

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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Letters to the Editor

Refreshingly Honest Column on Student Life
Pinpoints Problems That Need Addressing

To the Editor:

I found “The God Beat” columnist Eric Hirsch’s “Death, Life, and the University” piece on the often overwhelming anonymity of student life on campus to be very refreshing, honest, and revealing about Columbia’s campus life. He has touched on experiences that many of us have shared at this institution, at least in some capacity. If you haven’t waited 40 minutes in a bathrobe to be let back into a room you’ve been accidentally locked out of, or gone down to Schapiro only to find that the printer is once again on the fritz, never fear, your time is coming. Hirsch’s candor about the relative lack of consideration inherent in the bureaucracy’s treatment of current students is especially illuminating. Sometimes I’m really not surprised that Barack Obama doesn’t talk about us much, given how the bureaucratic University system might have treated him when he was a student here. Even now, I feel like the harried student Hirsch writes about. I have been waiting about five weeks for a substantial check from the University, and I have certainly been to the so-called “four corners of campus” (including Payroll at 131st) in an attempt to rectify the situation.

Fortunately for me, a kind employee in the Work Study office endeavored to help where even my previous employers would not, and I have recently been able to make some headway. This doesn’t happen enough, and Gloria deserves to be commended for caring.

Employees in higher tiers of the University system should actually listen to students and demonstrate some compassion before we, the amorphous “student body,” grow jaded by their treatment of us. At the very least, they could read *Spectator* to find out what students are saying about the effectiveness of University staff and offices, especially in the context of the areas that Hirsch so astutely criticizes.

Laura Taylor, CC ’10
Feb. 16, 2009

To the Editor:

In his column last Thursday titled "Enviro-Radicalism at Columbia," my fellow *Spectator* columnist Jonathan Hollander made a series of uncharacteristic factual errors.

The first glaring issue was Hollander's characterization of John Jay meal plans as "wildly overpriced." It's true that student meal plans are expensive, but a little investigation might have dissuaded Hollander from the "overpriced" label. Dining Services representative Victoria Dunn explained to my Food and American Life seminar a few weeks ago that Columbia's commitment to paying employees a fair, livable wage is the greatest factor in price mark-up. A full 52 cents from every dollar spent goes toward labor costs. So yes, food is expensive, but it's marked at the price necessary for employees to get health care and days off.

Of course, the larger point of Hollander's column was that students should have the choice to use trays in John Jay because their abolition didn't "actually do anything to help the environment." He goes on, "the inconvenience alone probably outweighs the environmental benefits in the minds of many students." Unfortunately, that is flatly wrong. Had he asked one of the EcoReps, he would know that food waste has dropped from 450 to 75 pounds per week since trays were removed. That is an astounding shift, attributable to the fact that students can only take one portion at a time. Some sacrifice!

Finally, Hollander argues that the imposition of EcoRep rules is a violation of student choice. He objects to trays being removed and plates being scraped because he doesn't get to make the decision for himself. The truth is, students don't make the environmentally friendly choice when the alternative is more convenient. We'd rather take too much food and waste water than make the small extra effort it takes to go back for seconds and brush our scraps ourselves. The environmental benefits far outweigh student whining.

Oh, and Jon, lay off San Francisco.

Kate Redburn, CC '10
Co-Columnist of "Shock and Awe"
Feb. 12, 2009

Editorial Neglects to Mention GHAP as a Peer-Led Health Services Initiative

To the Editor:

Few universities offer free and confidential HIV antibody testing to all students. Even fewer provide those services through a pioneering peer-based counseling system. Columbia, however, does all of these things through the Gay Health Advocacy Project (GHAP) at Health Services. Unfortunately, the February 10th staff editorial, "Well Student," makes no mention of this resource.

Since its inception as the first university-based HIV test center, GHAP has morphed into an innovative project of peer-led, walk-in counseling on a wide variety of issues related to students' sexual and emotional health. Proudly beginning as a program to promote the specific health needs of gay men during the AIDS crisis, GHAP now offers HIV testing and counseling services to Columbia students of all backgrounds and identities. Five days a week, GHAP peer counselors offer students a non-judgmental, supportive, and confidential environment to discuss HIV and STI (sexually transmitted infection) transmission, sexual risk reduction, sexual identity concerns, relationship issues, and many other matters related to students' overall well-being. GHAP fills a crucial role on campus through sexual health presentations for students. In addition, GHAP serves as a critical hub for referrals to other health resources on campus such as Counseling Services, Nightline, and many others.

Similar to their peers in Well Woman, GHAP peer counselors are undergraduate and graduate students who spend an entire semester undergoing intensive training under the auspices of Health Services. During the rigorous training period, GHAP counselors learn sympathetic and accessible counseling skills, the HIV transmission model, women's and LGBT health issues, STI health risks, and a host of other vital information. This demanding training is supplemented by bi-weekly supervisions and ongoing training seminars.

I was heartened to see the editorial board's coverage of vital peer-led health services available to Columbia students. With increasing rates of HIV transmission in New York City, it is impossible to overlook the importance of sexual health resources and HIV testing. A quick investigation would have revealed the historic services which GHAP contributes to the overall well-being of our campus community.

Ira Stup, GS
GHAP peer counselor
Feb. 15, 2009