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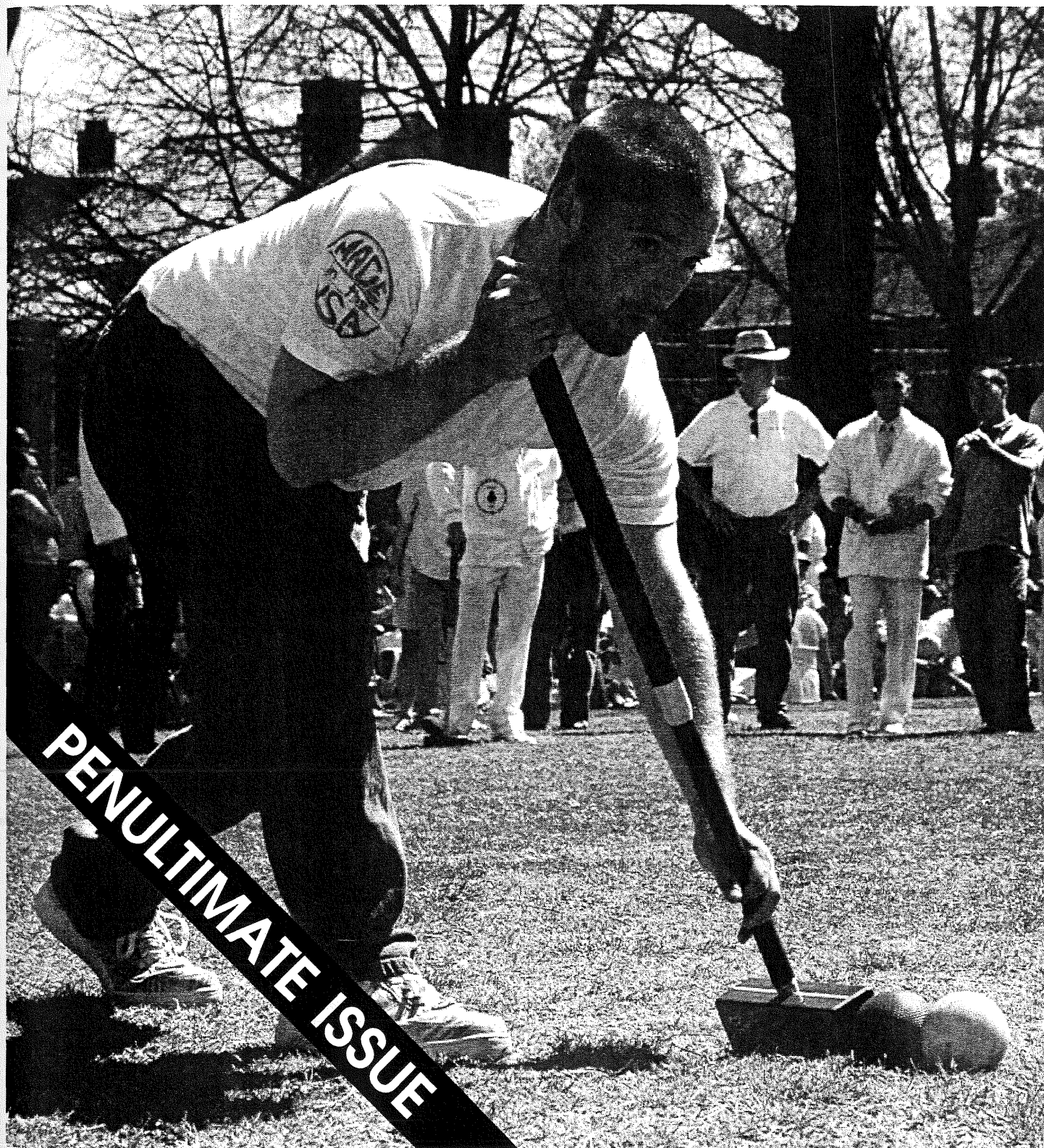
THE



GADFLY

The St. John's College Student Weekly
Volume XXVIII, Issue 22

Annapolis, Maryland
April 26, 2007



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Founded in 1980, *The Gadfly* is the student weekly distributed free to over 500 students, faculty, and staff of the Annapolis campus as well as tutors emeriti, members of the Board of Visitors and Governors, and the offices at the St. John's Santa Fe campus. Opinions expressed within are the sole responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the opinions of *The Gadfly* staff. *The Gadfly* reserves the right to accept, reject, and edit submissions in any way necessary to publish the most thoughtful, informative, and thought-provoking newspaper which circumstances at St. John's permit.

Letters of 200 words or fewer have a better chance of being published than those longer than this limit. Letters submitted will be edited for grammar, punctuation, and spelling in most cases. *The Gadfly* is not obligated to publish all submissions and will not print anonymous submissions except under special circumstances. Yearly subscriptions are available for \$30.00. Tax-deductible contributions are greatly appreciated. Please make checks payable to *The Gadfly*.

The deadline for submissions is Saturday before midnight, unless permission for a delay is granted in advance. Submissions can be accepted as long as they are legibly written, but typed copies, diskettes, and e-mail submissions are greatly preferred. Please e-mail submissions to gadfly@sjca.edu.

LETTERS

Friday Night Punctuality

The bell Mr. Dink rings in the FSK lobby after every Friday night lecture is a signal that the lecture question period is about to start. It is about to start. Not in five minutes. Not in ten. And certainly not in a half-hour. It may not seem to be a big deal to be a few minutes late, but it is disruptive, not to mention rude both to those who are trying to listen and to the lecturer.

I hope next year we can be more prompt and show the lecturers the proper respect.

Bradley van Uden '10

New Gadfly Editor, etc.

We are proud to announce that Ms. Elizabeth Burlington will become the new Editor-in-Chief of the *Gadfly* next fall. Ms. Burlington has been an Assistant Editor and weekly columnist for the *Gadfly* since the beginning of the year, and has many talents – not the least of which are her sparkling personality and sense of humor that no one else appreciates, both of which the current editors felt were essential qualifications for the job.

In addition, the editors would like to take this opportunity to notify the polity that next week's issue will be the final *Gadfly* of the year. You know what that means: yes, now is the

perfect time for you to submit that "Greatest *Gadfly* Article of All Time" you've been pondering since the beginning of the year. (Seniors take note: you wouldn't want to graduate without being able to say that you had at least one article printed in the *Gadfly*, would you?)

Please Note: the usual Saturday night submission deadline (see bottom left) still applies, although we will do our best to exercise clemency toward tardy submissions for the final issue of the year.

The Editors

Spring Don Rag Schedule

Freshmen, sophomores, and juniors: Please note that Spring Don Rags will occur on the following days.

Monday, May 7
Tuesday, May 8
Wednesday, May 9
Thursday, May 10
Friday, May 11

Tutorials will be cancelled on those days. Seminars and preceptorials will continue to meet.

Consult the Registrar's bulletin board in the Coffee Shop for the date, time, and location of your Don Rag.

"Resurgent Winter Did not Quite"

by Shant Shahrigian, '08

Resurgent winter did not quite kill
the flowers (tulips) outside the BBC.
Deprived of the sun they'd wilted until
last week—they bloomed, by the door and a tree.

Hopeful sight. Hidden from the basement view,
they're yet visible very late at night:
Of the bright colors you can make out some hue,
the petals catching rays from the inside light.

Thoughts on the Just, the Fair, the Arbitrary, and Grading at the College

by John Tomarchio
Tutor

ARE DEADLINES JUST? I don't think so—not because they are unjust, but because they are not a matter of *the Just*. I Capitalize and *italicize* to emphasize that I mean *just* in the fulsome sense of *good by nature*. For example, when I make a Junior Language essay due next Friday in anticipation of making a Freshman Lab essay due the following Friday—to pace my grading load—being oblivious that the Juniors are currently suffering Maxwell, and that one of my core groups even has a Maxwell essay due that week, there is nothing in the nature of the thing that makes the deadline right or wrong. It is like laws that make it right to drive on the right side of the road: they are arbitrary laws [from Latin *arbitrium*, decision], rules of order that have a reason for them and create an obligation, but by virtue of an elective decision duly made, not a natural good rightly discerned.

Essay deadlines, being of an arbitrary nature, are more a matter of the fair than the just. The fair stipulates what applies to each, and all, and in the same way. Is it *fair* that some should have more time to write their essay? In the scenario I give above, some students have less time to write their French essay because of their Maxwell essay. One student dashes off a perfunctory essay because he cares little for Molière, while another gets mired down from delving deep into the poem. Yet another is an inveterate procrastinator. The problem is that it's often hard to tell who's been delving and who procrastinating. To avoid judgments, we resort to rules: it's easier to determine whether something is fair by the rules than just in itself, because the rules are of our own making, whereas natures are not. But sometimes the good disobeys the rules. And sometimes the bad obeys them.

When I lived another life in another world as a professor of Philosophy (I capitalize to emphasize that I mean the discipline, not the activity), my paper assignments took the form of well defined tasks published *cum* grading-criteria at the start of the semester, together with their percentage-values in the grade-average. Other professors were obliged to publish similar syllabi, criteria, and percentages; many also published penalties for late papers. Students knew from the outset what was expected and how it would be graded. There are no pub-

lished tasks *cum* criteria for St. John's essays, and no published grades, let alone penalties, these being at odds with the nature of the thing. Even notwithstanding that such a personal inquiry is naturally ruled by the writer's own rhythms of thought, what sort of penalty is fair where both grades and penalties remain undisclosed?

I, for one, think that essays are an indispensable part of a St. John's tutorial. Most of our learning at the College is done in common, but if individual students do not take responsibility for their own thinking, I think that their learning will be incomplete and their education deficient. If students are to learn to think for themselves, they must sometimes think by themselves. I think that essay accounts of such independent thinking are such an essential part of the work of a tutorial, that I will not give a "satisfying grade" to a student who fails to give one in. I tell students from the beginning: give me your essays, however late, or I will count your work less than satisfactory. (I also mention, by the by, that I probably won't be able not to feel *really annoyed* while reading those late essays—given the nature of retro-reading—and that it may well depress my evaluation as well as my spirits, even despite my best intentions to the contrary—given my nature as a creature subject to passions.)¹

Now, there may be tutors who regard tutorial essays quite differently, as ancillary rather than essential, who think the real learning goes on in the talking. A tutor may assign essays mostly because of the College rule about them. Such differences in outlook are intentionally tolerated at the College. The consequence, however, is that students doing the same part of the Program are subject to grading that varies depending on the tutors they happen to get. The arbitrary comes into play here, this time not in the sense of the elective, but of the accidental, what by nature lacks a reason or rule in itself. Of course, the arbitrary in the form of the accidental belongs by nature to all things in motion, and so to the College. Perhaps the important thing is that tutors disclose their

expectations, that they not seem arbitrary in the sense of capricious.

The difficult case for me is grading by committee. Even if grading naturally varies from tutorial to tutorial, at least within each there tends to be uniformity. But senior essay committees are *ad hoc* and *e pluribus*. Differences from tutor to tutor and committee to committee are only natural. Sometimes differences in evaluations are quantitatively significant, as between an A- and a B, and sometimes only in *feel*, as between an A- and B+ (the *nearly excellent* and the merely *very good*?). There is no arbiter of such differences except the tutors themselves. Sometimes a decision is reached by one tutor's persuading the others about the merit of the essay, but sometimes only by a compromise (in rare cases, the committee is hung, though never hanged). Such a grade is not arbitrary in the sense of capricious, since there are rules and reasons for it, but in the sense of negotiated, since the rules are procedural and the reasons pragmatic, so that the consensus is as much a decision as an evaluation.

Perhaps the root of the difficulty is that left to our own devices, we might well not give grades at all. Our device for comparing evaluations of what is done here is the Don Rag. But when we accede to the world's demand for a quantitative account, and take up the business of grade-giving and transcript-making, we *willy nilly* [*cf.* Latin *volo nolo*] get into the business of translating our other-worldly ways into worldly terms. In speaking a language not our own, we risk speaking it poorly and not being understood. I think that to speak it effectively and responsibly, we need to look at our own ways collectively and at the world's ways pragmatically. The world seeks by means of number and rule to overcome the capricious, the accidental, the variable, even the individual. It thinks justice is fairness, and outcomes measurable. It interprets the grades we provide it with its curves, percentiles, and equations, so as to measure our ways of learning and evaluating with its divergent ones. Its decisions follow suit. How do we enter into converse with such a world, yet not be of it? 🐸

1. I'm not sure whether such a disclaimer should save me from imputations of being a lying weasel. In any case, I think *Jen* should *suit*, rather than *sais*, but what do I know? :)

The Uselessness of St. John's

by Tim Jones '08

ST. JOHN'S IS NOT USEFUL for anything. Here at the college, we attempt to study subjects, but instead of studying the subjects themselves, we end up studying interpretations of those subjects. Rather than coming to know Shakespeare through acting and watching his plays, we read them silently in our dorm rooms. We study math not by figuring out answers to mathematical questions, but by memorizing proofs already figured out by earlier mathematicians and regurgitating them in a classroom. In lab, we conduct experiments, but at the same time we are hindered by having to discuss the idle and often inaccurate speculations of the program authors who first attempted those experiments. Our own efforts at writing are limited to essays about program books, and so student writings are nothing more than inferior secondary sources. There are few exceptions to this: the typical student writes three or four poems before graduating. Even in philosophy – where it would be logical that our Socratic, dialogue-oriented class format should be able to address many of these concerns – no student is ever allowed to begin or organize a philosophical inquiry by himself. Instead, it is always begun and organized according to a given reading.

St. John's doesn't strive for anything new or innovative, but rather prefers to rehash the past. Therefore it might be reasonable to think that St. John's would be an ideal place to study history. This is not the case. An historian does not simply try to understand the past in the way that it has been understood by conven-

tional wisdom. Rather, a successful historian tries to identify and correct the inaccuracies of other historians. Rejecting conventional wisdom requires imagination. As the examples above illustrate, the St. John's program does nothing to spur the imagination to such insights. Of course, I do not dispute that it requires some imagination in order to connect two parts of a book, as we often are required to do in seminar. But the ability to interpret a seminar text comes from experience of the world more than simply from reading other books. In this respect, the St. John's curriculum isn't even the best context in which to understand literature.

So what is a St. John's education good for? To begin with, it is good for subduing students such that they write articles against the curriculum rather than actually hoping or attempting any real change. It enables St. John's alumni to claim that they "have read all the great books." It even has small research benefit, since alumni are familiar with a variety of sources on many topics, though not much of a benefit, since little is known about any topic in particular. St. John's as a "Great Books" program has no utility. We all know this, and often laugh about the job outlook for Johnnies, but only to avoid the truth, that there is no good reason for anyone to enroll in a great books program.

That said, I hope to see you next year. (Yes, that was a hypocritical statement: what else would you expect from a Johnnie?)

WHERE'S YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR?
THE TRUTH ABOUT
Julius Caesar:



End-of-Semester BWI Shuttles

Sign up in the blue
binder in the Asst.
Dean's office.

Space is limited, so
sign up early!

'Dear Elizabeth...'

by Elizabeth Burlington '08 and Ali Schwab '08
Editors

DEAR ALIZABETH,

When I came to St. John's I was a barely legal virgin who didn't dance, drink, smoke, or lie. The Truth and Virtue in my soul held out bravely for a few weeks until I encountered these other great powers, free booze and [lustful] upperclassmen. I am now heartless and a drunk. (I choose to blame junior year.) My new-found viciousness, while solving most of my problems, has created a few. Specifically, most of my friends, angels that they are, find it a little hard to talk to me. Some of them have even suggested I should maybe cut down on the drinking! How can I conceal my real character from them?

Secondly, I feel I am losing my intellectual credibility. Isn't there a disconnect in drinking myself into a stupor on Wednesday night and arguing for Universal Moral Certainty on Thursday night? I used to be a smart person! Really! Now I only hope my classmates can't guess that when I should be thinking about the domain of rational numbers I'm probably thinking about my core group member's amazing [looks]. Does this mean I should rethink my life? Or is there perhaps some sophistry you can offer me in my time of self-doubt which will allow me to continue my happy hobby of drinking at least on days that end in "y"?

Sincerely,
You Don't Know Me

Gentle Junior,

Sophistry is my colleague's department. I only deal in euphemisms, which are fruit of the same branch, but are never really successful in disguising the truth. But I'll do what I can to help. Real letters just tickle me and my unlikely partner pink.

Since you were so kind as to open up the possibility that you should rethink at least certain aspects of your lifestyle, I think that I (you know me) will take that route. Beer

is not the answer. It drives one to drink. (Someone finally took me aside and explained it to me the other day. I was shocked and horrified.) You just read *Gulliver's Travels*, right? You remember the Yahoos getting high on Mystery Root and rolling about on the ground? That should be all the evidence you need that (a) intoxication is silly, in a disgusting kind of way, and (b) it isn't



conductive to the truth and virtue you miss so much. It's rolling around on the ground, for Pete's sake! A walk around town on a gorgeous day, chatting innocently with friends about inconsequential things, is more fun and does fewer gross things to your liver.

Furthermore, you need to find something more interesting to look at than other people's bodies. Have you tried... you know... art? I mean real art. Real art is like Wheaties for the eyes. If you have a decent visual memory, it's Wheaties for the imagination too. After you realize how nice it is to take intellectual stimulation from what you look at, your eyes and your imagination will become habituated to having something

substantial to chew on, and it'll be easier to concentrate in math class. It'll give you something to talk about with your estranged friends, too. If art doesn't work, get some other fun little hobby. Many things can accomplish that same end. You know what you like better than I do.

Emerging from a drunken, lustful haze and starting to go through life clear-eyed and sober is like coming out of the cave. You blink a little bit, but then you're fine, and you realize the cave was a pretty depressing place. The same thing is true of going from heartlessness to general good manners. Finish adjusting to the small amount of inconvenience it causes, get a little taste of being nice to people, and you won't want to ruin people's days anymore with your sour ranting.

My kids will get the same monologue and like it,

A. Schwab

Dear "I Probably Know You,"

Drinking yourself stupid is never generally a good idea, but it sure is amusing for other people. I will probably get in deep doo-doo for saying that, but I have two papers to write this week and right now you are not my highest priority. Plus it smells like tuna in this office, for some reason.

Don't ever change yourself to make other people happy. No matter how much it may "benefit you in the long run" or "prevent near-death by alcohol poisoning on Tuesday nights" it is simply not a good idea. Do what

your heart tells you, and now my heart is telling me that I need an ice cream sandwich.

Eating ice cream sandwiches instead of answering your questions,
E. McDowell Burlington-Sainz

Please send your
Program Predicaments
to Elizabeth Burlington
or Ali Schwab
via Campus Mail.

CROQUET 2007

Photos by Clarke Saylor



The Freshman and St. John's Choruses sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" and "Navy/Croquet Hymn" under the direction of Mr. Kalkavage



They must get hot in those sweaters, don't you think?



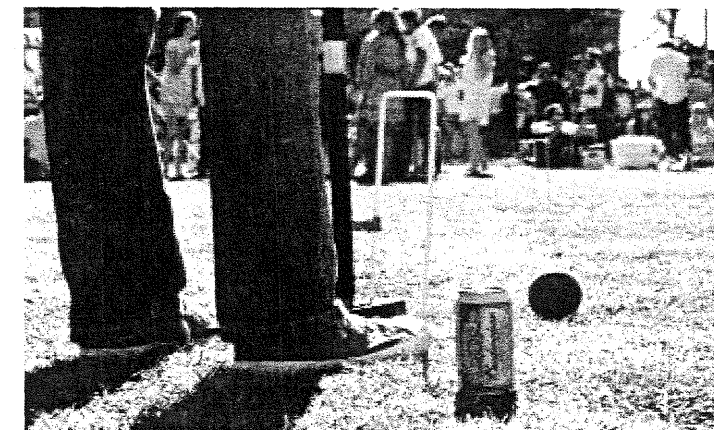
The whole shebang: a view of the action from Pinkney Hall.



Johnnies take the field sporting patriotic paraphernalia - a nice contrast to last year's Soviet-themed uniforms.



Schylar Sturm '08 and Julia Patterson '09 - or "Spatterson," for short.



Jake Crabbs '09, fortified by his trusty Budweiser, prepares to make the perfect shot.



Victory! Sterling Schlegel '08 embraces Tristan Evans-Wilent '07 while Christopher Mules '07 approaches.

THE GADFLY

St. John's College
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Johnnie Quotes of the Week

Ms. S: That's not elegant! It's just bad algebra!

Tutor [on Pride and Prejudice]: I suppose if you have four daughters... I only had the one son, but he's grown now, so who cares about him.

Tutor: I wasn't always as you see me. I used to be worse.

DC Minutes April 18

by Charles Hamm '08
D.C. Secretary

Members Present: Mr. Meyers, Mr. Gershman, Mr. Bea, Mr. Moore, Ms. Andrews, Mr. Weller, Mr. Kuenzi, Mr. Pittman, Ms. Hauspurg, Mr. Hamm, Ms. Hickling, Mr. Lewkow, Mr. Drexler, Ms. Seiler, Ms. Walsh, Mr. Donahoe. Agenda: Discussion of the new Orientation process. Mr. Meyers began the meeting by presenting the council members with a short letter to send to our counterparts at Virginia Tech expressing our sympathy and support. All members supported the idea. The following discussion was a short one on the new orientation process. Freshman tours, Movers and Shakers and generally the entire Orientation are being evaluated. The general consensus was that far more student involvement is needed. The idea of a short book with all information relevant to freshmen, to supplement the student handbook, was proposed and supported.

2007 Mitchell Gallery Community Art Exhibition

OPENING RECEPTION: Sunday April 29, 3:00 – 5:00 PM. Reception will feature poetry reading, music by Old Tyme Band, and announcement of Moran Prize.

COMMUNITY ART EXHIBITION: April 29 – May 13, 2007

SCI MINUTES

BY SUSAN GARRIGLE '09

The Student Committee on Instruction met in the Private Dining Room at 11:45 AM on Thursday, April 19, 2007. Members present: Mr. Wilford, Ms. Garrigle, Mr. Croker, Ms. Goguen, Mr. Lindquist, Mr. Greenstine, and Mr. Papadopoulos. Also present: Ms. Kronsberg.

The primary objective of the meeting was to hold a forum on the Calculus Manual. It was drawn to the committee's attention that in order to discuss the manual we must first ask the question: What do we want to get out of the manual and what do we ultimately want to achieve by learning calculus? Many problems with the method in which it is taught were raised such as how the students have difficulty thinking about calculus abstractly and then applying it to physics. It would be beneficial to show the application sooner in the learning process thus helping with the conceptualization. As usual with math discussions, the Algebra Test was raised. It seems

important that in many classes students have difficulty following the manipulations of the equations, because they are poor at Algebra and do not remember its basic concepts.

Moreover, students see something intimidating in the math, as they are uncomfortable with the notation. Further, unlike in freshman and sophomore Math Tutorials, participation at the board is not divided evenly among the class, therefore giving some students a free ride to get away without understanding even the most basic algebraic steps. Further it appears that in the minds of the students there is something innately easier in drawing a diagram for geometry than going through lengthy steps. Following it on the board becomes difficult.

The SCI meets every Thursday at 11:45 AM in the Private Dining Room. All members of the polity are welcome to attend. 🐝

The King William Players, directed by senior Chris Bea, present:

The G

by N

Fr

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FREE AN

DATE DUE

