

The Core's Forgotten Class: NYT 1101y

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October 18, 2004

Columbia University prides itself on creating well-rounded students through the Renaissance ideals of the Core Curriculum, yet it falls short of its goals. While the Core enlightens us in Western schools of thought well beyond what our majors can teach us, it fails to give us a contemporary view of society and the world.

An easy way to remedy such a deficiency is through the distribution of free newspapers. With free newspapers, the Columbia administration would not only expand our awareness of the world, but also help fulfill the goal of creating the all-around intellectual, as aware of the crisis in Sudan as he is of neo-Platonic thought.

In order for the University to fulfill its stated mission of providing students with “the depth of understanding and intellectual flexibility they need to respond to the challenges we all will face in the years to come,” as the University’s mission statement reads, Columbia has a responsibility to offer resources that give students the opportunity to be more informed about events shaping the world. In recent years, many of our Ivy counterparts including Yale, Cornell, and Dartmouth have adopted free newspaper readership programs. As an invaluable source of current news and insightful commentary, we believe that free and convenient access to the nation’s leading newspapers is critical to the development of a student body with a heightened awareness of the world in which we live.

Last spring, Columbia did take the first step in launching the USA Today Collegiate Readership Pilot Program. For four weeks Columbia University students received free access to weekday editions of USA Today, The New York Times, and the Financial Times at five convenient campus locations. Overall, more than 4,177 students participated in the program, 43 percent of which took a newspaper each day. The fact that newspapers were gone every day by noon at John Jay, Lerner, and Dodge Fitness Center demonstrated the popularity of the program. So successful was this program that students who missed their chance to grab the early edition of their favorite newspaper often found empty racks.

In conjunction with the program, two surveys were conducted before and after the pilot to measure changes in student readership habits. As survey results indicate, more than 50 percent of the students involved in the program had

increased readership habits. Results went on to attribute this increase to the convenience of on-campus pickup locations and the wide selection of available dailies. Students were reading the newspaper every day!

Student response to the pilot program has been overwhelmingly positive. Having been editorialized on these pages numerous times, the program has also won the full support of Spectator. Such unanimous support is rare at Columbia and signifies the importance of such a program on campus. With the termination of the pilot program, however, we must now explore new ways to continue providing students with this service. Last week the University's top administrators, including University President Lee Bollinger, Senior Executive Vice President Robert Kasdin, Provost Alan Brinkley, and Deans Austin Quigley, Zvi Galil, and Chris Colombo all received detailed packets from the Columbia College Student Council containing an overview of the program, survey results from last year, as well as over 100 e-mails from students voicing their support for free newspapers at Columbia. We hope they will use the funds at their disposal to enhance student life by providing free newspapers for everyone.

Last week, we had the privilege of discussing the Readership Program with Vice President of Student Services Lisa Hogarty. She welcomed the idea and assured us that there were no logistical issues involved in the distribution of newspapers under the Department of Housing and Dining. She also pledged to support such a program with her department's funding abilities.

Still, the funds necessary to bring these newspapers to school are far from being secured. University Student Services alone cannot shoulder the financial burden of the program; the distribution of free newspapers should be the interest of every department, division, and school invested in the goals of the Core Curriculum. Consequently, we are imploring all administrators to act upon our endorsement and recognize the necessity of free newspapers on campus.

Let's make sure our future world leaders are informed.

The authors are president of the Columbia College Class of 2007, Student Services representative for the Columbia College Student Council, and vice president of policy for the Columbia College Student Council, respectively.