

## OPINION PAGE OPEN LETTER

By Carl Frankel

Dear Folks,

You are a lovely group of people and getting to know you is a real source of pleasure for me. I'm very impressed with your honesty and friendliness, among other things. But I think most of you are doing the whole university bit wrong. You act as if this were Highacres High School. You wait to be taught. You are underusing several important resources here. One of these is the faculty--diverse human beings who get their kicks from turning students on to learning and who are never more pleased than when they see interest, growth, and enthusiastic response. You also have a good little library. And most important, you have each other--a group of peers all supposedly motivated by desire for some kind of higher learning. And all you seem to want to do with these resources is collect CREDITS. As if a credit were something real. A credit is a bogus reward. A credit is a bookkeeping convenience. Yet you put yourself through all-nighters, exams, readings, hundreds of hours of listening and note-taking, for credits. In so doing you are allowing your THOUGHTS, your very own private thoughts, to be molded and channelled for very dubious rewards--written permission to obtain a job of uncertain satisfaction to you, status to impress your friends, or mere time-killing because you have nothing better to do. For credits. Even the word sounds cheap, like the devalued currency of some 25th century planet: "I'll fix your hypermeson activator, earthling, but it'll cost you thirty thousand credits."

You're demeaning yourselves, people. You should be more careful about forming your thoughts. Why do you so passively allow people like me to mess with your minds? You take better care of your carburetors! Why don't you look for new and interesting ideas that sit well in your brains? Why don't you ask a few fundamental questions?

Why are you never amazed at anything? Is it so reasonable to you that the earth circles the sun? Is it enough to know that it does and is there no point in asking why? Is it apparent why you are two or three years too young to drink? Is all the opinion on this issue clear? Does it matter at all?

Some of you could be improving your health and ability to concentrate by yoga training. Some of you might be finding deepened understanding of yourself in reading Anais Nin or Robert Lowell. Some of you could be finding a whole new source of pleasure and appreciation of your natural environment by canoeing. Some of you could find messages from your own nightmares in Franz Kafka. Some of you might build a sense of purpose and worth in political action or community work. One in ten of you could be gaining new self-esteem and pride from gay studies. Some of you could be deriving religious insight from quantum mechanics. All of you could be broadening your knowledge of foreign cultures if for no other reason than to better understand why your gasoline is costing you so much. And you could be doing these things together. But no, you are collecting credits.

Now folks, this is not an appeal for campus activities and "school spirit" as in "Our campus has seventy-three clubs, four honorary societies, six bands, a flag, a pledge of allegiance and a begonia garden, not to mention the greatest elevation above sea level of any school north of Biloxi." School spirit is mindless trash. I am appealing for positive thinking and positive doing. You are old enough to be actively shaping your lives. You have the mental and physical resources, and the time. Only you're not doing it. You are passing courses, gaining credits, accepting. You are not questioning, not exploring, not challenging. You are passive learners.

In this, of course, you are not alone. Apathy and cynicism seem to have crept into every human activity lately. We watched the cocky idealism and naive enthusiasm

of several years ago spawn new political movements, new forms of mind altering and consciousness raising. Then we saw the collapse into violence and discord. And today we are cynical and apathetic. Nothing can be done, says the voice of experience. Nothing, at least, by me, says the voice of your own doubts and self-denial.

But dear people, the point is simply that something must be done. Something WILL be done, by somebody. Our social institutions are failing us. The contradictions between our ethics and our daily lives are becoming very glaring. We talk peace, understanding, ecology, but we live expediency and exploitation of the earth and each other. If there ever were a time in which the best course was to stay quiet and get trained to take your place in society, this is not that time. This society is not working all that well. It is trying to transform itself into something better and it does not know how. If the college educated youth of this society are not going to bother looking for new answers to our problems, who is? We can wait for the second coming. We can wait for the Starman to land. We can wait for one strong man to herd us into action (It's happened before). We can become bitter and curse our lot and blame others. But if we wish rather to build new institutions that revere and protect our planet, that value all human life, that protect the weak and poor; if we want to redirect technology to the attainment of important social goals; if we wish to expel a lot of negative and destructive crap from our minds and become the sensitive, caring, creative people we should be, it will take work. It will take thought. And more than that, it should be FUN: fun to try on new ideas, fun to understand and express ourselves creatively, to challenge ourselves, to help and learn from each other, to seek our values and prove their worth by living them.

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