

"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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Founded in 1980, the *Gadfly* is the student newsmagazine distributed to over 600 students, faculty, and staff of the Annapolis campus.

Opinions expressed within are the sole responsibility of the author(s). The *Gadfly* reserves the right to accept, reject, and edit submissions in any way necessary to publish a professional, informative, and thought-provoking newsmagazine.

The next *Gadfly* meeting will take place Sunday, Sept. 8, at 7 PM in Room 109 on the first lower level of the Barr-Buchanan Center.

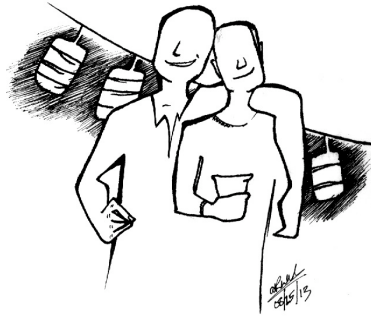
Articles should be submitted by Friday, Sept. 6, at 11:59 PM to sjca.gadfly@gmail.com.

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This House for the Feeble-Minded

Robert Malka A'15

Dear Freshmen,

Welcome to St. John's. It's lovely, isn't it? The College's isolation from the outside world is deceptively important to the Program. Bearing that

in mind, I would like to talk to you about something I find immensely important—defending what the Program does, not just for us as individuals, but for society as a whole.

I'm pretty sure that every single Johnnie has had to defend the Program before skeptics ranging from friends and family to strangers and employers who gawk, aghast, at the thought of declaring no majors, of taking no tests, of hearing no expert lecturers, of reading apparently old, useless, decrepit books by old, useless, decrepit authors—until it occurs to these interlocutors to ask that really, really frustrating question:

“So what do you guys *learn*?” As if we don't.

My answer usually goes something like this: Rather than learn a very small portion of a very particular subject, we spend time wrestling with—and eventually *unlearning*—many of the prejudices and superstitions we have been carrying around for the better part of two decades. We do this by sitting around a table and hashing things out with the aid of difficult primary texts (and without watered-down scholarly analyses); this process gives us a strong set of communication and critical-thinking skills applicable to any field. Instead of being forced to commit at the ripe age of 20(ish) to a major that we will, statistically speaking, change an average of *five times* throughout our college careers, we get four more years to discover ourselves and what we really want, all the while developing vital skills.

And this explanation doesn't even address the legitimate and valid ways that Aristotle and Einstein, Plato and Nietzsche, Dante and Plutarch and all the rest provide genuine insight: about who we are, what we want, and why we do what we do; about what truth is, about why bad things happen to good people, about why we are here in the first place. Their answers—and just as important, their questions—reveal to us our own wounds and defenses, losses and victories and struggles, and potential yet to be actualized.

Whenever someone is unimpressed by the St. John's Program (thankfully I don't meet those people, but I hear that they exist), I am reminded of an Isaac Asimov short story called “Profession,” which, were I able to shift around the Program a bit, I would make required summer reading for freshmen. It's an allegory of the United States' educational paradigm as we know it. In the story, by a certain age children are “taped” (made to specialize in a particular field) and shipped off to some location in the galaxy to do their work. Our main character, however, can't be taped like everyone else, and, to his shame, is sent off to a “House for the Feeble-Minded,” where he reads and thinks (and therefore innovates) all day. But he can't accept that he's been put in a place with such a damning name, so he goes out into the world and tries to figure out his lot in life. As it turns out (spoilers!), the House for the Feeble-minded is a ruse to capture the world's true innovators: “We bring you here to a House for the Feeble-minded and the man who won't accept that is the man we want. It's a method that can be cruel but it works. It won't do to say to a man, ‘You can create. Do so.’ It is much safer to wait for a man to say, ‘I can create, and I will do so whether you wish it or not.’”

Now, obviously, St. John's is not a “House for the Feeble-minded”—but those who look down upon our education very likely believe it to be. We must do as our main character does: believe in ourselves and the Program enough to know that St. John's is perhaps the smoothest road to becoming a critical thinker and to developing the inner strength to reflect on ourselves so that we can pursue a life worth living. ♦

“We must...believe in ourselves and the Program enough to know that St. John's is perhaps the smoothest road to becoming a critical thinker...”

From the Editors:

To our newest Johnnies, welcome. To old friends, welcome back. We're excited to resume at the helm of the *Gadfly*, and we're eager to continue its tradition of supporting sustained, thoughtful inquiry at the College. We'd like to invite all members of the community—students, staff and faculty, administration and alumni—to submit.

This issue focuses on those new to our community. You will find here bits of advice solicited from the Polity via Facebook. We hope the words for newcomers will not only serve those who have just arrived, but every Johnnie-in-development.

Best wishes in the coming year.



Dear Class of 2017...

This year, in conjunction with the new overnight program, the Admissions Office will be reading a few freshmen seminar assignments. They recently took part in a Harvey lab and sheep pluck dissection. For more information, and to find ways to help out with the prospective student experience, please contact Alexandria Hinds at 410-626-2525, or Alexandria.Hinds@sjca.edu.

As the school year begins, the Admissions Office is alone in ruminating on transitions and endings. For the rest of the community, Registration and Convocation mark the beginning of your journey. Even President Nelson is blogging about “Beginnings.” Yet, we in the Admissions Office, know that your journey began a long time ago. We have had the privilege to get to know you—some through visits and interviews, others through the Summer Academy or Accepted Students’ Day—and all of you through the application process itself. We know who spent a semester at sea, who juggles fire, who designs websites, who is a published author, who applied the day before Registration, who is an accomplished pianist, and who is on Facebook 20 hours a day (of course, you know who that is too). We also know who loves J.D. Salinger and Ayn Rand (but don’t worry—it’s all confidential over here).

This leg of the journey that you’ve chosen to undertake with us will reveal many things about your nature. Your time at St. John’s will shape you—but not into any given mold. Instead, it will teach you what is to be sloughed off, and what is fundamentally you. The Program will strip away many of your delusions and insecurities, and expose your inner nature. You will be able to clearly look at the biases which have held you captive (in some cases, unknowingly). Some of these biases you will keep; others you will release. The process is liberating.

As you walk this journey (which probably started when you received the “Following Teacher Will Return” mailing, or picked up your first copy of *Colleges That Change Lives*, or listened to that nudging from a parent, friend or teacher who said, “But you have to look at this school”),

we in the Admissions Office are cheering you on. When we took time with you during the application process (whether it took years or days), it was because we really thought you’d be a good fit for St. John’s. And so, we encourage you to stop in sometime and say hi. Tell us what life is like now that you’re on campus. Tell us how we can be more effective in spreading the gospel of St. John’s in your hometown. Most importantly, come tell us what you’re reading and thinking about in class—we have a genuine interest in the things that are important to you, as students.

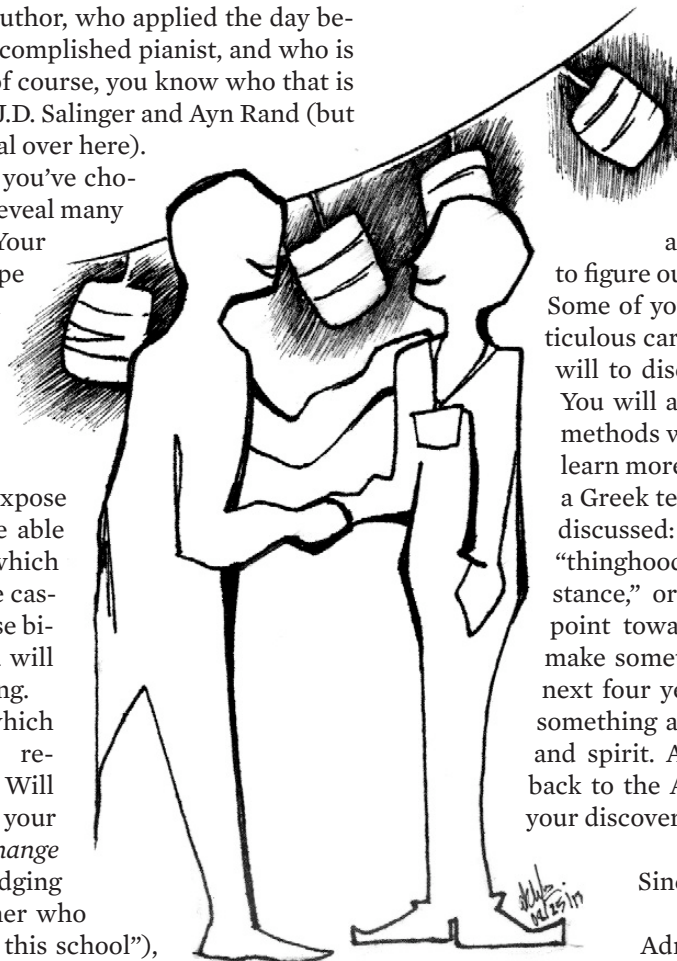
There is nothing more satisfying to an Admissions Officer than knowing the fit has been found, and found here.

At the risk of sounding trite: lab class is possibly the best metaphor for life. At St. John’s, you are given a basic framework and a few tools, and then you’re left

to figure out both the question and the process. Some of you will cut into the matter with meticulous care and precision. Others will chop at will to discover what can be exposed within. You will all watch each other and share your methods with one another, and in the process, learn more than you ever could alone. There is a Greek term in lab you have probably already discussed: ουσια. This is roughly translated as “thinghood,” or sometimes “essence,” or “substance,” or quite simply, “being.” It seems to point toward the universal properties which make something a thing *qua* thing. During the next four years you will likely discover a little something about the ουσια of the human mind and spirit. And we sincerely hope you’ll come back to the Admissions Office to share a few of your discoveries with us along the way.

Sincerely,

Admissions Office



The Gadfly Presents the Class of 2017

EARNEST

PHENOMENAL

NOUMENAL

what's the fluid chart?

I made a terrible mistake.

I missed breakfast.

Hey-- i probably should have asked this before we got on the road-- but is there any rule against bringing fish?

Does the dining hall have good hot sauce selection?
Very important question.

... is anyone from illinois

yeah okay
so how do you pronounce the X
chi
is it like the jewish ch or what

on a more serious note, what are the chances of getting a caprese salad in the dining hall?

Also would you recommend bringing Tupperware?

How's the gym there? Specifically in regards to pumping iron?

*The following quotes are taken from the SJCA Class of 2017 Facebook page. The *Gadfly* bears no responsibility for the ridiculous things freshmen say.

Can someone explain to me the phys ed requirement?

Would a Keurig Cup Maker count as an open heating element?

Can anyone pls help define the difference(s) between modernism and postmodernism?

is it at all possible to do both a varsity sport and intermural?

That would depend on how Good is defined, which would probably depend on other fundamental assumptions about reality such as Materialism vs. Immaterialism, Atheism vs. Theism, Atelological vs. Telological, Existentialism vs. Realism, etc. Good's definition, as well as the definition of the other Transcendentals, is determined through the analysis of those fundamental assumptions one makes. Indeed, I think all thought is.

POSTURING

programtip #1

you're in college. party hard, have fun, play sports, and make mistakes and stuff. then monday morning (or any morning, let's be honest), wake up, shake it off, and go to class prepared to contribute and to respect the contributions of others because, after all, you're in college.

programtip #2

books shmooks.
have fun and grow.

programtip #3

send amorous letters through campus mail; it may end up getting you a spouse.

programtip #4

moderation and your lexicon are your new best friends.

programtip #5

listen to bach.

programtip #6

sing from the bottom of your soul. freshman chorus might be the single most important class at st. john's.

programtip #7

get sunlight and occasional exercise.

programtip #8

you are allowed to have silences during discussions.

programtip #9

love the program, and how it might enhance and better who you already are. if you don't love a particular text, that is all right. always remember who you are, or continue to mold who you want to be. holding to one's self-identity can be difficult at a college full of enthusiasts, but remember: this program is here for the purpose of helping you to be the person you would like to be four years from now.

A Letter from the Quintessential Hell Bitch

Catherine Moon A'14

A quick check of your new lexicon or look at one of Ms. Brann's old speeches will tell you that the word "gymnasium" derives from a Greek word meaning "place of nakedness." Well, that's kind of uncomfortable—or at least that was my immediate reaction when I first heard this information, as a freshman. I remember thinking that it was an unfortunate etymology, and certainly not one that enticed me to enter a place with which I had little familiarity.

The gym and anything considered an athletic endeavor fiercely intimidated me, because I believed myself to have some semblance of self-knowledge and thus to know this: I was not an athlete. I *knew* I couldn't do those things. When the Athletic Director gave his infamous *thumos* speech, he told us we were *all* athletes. He spoke of how the life of the mind is nothing without a sound body.

Of course, I knew his words did not apply to me. As I said, I was no athlete. There's no way the upperclassmen at Kunai or Intramurals or any of the other club sports would have actually wanted me to show up and participate with all my ineptitude and absence of *techné*.

So I didn't show up. I didn't participate. I wasn't present. All I did freshman year was go to class and watch a *lot* of movies, which, although not inherently bad, just got boring after a while. Most of the people I knew were on my floor or in my classes, and I certainly did not know—let alone speak to—anyone who wasn't a freshmen. Going into sophomore year, I didn't want that to be the case again.

So I tried. I went to Kunai, and I was bad. There were many, many times when I went to kick the ball and completely missed or fell down for no reason. But, despite my ineptitude, the girls were nice, and for some crazy reason they seemed grateful for my presence. After that first attempt, I wasn't sure whether I would go back. Even though the girls were super friendly, and it felt incredible to survive something I never thought I'd be able to do, I was still embarrassed about my straggling skill level.

Then, one afternoon, one of the Kunai captains came up to me and said that she really appreciated me being there and would be so pleased if I came back. It wasn't an imperative. It didn't feel like she was commanding what I ought to do or be; rather, she was letting me know who I *could* be, and that I was probably capable of more than I knew.

So I went back. I kept trying. I returned to soccer every Tuesday and Friday, and by the end of the season, I actually scored a goal. I persevered through each new sport, and by the winter I eventually felt comfortable enough with myself to play with the guys in Intramurals, and I became a regular member of their team. Suddenly, I wasn't stuck in my bed watching that episode of *How I Met Your Mother* I had already seen five times. I actually had places to be. I even knew and felt comfortable enough to be conversant with most people on campus, all because that first day of Kunai soccer sophomore

year, I chose to be vulnerable. I chose to be naked. I had finally chosen to take the leap and enter the gymnasium.

My first thought about the etymology of that word was correct: it *is* uncomfortable. Allowing yourself to test your limits and be vulnerable in front of strangers is uncomfortable and intimidating and scary. But it's worth it. Don't take the discomfort as a sign to quit or runaway, but rather as an indication that there's something at stake, that you're on the precipice of an unexpected and worthwhile gain.

So, come to the gym, the place of nakedness, of vulnerability and, in the words of Mr. Grenke, "Learn who you are. Learn who you want to be. Learn who you can be." With pride, I can finally say I am an athlete, and

that my limits are much farther than I ever knew. There is nothing I want to do that I feel unable to pursue. Welcome to St. John's, and I hope that now or one day soon, this will be true for you too. ♦

“Allowing yourself to test your limits and be vulnerable in front of strangers is uncomfortable and intimidating and scary. But it's worth it.”

Announcing Project Polity

As Socrates once said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." This short line speaks to Johnnies in a way that almost defines our entire endeavor here. However, within this profound self-examination, we easily become so submerged in theory that we fail to *do* anything that lives up to the Virtue over which we speculate.

Project Polity also believes that "the un-lived life is not worth examining." While we love to wonder, "What is Virtue?", we also like to do what most immediately seems virtuous: to aid the needy, the less fortunate, the environment, and to further the community in which we live.

We do this through meaningful community service, can drives, tutoring, fundraising, and outreach. We believe that such activities not only help ground us in the midst of this college's deep examination and introspection, but also help bring Johnnies together and bolster the camaraderie of the Polity we all cherish.

However, we also see the "Polity" as not existing only within the St. John's "bubble," but also within our larger community. Thus, we also seek to incorporate "Townies" and "Middies" into our activities.

So if you would like to spend a few hours through the year to take your mind off philosophy and give back to the city in which you live, if you would like a chance to meet new Johnnies and other Annapolitans, then help out with any number of Project Polity's service projects.

We will be holding a meeting in the private dining room at 11:30 am on Thursday, September 5th. If you would like to be on our e-mail list, please write to projectpolity.scja@gmail.com. We look forward to seeing and hearing from you! ♦

BURSTING THE JOHNNIE BUBBLE

(ohnnie)

Ian Tuttle A'14

Welcome to the newest members of our community, and a brief word of explanation: If your experience is like mine, you will soon discover that St. John's is an unfamiliarly insular place. As the College has matured, it has sought to cultivate an atmosphere unburdened, as much as possible, by the grind of the outside world, so that each member of the Polity can enter deeply into the study of "the best that has been thought and said."

While I heartily support that endeavor, it can, consequently, be easy for us to become unmoored—to forget that the questions we ask and the conclusions we reach have consequences that ex-

tend far beyond the boundaries of our small campus. "Bursting the Johnnie Bubble" is a regular column that seeks to remind us of the world "out there" and stimulate conversation on a variety of topics that may not arise explicitly around the seminar table, but with which we must still contend. We should hope that we can consider them more thoughtfully and pursue answers with greater clarity as readers of the Great Books.

Your responses to this column are always welcome. My hope with each piece is to begin a dialogue that continues both inside and outside these pages. Best wishes, and welcome to the Bubble!

I have a theory about New York—or at least the five neon blocks that constitute Manhattan's Times Square, sometimes humbly called "The Center of the Universe."

If you have never been to Times Square, you still know it. The ball drops there every New Year's Eve to the music of Ryan Seacrest's dulcet tones. Broadway is there (everything from *The Phantom of the Opera*, a classic, to *The Book of Mormon*, which is not). It's block upon block of IMAX-sized advertisements, brand logos, and people dressed as Dora the Explorer. There is a naked cowboy. Actually, there are two—one black, one white. Diversity.

Times Square, like a nudist colony, is one of those places you have to see to believe. But (my theory), as with a nudist colony, if you want to see it more than once, there is something wrong with your soul.

Many people feel the same way about politics. Like Times Square, it's a lot of flashing lights—and not much substance. It's dirty, it's loud, it's overwhelming. You're always a tourist in the world of politics, which comprises the handful of people who actually run the show and the vast audience (that's us schlubs) to whom they attempt to sell their best shtick.

Sometimes there is good reason to see it that way. Two summers after resigning his House seat in disgrace, Anthony Weiner, now running for mayor of New York City, was caught once again sending pictures of his bathing suit area to online companions under the zesty username "Carlos Danger." Also in the Big Apple, former New York governor Eliot Spitzer is running for city comptroller. Spitzer resigned his governorship in 2008 when it was discovered that he had trafficked in high-priced "escorts." On the opposite coast, San Diego mayor Bob Filner finally resigned after 18 women accused him of sexual harassment. "Filthy Filner" has claimed that his predilection for fanny-pinching is the city's fault, because it did not provide sexual harassment training.

That's the slimy side. But there is also the scandalous side: the four Americans left to die at an under-protected American embassy in Benghazi, Libya; the IRS, which targeted Right-leaning organizations for unprecedented—and illegal—scrutiny, asking for everything from members' résumés and Facebook posts to groups' prayer habits; the Department of Justice's wiretapping Associated Press and Fox News journalists in violation of the First Amendment; and the National Security Agency, which admitted last week that analysts in its domestic surveillance program deliberately violated privacy rules—this after acknowledging 2,800 different privacy viola-

tions between April 2011 and March 2012.

With the exception of Benghazi, which occurred last September, each of the above stories broke just this summer. Take the long view and all of politics can look like smut and scandal, and you can begin to understand why only half of eligible Americans come to the polls, even in presidential years.

St. John's is rather isolated from all this—and thankfully so. The Great Books are removed from the happenings of the campaign trail, the halls of Congress, and media studios. And they should be. We rightly cultivate an atmosphere here

where we can devote ourselves to these books and to the deep, abiding questions they raise.

But among the temptations of this leisurely space is the temptation to consecrate the books as ends and to forget that, ah yes, there is a world out there—a world to which these books are intimately connected.

The questions of politics are intricately tied up with the questions of the works we engage

here. Irving Babbitt, a prominent literary critic, made exactly this observation in his 1924 book *Democracy and Leadership*: "When studied with any degree of thoroughness, the economic problem will be found to run into the political problem, the political problem into the philosophical problem, and the philosophical problem itself to be almost indissolubly bound up at last with the religious problem."

Our politics, except in a few shining corners, has abandoned such an audacious claim. Better, say many, to stick to our reductionism, to worry less about metaphysics and more about getting things done. Commenting on Babbitt in *The Conservative Mind*, published in 1953, author Russell Kirk rebutted the inclination toward strict pragmatism with this question: "In sober fact, do men have souls, or do they not? Upon one's solution of this inquiry rests the basis of politics; for if men do not possess souls, if there is no higher will, then they may as well be treated as parts of a machine."

Politics, for all its muck and mischief, is a high thing, and for it to serve and elevate it must be predicated on a right understanding of the highest things. A liberal arts education aims us to move us closer to that understanding. It helps us seek, in the classical formulation, the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. It helps us answer Kirk's question.

If we answer affirmatively, we get a politics founded on something more than utility or force, a politics informed by the wisdom of the Great Books and thoughtful self-examination—and that is much more impressive than anything in Carlos Danger's Twitter feed. ♦

“Times Square, like a nudist colony, is one of those places you have to see to believe.”

UPCOMING EVENTS

Tuesday 8/27

Madrigal Choir, Great Hall
11:45 AM

Kunai Soccer
4 PM

Wednesday 8/28

St. John's Chorus, Great Hall
7 PM

Thursday 8/29

DC Elections, Dining Hall
Lunch

Friday 8/30

Kunai Soccer
4 PM

Lecture: "Grey Parrot Number Acquisitions: Parallels With and Difference From Young Children," by Professor Irene Pepperberg, Harvard University
FSK Auditorium
8:00 PM

Saturday 8/31

S&C, Great Hall
10 PM

Sunday 9/1

Soccer
H vs. D, 1:00 PM
W vs. S, 2:45 PM

If you would like to see your event on the weekly schedule, please email sjca.gadfly@gmail.com.

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. McQuarrie, 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. ♦