



No it's not the invasion of the tackiest neighbors from hell on higher education, just 1,000 plastic flamingos at the U. of Wisconsin.

IT'S ALL FUN AND GAMES

Crazy student pranksters sabotage campuses

By Mike Meyer, *The Badger Herald*, U. of Wisconsin

They lurk in the shadows, scheming of nefarious deeds and descending on unsuspecting campuses. They sabotage university computers, deface campus property and harass administrators.

Black face paint and the theme from *Mission Impossible* are, of course, optional—usually reserved for those special strikes. But when pulling off legendary college pranks one thing is certain: it's gotta be big.

And big certainly is what California Institute of Technology pranksters had in mind when they attacked the HOLLYWOOD sign with visions of school pride in their heads. In May 1987, as the centennial of Hollywood approached, students at Caltech decided to alter the sign to say something a bit more... scholarly. In the middle of the night, the students used plastic sheeting, nylon ropes, duct tape and climbing equipment to transform the legendary landmark to read CALTECH.

Since 1902 when a drinking club at Yale U. tricked temperance advocate Carry Nation into posing for pictures with them as they smoked and held steins of beer, col-

lege students have persisted in hoaxing their stern administrators and each other. Students always seem willing to test their brain power if it will result in a laugh rather than a grade.

Mary Rouse, dean of students at the U. of Wisconsin, says pranks are an important outlet for student expression. "I must differentiate between malicious pranks... and having fun. I don't discourage harmless ones at all. The Statue of Liberty was one of the best events we've ever had."

In 1979, the Pail and Shovel Party was elected to head the Wisconsin Student Association after promising—among other things—to waste students' money, change everyone's name to Joe Smith (so professors could know each student by name) and bring the Statue of Liberty to Madison. They made good on their promises, constructing a Lady Liberty who seemed to have been dropped in frozen Lake Mendota.

She was a 22-foot tall head from the bridge of the nose upward and an arm 40 feet tall from wrist to the tip of the torch. Claiming they had purchased it from a financially strapped New York, the party said a helicopter transporting the statue dropped it, sending it crashing through the ice. After an overwhelming victory again that fall, the Pail and Shovel crew planted more than 1,000 pink plastic

flamingos on the campus and threw a toga party for 10,000 people, during which *Animal House* partier John Belushi phoned in his support.

Although the Pail and Shovel party had their detractors, the humor they brought to campus was welcomed. "In fact, if there's anything we could use more of among our students, it is more gentle humor," Rouse says.

In an attempt to fill this dearth, or at least stimulate students to action, prankster Neil Steinberg has authored the mischief-maker's bible, *If At All Possible, Involve a Cow: The Book of College Pranks*.

In *Involve a Cow*, the majority of the painstakingly documented pranks occur at small, elitist schools like Harvard U. and Yale. "People have to think they're special to do pranks. If you're just some Joe Schmo happy to get into school and get your degree and then grab a job, you're not going to commit any pranks because they're not going to occur to you," Steinberg says. "You also have to have the leisure time to say, 'The Dome is going to look better as a... tit.'" In past years the Great Dome at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has been doctored to resemble a birthday cake, a jack-o'-lantern and, perhaps in a commentary on the sex lives of MIT males, a female breast.

But MIT's antics only begin there.

"You also have to have the leisure time to say, 'The Dome is going to look better as a... tit.'"

Steinberg says that during the years the school has formed a fierce prank-committing rivalry with Caltech. While Caltechers were entering a McDonald's contest 1.2 million times, MIT undergrads were inventing new forms of measurements like the Bruno (the indentation caused when a piano lands on concrete). While Caltech pulled the Great Rose Bowl Hoax (changing the flip-card display to read "Caltech" on national television), MIT caused a giant weather balloon to burst through the turf at the Harvard-Yale football game.

But the times they are a-changin'. That smell over at MIT is not the devious burning of midnight oil of the Technology Hackers Association (the resident "prank club") but of chemical reactions as students—gasp—study. "This is the right place for pranks," says undergraduate Reuven Learner. "If it'd happen anywhere, it'd be MIT. But people have been pretty boring."

Steinberg is dismayed by this lack of devilish dedication. "I think students forget that they're not inventing the wheel," he says. "They don't have a sense of tradition, of their place in history."

In *Involve a Cow*, Steinberg lists six rules to pranking. The sixth rule recommends the inclusion of a bovine, but most importantly, the first rule is: "You have to actually do it."

Remember that.

But some pranking lives on as students take to campuses with their shenanigans. The tiny Southern Minnesota town of Northfield proves a veritable treasure trove of trickery. With St. Olaf and Carleton, two liberal arts schools, situated less than two miles across town from each other, the possibilities for prankishness seem endless.

At St. Olaf last May "someone sent a slip to all of the seniors saying they were short one class, and the [registrar's] office was mobbed," says student Chris Kaster.

Registrar John Treoem amends Kaster's story. "Actually only 60 of our 720 graduates received a fake notice," he said. "I thought it was funny. About half of the 60 fainted, and then showed up at the registrar's office in a state of absolute terror...."

Across town at Carleton, pranking is considered just "taking care of business." President Stephen R. Lewis reserved himself a place in history with his handling of the demands of a 1991 group named RAISE—Replace All Institutional Symbols with Elvis. After kidnapping the American flag and unfurling one bearing The King, they demanded "the leader of our community perform an Elvis impersonation," Lewis obliged with a tear-inducing rendition of "Hound Dog" at a council meeting.

Venerable institutions like Carleton seem conducive to pranking, Lewis says.

"Part of our message to students when they arrive is take issues seriously, but don't take yourselves seriously. We do try to have fun here; contemplating the purposes of the universe all the time can be a bit restraining."