A Weak Link Of College

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Abstract

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I WAS browsing through the cartoons in the Des Moines Register the other day, getting my culture for the week, when I ran across one which I thought was quite amusing. But when I showed it to one of the “sisters,” she looked at it — then me — with a blank stare.

She scene was a diplomatic party, with two Americans standing in the foreground conversing in quiet tones. The line ran something like this: Cordial to India, forgiving to England and France, cool to Yugoslavia, firm to Russia . . . there now I think I’ve got it!

I thought I “got it” too, and proceeded to tell the unappreciating young lady that she should read more about contemporary affairs . . . maybe just try the morning paper for a start.

A few days later I sat down at a table in the union, and made a valiant attempt to hear what was being said. “The team” were two words which I heard, so I naturally assumed they were talking about basketball, and interjected a comment. “Oh no,” was the reply, “we’re talking about the Ike-Nixon team.”

The sequence of incidents made me stop and think that maybe I wasn't too well-versed on the outside world either, if the immediate thought association to “team” was some local incident.

You know, it really is cozy here at Iowa State College. We’re a nice homogeneous group with many common interests . . . the Union, hatred or love of Guild, studies, and not enough time, ever. In fact, we have our own little city, with suburbs of pleasure in Boone and Des Moines.

Very nice, but what happens on graduation day when we are nudged into a world about which we neither know or care? What I allude to is a personal acquaintance with what’s
happening or simply knowledge of contemporary affairs. We may know ISC backwards and forwards, but just how much good is that going to do when we step into the voting booth? How much is knowing the scores of all the basketball games going to aid in judging a man or party to put into office?

You don't find out about state, national and international events sitting in the Union. Segregation, tariff laws, conservation, labor, big business, foreign policy... these are topics which seldom mix with the business of drinking coffee and playing bridge. Like anything else, you have to study news to know it.

News has been said to have either direct or indirect value, and the former seems to have the most, and in many cases the only appeal to Iowa State College students. Direct news is that which immediately affects you such as the liquor-by-the-drink law in Iowa, the new football coach, or the announcement of a new parking policy in Ames.

Indirect news may not touch you immediately in your present situation, but in many cases it will effect you sooner or later. Did you ever stop to consider that if Eisenhower's new foreign policy towards the Middle East flops, we might find ourselves with several new enemies in the cold war? Or did you know that Ike had proposed a new policy towards these countries? Believe me, it's worth finding out what's going on so that you can at least have the chance to express your opinion to your congressman if you don't approve.

"Well, I just don't have the time," laments the student body. You are now supposed to be preparing yourself for sixty more odd years of time.

There is a minimum that should be spent by every student, and it shouldn't interfere with the offering of sacrifices to the great god "study," or the greater god "activity." (Because this is a scholarly study, we'll leave out the gods Pan and Bacchus.) The modicum consists of turning on the radio in the morning before the 8 o'clock and hearing one good news summary, reading the morning paper over coffee, and tuning in on a radio or TV news summary in the evening. Most residences also receive at least one good weekly news summary magazine, and it wouldn't hurt to glance through this either. That looks like a lot in cold type, but actually shouldn't take over a half-an-hour a day, and you
can do something else, like getting dressed, while listening to the radio.

After you become acquainted with the subject of "What's happening," you might go a little further. In fact, believe it or not, there are a few people who have already scratched the surface. There are many opportunities here, both in the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities which can help the eager beaver up the ladder.

Have an extra 3 hours for an elective? Sign up for History 490, a course dedicated to the study of contemporary affairs. The course not only delves into the present-day history, but also attempts to set up a list of books, magazines, and resources to aid in beginning a sixty-year reading program. (This is something you can USE later on, too!)

The Union also has some excellent opportunities for spoon-fed learning. On Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. an authority conducts a Social Science Seminar. The topic last week for example was the governmental setup of modern Russia. The news forum held on Fridays at 4:00 p.m. consists of a short discussion by some authorities, followed by a question and answer period from the floor.

There is also the personal approach . . . that is meeting and talking to the students who are here from other countries. If you don't know any foreign students now, it would be an excellent experience to attend a meeting of, or join the Cosmopolitan Club. These people usually have a lot to say concerning our country's policies towards their native land, and it is stimulating to discuss this topic with them.

Finally, there is a wealth of material to be found on the news stands, on radio, and on television relating to the study of contemporary affairs. Harpers, The Reporter, Current History . . . Alex Drier's or Edward R. Murrow's news analysis . . . Meet the Press, to cite a few examples.

There is opportunity unlimited to study history in the making if you will only give it half a chance.

—Sally Mahedy, T. JI., Sr.