

Toward a Truly Intelligent Community

Allen J. Fromherz

The sign of true intelligence is the ability to hold numerous contradicting ideas at once. Intelligence is the ability to see not just one or two dimensions but three, or four, or more.

A truly intelligent community upholds, respects and fosters interaction between numerous conflicting and even contradicting political, social, cultural values. Is Dartmouth College, in this sense, a truly intelligent community, a community that not only copes with contradiction but also thrives with contradiction? Is Dartmouth College a community that fosters the rich but delicate benefits of divergence, difference and dissent? Yes, Dartmouth College is undoubtedly an “intelligent” community. But no, Dartmouth College has not yet achieved the full potential of this intelligence.

The major reason for this failure is the occasional, but often prominent, disconnection between “academic” life on campus and “real” life on campus. Even as we learn about the meaning of diversity, dialogue, and acceptance of divergent views in the classroom, we do not always implement those concepts into our immediate social surroundings. For some Dartmouth students, social life at Dartmouth is defined as anti-academic, a time to escape the academic, a time to “escape” the demands of intelligence, a time to “retreat” from a multidimensional to a unidimensional world. Why is there this need to retreat? What explains our ability to have an intelligent vision for Dartmouth but not necessarily live that vision?

When we face contradictions and challenges to our sense of identity, there can be excitement, passion and creativity, but there can also be fear, dread and loss. It is in these moments of fear and that we retreat to our uni-dimensional worlds. It is in moments of dread that we make unilateral statements, labeling other groups. It is during moments of loss that we sometimes feel the need to crystallize our opinions and our identities. It is in these moments of weakness that contradiction turns into conflict, the type of conflict that does not involve communication, only accusation.

Conflict without compromise undermines the basis of a truly intelligent community. This type of conflict can originate outside Dartmouth: issues of racial and economic divides, or the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Yet, Dartmouth should not treat these conflicts as exterior or inevitable. Instead, as an example to the world, we should find ways to break open these intractable conflicts through honest, safe and open communication. If we are really to be an intelligent community, we should be willing to

accept contradiction and compromise, even if it would seem easier to retreat to the familiar, the uni-dimensional, the lifeless shadows of the cave.

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