned how to ride their bikes. Whenever bicycles were brought up in conversation, I would, embarrassed, become quiet, thinking that, as long as I was silent, it could not be revealed that I had yet to master this seemingly mature skill. After hounding my father for weeks (or at least what seemed like weeks), I had finally gotten him to remove my training wheels and let me practice riding without them. The simple thought of riding freely, unencumbered by those childish side wheels, made me grow confident. I was confident, anyway, until those frozen moments before takeoff.

As my father began pushing me down our long driveway, my wobbling became emphasized. Almost falling over a couple times, I was miraculously able to stay up, much in thanks to his now very tight grip on my shoulders. Then, suddenly, everything clicked. I found my balance and

My breaths became rapid and short. This was it.

centered myself. My father's grip loosened. Lighter, lighter, nothing. I had done it. I was now riding my bicycle; I was a man (or as much of a man as one can be at eight years old). Unaided by extra wheels and parental figures, confidence filled my being. I began moving faster, now rolling smoothly, towards the end of the driveway.



Craning my neck, I looked backwards for the smile that would surely be beaming across my father's face. Yet I did not see what I expected; there was a look of great dismay upon my father's face, and urgent words seemed primed to explode from his mouth. Quickly looking forward, to see what the

matter was, I was met only with a faint and curious reflection of myself. For less than a split second, I was utterly confused. Then, as my gaze widened, the totality of the scene unfolded before me. Two jump-suited workers, only moments ago hidden behind the bushes at our driveway's end, were carrying a huge piece of plate glass, raised vertically, towards my neighbor's house, and I, now speeding down the driveway on my bike, was lined up perfectly perpendicular to the center of it. The two workers had no time to react, and I

Quickly looking forward, to see what the matter was, I was met only with a faint and curious reflection of myself.

had yet to learn how to steer or brake. Ducking my head down, I barreled into the gigantic piece of glass, helmet first, shattering it into thousands of pieces with a deafening crack. I was thrown clean off my bike and tumbled into the street, my helmet smacking against the ground several

times amongst the glittering shards.

I woke up in a hospital sixteen hours later, having been knocked totally unconscious. I had cuts on my legs, forearms, and shoulders that required 64 stitches in all. I had a cracked rib, three fractured fingers, a torn ligament in my elbow, a scraped cornea, and a severe bruise on my coccyx. I learned two things from my first bike ride that have shaped my life ever since.

The first life lesson I took with me from that fateful day is that trying new things is a terrible, terrible idea. I wanted to try riding a bike without training wheels, and look where it got me. If you try something new, you will almost

POETRY

Like

He used it in his similes,
And in its proper form—
Expressing strong affinity
For things that he adored,

But underneath his prosody
A monster reared his head—
A “like” that rendered arguments
Ambiguous and dead.

The word was meant to link his thoughts,
To smooth a verbal road,
“This tactic was, like, credible,”
Though soon came to erode

As listeners—beforehand still—
Refused to hear the story,
The only folk who yet gave ear
Were circumlocutory.

What happened to the pregnant pause?
Why need we speak with haste?
Few Grecian plays are tragedy
Like good speech gone to waste.

It should not take a Cicero
To look upon with fright
This parasite of rhetoric—
I have no love for “like.”

On the Widow’s Walk

A year has passed—spring season gone—and again
I hear the murmur of a changing Wellfleet tide.
Only the pine trees stand between the widow’s walk
And the bay. Their verdant branches hold the water’s
Blue, and hide the dirt-road passageways
Traversed by those who get away. This is
A textured beach—with residues of life arund
Before the tide went out—so we don’t mind
Small oyster cuts. I see the shells, and the bordering
Marsh, with reeds and holes for fiddler crabs,
And a boat called Audrey. She is alone at low tide,
And tilts on her side—a thing stranded, but at ease.

These forms appeal to anyone—but more,
Remind us of the past. I think of netting minnows,
And clothesline fed in jetty cracks to tempt
Green crabs to bite; and family—Grandma reading
War and Peace, and my brother, who thought that he
Could throw a curve when his wiffle ball moved aside
With the wind. Wordsworth spoke of repose well:
We gravitate toward changing tides when they contain
A fixity. They speak, breathe, and pull us in
With force, when our pasts are strewn across the sand.

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Ducking my head down, I barreled into the gigantic piece of glass, helmet first, shattering it into thousands of pieces with a deafening crack.

certainly end up injured, maybe even with a severely bruised coccyx. That is why, for the past nine years, I have eaten the same thing for lunch every day (a peanut butter and jelly sandwich),

learned from my first bike ride is that bicycles are two-wheeled death machines. Bicycles are by far the most dangerous thing that man has invented. With my college education, I hope to

I have read the same book (*Superfudge*) 47 times, and I have not ventured farther than four miles from my house. I have kept everything in my life as unchanged as possible, and I have yet to be severely injured. Is this a coincidence? I think not.

The second lesson I

start a foundation with a mission to eradicate bicycles from the face of the earth. Bicycles are the chariots of Satan, and I cannot bear to live on a planet where they freely roam the earth, bringing terror and dismay with them wherever they go. I will devote every second of every day of my life to destroying all bicycles, thus freeing humanity from its greatest foe.

In conclusion, that is what I think I would bring to your university. 

Griffin Harris '17 and David Brand '14 are Contributing Writers for The Indicator.

FROM THE INDICATOR'S ARCHIVE OF MAD LIBS

If there's one thing we love and support at the Indicator, it's privacy. But more than that it's gross and unjustified intrusions into the lives of others. In keeping with this stance, we gathered our superbly savvy squad of spies and harnessed their alliterative prowess to obtain a copy of this year's commencement speech from the computer of the speaker themselves. It wasn't easy, and unfortunately much of the key information was lost in hyperspace (you know, where the interweb is). That's why we've left it to you: our Indicator heros to figure our the missing pieces in the speech, so that we can spoil it in full before graduation day. Good luck.



Greetings class of 2014,

When I first found out I was going to make the commencement speech, I felt _____ (adjective). Flustered and unprepared, I asked my _____ (source of advice) for advice. They told me, "whatever you do, don't recount this dead-end attempt at receiving advice in your graduation speech." They were right. Anyhoosle, we've had a lot of great memories as a class. Like the time we _____ (verb, past tense) and stole all the _____ (plural noun) from the _____ (campus building). _____ (campus administrator) was so mad they completely burst their _____ (body part ending with "agina" or "enis"). Those were _____ (adjective) experiences and I'm glad to have shared them with every one of you - except _____ (name of specific Amherst College student that you hate). Hey, _____ (same name), go sit on a pile of _____ (synonym for shit). If I've learned anything in my time at Amherst, I've learned that life is like a _____ ("box of chocolates"). Now, I know what you're thinking: "Who is this _____ (negative characteristic) person in a stupid hat to give me life lessons?" And to that I say: _____ (grossly offensive insult). _____ (retraction of said insult). Well, it's been a great four years. In the words of famous alumnus _____ (washed-out celebrity), "Thank you."

Do you like to have thoughts? If so, write, draw, or edit for *The Indicator*.

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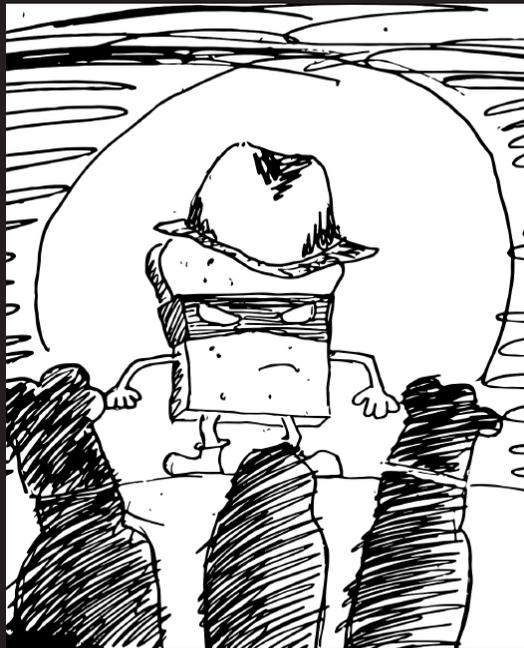
"DRINKING TO FORGET OUR ALCOHOLISM...SINCE 1848"

The Report Card

Subject	Grade	Comments	Subject	Grade	Comments
Stats guru Nate Silver to get commencement honor	A-	Silver expected to predict exact text of commencement speech to plus or minus 3 words.	College creates new office of environmental sustainability	B	They want to implement fresh new ideas right away, but they'll have to recycle the old ones first.
Farm Fest showcases local produce	A	Come for the beer. Stay because, well, you're on Tuttle hill and you're drunk.	City Streets multicultural festival a fun time for all	C-	Except, you know, patriots.
Formal frenzy overtakes Amherst	B+	Panda East now accepting loose leaf paper as valid identification	Accusations of overspending on AAS elections dismissed by JC	B+	Accusations of bribery dismissed by JC with their new gold-plated gavel.
Clippers owner banned from NBA for racist comments	R	My god! What will happen to his Sterling reputation?	Spiderman 2 released to lackluster reviews	C	Damnit! Now I'll have to watch that other Spiderman 2 movie that came out recently.
AAS pres. election won by 2 votes	F	My friend and I never vote. What's the use?			

-RS, JP, LP, RA

INDICATION CONTEST



Submit a caption to theindicator@amherst.edu
Think about how great it would be if you won!

Spice up YOUR graduation
with Circle hats!



Don't settle for 1 degree
when you can have 360!

for the well rounded student