

OPINION

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. - The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution



ZACK MENTZ

Sheep Lust for Sheepskin : The Penn State Experience

By Chris Hvizdak
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With a slip of the tongue only possibly inside a bureaucracy as extensive as Penn State, some marketing stooge has managed to undermine the supposed "higher" value of higher education with two simple words. How so? I'm told that when new faculty members are going through orientation at our fine university, the terms "consumer" and "product" are often used in place of "student" and "degree." I believe this inadvertently reveals a greater truth about Penn State and higher education as a whole. Isn't the aim of college to challenge young minds to reach new heights, to become exposed to new ways of thinking, to have some consciousness expanding, "Dead Poet's Society" kind of experience? Or has college education become reduced to a lunch line that you passively cycle through, pay your bill and get a stamp on your forehead that reads "Mechanical Engineer" or "Publicist" just for being a good enough sport to stick around long enough? Have I just outlined an argument with ridiculous extremes? Am I over-reacting? I would be. That is, if there wasn't considerable evidence to back me up.

How many classes have you been privy to in which a professor practically begs for student/consumer participation? I've had a quite a few. Whether the class size is 12 or 120, no one answers questions. No one participates. It is truly pitiful to see a faculty member, who has spent a lifetime accruing knowledge and experience, struggle in vain to engender a spark of participation in a room full of disinterested youths which are supposedly at their prime.

This is not entirely the fault of the administration, students share the blame for this abysmal state of affairs, however I contend that the university is largely responsible and I'll get to them in a second, but first, let's talk about the student body. Students are human. That's no crime. We can be distracted, tired, burnt out or simply bored. Whatever the mitigating circumstances, the current state of disinterest I see people expressing in their own education goes far beyond the sum of all human weaknesses.

It's true that not all of those 120 or even 12 students "should be here." "College has become the new high school," "college has become trade school;" I'm sure you've heard clichés like these that apparently describe the nature of modern higher education. Like most clichés, they hold an element of truth. More students are enrolled in college now than ever before. It is

almost impossible to secure a living-wage job without a college diploma. Consequently, everyone needs a sheepskin. America has supposedly shifted from an industrial economy to an information economy. Because of this shift in the work force, I think it's fair to say that there are far more "sheepskin fiends" who merely want to get their hand stamped so they can "Pass Go" and get a decent job than students who actually seek to become educated. End result: lack of class participation and thusly the passive travesty that is higher education.

So what is a university to do? A gallant institution of higher learning might grab the bull by the horns and structure rigorous majors that require all of their graduates to develop analytical skills and study the foundations of modern thought, so that their graduates would instinctively entertain multiple viewpoints on any given issue, have a solid understanding of the ways of the world and be keenly armed to better society. Or a university could simply "go with the flow" and pander to the lowest common denominator to give the people what they want. Such a university would issue a type of passive, assembly line, cookie-cutter degree. This would not be a cherished and admirable institution that gave the people what they needed rather than what they wanted. This would be a flophouse of "education" that passed out product to anyone with cash. To add insult to injury such a university could arrogantly admit to doing so and that would be simply atrocious. And so vanishes the wizard in a puff of pomp and circumstance, leaving only a nasty little man ruled by the profit motive writhing behind the curtain.

Too harsh? Naah. I don't mind hurting Spainer's feelings. I've met a lot of great students and faculty as well as a few awesome administrators in my Penn State career. It's not their fault that society at large and the Penn State bureaucracy set a tone so hostile to higher learning. A lot of readers my take me as a whiney "blame the institution liberal" and up until this point you could fairly conclude that. Hold your fire for a second there my right-winged friends, I've got a dose of "self reliance" conservatism on the way.

For all of you who have conquered academic passivism and

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Quote of the Week

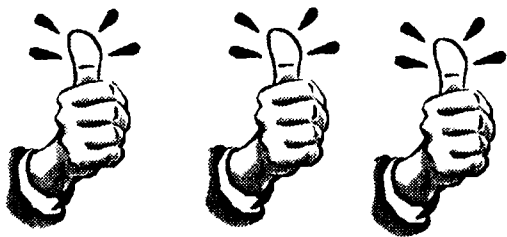
"Friendship is but another name for an alliance with the follies and the misfortunes of others. Our own share of miseries is sufficient: why enter then as volunteers into those of another?"

Thomas Jefferson

managed to read this far, I will now, in a 'departing senior' type fashion, reveal the secret of higher education.

To put it simply, college is what you make of it. You've heard that before. Let me lay it out like it is. Show up - get your card punched and get your degree but make college work for you. In my numerous years at Penn State I've switched campus, switched majors, burned all my late drop credits and tacked on a few minors to boot. But in that time I've also lost 165 lbs., developed extra-circular skills in all the digital arts, shepherded my own feature film through pre-production, production and now post-production and generally had a fine time of it all. I like to think of higher education as a government subsidized reprieve from a full time job that allows me to develop and pursue what it is I'm truly interested in. I've made college work for

Beacon Thumbs Up



- Three day weekends.
- Courteous students who hold doors for others.
- Two-liters of your pop in Brunos.

Beacon Thumbs Down



- Deep puddles on rainy walkways.
- Early morning lawnmowers outside dorm windows.
- The career fair being held far from the center of campus in the Junker center.

Furniture follies in the apartments

By Jennifer Haight
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If you've ever gone into the apartments on campus then you know the furniture that fills them is in pretty bad shape. There are grooves in the cushions and springs of the chairs and the couchish type thing. Cuddling on them is next to impossible because the grooves have already predetermined where you are to sit. When you do choose to sit on the cusp of one of these grooves, you feel like you're going to fall into a canyon.

It is to the point where most students bring their own couches and chairs. Or if nothing else, cover them up with towels and blankets. The sight of them alone makes a person want to barf; maybe that's why they're so dirty looking. Upon closer inspection, you will notice the discoloration of said furniture. It is most often a weird brownish color. It looks like last nights rager threw up all over the furniture. Or at least had a few beers spilled on it. If someone were to cut it open, I can only imagine the filth they would find.

Also, I am surprised that the lamps still give off light. The light bulbs get changed, but the shades are detestable. The grossness of the lamp shades is worsened and illuminated when the lights are turned on. They look like they've been inside the house of someone who lived until he or she was 200 years old, smoked every day of his or her life and was unable to clean.

The bathrooms are a whole other ball game. The shower floors are so uneven that the water doesn't drain because the lowest part of the floor is below the drain, resulting in puddles and weird smells. I am scared to sit on the toilet seats because some of them have cracks in them and I always fear that my bottom will get pinched.

Okay, so most of the apartments have new desks, beds and dressers in the bedrooms, but these are hardly the rooms where most of the social gatherings take place. It is quite embarrassing when someone who lives in the Behrend apartments invites someone from a different school over for the weekend and that person doesn't want to sit on the furniture in fear of contracting some weird kind of fungus.

Next to the bedrooms, the kitchens are the most livable rooms in the apartments. The tables and chairs are plain wood with no cushions to break. There are also new refrigerators which add a nice touch, but do not take attention away from the living room furniture or the bathrooms.

To live in the apartments, it costs \$4140 per year; the apartments are equipped to house 288 students. So in a year, the school makes \$1,192,320 on just the room and board from the students living in the apartments. I don't think it is unreasonable to invest in some new fixtures for the apartments.

When purchased in bulk, I am sure that the school would get a hefty discount on new furniture. Why not make the investment? It would be highly appreciated by the students and may even encourage more people to want to live on campus.

Submission Guidelines

The Beacon welcomes readers to share their views on this page.

Letters and commentary pieces can be submitted by email to opinion@psu.edu or directly to the Beacon office, located in the Reed Building.

Letters should be limited to 350 words and commentaries should be limited to 700 words. The more concise the submission, the less we will be forced to edit it for space concerns and the more likely we are to run the submission.

All submissions must include the writer's year in school, major and name as The Beacon does not publish anonymous letters.

Deadline for any submission is 5 p.m. Tuesday afternoon for inclusion in the Friday issue. All submissions are considered, but because of space limitations, some may not be published.

All submissions must include consent to be edited before they can be edited for publication.