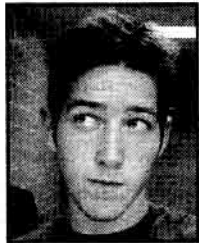


The Idiots Guide to Being Unprepared

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We've all been there. The first few minutes of class are great, a few casual jokes from the teacher, comments about the weekend, and then he says the words. "Let's turn to the reading." Right. Let's turn to the reading.



WHERE THE
HELL IS
WAYNE, ME

18 copies of a stapled packets leap from their respective three ring binders, and 18 heads stare down at 18 unruffled and perfectly crisp reproductions. Not one has a fold on its corner; none are highlighted, or underlined. There are no little notes or asterisks in the margins. These are not dog-eared copies.

18 sets of eyes scan the first few pages for buzzwords and catchphrases, italicized print and subheadings. After a few uncomfortable silences and totally off-the-mark answers to broad, simple, un-profound questions, it's pretty clear to everybody that nobody's read a damn thing.

Skidmore students, myself included, will rarely perform any mentally strenuous activity for which there is no proof that they actually performed it in the first place. Why is it so difficult to take twenty minutes out of the day and do a little bit of reading? We are, after all, paying thousands of dollars for each class we take. Why is it so hard to actually do the assignments we pay professors to assign? Or, do we assume that

since we are paying so very much for our educations, that it is our right to absorb as much or as little of it as we want?

At the beginning of each semester I dutifully trudge to the bookstore and dole out hundreds of dollars for textbooks. Professors, in turn, assign readings periodically from their pricey pages, which I, in turn, neglect until that very same professor, or one much like him, assigns some sort of written assignment pertaining to the readings I didn't do in the first place. Then, I hurriedly scan those same pages I formerly shrugged off, frantically highlight, underline, annotate, and asterisk until I piece together enough information to make do, and inject that

information into the heart of my paper. This is how textbooks accomplish their mission.

I apply this 'ebb and flow' philosophy to almost every aspect of my life. I let my room collect layers of clothes, garbage and filth until I can no longer walk, let books and papers and food crowd the usable space on my desk to the size of a postage stamp, and allow all sort of refuse to fester in my trash can, including more than half-a-dozen used coffee filters that waft a pungent coffee-shop scent day and night. I let all this pile up until it gets so bad, so revolting, and so inhabitable that I simply cannot live in my own debris any longer. At this breaking point, I spend two full days sorting, scrubbing, emptying, washing,

and, finally, vacuuming all of my possessions, until the cleanliness of my little room is nothing short of impeccable.

Back to the 18 untouched packets; somehow we all thought the kid next to us would come through, obediently and carefully read every word of the assigned readings, and make thoughtful, inspired comments in the first half of class, which we who were unprepared could note, copy, reword, and expound in the second.

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We were all told that things would be different in college when we were back in high school, filing applications and filling in SAT bubble sheets. They told us we would have hours upon hours of tedious reading to do, papers to write,

and toilsome assignments to wade through problem by problem each night. That's probably true at some schools; it may be true here. The fundamental difference here is that we don't do, or even attempt, most of the assignments we're assigned.

I have a friend who goes to Middlebury; she visited last weekend, but had to leave early so she could 'hit the books' before Monday. When I asked if she had a particularly big project she had to get to, she said that no, it was like this every week. She studies on the weekend. Every weekend. Every single week.

Shaken, I called my mother, whom I call when things trouble me. She said she did the

same thing 20 years ago when she was in school. I couldn't believe it. We're not even talking about Sundays here; we're talking Friday and Saturday nights. Most Skidmore students wouldn't be caught dead near academics on a weekend. Most Skidmore students wouldn't be caught dead near academics on a Thursday. Most Skidmore students think Thursday is the weekend.

I'm happy to report, though, that my dad did not study on weekends, or most weekdays, for that matter, while he was at college. Like father, like son. My father is also messy. Since he likes being married to my mother, though, he confines his messiness - mostly - to his car, the back-seat of which he allows to slowly fill up with clothes and CD cases and take-out bags until the pile finally crests the windows. Then he opens the passenger doors and lets it all spill out into the driveway, whereupon he sifts through it for an entire afternoon. Go team.

So, while I don't advocate student irresponsibility, let's say I understand it. And, yeah, I may be dramatizing, but think back on how much reading you were assigned this semester, and then think back on how much you actually read. Get the picture?

Oh, and to those of you who are reading with wide eyes and righteous indignation, those of you who really do complete every assignment and read every handout, don't go changing on my account. Really, we need you. We need every last one of you, especially in my 9:05 LS2 class. After all, without you, there's no-one to paraphrase: we'd actually have to read.