

for the latter's ideas. In the Fordian, Freudian, Pavlovian, Wellsian society to come, the Lawrencian noble savage's only recourse is to hang himself.

How could Huxley and Lawrence have gone on much longer even if the latter had not died prematurely? Lawrence was coughing constantly by 1929. Nevertheless, he still claimed that the greatest thing is simply to be alive in the flesh. By the mid 1930s, Huxley was admonishing readers to seek union with the Divine Ground, to transcend, in other words, time, one's ego, and its cravings. Repeatedly, he bemoaned the wearisome tension within each of us between passion and reason. He detested an allegedly mismade world of conflicts and counterpoints, external and internal, that disturb one's peace of mind and make physical and spiritual harmony next to impossible.

I lost count of the many revisions I did of the Huxley-Lawrence chapter; "innumerable" is the adjective that springs to mind. I told my parents that I expected to be working on this chapter until I was 40. That Engel accepted my umpteenth reworking is testimony to the power of patience and compromise on both sides.

Eventually, I finished revising Chapter VII, the last chapter, and Engel declared himself content. "I'll raise no more diffi-

culties" was how he put it. I had overshot the deadline for a June degree, so I received the Ph.D. in March 1968, despite submitting the dissertation the previous summer. I spoke with Reuben Brower, my second reader, twice—first by phone when I asked for his guidance and again in his study in Adams House when I picked up his copy of the final draft. Flipping through the pages as we talked, I noticed check-marks penciled into the margins, sometimes two or three per page. Panicking, I asked if they indicated places for additional revisions. "The marks note things I liked," Brower replied. "Professor Engel doesn't always do that."

When my book came out, the following notices, printed one after the other in *Book Review Digest* 1970, would have amused the contrapuntist. Recommending *Aldous Huxley: Satire and Structure* to university libraries, the reviewer for *Choice* concluded by observing that "[Meckier's] chapter on the relationship between Huxley and Lawrence holds considerable human interest, as well as being critically rewarding." On the other hand, Keith Cushman in *Library Journal*, though calling my book "one of the best studies of Huxley's achievement as a novelist," took exception to "the lengthy chapter on the relationship between Huxley and D.H.

Lawrence," which he judged "less satisfactory." In the "Acknowledgements," my remark that "Dr. Engel's critical vigilance, especially in the Huxley and Lawrence chapter, was more than I had a right to expect" stops just short of irony.

And yet I remain greatly indebted to Monroe Engel's involuntary supervision. He told me to write a book, not a dissertation—excellent advice that I always passed on to my graduate students. He never excused something he disliked, which I now see as a tremendous compliment; I would never be guilty of any fault he thought he could correct. To this day, whenever I write, he looms over my shoulder, a grey eminence, whispering "*De trop, Meckier*," until I reach for the blue pencil and begin to shorten the manuscript. In the chapter on *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield* in the third of my books on Dickens, I make kind use of Engel's *The Maturity of Dickens*, a belated thank-you for his unrelenting attentions. ▽

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THE UNDERGRADUATE

The Busy-ness School

by JOHN A. LA RUE '07

"Is THERE NO ONE in this House who plays basketball?" the e-mail reads.

I feel a twinge of guilt. I signed up to play intramural basketball for Quincy House at the beginning of the season, but have not been to a single game. Worse, I am one of the intramural (IM) representatives. I'm supposed to be *organizing* these games, rallying Quincy House to take on Lowell, or Cabot. If anyone shows up for a game, it should be me. Though basketball is not my favorite sport and (speaking po-

litely) I'm unskilled, this is the under-six-foot league. It's the one place in the world where I'll admit my height of five-foot-eleven-and-three-quarters instead of claiming an extra quarter-inch—I've found that basketball is more fun when you can loom over the other players.

"We usually play with only four," the team captain continues, "But this e-mail list has, like, 30 people on it." The pattern is all too common. It seems everyone is interested in intramural sports, but only in

the abstract. When I approach a pack of sophomores for a table-tennis tournament, their sweeping claims about how much they love Ping-Pong rapidly transition into backpedaling questions about the dates and the time commitment, and mumblings about not really being very good at it.

"You don't have to be good," I doggedly explain, "You just have to be *there*."

I take my own advice, and go to the basketball game.

JOHN HARVARD'S JOURNAL

Walking the icy brick path past the front of Lowell House to the Malkin Athletic Center with the air crisp and cold on the bare kneecaps below our gym shorts, we worry, tonight as ever, not about the quality of our team or opponents, but about the quantity of our players.

"Anyone else coming?" the captain asks.

"Jack's meeting us there," I answer, watching the steam of my breath rise and dissolve into the stars.

"I'll call Dave."

I wonder where everyone is, not only tonight, but every night. What are people doing that has them so wrapped up that they cannot spend an occasional hour with their Housemates, vanquishing some less worthy House?

"Work" is the generic response, a totally inscrutable answer that deters further inquiry. It calls up the common struggle of all Harvard students against that implacable foe. Homework, it implies: the monumental burdens of reading, writing, and calculating. There is always work to do, with the papers flowing across my desk like an endless stream cascading down from the mountains of unread books piled high around my chair. At times it occurs to me to envy Sisyphus for his lack of deadlines.

Citing "work" as an excuse from intramurals conjures up an image of the studious genius, bent over books in the light of one lamp. It's an effective riposte, because it tosses the question back at the questioner: Don't you have work to do? Aren't you a model student, just like me?

I've learned to listen not to the answer, but the tone. When the word cracks out sharply, a brusque, determined snap, there is no hope for persuasion, so I let the issue drop. The sound I

seek is the telltale tinge of regret, the tiny resigned sigh.

"By 'work,' do you mean, 'the Internet?'" I ask. "Updating your Facebook profile, perhaps?" A rueful grin undermines any claim of diligence with a guilty acknowledgment of past and future procrastination. Now



a true consideration of alternatives begins, as the lure of the basketball court fights the impulse to sit tethered to a desk, where we can reassure ourselves that, although we are not working just yet, we're on the verge of starting.

I do not doubt that some proportion of the College does sit tirelessly toiling at homework night and day, but I have sat

through too many silent hours in section to believe that all or even most of us are as studious as we claim. At times, I am tempted to rise up in outrage at these classmates who have not prepared for discussion. This happens most frequently when I want someone else to speak up with the answers I do not know be-

cause I, too, have only skimmed the assignment. I am likewise vexed by my fellow undergraduates' combination of categorical support and aversion to participation each time I seek to interest them in intramurals or political campaigns, in squash games or divestment from Sudan. Then I realize that I have not been to a basketball game—varsity or intramural—all year.

I am not the only one who reaches out for support that isn't there. The sports teams complain about the empty bleachers, the a cappella groups beg for audiences, and so many individuals have an event to sell that it can be dangerous to broach this topic conversationally. A friend nodded vigorously when I mentioned the bewildering busy-ness that everyone claims. She knew exactly what I meant. She was running psychology studies that paid undergraduates five dollars for 20 minutes of their time, but students participate only grudgingly.

"I feel like I'm selling insurance," she sighed.

The next day, I got an e-mail inviting me to participate in her study, held in William James. Scrolling through the list of available times, I realized that I had a scheduled conflict—a job, a lecture, a job, a meeting, a section—in all but two slots. The first of these I had set aside for lunch—not the extended, lazy, dining-hall lunch with friends and a second helping of cookies, but the tense, rushed fly-by meal, snatched in prepackaged plastic

wrap from the student lounge under Annenberg Hall. From Annenberg to the white heights of William James would be a small divergence from my habitual trajectory, yet I was unwilling to forgo my cramming (food into mouth, Hobbes into head) to make the trip.

I realized that my friend and I had misstated the question at hand—it's not *why* people are too busy. The question is why people are too busy to do the things *I* do. To me, it is entirely incomprehensible that any large number of people would set aside 60 minutes to watch *The OC*, yet balk at an hour of organized dodgeball. The *OC* mix of suntans and melodrama falls very low on my list of priorities, but I suppose its fans don't see much point in bombarding one another with heavy foam spheroids. Even where the actions in question are more weighty—say, skipping class or homework for a political campaign—I can see that personal preferences would rank school assignments before political action. On close examination, I can understand the choice to watch TV instead of play IM sports, or read instead of rally.

Yet this was not always so.

I have been reading through old accounts of efforts to persuade Harvard to divest from companies doing business in South Africa—a 1978 *Crimson* headline reads “More Than 1000 Rally Against Apartheid.” Three days later: “3500 students—more than half the undergraduate population—took part in a torch-and candlelight procession.” I can hardly imagine a rally of this magnitude today. What could possibly motivate so many students? I was impressed when divestment from firms in Sudan brought 300 students to a rally last year. What is so different about today, I wonder, that 300 appear in place of 1,000 or 3,500?

My initial reaction was a mental shrug: “Well, it was 1978.” My friends do the same: “Of course there were protests. It was 1978.” But though reasons abound for why students in 1978 might have felt intracollegiate or international causes affected them personally, I am unsatisfied with accepting the era alone as a sweeping explanation.

Neither intramural sports nor divestment movements hold the attention of

today's undergraduates. I doubt that there is more homework now than there was in 1978, or that today's students do a higher percentage of it. Possibly there are more opportunities on campus, drawing students one way or another. Studying abroad has become easier, and about 100 student groups have been formed since 2003. Increasing the number of student groups without increasing the number of students makes a greater demand on undergraduate time. Yet this begs the question—if more groups are the cause of declining attendance, then why do new groups continue to crop up?

The plethora of opportunities still does not explain why each of us is so busy; opportunity does not mean action. Simply to state that we *could* be more scheduled and more busy than ever does not explain the choice. My daily agenda is not divinely predetermined—no administrator pulled me aside to lecture me on the importance of keeping Thursdays fully booked. For one reason or another, I have picked each of these classes, jobs, and ex-



tracurricular activities, as my classmates have picked theirs.

I think that the difference lies somewhere in the composition of these choices. Somehow, the overarching sense of the *summum bonum* has shifted, so that today “work” is excuse enough to evade the pressure of our peers for whatever activity they advocate.

We understand and accept that an unspecified individual endeavor supersedes a voluntary collective effort. Frustrated though we may be over the failure of our peers to follow where we lead, we will tenaciously defend each precious hour of our own day from usurpation by an outside force.

My hours are my own, it would seem, to use or to squander. I am free to do whatever I want, unless I want to play on a basketball team. I can't do that, because our team has no players. As a consequence, we players have no team. ▢

*Berta Greenwald Ledecy Undergraduate Fellow
John A. La Rue '07, a model student, never makes excuses and always works when he says he will.*

SPORTS

Up Three Times

Triple jumper Samyr Laine takes true giant steps.

IT'S ONE OF THE LEAST understood, and most difficult, events in a track and field meet. Yet the essence of the triple jump is simple: jump three times. The rules, however, have some stringent specifications on how you jump. It starts like a long jump: the athlete sprints down a 120-foot path to the takeoff board and jumps—but if even one toe goes past the board's front edge, that is a foul and disqualifies the jump. The rules also dictate the takeoff leg for the three jumps: you can choose to start on either leg, but once committed, you must

abide by the sequence. Take off from the board on, say, your right leg, then land on the right foot; jump forward again off that right foot and land on the left; then make your third jump with that left foot and land in the sand pit, just as long jumpers do after a single leap. The officials measure the distance covered from the takeoff board to the landing mark in the sand that is closest to the board. “It's not instinctive at all,” says Samyr Laine '06, summarizing the process. “Some say it takes 10 years to master.”

If so, Laine is only about halfway