a guide to life on campus.
This issue marks the publishing debut of “The Carleton Manifesto,” a journal of opinion servicing the Carleton community. It was conceived, written and published with the intention of providing a fresh perspective to the campus. Although our editorial stance does not identically reflect traditional conservative values, we view the liberalism on campus and the attendant liberal causes and organizations with skepticism. Not because liberalism is wrong, but because one should question any dogma, especially if it is the dominant mindset. Too often, people endorse positions merely because others do, or because they are politically fashionable. Therefore, our primary objective is to challenge and question the liberalism on campus with an eye toward encouraging debate and controversy. We also want to provide a means for students to express ideas which normally would not have a place in any other Carleton publications – essentially opinionated, yet supportable, articles. Although the thrust of “The Carleton Manifesto” is political, we welcome articles on arts, sports, or other relevant aspects of Carleton life. We are an underground newspaper. Thus we are in our own way surreptitious, unconventional, and financially limited. At the same time, however, we hope to be honest and forthright. We realize that many of our positions may upset or enrage more than a few. We apologize. The ability to stand up and actually say something is worthwhile, but often ignored. Clearly, Carleton has the talent and wherewithal to make meaningful statements without being pretentious or trendy. We are just providing a means and an incentive.
Beat back the bullshit

STAFF EDITORIAL

Bullshit knows many shapes and colors. Comedian George Carlin calls bullshit “America’s most profitable business.” The public is continuously fed big steaming piles of it, from the blathering of talking heads on network news to the thousands of ads that streak across our eyes every day. Spinmeisters and suited charlatans are eager to peddle deceptions, half-truths, and little white lies to a hungry public. And it’s not just politicians, CEOs, and TV personalities that profit from bullshit — American culture on the whole seems to believe that the truth is flexible, that true motives need not be revealed, and that it’s better to be polite and “politically correct” than forthright and honest.

Is Carleton a haven from this bullshit-dominated world? Well, yes and no. Our school certainly celebrates quirkiness, but there are still forces on campus that attempt to shape the way you think. Carleton has its own set of taboos; opinions that run contrary to the common campus attitudes tend to be dismissed outright. The dominant opinions here, while not necessarily false, are often propped up by bullshit — people clinging to ill-formed views and relying upon shoddy evidence because they never had to stand criticism. It is also easy for someone to spend four years huddled alongside people with belief structures resembling his or her own, thereby depriving him or her of opportunities to be challenged intellectually.

Even professors play an unwitting role. To their cred-

it, most Carleton professors tend to encourage students to critically examine everything they read or hear in class, and they usually welcome opinions that run contrary to their own. Still, academia tends to be a rigid world, governed by principles, methods and worldviews, and professors must awkwardly balance developing their students intellectual individuality and preparing them for a future in academia by drilling them in methods accepted by the academic community. Why do you think they call areas of study “disciplines”?

Can you still thrive in a place like this? Absolutely. Beating back the bullshit necessitates becoming intellectually adventurous. This means fine-tuning your bullshit meter — learning to distinguish useful information amid the static — and developing a critical mind. It even means making a habit of stepping beyond your comfort zone and picking a fight with someone who disagrees with you. Only by experiencing the taxing and uncomfortable process of criticism can you emerge confident in your own genuine brand of truth. Even if you are unsure about your position, don’t be afraid to put what you have out there. It’s the radical thinkers who change the world and discover truths never before imagined. And who says you can’t have a little fun along the way?

Want to write an opinion piece criticizing the Carleton administration? Write it! Thinking of doing your philosophy paper on the virtues of communism? Do it! Inclined to voice opposition to affirmative action at the next Chili Night? Go for it! Want to throw this Observer issue into the garbage in defiance and disgust? More power to you! Now is the time to start making the best of your Carleton experience. Fortunately, no one here can make you drink hemlock simply for defending an unpopular point of view. And even though the flak you receive may seem just as poisonous, always remember that bullshit tastes much worse.

The staff editorial represents the majority opinion of the editorial board.

[editors’ note]

Welcome! We editors are delighted that you’ll be spending the next four years at Carleton. So delighted, in fact, that we prepared this special Observer issue just for you as an introduction and, admittedly, an advertisement.

Our goal as a publication is to ensure intellectual diversity in the discourse on campus; something which, in the face of overwhelming liberalism at Carleton, often gives us a conservative slant. In each of our four issues per term, we strive to provide Carleton students with well argued opinions, important news, and a little levity, all of which, we hope, will make you consistent readers (if only to write us angry emails or respond to a controversial piece).

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The Observer reserves the right to edit and print responses and submissions sent in any form.
For most of us, student government in high school was a morbid joke; most likely it was a motley medley of mostly mediocre meetings and modest motions. Student governance at Carleton is, thankfully, much more meaningful and, undoubtedly, immensely important. The Carleton Student Association (CSA) Senate has several serious services to complete in the college community.

The Senate’s most visible and valuable role is to support student organizations by securing their funding. Each year, the Senate – via the Budget Committee and the Treasurer – distributes over $300,000 from the student activity fee. The money is used to host hot all-campus hootenannies, fund conveyance to conferences and competitions, bring big-name speakers and performers, and promote events. Every spring, chartered organizations submit a budget to the Senate for the following year, but individual students and organizations can also ask at any time for additional money from the Treasurer or Budget Committee.

Representing the rabble of students to the ruthless rule-makers of the college is another vital role of the CSA Senate. One way this is done is by proposing and passing resolutions on college policy. Last term, Senate passed a resolution to curb the copious computer waste with recycling. Occasionally the Senate will host deans or decision-makers from within academic departments so vocal students can voice various concerns to the visitors. Additionally, some Senators and students-at-large are selected to serve on certain committees like the College Council. Senate uses these informed individuals as intermediaries to relay concerns and pass on ideas. The Senate officers themselves represent the student body directly to the Board of Trustees.

The Senate also busies itself building bridges to the boisterous St. Olaf student body, and, during the course of the academic year, will pursue other proposals and projects that come up. Last year, these projects included the promoting of a “party crew” to support all-campus alternatives to alcohol.

In order to make this spectacular system of self-governance serve the students, you need to take action. Vote in Senate elections. Come to the candidate debates. Sit in on Senate meetings and express your ideas. Bribe Senators... wait, don’t do that, but do talk to them. More importantly, consider serving as a student-at-large representative on a College Committee. The Senate desires dedicated debuntantes (alright, that was a stretch) to fill spots on everything from the Library Committee to the Academic Standing Committee. Visit the CSA Senate website to apply and for more information about the Senate in general.

Note: Circles represent different committees. Relative size of circle denotes number of openings on the committee. Overlapping circles are not overlapping positions.
Refund your MPIRG fee

ANDREW NAVRATIL/opinion

The MPIRG fee, what is that? Perhaps you did not even notice the little charge for $7.50 on your fall term comprehensive fee statement, after all, it is easily the smallest fee you will encounter in the next four years. But if you investigate it, what you will find — that MPIRG is not what it seems and collects its revenue through an unfair and exclusive system — should shock and disgust you.

The Minnesota Public Interest Research Group (MPIRG) portrays itself as a student-led statewide organization that leads action in the public interest of all Minnesotans. It uses appealing phrases like “better democracy” to draw in support, but the democracy sought is the public financing of campaigns (seen by many as an unconstitutional suppression of free speech).

The inclusion of “research” in its title suggests the organization conducts studies and research and then presents their findings, but MPIRG does no such thing. Its main focus is mobilizing support for liberal causes and lobbying the state legislature to adopt legislation. To build a network of students who will aid in these lobbying efforts MPIRG has a paid campus organizer at Carleton. Part of the $7.50 taken from you is given to a Carleton student to disseminate dictated stances on political issues; you just paid that salary.

No other leader of any student organization at Carleton is paid using money from the comprehensive fee statement. No other student organization has an optional charge — or is likely to be allowed to have a charge — on the fee statement. Because of its unique funding mechanism, MPIRG is not subject to the financial guidelines and oversight of the CSA Senate, something to which every other student group is bound.

The refuseable/refundable fee mechanism used by MPIRG works for the organization and not for the student body. MPIRG relies on laziness, apathy, and a lack of awareness to boost its revenue. Did you know what MPIRG was and what it did last month when you received the comprehensive fee statement? If you didn’t, and you paid the fee, MPIRG succeeded in using your lack of awareness to collect $7.50 from your pocketbook.

Luckily, it isn’t too late for you to get a refund. Fill out the refund slip put in your campus mailbox in the next two weeks or stop in the Business Office in lower Leighton and Carleton will credit your account for $7.50. While a single person will not have a huge impact on MPIRG’s revenue, together we send the message that Carleton students prefer to think and act for ourselves. If nothing else, it’ll buy you a sandwich at the snack bar.

“Truth is the most sacred virtue of the human heart.” — SENECA THE YOUNGER
My roommate and I arrived at a house and were ushered inside to meet the “crew”. I soon learned that a black t-shirt, tied appropriately, functions rather well as a mask. After we were all ninja-ed up, we loaded a hundred pound footbridge, a hundred live goldfish, and a hundred plastic cups with a single net into the back of a car and drove to the junction between the two dorms.

We were met there by the rest of the team, who had laid out a plastic tarp in the large dip in the floor and already begun to fill it with water. A few chemical packets were dropped in to make the new environment goldfish-friendly, the goldfish were placed in their new home, the bridge was set over the pond, goldfish literature was left next to the cups and net, and a sign was set asking people to adopt goldfish as they walked over the Carleton Koi Pond.

Working together, a group of roughly ten Carleton students terraformed 45 cubic feet of empty space into a living environment. Close to a dozen individuals did something tremendously difficult and did it well, something even the administration will admit if pressed on the issue. You may wonder why we would even attempt something like that: To quote Mallory, “Because it’s there.”

That attitude is our school, and you will never have more opportunities for mischief in your life, so be sure to play while you’re here. But don’t let that motto stop when your games do. You have been given a lever, and a place to stand, it’s up to you to move the world. Let the world be a stairway corridor, and be sure to build your goldfish pond.

The best thing I’ve done at Carleton is the one thing for which I cannot take credit. Almost two years ago, several friends and I built a temporary goldfish pond in the staircase corridor between Burton and Davis.

It was around 1:00 a.m. on a weeknight in November of 2003 and I was online helping a friend put together an application. The phone in my room rang and I heard a voice I recognized on the other end; I was told to “wear black, bring my roommate and his car, leave immediately, and carry a black t-shirt with me.” Without delay I gathered what I needed and left.

Maybe you worked for President Bush’s reelection campaign. Maybe you’re a fan of Edmund Burke and other like thinkers. Maybe you’re really a libertarian. Or maybe you simply dissent from the prevailing liberal/Democratic worldview. And now that you’re going to Carleton, a school with a tremendously liberal reputation, the vast majority of the campus will categorize your political and social views in one way: conservative.

Even though this blanket label does a disservice to all persons involved and is intellectually disingenuous, it is the norm at Carleton to apply the label freely to anything resembling a rightward stance. This is unlikely to change anytime soon, so for the time being, let us shrug our shoulders and enjoy each other’s company. After all, what’s in a name?

Our “conservative” views, in all their diversity, are in the minority. A very small minority. You will find skepticism among your professors and disinterest and confusion among your peers. But this is not at all a bad thing.

A liberal arts education is about being challenged. Not just the challenge of large amounts of coursework, but also having one’s own beliefs and ideals challenged as well. You “conservatives” of Carleton are better served in this respect than anyone else on campus. Expect to emerge from Carleton with sharp critical thinking, heightened oratorical ability, and a thick skin. You, not your friend who tows the usual liberal Carleton political line, will have received the most from your four years.

That being said, there is a trap of victimization that is all too easy for Carleton conservatives to fall into. Don’t let hostility and skepticism get you down or make you resentful. There is no need to feel sorry for yourself! As a beleaguered defender on the ramparts of liberty, you are exactly where you ought to be. We should take joy, indeed, in finding ourselves where the fighting is the hottest. As Joseph Epstein observed in the Wall Street Journal, “the barbarians may be at the gates, but then they always have been. Besides, the gates are a damned good place for barbarians to be.” He goes on to urge conservatives to greet the hordes of disorder with wit and a smile. Draw your swords of intellect with a smile and find joy in political battle. We are, after all, in the words of William F. Buckley Jr., “the best show in town.”

info meeting. tues. 9-20 7:30 p.m.
HILL LOUNGE (upper syles)
STAFF PICKS

best in academia

STUDY SPOT Olin-Mudd connector. Cozy and quiet, couches just around the corner. If you like occasional social distractions, try Upper Sayles. Unlike the Libe, it never closes.
HELP Use the Write Place for writing or the Skills Center for math. Also, be sure to take advantage of profs’ office hours.
DOCUMENT STORAGE “Home” folder – you can access it anywhere there’s internet access. home.its.carleton.edu/HOME.
BEST WAY TO FIND GOOD PROFS Check review, but be aware that posters often talk in extremes. caucus.carleton.edu.

best in town

HAIRCUT Cuts on the Cannon with Sandy. $22 for students and the best conversation you can get. 507-664-9495
TAXI A&R Taxi. It’s usually a few bucks cheaper than the rest.
FREE RIDES Northfield Transit. Or you could always find a friend with a car.
SHOPPING Ragstock. A mix of vintage, thrift and discount, you can’t go wrong.
MOVIE RENTAL Try the media library in Scoville or the Northfield Public Library before paying a dime.

best out of town

DESTINATION Uptown in Minneapolis. Lots of cool shops and awesome eateries that aren’t too expensive either.
MONEY MAKER Become a campus driver. It’s relatively painless, and the clubs you belong to will love you forever.
TRAVEL ON THE SCHOOL Join either Model UN or Mock Trial.

best eats

ICECREAM Hogan Brothers or Cocoa Bean. At $1.50-2 for heaping scoops of cold, creamy goodness, they’re hard to beat.
FREE BREAKFAST Dacie Moses House, 10 a.m. Sunday mornings. Homemade, plentiful, and delicious.
ORGANIC GROCERY Just Food. Locally-based co-op.
DINING HALL The world may never know.

best social

STALKING TOOL facebook.com. Join – it’s definitely worth your while. You’ll get over the guilt factor real soon.
WAY TO DE-STRESS Take a class like Social or Folk Dance.
FILE SHARING Peer-to-peer Gnucleus. sourceforge.net/projects/gnucleus. Also, try iTunes playlists in your area.
DISCUSSION EVENT Chili Night. Thursdays, Stimson House. Each week is a new topic, plus you get dinner.
PLACE FOR A MEETING reserve a good room, or even an island – seriously. carleton.edu/campus/campact/roomrequest.
WAY TO GET YOUR VOICE HEARD Write an article for The Observer (hey, you saw that one coming, right?)

write. draw. argue. edit. compromise. change. talk. editorialize. design. report. persuade. interview. describe. critique. listen. dissemble. draft. debate. incense. organize. participate. offend. type. engage. defend. read. market. influence. transcribe. enrage. innovate. convey. investigate.
join.
Let me begin this by telling you that I cannot sing. I’m not saying that I am somewhat off-key or that I have trouble with volume control (I do and it’s another issue entirely); the problem is that when I open my mouth and attempt melodic construction, the result lies slightly between strangling stray cats and kicking a sumo wrestler in the groin as he drags his fingernails across a chalkboard.

I cannot sing.

So, of course, the first thing I did when I got to school my freshman year was sign up for an audition in one of our prestigious a capella groups. To this day I have no earthly idea what demon possessed me and scrawled my hand across the timesheet. I’m willing to bet it was the same demon that put a Dashboard Confessional CD in my headset and instructed me to sing along with the lyrics for two hours before the execution.

I found myself early when I arrived, so I plopped down outside the room and calmly waited. By “calmly waited,” I mean that I was covered in flop sweat and praying for an earthquake. Luckily, there was another guy there who was waiting for his chance to sing.

He and I hit it off immediately, how could we not? He turned to me and (in my mind, I always say this part with a snotty British accent) asked, “So what, pray tell, is your singing experience?”

I was undaunted, I had been a highly successful debater in high school and, regardless of the subject matter, I was not to be taken down by the first person I met outside of the new student week brouhaha, “Huh?”

“Your singing experience,” he repeated, because my obvious problem was that I was deaf and couldn’t hear him the first time (it was a very gracious gesture).

In the time I had between his charming comments, I managed to ask, “Uhhhhh... what do you mean?” It was at this point that I realized that I had left my flask of vodka sitting on the desk in my room. I’m not sure why that thought came to me then.

He proceeded to tell me, and I swear this is exactly what he said, “I’ve been singing for 12 years now and I was in the All State Choir [he said the capitals, I heard them in his inflection] back home, I sing tenor.”

Well, that cleared a hell of a lot up for me in a short amount of time.

I proceeded to tell him that I had been singing for 16 years and, although mostly it had been in the shower, I was confident I could sing in any range, from low to high. I had listened to enough old Jackson 5 songs to know that a high falsetto was all the rage among vocal groups, I was unafraid.

Except that I was afraid. Terrified. This was, without a doubt, the scariest stupid thing I had ever done in my life. Obviously I’m excluding real scary things here, my high school was public, after all.

So after my little bathroom singing explanation which, looking back on it, probably sounded sarcastic, he and I sat in uncomfortable silence. I remember thinking, “thank God it’s quiet out here” because neither of us could hear the singing of the current auditionee, so no one outside would hear me either.

After a few agonizing moments, the door opened, a guy came out, and I went in. My first task was to sing scales as someone from the group played the chord on the piano; I think they must have been playing with me because after the first two or three attempts, I should not have been asked to continue; the volume of my voice shifted more with each note than the actual tone I was singing.

But I persevered, made it through, sang my audition piece with all the presence and charisma of William Hung, and slunk out of the room unable to look anyone in the eye. I’ve told the story just about every time I visit my family and, if you get a few shots in me, I may very well grace you with several scales, all of which sound suspiciously alike.

It was the singularly most embarrassing thing I have ever done. I don’t regret it for a minute. Don’t regret doing embarrassing things here! Everyone around you is doing them too, it’s why you applied to college... that, and the education. So audition for everything, even if you want to lock yourself in a closet afterwards with a bottle Jack and a baby blanket, you’ll always be able to sing a D scale with three off-pitch notes at seven different volumes, remember the horrific experience, and laugh about it three years later.