

Life at the University; a letter from the lounge

Dear Mom,

I thought I'd take the time to write you a letter and tell you about my first week at the University.

Remember that \$200 we sent last spring to reserve a dorm room? Well, the reservation didn't quite work out like we planned. The University over-booked dorm accommodations by almost 300 people. The administrators say this is common practice because some students don't show up or end up leaving the dorms during the first few weeks.

I suppose it is better from the University's point of view to inconvenience students rather than have a few empty dorm rooms in December. It's just that I was so excited to start living the college life that not having the room we reserved in advance is a real disappointment.

Because there were no rooms available, they put me in the lounge. Although there is not much privacy, I get to sleep in a bunk bed just like the one at summer camp when I was 12. Not to get off the subject, but some guy with dreadlocks and bare feet just peeked into the lounge window. I sure hope it's safe here.

The University is renting motel rooms for some of the guys that didn't get rooms. I sure wish they gave us maid service in the lounge, but I'd be willing to go without a maid in lieu of a door and a lock. I think it's kind of discriminating that only men get to live in the motels. Maybe the men that run this place think women should be maids, not have them.

Last week, all the people living in the dorm came running through my bedroom. Apparently two of the people lucky enough to actually get rooms were playing hide-the-burning-candle in the bookshelf. Someone told me that these individuals put a lit candle under a bookshelf and then left. Of course wood has that really swell combustible quality. The ensuing fire gutted the interior of the room. Some people are so ungrateful.

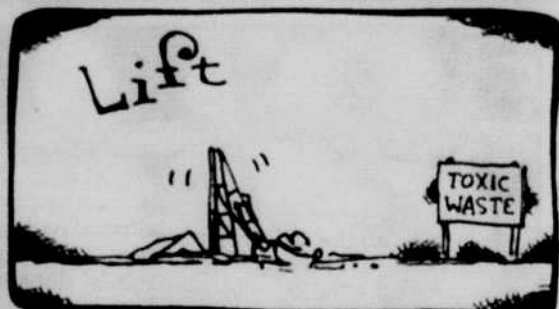
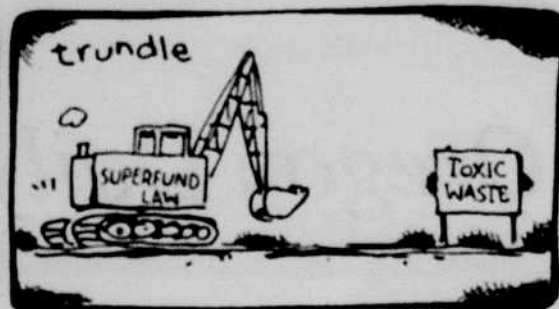
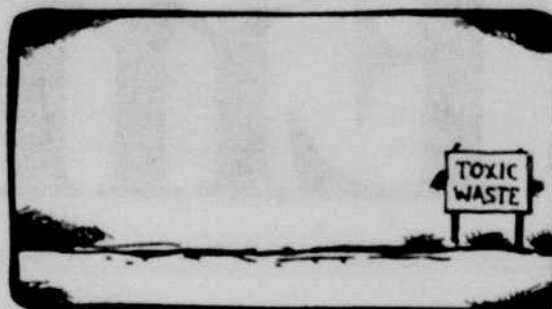
My friend Julie pledged to a neat sorority, so she now has a place to live. I miss her already. After she found out the sorority accepted her, she wasn't allowed to leave her new sisters for 24 hours. She called it a lock-in. I think it's more like house arrest.

By the way, I saw Uncle Fester on 13th Avenue. He was with a whole bunch of strange-looking people begging for spare change. He told me that on the average, he makes about \$7 per hour doing this and it's all tax-free. No wonder he can afford those big house payments.

I need to sign off now because I am going to sleep in front of the Bookstore tonight so I don't have to wait in line too long tomorrow.

Love and Kisses, Your Daughter

P.S. Speaking of spare change, could you send another \$50 next month? I got a bill from the University and there is a \$50 Resource Fee on it. I haven't found anyone yet who knows what it's for.



OPINION

Welcome to the assembly line



GAYLE FORMAN

Everything evolves. Education is no different. The once simple tradition of higher education — a gathering of men studying religion — has snowballed into something far more confusing.

Education for education's sake, for the pursuit of knowledge, has become an antique. No longer do we embrace academia in search of truth and knowledge. In spite of all those inspirational and educational quotes scattered around the campus, most of us are here as a means to an end. A college education is simply another line on our resume. We start school so that we may finish school.

The University folks know this. Before we ever set foot into a lecture hall, our educational future is already mapped out. Departments carefully construct little diagrams to lead us toward graduation. They hold our hands as they help us maneuver our way through school. Counselors make sure we stay on the straight and narrow path.

They want our major declared within two years and they want us to leave here in five years.

Welcome to the world of assembly line education. Usher students in, teach them and push them out. Students have become commodities whose greatest value is their usefulness.

Not to paint the University as some type of evil, conforming machine. The curriculum we are spoon-fed is a solid preparation

for life. Forget frivolity; utilitarianism is the name of the game for education in the '90s. Administrators here know this game, and they are doing their best to get us through the system as fast as they can.

We, too, are trying to get through school as fast as we can. School's an educational marathon. We race against rising costs of education. Every year that we linger, tuition increases and our debts compound. We stay one step ahead of crumbling departments, hoping to finish while there is still something to finish. When double majoring translates into the doubling of debts, we must sometimes bypass the quest for knowledge for the sake of pragmatism. We resort to battling our educations against their costs, and often education loses.

Not that receiving a practical, useful education is a bad idea. Few can scrape a living studying philosophy. Most of us will not have the luxury of being able to learn for a living. And so, in light of the ever-shrinking job market, it's not a bad idea to leave school with skills, a master plan, and a career goal.

But our education suffers for it. We confuse information with knowledge. We deny ourselves the pleasure of learning. College is a chore to so many people. We concentrate so much on finishing that we forget to focus on learning.

How often in life do we find ourselves in the unique position that we now occupy? Surrounded by scholars and dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge. What resources these people are. Students are bombarded with opportunities to learn silly, useless things. Things like history, philosophy and literature. Liberal Arts study in today's assembly line of education is quickly becoming obsolete.

And to many students, that is

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indeed a good thing. A degree in philosophy will lead only to a job at McDonald's, perhaps. A degree in business or journalism is training that will lead to a job. But since when do we measure the value of an education by the job it will attain? If that is how we measure education, then we must call it something else. Call it training, but not education.

Of course, if we take the time to sort it out, education and training need not be mutually exclusive. The pressures to just take the degree and run fall heavy. But seeing as we are here, faced with so much opportunity, perhaps veering off the career path, even if it means stalling graduation a term or two, is advisable.

I know for myself, I wanted to get out of here as fast as possible. Now, with one year left, my classes are set. If I want to graduate on time, I have no room to lollygag in a luxury class such as, say, underwater basket weaving. But I don't want to find myself with a "good job" in the "real world" and a yearning for the many classes that I detoured in the name of speedy graduation.

So as you travel through this educational assembly line, take time to smell the glue of your books. Don't always listen to what those advisers tell you. I'm not advocating the 10-year graduation plan for anyone; it drains the bank and the self-esteem. But don't concentrate on gaining that degree so much that you forget to get an education while you're at it.

Gayle Forman is a columnist for the Emerald.

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