

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXIX, Number 60, 21 April 1995 — SPECTATOR SPECTRUM Ask what you can do for Columbia  
[ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

## S P E C T A T O R SPECTRUM

### Ask what you can do for Columbia

Columbia is not a perfect place. That statement should not come as a surprise to anyone who has worked or studied here. There are things that happen on this campus that are completely inexplicable, unavoidable, and sometimes, downright wrong. Unfortunately, we can't change bad tenure decisions, cutbacks in financial aid and departmental offerings, awful athletic seasons, or life in New York City.

What we can do, however, is change ourselves, to try and make life better here for everyone. While it is unlikely to expect much from an apathetic student body, every year you do see a few souls who

stand out in their work to improve Alma Mater. We can all learn something from them. If I can (badly) paraphrase John F. Kennedy, we should ask not how Columbia can change for us, but rather, how we can change to make it better.

How do we go about doing this? There are three goals we can all set for ourselves. First, we can help

others in the Columbia community. We always talk about helping others in the Morningside Heights community, which is certainly a worthy vocation, but this is a little different. Maybe it's New York's artificially competitive atmosphere, but it seems that people on this campus are too protective and proud of their own accomplishments, and as a result are too competitive and too sparse with their praise for others. We all complain about Columbia's advising system, even after the creation of the house system. How much better would things be here if students could, without the benefit of a structured advising system, help each other through sharing advice, experiences, and ideas? It would certainly cut down on the competition and occasional ugliness that follows from the current system.

Second, we can all stand to lose a little bit of our egos. It seems that too many student leaders get so wrapped up in their causes and agendas that they become self-absorbed. When this happens, the good cause tends to disappear in favor of résumé-building and self-aggrandizement. It's gratifying to see that this didn't happen with the AIDS Quilt project that's coming to campus this weekend. Whatever you think of the merits of having the event on campus, all of the people on the committee have worked very hard and very selflessly to make things happen. Although there are a few students who stand out as having initiated this effort, none have stood out in the wrong way. This seems to truly have been a team effort.

Finally, we can all learn to be a

little more patient—  
to grin and bear it.  
This is a university.  
The schools here  
teach many dis-

ciplines. Some  
areas of study, pro-  
grams, and extra-  
curricular groups  
are better funded  
than others. Some  
are neglected en-  
tirely. This does not  
mean that the ne-  
glected areas are  
unworthy. It just  
means that some-

thing else would have  
to go. When we com-  
plain about the lack of an Asian  
American Studies department, would we  
really be better off, if in creating this depart-  
ment, we had to make major cuts in two  
others? Because this campus has so many  
diverse peoples and interests in it, it is  
impossible to satisfy everyone immediately.  
In the seven years I've been here, there have  
been plenty of changes for the better; in the  
next seven years, there will undoubtedly be  
plenty more.

I've tried very hard to live up to these  
three goals in my seven years here. I have to  
admit, I had a good role model. My father,  
who passed away three years ago today, was  
a Columbian for 40 years—first as a student,  
and later as a physics professor and an  
administrator. He didn't give up on Columbia  
when things were going bad in the 1960s. He  
did everything he could to make this place  
the best university in the country. He served  
on, and in some cases, helped spearhead,  
committees that brought women to Colum-  
bia campus, that guaranteed housing for  
undergraduate students, and that changed  
the science requirement to make it more  
significant. Even while doing that, he man-  
aged to teach his classes, always be there for  
students (even his son, when he made the

mistake of taking "Physics for Poets"), grade his exams on time, and still have time for his research and writing. Perhaps most importantly, he was modest enough not to want to take credit for what he had accomplished. He'd probably be mad at me for praising him like this if he were around to hear it.

Even if students can't change to help improve Columbia, there is another way to look at this school and its imperfections. It may not be something we want to deal with as students, but the real world that awaits us after graduation isn't exactly a kind place either. Lots of things go wrong, often without warning or explanation. Sure, Columbia has its share of stinkers who sit in administrative or bureaucratic offices and use their positions to get on a power trip and make students feel small. But isn't this a good preparatory tool for what we're in for after we get our diplomas? Students at other schools might think they have a blissful existence, not unlike a second four years of high school, but they're in for a rude awakening once they graduate.

Having been hardened by New York and the lifestyle at Columbia, we may well be ahead of the game.

**Jeremy Feinberg, Law '95,**  
**makes use of the metric system on alternate Fridays in**  
*Spectrum.*



***Balancing the Scales***

**Jeremy Feinberg**

financial aid and

advice, experiences, and ideas? It

to

Th

Th



an

gr

cu

an

th

an

tin

m

g

ork to improve

SADRI SHADMAN

thing