

Published January 10th, 2018

Cobalt Scraps

By Alexandra Reinecke



Alexandra Reinecke is from Westchester, New York. She currently resides in Lafayette, where she is junior at Campolindo High school. She writes every morning at 5 o'clock opposite a print of "View of the World from 9th Avenue" and consumes copious amounts of coffee. Her likes include maple-flavored anything and snow. Her favorite animal is a tiger.

which Harvard and like universities aggrandize them.

Disingenuous to its proponent schools' missions and inequitable to both intellectual talent and diligence, athletic recruitment is a practice which imperils the very core of our democratic and meritocratic self-definition.

If Harvard aims to educate "citizen-leaders for our society," Yale vows to foster "outstanding research and scholarship" and Princeton purports to be in the nation and humanity's "service," why are future Hemingways and Kennedys being snubbed to welcome quarterbacks and kickers?

If Princeton had employed the same practice decades ago, rebuffing Woodrow Wilson for a goalie or F. Scott Fitzgerald for a swimmer, would we not live in want of such cultural masterworks as "The Great Gatsby" and the United Nations?

Through the practice of allowing coaches to 'pass,' or shepherd the files of prospective student-athletes through its admissions office unread or merely skimmed, Harvard and its peers exempt those with physical prowess from the rigorous hoops considering GPA, standardized test scores, and extracurriculars to which all non-athlete applicants are scrutinized.

The institutions whose missions mark their commitment to intellectual achievement and societal contribution, in other words, are also the institutions that partake in the inequitable athletic recruitment practice that, by turning away the likely catalysts of these mission-goals to accommodate student-athletes, hypocritically impedes the same achievement and contribution they purport to encourage.

While students admitted for academic prowess go on to lead lifelong academic careers, athletes throw, then retire from throwing balls. While Harvard may produce scientists to benefit humanity, it prioritizes producing football players to benefit itself-its student's entertainment, its alumni's sense of 'connection,' the revenue sports broadcasting of its athletes earns its multi-billion-dollar endowment.

It is no less fundamentally than they betray their societal promises that Harvard and its peers betray the interests of its prospective students.

Most elite college applicants are academically qualified for the institutions to which they apply. They have high, often perfect GPAs, and similar standardized test scores. Some are nationally, even internationally acclaimed artists, writers, photographers, musicians and scientists. Most are intellectual standouts.

But with 20 percent of classes at the Ivy League reserved for recruits, and admission standards lowered from the 1400 SAT, 3.9 GPA, and extensive extracurricular leadership and accomplishment demanded as minimum for the non-athletes' consideration to a 1140 SAT, 3.0 GPA, and no expectation of

While my peers with national awards and Mensa-level IQs agonize over impending admissions verdicts at America's top colleges, I was disheartened when a classmate celebrated the spot her ability to row a boat swiped her at Harvard.

From lacrosse recruits bound for Yale to 18-year-olds riding strong throwing arms to Princeton, American higher education's bias for athletes at the expense of deserving non-athlete prospective students is rampant.

As a child, the American Dream was woven as securely into the fabric of my body as was my dark hair, or brown eyes, or the awkward length of my right foot's second toe.

I grew up-like in my black, tie-waist ballerina sweater-dressing daily in the uniquely American conviction that the individual, through hard work and vision, can achieve unimpeded by tradition or circumstance.

I grew up instructed to work hard, be fair, to never lie or steal or cheat. Implied in that instruction was that my allegiance to such tasks would afford me their usual compensation.

But hard work and dedication have failed to make acceptance to my first-choice university more than improbable. The Harvard recruit has rowed past thousands of other deserving applicants.

Athletics are accompanied by multifarious physical and social benefits, stress reduction, bodily health, sportsmanship, and community large among them; unduly exaggerated, society's sports worship is by no means unfounded.

But the question is not of the value of athletics themselves, but of the practice-at the exclusion of other equally, if not more societally imperative fields-through

extra-athletic activities, prospective non-athlete students are routinely denied elite university admission to enable the admission of their athletic peers.

A cobalt scrap transcends its dollar value when we make it a prize, or a commendation. That an exclusive education is the cobalt scrap of our country's students also makes it a prize, like any other, susceptible to circumstantial depreciation.

But while a fat crimson envelope, by nature of the recruit's academic ineligibility, depreciates from a commendation of merit to a handout from an athletic coach, akin to a trophy purchased rather than earned, this is an inward and not outward distinction; the recruit graduates, in four years, with what the world mistakes as an intellectual distinction.

Maybe it's unreasonable that news of my classmate's recruitment turned my stomach to a sequined pit, to a pouch singed in inferneous shades from cherry to ochre.

On Facebook, a friend of the Harvard recruit employed the confetti emoji to convey the extent of her euphoria.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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