

“I was attached to this city by the god—though it seems a ridiculous thing to say—as upon a great and noble horse which was somewhat sluggish because of its size and needed to be stirred up by a kind of gadfly. It is to fulfill some such function that I believe the god has placed me in the city. I never cease to rouse each and every one of you, to persuade and reproach you all day long and everywhere I find myself in your company.”

- Plato, *Apology*

THE STUDENT NEWSPAPER
OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE

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Freshman Bodies, Freshman Souls

This reprinted article first appeared in the Gadfly on September 2, 1982, and appears annually in our first issue. Without a doubt our athletic director, Mr. Krueger, is willing to stand in for the first person voice used in this article—and to answer any questions about our athletic program. -Ed.

Bryce Jacobsen A '42

The reasons, both physical and metaphysical, why everyone ought to join in our sports program are many. I list a few:

1. We have the best athletic program of any college in the country.
2. Exercise is good for the body...unless you sprain an ankle or something like that.
3. Most of us feel better, are more alert, and can get more work done if our bodies are healthy and our souls are relaxed.
4. Friendly competition is one of the really fun things in life. It is good for your soul.
5. Your circle of acquaintances will be greatly enlarged. This is good for the soul, provided you can separate the wheat from the chaff.
6. You will learn to accept, and bear with, thousands of split-second decisions from the officials, a few of which are wrong. This is very good for the soul.
7. Do you like to strive for, and achieve, specific goals? If so, consider our college blazers. They are much sought after, and the pathway is clearly laid out. Striving for goals is good for your soul.
8. It is probably true that the more pure fun occurs in the athletic program than in any other area of the college. Fun is good for your soul.
9. If you get involved in team sports, and become a "good team player," you have realized that there are things in the universe that are more important than your own ego. This is a great good for your soul.
10. The benefits of exercise and friendly competition, learned while one is young, should be maintained for the rest of your life...i.e, they should become habitual. For virtue, as the Philosopher said, is a habit.
11. You will get to know numerous alumni, tutors, and staff members who participate in the program. This is good for your soul, or ought to be...provided that they are the proper sort of role models.
12. Our showers are the best at the college; always plenty of hot water.
13. Are you bothered by, or worried by, tobacco fumes in the air? Come to the gym. The whole building is a nicotine-free zone.
14. If you perform some sort of heroic deed on the athletic field, your name will be mentioned in our weekly column. Heroes are always acclaimed. But do not be carried away by this. Remember that "the paths of glory lead but to the grave."
15. A high percentage of our best students are active participants in our program.
16. Those who play, stay.
17. The gym is not particularly well-equipped, as gyms go. But it has washers and dryers, and a coke machine...and I will explain to you, if you ask me, how you can get yourself in tip-top physical shape, without any equipment at all.
18. You can sit in an old-time barber's chair in my office...you can pump yourself up and down, and adjust the slope high or low. Where else can you do that?
19. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.
20. It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.

So there you have it: twenty good reasons why you should participate in our athletic program. If you are not convinced by all of this, come and talk to me. I can probably think of some more good reasons. Or better yet, talk with the upperclassmen. They will tell you all sorts of strange, interesting, and wondrous things. ♦

From the Editors:

Welcome back! Or, if you're a freshman, simply welcome! Don't worry, The Gadfly doesn't bite all the time. We usually just nibble a little now and then. After all, we do need a little bit of horse blood to reproduce and lay our eggs. Please enjoy these pages written by your fellow polity members--the gadflies among you.

- The Gadfly

On the Gadfly

Rose Pelham A'20

Dear Polity Members,

At the beginning of each academic year, we publish the first issue of the Gadfly with the following excerpt from Plato's Apology on the cover:

I was attached to the city by the god--though it seems a ridiculous thing to say--as upon a great and noble horse which was somewhat sluggish because of its size and needed to be stirred up by some kind of gadfly. It is to fulfill some such function that I believe the god has placed me in the city. I never cease to rouse each and every one of you, to persuade and reproach you all day long and everywhere I find myself in your company. (Apology 30e-31a)

The tradition serves two functions. The first is to introduce the paper to anyone who is new to campus by explaining the origins of our name. The second is to renew our commitment as a publication to live up to that name insofar as we are capable. It is this latter purpose that is the more important, as it situates us within a historic tradition of critical dissent. The tradition of challenging authority and questioning the ideas taken for granted within public opinion (that is to say: of challenging *δόξα*) is something we should regard as essential to living freely. Today, we typically think of this as an element of freedom of the press, though, in truth, it is much more fundamental. The expression of dissent or critical social commentary is key both to social change (be it reform or revolution) and the maintenance of an equitable society. It is a principal means by which oppression and injustice may be challenged. Last, the way in which we go about it, drawing upon the example Plato gives us of Socrates, makes the Gadfly an intrinsically Johnny institution.

The Gadfly is open to, and to a large extent relies upon, articles submitted to us by members of the polity--readers like you. We welcome the writing of anyone who wants to share news and new ideas with the polity: anything from student journalism and essays, to short stories and even poetry. There are relatively few restrictions on what can be published in the paper. Naturally, we will not publish hate speech, or articles that defame individuals. We also require that articles be sent to us either as Word or Google documents for ease of editing. That said, we publish the vast majority of student and tutor submissions, and generally want to facilitate the ability of polity members to share their ideas publicly.

The Gadfly changes every year with the changes of the polity and the polity members who run the publication. Our readers have a substantial effect on our work as a publication, both through the feedback we receive and the articles you submit. If you want to change some aspect of the publication, the best way to do so is to work with us on it. In that respect, we can always be yours--our reader's--the polity's publication.

Sincerely,
Rose Pelham
Co-Editor-in-Chief
A'20 ♦

An Appeal to Freshman

Kira Anderson A'18

Freshman,

St. John's has no guidebook. We have a handbook, yes, but that exists to tell you what is or is not appropriate behavior in our polity. A guidebook, however, tells you what things are of interest and how you may reach these interesting sites. St. John's has no guidebook, because truly everything here has a facet that will interest you. You may not yet know of your burning passion for improvisational acting or of your fiery dedication to your intramural basketball team. What interests you have now are limited to your experience outside of the college. Therefore, I am here to encourage you as a senior who knows that she has not experienced enough of the college in her three-going-on-four years; I address you as a student and as a club leader myself, as a lab assistant, and as someone who wants to see you succeed.

Coming to St. John's is a transformatory experience. You will learn many things here (and forget just as many perhaps), but I wish to impress upon you that this is a place of change. When you graduate, diploma in one hand and champagne in another, you will be a different person from the one who set foot at convocation and received a copy of Euclid. Of course, you will be older, because time waits for no one, but there will be a change of spirit as well. What you know and think you know before St. John's are merely stepping stones.

Thusly, I encourage you to take a full survey of what St. John's has to offer, detailed to you by someone who has in fact already started panicking about a life outside of the Johnnie Bubble. I will present my solicitation in the form of a list, as pleases me and the average reader. "Listicles," though universally despised, should be given the commendation of at least being succinct.

1. Join a club. In fact, join four or five, and when you realize you can't balance them all with your class work and your burgeoning friend group and need for down-time away from people, drop your least favourite or least favourites.
2. Explore every building on campus (when they are open of course, not after hours.) I have personally discovered many of my favourite hiding spots by taking a Johnnie safari and trekking about for a while. Your dorm is interesting, I'm sure, but I dare you to try to find the illusive Gadfly office or determine the age of Temple Iglehart (the gym, for the uninitiated.)
3. Make friends with people who are different from yourself and your normal group of friends. This may be self-explanatory, but often the best friendships are forged in the celebration of differences.
4. Know your tutors. I did not have a meeting with a tutor of my own volition until the summer after my junior, perhaps sophomore year, and I know that now that was a mistake. I feared that tutors would think me stupid; I thought that I didn't deserve their time. I learned, however, that I could not have been more wrong. Tutors work at St. John's because they love discussion and teaching, and every tutor that I have asked to meet with has accepted the offer with grace and kindness.
5. Know your administration and do not be afraid to speak up. This is a lesson I learned only after much experience at the college, and I fear it may be the most important that I relay to you. Know who you can report things to. Get to know who the Title IX coordinator is. Get to know the assistant dean. Meet our new President. Know your RA, and if you don't feel comfortable with an RA, make sure to get to know one of our several (FREE) school counselors. If something occurs that you are uncomfortable with, report the incidents as soon as possible. College is a time for learning, and that cannot be done in an unsafe situation.
6. Enjoy yourself. You will hear from many upperclassman that freshman year is the easiest year at St. John's. It is, however, the hardest. Coursework is different from anything you have experienced in highschool, and adjusting will be tough. Balancing and managing one's life is also incredibly difficult. If someone belittles your problems with school work, saying that the year is easy, feel free to spit back some sort of biting comment like "Did you feel like being a freshman was easy when you were a freshman?" Or perhaps ask in a nice manner. My biased concept of communication is already quite evident.

Along with this article worthy of a mediocre buzzfeed link, I also extend something else to you: words by which to live perhaps. This quote is now on t-shirts, and bags, and leather bracelets (which I will neither confirm nor deny that I own,) but I feel that it is nonetheless relevant.

"Not all those who wander are lost," JRR Tolkien reminds us. Freshman year is a year to wander, to discover and adventure. Ask questions and look stupid sometimes. Everyone does, even if they pretend they don't.

So, go out and wander, budding Johnnies. Try clubs and meet people and talk to leadership figures. Go and pour forth much. ♦

Civility and St. John's

John Verdi

Tutor

In any community, but especially in a small one such as ours, a concern for civility, broadly conceived, ought from time to time to occupy a prominent place in thought and conversation. By civility I mean not merely a kind of public politeness (though I intend this, too), but also all the ways of being a citizen in something analogous to a *civis* or *polis*. Civility at work is equivalent to good citizenship. Whether we think the College community is succeeding or failing in promoting civil behavior, it behooves us to reflect on exactly how civility and its opposite manifest themselves here. Our hope should be that with heightened awareness and dialogue about the very notion of civility, we shall find ourselves behaving in ways that further our common endeavor, that is, our own ongoing education in the liberal arts. Much of what I'm about to say will seem obvious, perhaps even platitudinous; but sometimes "the aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity." (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 129)

In this article I would like to propose—with little comment—

twelve guidelines, principles or rules of civility, of civil discourse in particular. I think of these as beginnings to what I hope will become an extended public discussion of the forms civil behavior can take at St. John's. (In fact, I'll end these remarks with an opening question.) There should also be opportunity to investigate whether or not civility is even all that important to our living together. I for one think that it is, but the forms it takes in practice may be perceived as varying widely, and some discussion of these manifestations could be enlightening.

1) Civil behavior is an essential component of good citizenship, and may even be equivalent to it. Civil behavior is an acknowledgement that the concerns of others have a proper place *alongside* my own.

2) Civil discourse is *bounded*. Participants agree, either explicitly or implicitly, to limit the scope of what may be said in a discussion. This is most in evidence in our classes.

3) Civil discourse shuns reliance on authority as much as

possible. The intrusion of authority into a discussion separates at least one member from the others, and thereby threatens the commonality of the enterprise.

4) Formal modes of address help maintain an attitude of respect and dispassion in civil conversation (at least usually!).

5) Civil discourse requires that we be prepared to put ourselves and our ideas *at risk*. In order for this to be possible community members must feel that they and their ideas and their questions will be taken seriously at all times.

6) In a genuine discussion participants attempt to find the maximum amount of common ground with one another. It is often the case that the continuing of the conversation takes precedence over the drawing of conclusions, however tempting such closure may be.

7) Civil discourse requires both *sympathetic listening* and *engaged speaking*. The former, which might also be called *civil listening*, demands that we listen with our ears, not our mouths. That is, we listen to find what is

best in what someone is saying; we thereby acknowledge that the other is someone like me. *Engaged speaking* is carried on with broad vision and with an eye on common purposes.

8) Such civil discourse opens up spaces for disagreements to be aired without bringing the conversation to a halt.

9) It demands that when we disagree, we not become offensive, cynical or silent.

10) To discuss civilly—and perhaps to be civil *in general*—I must be willing to place the goals of the community above my own

comfort. For a student this might mean speaking in class when he or she would rather not. For all community members it means not insisting on being left alone when by participating I can improve the community, no matter how uncomfortable participation may be for me.

11) Self-governance is a mode of civility. At St. John's the faculty tries to govern itself in many different ways. The Dean, Assistant Dean and Associate Dean for Graduate Programs are chosen from the faculty itself, and they serve for limited terms. At faculty meetings we try to discuss all manner of College concerns, from the

Program and our teaching in it, to the plans for the new dorm and the place athletics has here. We try to remain vigilant about not allowing self-governance to erode, but we often fail to achieve our ideal.

12) Civility, as it manifests itself in discussion, requires that I recognize the possibility that what someone might say has the power to change the way I see.

After this long introduction, I can now ask my opening question: How goes it with civility at St. John's?

John Verdi, Tutor ♦



What I Did Over the Summer

Hope Taglich A'21

Over the summer, I worked as an intern in the compliance regulation department for a regional home healthcare company in New York City. I scanned files. I called patients and asked if their medical equipment was delivered on time. I was cursed out in five different languages (English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish, Russian and French). I befriended my supervisor, a wonderful woman named Joselin. She was Dominican and from Long Island (we grew up a couple towns away from one another), as well as a passionate Francophile. (She gave me a copy of Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank*, which I devoured). I stayed with my grandparents, which was immensely helpful as it spared me the agony of having to pay New York rent and groceries. I performed at poetry slams at the Bowery Poetry Club. I read *Don Quixote* and *Death in Venice*. I started kickboxing. I began a brief romance with a boy named Kwai, with whom I was stuck on West 34th Street on one midsummer night, during the city's largest power outage since 1977. I cooked for the first time in my life (grilled chicken with paprika and pesto sauce, with some steamed lentils).

I also recovered from an-

orexia.

My eating disorder began during the summer of 2013. I was about to begin high school and had begun internalizing the idea of What I Was Supposed to Be. I was supposed to have twiggy arms and a flat stomach and a thigh gap and to make myself small and inoffensive and palatable and hot. My mother never actively projected her own insecurities onto me; I never remember her calling me fat, really. I grew up hearing her voice her own feelings of disgust over her body. I remember being nine years old and joking that, at holidays and family gatherings, the men always talked about politics and the women always talked about losing weight.

"I'm so *fat*," I would hear her murmur, pinching anything she could pinch. Sometimes she would call me over.

"Look at how *fat* I am."

I would compliment her, and she would respond with, "You're sweet." My mother very seldom says "Thank you," when someone compliments her. She seems to think each compliment is nothing more than an act of charity. My mother is a beautiful woman. She has honey-colored skin and rich hair and almond-shaped dark

eyes that flash when she gets excited about something and great cheekbones. She seemed blind to the fact. Through my observations of her, I learned to associate femininity with self-loathing. To be a woman is a sort of cardinal sin, one that must be atoned for through periods of fasting, fad diets and relentless exercise. And so that is what I did.

The summer before I began high school, I swam every day for an hour and began calorie-counting compulsively. I lost 20 pounds. Over the course of the year, I lost about 10 more pounds. It was never enough. My memories of high school are memories of standing in front of the mirror, pressing my legs and feet together to check the size of my thigh gap. I remember weighing myself every morning. At one point, I was only eating about 700 calories a day.

"You look sick," my mother told me.

I would turn my face away to hide my smile.

Once my grandparents came over and devoted much of their visit to urge me to gain weight. "You're losing your beauty," my grandfather said.

That brought a rebellious sense of pleasure. I *felt* beautiful the more I limited myself. Self-loathing

brought a sense of catharsis for me. Beauty, I felt, was a reward. I would punish myself for existing by decreasing inch by inch of my surface area. It was like cutting, except that it would enable me to fit into a size 2, and a size 2 was skinny, and skinny was beautiful. I felt isolated at school, and it became a repose for me. It was a source of self-assurance. Even if I was unpopular, I was worthy and beautiful. I became more worthy and more beautiful with each pound I lost. As I began to stress more and more about what was going on at home (which was a lot), I restricted more and more. It continued in college. I worked out even when injured. I ate very, very little. I neurotically calorie-counted.

Over the summer of 2019, I began my first treatment program (three days a week after work from 6 to 9, Saturday mornings from 8:30 to 1:30). This was essentially the result of an intervention.

“I don’t have a problem,” I told Alethia, my case manager at the clinic, one afternoon in May. Alethia is a trained professional; she is not supposed to cast visible judgement on patients. However, I could tell that she smelled bullshit.

“Seriously, I *don’t*.”

She asked me to describe my eating habits to her, and I told her. It was apparent, then, that according to Alethia, I definitely had a problem.

Reluctantly, I started treatment. After several weeks, I realized I did have a problem. I didn’t know if I wanted to recover, though, because I was comfortable the way I was. I wasn’t happy, really, but I had learned to dissociate pleasure from eating during that fateful summer of 2013, and I was afraid of the weight gain that would result from recovery.

I didn’t wake up one morning and feel instantly more determined. I gradually began to stick to the meal plan that had been assigned to me. I was shocked at how much energy I had; I no longer had midday energy crashes. I had been struggling with depression over the previous year, and, with each passing day, began to feel endorphins come creeping back. It reminded me of an unthawing. I had crippling episodes of dysmorphia, but I stopped weighing myself. I began to *want* to get better. It was a terrifying thing to want, because I could not imagine myself without my eating disorder. My skinniness had been a cornerstone of my identity since I was 14.

It is terrifying, but then you just do it. And it sucks, because it’s extremely stressful to eat three full meals a day. I hadn’t had three full meals a day in six years, *and* my meal plan also required me to have three snacks. However, a very wise refrigerator magnet once told me to do one thing a day that scares

me, and being meal plan-compliant became that one thing a day.

I had three meals a day, and the world did not implode. I did gain weight. I don’t know how much I weigh now. I recently talked to a friend who told me I looked “plumper,” and for a second, it felt like I could barely breathe. He was a friend I had been open about recovery with.

“It looks good on you,” he said.

And so it does. I am not a size 2 anymore, but my body is mine. My high school mantra was a quote from Kate Moss—*Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels*. Ms. Moss’s principle is incorrect. Emilie du Chatelet, the author of one of the first modern self-help books, *On Happiness*, states that in order to be happy, one must be without prejudice, passionate about various arts and subjects, virtuous, healthy and loving of oneself. In fact, Chatelet states, “One of the great secrets of happiness is to moderate one’s desires and to love the things already in one’s possession.” Moreover, in Descartes’s *Meditations*, the essence of human self is reduced to the purely intellectual: “I think, therefore I am.” The human body exists as a vehicle for the soul; the soul is the key to the human person. It is the source of its *ousia*. My body, therefore, does not define me. Society might care what size jeans I wear, but Descartes does not. ♦



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