

THE HIGHER LEARNING: A SURVEY

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This is an election year, so naturally politicians are lamenting the state of higher education in America. But the level of the sputtering and alarm coming out of Washington lately got this reporter wondering: Is our young people really not learning?

To find out, I dispatched my agents to gather actual questions from final exams at the nation’s “elite” colleges and universities. Here’s what I found.

ANTHROPOLOGY 301, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

What was “TAB”? Briefly list the “swinger culture” mores that were represented in the product’s striking mauve packaging. In addition, speculate as to why the Pepsi™ Corporation no longer stocks TAB at your local supermarket and instead markets it exclusively in the Pacific Rim.

ART (FIRST-YEAR REQUIREMENT), VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

What does “Art” mean to you? While composing your answer, doodle one of the following in the margin of your test booklet: a) a race car, b) a pretty unicorn, c) a pagan warrior-mutant slaying a vicious Hell demon, or d) an unflattering caricature of your examination proctor.

ECONOMICS 312, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

What is risk, really? We’ve heard a lot lately about the so-called “bursting of the Bubble,” and sure, Mom and Dad are financially ruined, but what about you? Isn’t it time you took defensive investment positions for your *own* future? Call one of your instructor’s customer service representatives at x834 to receive a free brochure that debunks common myths about investing in the Infinite Growth hedge fund. And hurry--money is wasting!

ENGLISH 212, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

If Shakespeare were alive today, who would be his favorite Friends character? You must defend your answer by quoting passages from three Friends episodes (episodes about the monkey will only receive half credit).

ENGLISH 457, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Your instructor has written a feature-length screenplay inspired by the

life of radio shock-jock Don Imus. (Jay Carr of the Boston Globe recently described the script’s three-page treatment as “a wonderfully emotive adventure, by turns sardonic and pitiful.”) As a Harvard student, it is likely that your immediate family has connections to the entertainment industry or a global media conglomerate. Explain how you would use your insider connections to get this remarkable script produced (“A stinging send-up of morning radio egomania,” raved my former college room mate, Carl Dross of WTLH radio, Tallahassee). If the movie grosses at least \$100 million in domestic box office sales, you will receive an “A” in this course as well as the customary 10% agent’s fee. (The rest of you stinking nobodies can skip this question.)

FILM STUDIES 311, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Last week, we screened what your instructor’s Teaching Assistant described as “a seriously messed up” film entitled *A Clockwork Orange*. Explain, in your own words, whether you found that the movie: a) fucking ruled, b) was okay but way too long, or c) sucked.

HISTORY 332, OBERLIN COLLEGE

The late Sixties were marked by frantic political upheaval. According to your instructor’s latest book, *1969: The Boiling Point* (1977, Rutgers University Press; ISBN: 0375401957; \$27.95), why did so many otherwise peaceful citizens want to (justifiably) kick Richard Nixon’s bony white ass for him? Extra credit: Why did General William C. Westmoreland also deserve a good whupping?

HISTORY 399, YALE UNIVERSITY

Identify any the following historical figures and briefly explain why leaving MTV was the worst career decision he/she ever made:

- Ken Ober
- “Downtown” Julie Brown
- Adam Curry
- Kennedy
- Former U.S. Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neil

GOSPEL STUDIES 200, BOB JONES UNIVERSITY

Assume that God intends to flood the planet again tomorrow. Briefly explain why each of the following people would *not* be selected to captain the ark:

- A Jew
- A Catholic
- A red Chinese
- Al Gore

JOURNALISM 490, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Rumors have begun to circulate on campus that a certain School of Journalism faculty member (who, coincidentally, is in competition with your instructor for tenure) routinely commits marital infidelity with a buxom but surprisingly mature undergraduate. This woman's name is Beth, and she allegedly works part-time as a waitress at McSorley's Old Ale House. You are to determine the identity of this professor, gather color photographs and written eye-witness accounts to substantiate the aforementioned rumors, and publish your findings in the upcoming issue of the *Columbia Record* under the banner heading, "Higher Education at Columbia: Getting Down and...Dirty?"

MARKETING 100, RICE UNIVERSITY

Robin, a Senior Account Manager at a major Madison Avenue firm, is absolutely dying to launch a new celebrity "signature" fragrance, but she can't decide who's hottest right now--Cameron Diaz, Ashanti, Leonardo DeCaprio, or that skinny chick on "Will & Grace." Using the amount of coverage each star enjoyed in last week's issue of *Entertainment Weekly* as your benchmark, whom would you advise Robin to select?

MEDIA STUDIES 210, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

In the final episode of "M*A*S*H," Hawkeye constructs a message to his old pal B.J. in the form of carefully arranged stones. What is the text of this message, and why is its symbolism relevant to the episode's "final farewell" theme?

MUSIC 313, AMHERST COLLEGE

What is meant by the musical term "New Age"? Name three artists of this popular movement and briefly rate, a) the terms of their recording contracts, b) their elaborate, often futuristic stage sets, and c) the second-rate television actresses to whom they are married.

PHYSICS 432, CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Notice: Your instructor's lobbying firm has requested that she and her graduate research staff testify in favor of continued electricity deregulation before the House Energy Committee. Due to your instructor's absence, the exam has been rescheduled to Friday, December 22nd from 9:00-11:00 PM. Please realize that this minor inconvenience may result in you and your family's saving up to 15% on your annual energy bills.

POLITICAL SCIENCE 225, HAVERFORD COLLEGE

Late in 1990, mega-manager Jimmy Hart rocked World Wrestling Entertainment (then known as "The WWF") by announcing a coalition among former arch-enemies George "The Animal" Steele and Rowdy Roddy Piper. According to Hart, the alliance was formed to "give a major attitude-adjustment" to then-reigning co-champions Hulk Hogan and "Nature Boy" Rick Flair. Hart challenged Hogan and Flair to prove themselves "once and for all" in a no-holds-barred, last-man-standing, tag-team cage match. With the luxury of hindsight, rate the success of Hart's behind-the-scenes machinations and explain why many in the WWF still believe the man harbors a secret agenda. ♣