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How Macklemore “Robbed” the Grammys

It might be less about race...

MATTEO MOBILIO
STAFF WRITER

The Grammys are a week old. Everyone’s already sick of the jokes about Pharrell’s Arby’s hat. We’ve all watched Beyoncé’s incredible chair sequence one too many times, and hip-hop fans have all weighed in on the Macklemore fiasco.

For those who somehow missed it, Macklemore and Ryan Lewis took home the awards for Best Rap Performance, Best Rap Album, Best Rap Song, and Best New Artist. Hours after the ceremony ended, Macklemore posted an Instagram of a text he’d just sent to Kendrick Lamar, another nominee, and the critics’ choice, the awkward gesture struck notes of both sympathy and respect: “I wanted you to rob me.” Cue the blogosphere frenzy.

Some bloggers hate him because they think white people are taking over hip-hop. To them, I say: spend a couple minutes Googling. White guys have been done it in 1984. Some hate him because they think his music is terrible, which is fine. Everyone’s entitled to an opinion. And then there’s the cute stuff like this: “No [Macklemore] doesn’t make dumb ass jokes about Pharrell’s Arby’s hat.”

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Zachs Hillel House Officially Opened

NEW opportunities for community life - Jewish or otherwise - on campus

DANA SORKIN
NEWS EDITOR

On Tuesday, Jan. 28, Connecticut College formally opened its first ever Hillel House, named the Zachs Hillel House for its benefactor, Henry Zachs. The ribbon cutting ceremony was held in front of a large crowd of Connecticut College students, faculty and staff, as well as Coast Guard cadets and New London community members.

Dean of the College Carolyn Denard introduced Conn’s newest president Katherine Bergeron to speak first at the ceremony. President Bergeron praised Hillel and the construction of the Zachs Hillel House for its benefactor, Henry Zachs. The ribbon cutting ceremony was held in front of a large crowd of Connecticut College students, faculty and staff, as well as Coast Guard cadets and New London community members.

President Katherine Bergeron, Henry Zachs and others at the Zachs Hillel House’s ribbon cutting ceremony.

NewArtist. Hours after the ceremony ended, Macklemore posted an Instagram of a text he’d just sent to Kendrick Lamar, another nominee, and the critics’ choice, explaining that the process of building the new House began last May, and believes that the new House will work towards “ensuring the identity [of Hillel] as a whole.”

Because the Zachs Hillel House is the home of Conn’s Hillel, it is the home of Conn’s Hillel, a mezuzah was fixed to the doorpost before the crowd was allowed to see the house. Mezuzahs are pieces of parchment paper with Hebrew writings written on them, contained in decorative cases. It is traditional for a Jewish home or space to have one on the doorway. The mezuzah fixed on the Zachs Hillel House was a gift from Hillel vice-president Dana Albalancy’s father. Albalancy is half-Israeli, and the mezuzah was purchased in Israel for the House.

Before the construction of the House, Hillel would rent out spaces on campus for their different events. With Zachs Hillel House, according to Rosenberg, they can “spend more time planning rather than having to move things” and enjoy the ease of having a constant location.

Conn’s Hillel has also formed relationships with other college Hillels, such as those at Yale, Trinity, Brown-RISD and UConn. Before the addition of the House, Conn’s Hillel didn’t have the resources to invite other Jewish college students on to our campus, but they are now hoping to plan events that include other colleges.

Francus hopes that the addition of the House will give Jewish students on campus a “place to deal with [their] own Jewishness,” as well as

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On Old Dogs, New Tricks

I have never been in Johnson, have not once stepped foot inside that particular dorm. Although I do generally avoid the hospital-fluorescent halls of the plex, I never consciously decided to stay away from Johnson. It just kind of worked out that way. If I’ve ever had friends who lived there, I never found an excuse to visit them, and if there were ever parties there, I never ended up going. It’s a fact of my college career that I neither thought nor cared about until this semester—my last semester.

As a senior terrifyingly about to graduate in just a few months, these realizations have begun to dawn on me with increased frequency. I’ve never been in Johnson. I’ve never taken an anthropology class. I’ve never swam in the Arbo. I’ve never taken an anthropology class.

I’ve never seen a basketball game, and if there were ever parties there, I never consciously decided to stay away from Johnson. It just kind of worked out that way. If I’ve ever had friends who lived there, I never found an excuse to visit them, but I should probably go to a talk in the LGBTQ center because it might be interesting and expand my thinking in some way. It’s a weird and unexpected source of anxiety. While most concerns of college seniors are those of the future (Will I have a job? Will there be ever parties there?,) this concern is uniquely about the past. Have I had the “College Experience”?

More specifically: Have I had the Connecticut College experience? College, in part, is this strange place where you can get away with doing things that are scary, moderately illegal and socially unacceptable in almost every other setting. These are the more generic bucket-list items that college seniors everywhere consider trying to check off before graduation. But then there are the items on the list that are more personal, and apply specifically to the place you’ve been living the last four years. Going to the Lyman Allen museum, climbing to the roof of Cro, engaging in substance-enhanced nature appreciation in our lovely Arboretum.

It’s become difficult to parse through this potential list—figure out the things I want to do before I graduate, the things I should do before I graduate and the things I don’t need to do before I graduate. I do not ever need to try the turkey bacon in Harris because it looks like greasy strips of cardboard, but I should probably go to a talk in the LGBTQ center because it might be interesting and expand my thinking in some way. Or maybe not, but at least I’ll have tried something that I won’t have a chance to do after leaving Conn.

Trying to catalogue everything you have and have not done throughout your college career eventually becomes exhausting. It’s a consuming project that would eventually require time and energy than it’s worth. It’s important to take advantage of this unique time and place in our lives, but no one should spend their last semester at college just trying to check items off a mental list.

So my advice to seniors is this: think about what you’ll regret never having done in college and try to do it, but don’t think about it too hard, and don’t let it get you down. Graduation is approaching, maybe too quickly for some and too slowly for others, but there’s still time to try new things, meet new people and have new experiences, even within our small campus. Live the last semester of your college lives with a slightly more open mind; take more risks and have more fun. But don’t waste the present worrying about regrets you might have in the future.

-Sam Norcross, Opinion Editor
Zachs Hillel House Officially Opened

New opportunities for community life on campus

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

increase the amount of programming done in collaboration with other groups on campus, such as Yalla Bina, the Arabic club.

The 6,700 square foot space will not only increase the amount of programming that Hillel can put on, but will also be utilized by other campus groups and organizations. All of the speakers at the ceremony stressed that while the Zachs Hillel House is a home for Conn’s Hillel and growing Jewish community, which currently makes up around 10% of the student body on campus, it is a space that all Conn students and New London community members will be able to take advantage of.

Rosenberg said that Hillel’s events are attended by both Jewish and non-Jewish students alike, as well as Coast Guard cadets. The bright and spacious building includes a large multipurpose room, conference spaces, a kosher kitchen, administrative offices and a recreational room in the basement that will eventually be outfitted with games such as billiards and ping pong. The space will give Hillel opportunities to continue with their pre-established programs such as bagel brunches and holiday services, as well as create new programming for upcoming semesters. Francis cited the plan to install projectors and screens for film screenings and lectures as future events, which “Hillel had never been able to support before” the addition of the House.

Besides being a new space for all members of the College community to use, the space will also help Hillel do more in the New London community. Rosenberg explained that Hillel currently has relationships with three different local synagogues that all welcome students. The Coast Guard Academy invites Conn students to attend holiday dinners twice a year, and cadets are invited to Hillel Shabbat dinners. Francis mentioned that Hillel has baked homemade pastries and bread for Jewish seniors in the New London area, and will “continue to move forward” with their community service, aided by their new location.

The next step for the Zachs Hillel House will be finding a director to organize programming and events, as well as hiring Conn students to staff the house. Until these positions are filled, the House will be open Monday-Friday from 1 p.m.-5 p.m. for all of the College to enjoy. For now, certain programs will take place in the Zachs Hillel House, such as the weekly Talmud reading group led by Professor Andrew Peislin. Shabbat dinners will continue to take place in Freeman. Though the House is now officially open for use, a more official ceremony will take place in May.*
Then and Now: Connecticut College, 1952

Mary Lofton Wilson '52 on the Connecticut College experience, 62 years ago

ZOE HALPERT
CONTRIBUTOR

 Connecticut College has gone through changes, even within my short time here, but it was only through talking to Mary Lofton Wilson '52 that I realized how much has really changed in the past 50 years. In an interview with The College Voice, Wilson was asked to reflect on her time spent at Conn and her thoughts on its academic and social life while attending our school.

Wilson's reason to attend Conn was similar to what many students initially like about the school. "I wanted to go to a small, liberal arts school in the East, and it just appealed to me," she explained. During her first year, Mrs. Wilson lived in a dorm called Thames before living in Freeman for her final three years. She added that her favorite part of campus was the library. In the 1950s, the library was housed in what is now known as Blaustein. It wasn't until 1974 that Shain Library was built, which will be renovated, beginning this semester.

The food? "Starchy. Everybody danced too close or wandered off with them in any way." When asked if men were allowed in the dorm rooms, Wilson instantly said, "Oh, heavens no! Of course there were no men allowed above the first floor of any of the dorms."

As Conn today, the vast majority of students stay on campus during the weekends, but Conn in the 1950s more closely resembled a commuter school, and the relationship between Conn and New London wasn't nearly as close as it is today. "Pretty much everybody went away on the weekends. You got on a train and went to New York or Boston." Drinking played little role in the social life of the students. "We'd listen to music, we'd play bridge. We weren't encouraged to go into New London... There weren't real social activities, because there were no guys there!"

Wilson was an International Relations major and remembers the academics being very rigorous, like our classes today. "I would never question that I got a really good education there," she said. One class she does not remember fondly is typing and shorthand. She said, "In fact, I got the typing prize! Which I was kind of ashamed about. Here I went to an academic institution and that was what I got."

In spite of typing class, she said, "I learned a lot. And I had really good faculty. I had a history teacher that changed my life. [History professor] Chester Destler. He was so exciting! I had grown up in a Republican family, and I became a liberal Democrat; I think because of him."

The campus then had a significant lack of diversity, while today Conn is making huge strides to attract students from as many different backgrounds as possible. The class of 2017 is the most diverse in the history of the school. "Most of the girls' families had money, because in those days scholarship was not strong... It was always very obvious who was a scholarship student, which was wrong." Wilson continued, "Racially, it was not mixed at all. There were a few—very, very few—Asian students. You know, to tell you the truth, I don't remember that there were any black students there at all. But it just may be that I wasn't noticing or something like that. See that's what I mean about restrictive... it was not a diverse community at all. So that was not so good."

Still, it was a very new environment for Wilson. "I was just very fortunate to be in a group of people from all over the country. I met people that I had never been exposed to, and I loved it," she said. She fondly remembers her friendships formed at Conn, adding, "I have a couple of friends still that I went to Conn with."

Conn wasn't without its speed bumps for Wilson. "I think it was kind of a constraining environment. I would have been much happier if I think being in college these days. I mean, you had to follow the rules. There wasn't a lot to do other than study."

"It was challenging to go to school there," Wilson added. "Which was good. But on the other hand, not so good in terms of getting out there in the real world. But, the real world was different then too."
New CC Lending Library Provides Students with Sustainable Alternative to Purchasing Textbooks

MARINA STUART STAFF WRITER

The beginning of a semester is full of new classes, new professors and, of course, new textbooks. However, buying new textbooks is the bane of most Conn students’ existences.

This semester, there is an alternative to buying textbooks. The REAL Office and the Office of Sustainability have partnered to create the CC Lending Library. The Lending Library is run by Laurel Wolf ’14 and Laura Simmons-Stern ’14, who are both fellows at the Office of Sustainability.

“The idea came from Frida Rodriguez, a staff member in the REAL Office, who was inspired by a similar program at her alma mater. She approached Josh Stoffel, who approached us, and we took it on,” said Wolf. “We thought it was a great idea because it is really inconvenient to have to buy new editions every year, and textbooks are really expensive.”

Stoffel, the Sustainability Manager at Conn, agreed, adding that this project exemplifies the ideal holistic sustainability project.

“The Lending Library fits into the three spheres of sustainability: economic, social, environmental,” said Stoffel. “Economic, because it is saving money for students, and it lessens the feeding of the corrupt industry of textbooks. Social, because it is helping students who are limited financially when it comes to buying the bigger textbooks, so especially in science and math classes. Environmentally, because it limits the need to buy new textbooks, which is good for the environment and reduces the waste of printing and shipping.”

In addition to benefiting students in classes, the Lending Library can also be a resource for thesis writers who need background information found in textbooks that the library either doesn’t have or will only lend out for two weeks at a time.

“This is also great for students who buy used books for their non-major classes,” commented Simmons-Stern. “They have these textbooks they’ll never use again, and now an underclassman will be able to use them for free.”

The Lending Library is located in a little-known place on campus, a closet-like space in the lobby of Katherine Blunt Dorm. Its two shelves are overflowing with books gathered from the grab-and-go program put in place last school year.

Wolf and Simmons-Stern plan on bringing in more books and adding more shelves.

“One of the most exciting things about the project is that it can involve more people on campus with sustainability.” Stoffel remarked. “It engages those who already know about sustainability, and can draw in those who haven’t been involved, but unite them both, because the particular experience of the bananas into a pedagogical tool for activism and social justice aimed at the reduc- tion of social, political and economic inequalities, mainly based off Latin America. However, the events will draw on connections that expand on ideas both of intersectionality and transnationalism, and the ways in which local and global struggles can be thought of and further supported, in a critical yet engaged way.”

The events seek to inspire the student to question their position, especially in the United States. Traditional standards of activism and aid that exist in the modern world do not make sense.

The discussion that will follow the film will be examining the emergence of the “New Left” in Latin America that has resulted in the privatization of these seeds, and how these actions may be relatable to the neoliberal movement on a translational level. Karen Cardona’s ‘13 father will also join the discussion. According to Pacheco, the “has an extensive experience with the Conn Café.” Students who are interested may participate in the discussion to critique or support the actions of the neo-colonialist agenda of the “New Left.” Pacheco commented that he was “especially excited” for this event and discussion, as “not sure to miss it.”

Pacheco discussed his intention with the organization of these events, stating “The following series of events will focus on the local and global struggles for social justice aimed at the reduction of social, political and economic inequalities, mainly based off Latin America. However, the events will draw on connections that expand on ideas both of intersectionality and transnationalism, and the ways in which local and global struggles can be thought of and further supported, in a critical yet engaged way.”

The next documentary being screened is a student film titled “Born to Be Sold,” created by Pacheco and Phoebe Peterson ’12 on Tuesday, Feb. 18. According to Pacheco, the film explores the student-led initiative to stop the purchase of Chiquita and Del Monte bananas at Connecticut College.

The documentary examines the relationship between the historical exploitation of the injustices behind U.S. multinational companies in Latin America, and the story of a committed group of students who organized educational talks, performances, and SEIU discussions around the topic.

In bringing the film back to the experience of Conn student, Pacheco added that “it ties transnational struggles and injustices with the Conn community, turning the particular experience of the bananas into a pedagogical tool for activism and social justice.”

Conversation will follow after the film.

The final screening is the documentary “9.70,” directed by Victoria Solano, on Thursday of that week. The film explores the story of one of my personal relatives, the deaths of jovenes (“young” in Spanish) after the film.

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An alert to the present revolution in Ukraine and cautionary advice in navigating its coverage in American media

NELS CHRISTIANSEN
CONTRIBUTOR

There is audible tension in the air. The live stream from Kiev (literally Euro Square) is filled with war drums, flash bang explosions and fireworks. The drumbeat of the Ukrainian revolution is not performed by rank and file of well-trained troops but by citizens tired of a corrupt leadership. There are elderly women, next to ultra-right nationalists, standing beside leftist anarchists and those in favor of European Union integration. What began peacefully as a protest for greater European Union integration escalated violently when the president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych, imposed laws that made it illegal to protest, to insult a federal officer, and even to wear helmets in public. These draconian laws have since been repealed (as of January 28th) after the protesters took over several government buildings by force, yet the protests continue despite the concessions. The people want the president’s resignation for his corruption. Serhiy Lyovochkin, Chief of Staff of the Yanukovych administration, has already resigned but the President continues to deny requests for resignation.

There is a revolution in Ukraine right now and US mainstream media is glutted with sensationalist stories about Bieber’s arrest and the East Coast ‘cold snap’. If any news about Ukraine appears it is a flashing headline that disappears as soon as it came. Is this intentional denial? Do these displays of celebrity cultism expose deep-rooted denial that a true democracy, such as Ukraine’s, can fail? Thousands of people have barricaded themselves with bags of snow and debris and are standing off against the widely hated ‘Berkut’ police, who are specially trained to suppress internal rebellion. These are people who are in a ‘democratic nation’ but they still must defend their futures.

In a revolution there are never two clear-cut sides. This is especially true in Ukraine. There are those who are against the President and for the President but within those groups there are diverse castes of protesters who all have varying intentions for their activism. The Russian media is painting the protesters as right wing extremists (nationalists and white power advocates) who love violence and hate unity. The European media is sympathetically portraying the protesters as people who want national autonomy and alliance with the EU. Petroleum dollars from Russia are fueling corruption (the president’s brother, who is a dentist, nearly became a billionaire in a few short years). Russia is playing up the far-right nationalist side of things because they have an economic and social interest in the region.

Ultimately, a democracy tired of corruption has risen up against draconian laws that limited people’s rights to organize and protest, however, the Ukrainian people, tired of Russia imposing influence on Ukrainian affairs, have been protesting since late November. The media, especially Russian (their aim is to discredit the legitimacy of the protesters) focuses on the throwing of Molotov cocktails, bricks, and fireworks. As in any situation when mob mentality takes over fueled by passion there is violence, but attention in its true nature, as the hostility grows from multiple facets, and the protesters each have a diverse agenda with this movement.

It is a diverse cast of people who rebel against the oil wealth corruption that has plagued Ukraine. There is history of division that is still fresh in the minds of the older generations and this informs often issues are caught in the crosshairs of bipartisanship bickering and sides are artificially drawn. Abuses of humanity cannot be drawn into neat, twosided conflicts with the ‘good guys’ and the ‘bad guys’. Corruption and exploitation should not be rewarded and we, as critical thinkers at an institution of higher learning, should be globally informed because humanitarian issues are not limited to states or nations. We all know of the Occupy movement with its disorderly message and passionate messages. What happened to that momentum? Wall Street continues to be a profitable pyramid scheme, war for resources continues (loosely varied as ‘spreading democracy’), and the future is devoured to make a quick profit. What does it take for US citizens to raise up against corruption? I am not advocating violence but I ask; what would inspire citizens to raise up and forcibly create change, as the activist did in Ukraine? The glut of media we American’s consume daily is a formative source of information even if unintentionally ingested. Citizens should be aware of how their perceptions of the world are shaped by what they consume. If the mainstream media continues to spout celebrity worship and feed fear then we must inform ourselves and act as informed citizens who are not distracted by artificial lines—we are all humans after all.

There is a revolution in Ukraine right now and US mainstream media is glutted with sensationalist stories about Bieber’s arrest and the East Coast ‘cold snap’. If any news about Ukraine appears it is a flashing headline that disappears as soon as it came. Is this intentional denial? Do these displays of celebrity cultism expose a deep-rooted denial that a true democracy, such as Ukraines, can fail?
Human Rights Activists Worldwide Reflect on Inaction in Syria

A realist international relations scholar would likely say that all our options are less than ideal, and that we are being prudent in maintaining our mostly hands-off approach. However, for human rights activists, the Syrian civil war, which has claimed well over 100,000 lives, represents much of what is wrong with the international political system.

Conor McCormick-Cavanagh
Staff Writer

In a January 26, 2014 New York Times Letter to the Editor titled "Human Rights Inaction," Professor Tristan Anne Borer wrote, "Human rights advocates are at a loss; their primary weapon — shock — has proved to be ultimately powerless." She wrote her letter in response to the breaking news that State Department officials had known about a large cache of photos showing evidence of torture since November but had remained silent.

The photos, depicting victims tortured at the hands of the regime, have recently hit the news only because the Syrian opposition has begun to release the photos and hopes to use them to delegitimize the Syrian regime at the Geneva conference. Professor Borer expressed a resigned sadness at the news of this inaction by the U.S. government. Her reaction is justified, as the US and its allies seemingly act only if it serves their national interests and local political exigencies.

Professor Borer’s pessimism about the international human rights situation is completely based in reason. Time after time, the hegemonic states of the world have stood idly by while massive human rights violations have ensued. The Letter to the Editor cites Rwanda, Darfur and Syria, and the list is much longer. Rarely has the U.S. intervened simply for humanitarian reasons. When the U.S. has employed a humanitarian rhetoric, there have always been ulterior motives guiding these actions.

Libya serves as a prime example. Although the U.S. intervened for seemingly altruistic motives, it goes without saying that it saw the vast potential for investment in Libya’s oil; that is why the U.S. has not acted in Syria. The American Government has important interests in the region, but cannot differentiate our enemies from our allies. Al-Qaeda is omnipresent in Syria, which makes an opposition victory all the more precarious. The U.S. government now realizes that its own short-term national security interests would be better served by a continued stalemate.

On some level, our strategy makes sense. A realist international relations scholar would likely say that all our options are less than ideal, and that we are being prudent in maintaining our mostly hands-off approach. However, for human rights activists, the Syrian civil war, which has claimed well over 100,000 lives, represents much of what is wrong with the international political system.

Overall, further humanitarian intervention of any kind is unlikely in the foreseeable future, since it does not benefit our national interest. In the short term, the United States must fully invest itself in the Geneva conference and Secretary of State John Kerry must effectively concentrate his diplomatic efforts. The war in Syria is awful, and with what limited room we have to act, we must.

The United States can implore Russia to pressure the Syrian regime to allow aid from the Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross to reach besieged families in Homs and similarly boleled up civilians throughout Syria.

Although the conflict in Syria represents so much of what is going wrong with the international system, we must continue to be optimistic about what can be done in the future. Optimism and continued innovative strategies on how to approach humanitarian crises will help end these conflicts in the future.
OBAMA'S FIFTH STATE OF THE UNION:
PROMISES KEPT AND BROKEN

MOLLY BANGS
NEWS EDITOR

After waiting patiently through the pomp and circumstance required for the entry of various Supreme Court officials, cabinet members and finally, the President of the United States into the Capitol building, I waited to hear how President Obama would begin his fifth State of the Union address. He began, "A teacher... an entrepreneur... a farmer... a doctor... a man coming home after working the late graveyard shift..." I sighed.

When will politicians and their speechwriters stop feeding us the same corny lines laced with American exceptionalism? Our 44th president continued to give a loaded speech for the next hour. After taking the political, over-Americanized fluff as an unfortunate given, I was generally impressed by Obama's candor. He looked out at an audience packed with Congresspersons and Senators and asked if they would help or hinder the progress we've made as of late. Without mincing words, he declared, "We are not doing right by the American people when we shut down government." He continued to say that government officials must rebuild the trust of the people who elected them.

After citing the recent budget compromise as an example of successful bi-partisanship, he targeted Congress: "Wherever I can take steps without legislation to expand opportunity for American families, that is what I'm going to do." He referenced bypassing Congress and bureaucracy multiple times later in the speech, declaring that there are too many American officials who "fear the confidence of the public here and abroad, so these reforms do not do what they can to raise their employees' wages. He then announced: "In the coming weeks, I will issue an Executive Order requiring federal contractors to pay their federally-funded employees a fair wage of at least $10.10 an hour." His determination to bypass Congress appeared to be no joke. At this point in the speech, I was definitely starting to regain the original sense of pride I had when I voted for him in 2012. But just because our president left me feeling more fulfilled on the matter was nevertheless in some respects, I've felt for the vast majority of his tenure in the Oval Office, it does not mean I was left without quails. In addition to his contradiction regarding education, I challenge the president on three issues with which he closed his address: firstly, Mr. President, expanded on these "prudent limits on drones" you've imposed, because I'm not sure I believe you.

Next, you're right - surveillance programs do depend on the confidence of the public here and abroad, so these reforms spoke of are going to have to be extremely persuasive. And it wouldn't hurt to listen to the New York Times editorial board and grant Edward Snowden clemency.

Lastly, when you first took office, you promised to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay within your first year in the White House. Five years later in this State of the Union address you've renewed your vow to close this prison "because we counter terrorism not just through intelligence and military action, but by remaining true to our Constitutional ideals." So do it...
Next fall, Connecticut College may be joining the ranks of the other NESCAC's that provide exclusive freshmen housing by introducing a first-year dorm. During the Jan. 24 meeting of the Student Government Association, Vice Arcelus and Residential Life, conversations began about changing the residential experience of Connecticut College to make it easier for freshmen to connect and foster a greater sense of importance. First-year housing has included full freshmen dorms, all freshmen floors and clustering more freshmen rooms together in each dorm. While no decision has been made, the idea with the most support is to turn an existing dorm into a full freshmen dorm for a one-year pilot program. With no structural changes made to the chosen building, the freshmen dorm can be easily made or replaced, based on the results of the first year. Through restructuring the residence hall's democratic graphically and academically, Arcelus hopes that the college can ignite the student experience by lighting up the residence halls in a way we haven't before... as both social and intellectual spaces.

Evert Fowle '14, SGA President, believes that these changes will have a largely positive effect on campus community. "Not everyone is going to go out there and feel like they can talk to their freshmen classmates," Fowle said. "That's the goal of this program: to find a way for your more median Conn student, who's coming in here a little apprehensive, to find a way that he or she can feel like they are a part of this community too.

Open forums will be held for the campus community to express their thoughts, concerns and questions. The first open forum is expected to take place later this week.

"I'll admit, when I first heard talk of an all-freshmen dorm I was pretty taken aback. What would become of the sense of community and community that mixed housing breeds between students of all ages? The seniors who mentored me on how to choose a major? The junior who let me borrow her laundry card? And then I remembered...none of that ever happened. Aside from my House Fellow, Floor Government, and Student Advisor I didn't know a single upperclassman that lived in my dorm. I didn't even know half the freshmen in my dorm; if I used the far staircase, chances were we were never met. That's not to say I didn't have upperclassmen friends, but none of those friendships were formed in my dorm. Most connections to upperclassmen came out of clubs and events, places where we both had a reason to talk to one another beyond the passing "hello" going to and from our communal bathroom.

Over the past four years I've felt the sense of community on this campus slowly fade away to a point where I no longer fear I'm missing out on something if I'm away for the weekend. Sadder is the feeling that this community from freshman to senior, the camaraderie and support that only those other freshmen growing through the same exciting and frightening stage can understand. So why would you not want to be surrounded by these people?

Living in an all-freshmen dorm isn't isolating you from the rest of campus. You are in constantly around upperclassmen; you take the same classes, you eat in the same dining halls, you play on the same sports teams. Rather, a freshmen dorm is a way for first-year students to live in a social environment where they can explore new passions, discover themselves, and take risks among the safety of those going through the same transition.

Julia Cristofano
MANAGING EDITOR

A Freshman's Perspective:

HARPUR SCHWARTZ CONTRIBUTOR

The best of times, the worst of times— freshman year, we've all been there. We've all been a first-year student. As a typical incoming freshman, sometime in the middle of August you pack up your life into a few boxes and say goodbye to friends and family. You drive onto your college campus, pull up to the curb of your assigned dorm and are immediately swarmed by orientation staff eager to help you unpack. With your parents watching, your car is empty. Next thing you know, you are heaved inside your dorm to meet your roommate(s) and fellow classmates. And thus you have begun your journey as a first-year college student.

The Connecticut College first year experience is similar to any other, with one exception: we do not have all-freshman dorms. When I went on a tour as a prospective freshman, I distinctly remember how Connecticut College boasted about its unique dorm life. Conn is not segregated based on gender or grade. Not even our bathrooms are gender biased. There are no fraternities or sororities, you live in a dorm with a mix of residences of your dorm becomes a community.

One of my larger issues of the Connecticut College thrives on its unique housing, continuing its theme of being an all-inclusive environment. I think this is a big negative if we continue to treat all class years as equals. This model of all freshman dorms and floors is proven to work. However, if we start segregating by grade, this will mean a decrease in Connecticut College's distinct selling point of being a truly liberal college.

Do we really think that bonding the freshman class is more important than the other relationships that could be made living in a mixed house? There is something to be said about living with upperclassmen. If you have a question about something, what class to take or just if you need some advice, there is some one right door who has been there, done that. Okay, so maybe you're not best friends with the people on your floor, but at least you have that social aspect there are advantages of at least recognizing some familiar upperclassmen faces around campus. Mixed floors are part of what makes Conn a unique place, and these different relationships that are created are part of what makes Conn so special.

One of my larger issues of this dorm pilot program would be that floors would not be reconstructed. A location has yet to be chosen, but an all freshmen dorm will just be deemed as work without renovation. This potentially would allow for freshmen to have singles. However, I feel that having a floor is an essential part of the college experience.

Placing a freshman in a single would allow for already introverted students to keep to themselves. Maybe you do not get along great with your roommate, but it forces you to branch out. The debate then becomes whether a freshman in a single freshmen dorm is better or an isolated freshmen double.

Now the question most of you are asking yourselves is how do we affect this, and why should I care about freshmen? Well, because this will affect our whole campus. Right now, there is roughly a 25% rules in dorms (i.e. there must be an equal number of students from each year living in a house). It may be small at first, but there will be noticeable changes throughout Conn. These are many unanswered questions revolving around this change to freshmen housing, but only time will tell if the pros outweigh the cons, or vice versa.

A Senior's Perspective

Thursday nights quiet, and by my junior year Cro dances were no longer a fact of Saturday night. As S2D events, bingo nights, and open skate nights have started consistently, filling in these gaps in social programming, the natural next step is to revolutionize our dorm experiences to further create the type of community we want to create at Conn.

Imagine for a minute what your experience would have been like, as a fledgling camel on move in day, cataloging your belongings into a dorm teeming with hundreds of other excited kids and parents, rather than listening to your foot steps echo in the empty hallway as you and one other person move into the only freshmen room on your floor. How would it have felt to live in a dorm where everyone left their door open and hung out in the hallway working on projects for their intro biology class, rather than walking down an empty hall past twenty closed doors?

Freshman year is unlike any other in that you are independent for the first time. You're exploring academic fields you never knew existed in high school, you're joining new groups, you're surrounded by people from all over the country and the world. You are growing as a person in a way that only those other freshmen going through the same exciting and frightening stage can understand. So why would you not want to be surrounded by these people?

Fledgling Camels as imagined by Zander Asphalld

Reporting by Julia Cristofano and Harpur Schwartz.
If we were lucky, around 1 a.m., every night when we went to bed exhausted. It was well-earned.

Mid-week: "It's a good kind of cringe-worthy word that most people make plans for the Future - that I've been asked this question many times in the past few months, and while my answers have usually varied from "No, please stop talking," to "Nah, but I'll figure it out maybe," I finally reached a place of calm when thinking about the vast, open space that is my Future After Conn. During the last week of winter break, I attended an intensive career preparation workshop designed by Conn's Academic Resource Center (ARC) and sponsored by Diane Y. Williams '59, retired executive of Merrill Lynch. Called "Now Hiring!" the pilot program was offered to 12 seniors, selected through an application process, and included focused workshops on communication, finance and technology skills.

Despite Conn's rigorous academic schedule, the week of January 12, 2014 was the most intense of my time here. "Now Hiring!" beat out my regular seminar class I've taken in terms of workload. As I sit here, flipping through my binder syllabus for the week, I am having flashbacks to how exhausted I felt by the last night of the program. As one of the seniors remarked mid-week: 'It's a good kind of exhausted.' It was well-earned.

"Now Hiring!" was career prep boot camp. But with more Camel cookies and less physical activity.

The subsequent days saw intense resume workshops, presentations on Excel, PowerPoint and Prezi (which Garrett highly recommends if you'd like your presentation to be the equivalent of sending your audience on a rollercoaster ride) and strategy for making social media a professional setting. On Day 4, Joyce P. Jacobsen, Andrews Professor of Economics at Wesleyan University, spoke to us about personal finances and walked us through how to make a budget. She first gave us a worksheet and reviewed the spreadsheet of a real-life case study project we were divided into three groups of four, and given a set of questions to answer regarding a local business, Preston Ridge Vineyard from Preston, Conn, run by Andrew and Cara Sawyer. Working with our groups (until late late hours of the night), we all created 45-minute long presentations aimed to provide the Sawyers with suggestions for increasing their revenue and expanding their brand.

Pacing the floors of Cro at 2 a.m. and spouting out facts about grapes and wine that we just learned three hours before was unlike any other experience I've had at Conn so far. And pitching our ideas to the Sawyers the next day was a valuable glimpse into the business world that I feel many Conn students don't have experience with.

The only challenge I foresee in the future for "Now Hiring!" is keeping the workshops small and personal while simultaneously reaching more Conn students. The lessons and tips that we learned that week were invaluable, and more students should be able to share in this experience. What "Now Hiring!" did is a bigger CELS workshop of 50 or so students cannot is a realistic experience. After completing the program and recognizing what skills I have to offer future employers, I believe him. A Liberal Arts degree affords us an opportunity to translate our skills into a wide variety of careers. Maybe I will become a journalist. Maybe I will fall into a different career path by accident and be equally as happy. Only time will tell.

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STAFF WRITER

BE THE MATCH

Inspirited by their previous captain Molly Murphy, the Women's Ice Hockey team decided to involve themselves with 'Be the Match'. 'Be the Match' is a foundation that helps people diagnosed with blood diseases get the marrow they need to survive. Funds donated to 'Be the Match' help with research to figure out new ways of treating and diagnosing blood diseases. The team has been running t-shirt sales in helping the cause head to the work next year and after graduation. If you're interested in helping the cause head to the team, she hopes to continue connected us with the rest of this foundation is an easy way in any way we can. It has really to bring hundreds of students to a game carry an impactful message: Green Dot. Transforming over the years since the original game, Darcie's partnership with the men's ice hockey team created now extends into men's soccer and women's lacrosse, showing just how much can be done when a team starts playing for a cause. The third annual Green Dot game will take place on Saturday, February 8 at 7 p.m. in Dayton Arena. They will be rivaling Tufts, another NESCAC team that has become supportive of the tradition. For the past three years on this night they've played Tufts, who have been inspired in their own way through their white ribbon campaign, a campaign working to end men's violence against women.

This year will differ from the past in that the week of the game will encompass all things Green Dot. Monday will start off the week with a Facebook "storm" and tabling. Tuesday will consist of more passive campaigning leading up to trivia night with SAC at campus bar on Wednesday at 10 p.m. The following evening SAPA and Green Dot are working together to host BINGO in the 1962 room, also at 10 p.m. After a day of passive campaigning Friday, Dayton Arena will be a sea of green on Saturday. Thunder sticks giveaways, seat cashshins, buck a pack, raffles, and a camel photo booth in addition to what should be a competitive game. To top it all off, through generous donations from the Class Councils of 2015 and 2017, SGA, SAC and The Office of Student Wellness, the first 300 attendees will receive a free Green Dot shirt.

The Camels have an overall record of 4-11-1 while the Tufts jumbo hold a 3-13 overall record. After a big defeat this past weekend in their game against Wesleyan there are high hopes for the Camels to win the game. The game that was started by the seniors of the 2012 team is evolving into something bigger each and every year. One that has remained fairly consistent is the team's support and dedication to the Green Dot cause. With over 440 Green Dot Graduates on campus and more to come this Sunday as the week culminates with a Green Dot training, the men's ice hockey team has added the phrase Green Dot to our everyday Conn lingo. Their newest addition to the ice this year, a Green Dot logo or the rink all season, truly embodies how integral Green Dot has become to the team.

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The Winter Power Ranking will be posted weekly and will rank the eleven NESCAC schools based on men's and women's hockey; men's and women's basketball and men's and women's swimming and diving.

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The poll was devised as follows: Sports Editor Luca Powell ranked all NESCAC schools in each sport. These rankings were based on NESCAC standings as well as quality wins and influential losses to NESCAC opponents. These scores were averaged to create a composite overall ranking for each school.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Men's Basketball
Conn 84 - 77 Bates

Women's Basketball
Conn 64 - 56 Bates

Men's Hockey
Conn 2 - 1 Middlebury

Women's Hockey
Conn 0 - 3 Amherst

SO YOU DON'T MISS IT

Women's Basketball:
vs ECSU
2/4 6:00 PM
vs Williams
2/14 6:00 PM
vs Hamilton
2/15 2:00 PM

Men's Basketball:
vs Mitchell
2/11 7:00 PM
vs Williams
2/14 8:00 PM
vs Hamilton
2/15 4:00 PM

Men's Hockey:
vs Tufts
2/8 7:00 PM

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Athletes in the Studio: A Look at Student-Artists Off the Field

ANDREW SHAW STAFF WRITER

I

The center of a liberal arts education is the intersection of athletics and academics. The cross-disciplinary nature of the liberal arts allows us to holistic learning experience, within which we experience how different branches of college experience complement each other. The liberal arts mandates students not just be focused on being either an athlete or an artist. In a school where a third of student body is involved in athletics, they are often not mutually exclusive.

Recently, the Voice took the chance to explore if and how students are making these connections outside of the classroom between two fields that are often perceived to exist on either side of an unbridgeable—or at least unbridged—chasm: athletics and art.

Our first interviewee was Julia Byrne ‘14, who plays on the women’s soccer team and is a visual art major specializing in drawing. Byrne, also a business management and art history major, has been involved in the arts since she was young. "I've done ceramics since my freshman year of high school so I'm one of the more experienced people, because I have taken ceramics classes. It's one of those things, you, you finally are able to be the leader in the classroom. People will come to you, just like with athletics. People come to you when you're an upperclassman, and you're the one that tries to calm them down if they're nervous. It's just like one of those captain kind of things or teamwork.

TVC: What drew you to art?
EM: Both my parents are Hungarian. My mother actually has her Master's in interior and fashion design from Hungary. She actually has her own business for jewelry, but she's always done interior and fashion. So I've always grown up with that sense. And they're also very big antique people, so our house, there's not a single white wall, like you can't put a single picture up anymore. Every little bookcase is filled with intricate little things, so it was one of those where I've grown up into it and I had the possibility in high school to take a ceramics class. So I thought I might as well try. I tried it and I loved my teacher so much. I'm more 3-D oriented, like I've always loved playing with Play-Doh when I was younger and I was never one to draw. Still to this day am not good at drawing, [laughs] Here I have the chance to do both economics and art. I do want to go into the fashion industry on the marketing side or finance, but having an art background helps. I'm looking to try working at a company that is from America but that's situated all around the world. I'd like to work in Hungary.

TVC: What medium do you work in?
BB: I do different things, so talking to somebody else about something from each other's piece?

TVC: Do you think students from different media influence each other? Are you influenced in some way by people who aren't doing ceramics?
EM: They definitely do influence you and give you a better outlook, an inspiration of different things to do. I did take a printmaking course, which was 2-D based, and it was a challenge for me because I have little exposure to 2-D work, but it did show me different outlook, and especially seeing everyone else's work. It was very eye-opening, thinking, "Maybe I can experiment with this, but in a different sense." I plan on taking a photography class just so that I can experiment taking photography of my own pieces.

TVC: 3-D objects in a 2-D frame kind of thing.
EM: Yeah. It is nice, inspirational, to see other people doing the 2-D work. I've really never thought of connecting swimming and ceramics together, but they are similar in a sense.

JBP: I draw, so I do different things with charcoal and pencil.

TVC: Why do you draw? What made you choose drawing versus another medium?
JBP: I took a lot of drawing classes in high school and I had an amazing art teacher. She inspired me, and kinda, not pushed me towards drawing, but that's...what we worked on together, so that's what I wanted to continue to do.

TVC: Do you think you'll continue with art after school?
JBP: Hopefully. I actually would like to be an art teacher so hopefully I will be able to continue.

TVC: What grade level? Do you know?
JBP: Probably high school.

TVC: Do you think that different students working in different mediums in the art department influence each other? Do you learn something from each other's piece?
JBP: Yeah, it's nice because all the students do very different things, so talking to somebody else about either their work or your work, you can get different ideas, which helps you achieve a more well-rounded piece.

Esther Mehesz ‘15 was our second interviewee. She's a swimmer and a ceramics-based artist.

TVC: What do you and your swimming have in common?
EM: It is unfortunate of the different opposites, athletics and art, but you do both of them.

Esther Mehesz ‘15: I'm actually a double major with Art and Econ. which is already seen as a complete polar opposite — and then I swim and play water polo, too, so to be completely honest, I couldn't really say what they have in common. In the projects that I do, because their ceramics-based, I focus a lot on the Baroque style. But in a different aspect the whole time management and whatnot is definitely very helpful between sports and art.

TVC: Obviously both require a lot of time to get good at.
EM: Yes, I mean, being in the studio while being in season is very difficult, and on Sundays, that's where I am [laughs]. Project-wise, swimming and art, I could not tell you what I see in common, but it's more like, being an art major it is so time-consuming, and being in the ceramics studio it's a lot of trust and hoping and praying for the best. I do have a lot of pieces where the drying process will be fine but then you put it in the kiln and it might melt the wrong way. One of my pieces just now, the top of it literally collapsed into it. I wish there was a hidden camera in the kiln, but it was one of those things where it's like, you kind of just have to accept what you're gonna have from it. Where in swimming, you have to accept what happens at a meet. You can't always have a good day. You have to be happy, even though it may not be your best day, you always learn from the day's mistakes.

I've done ceramics since my freshman year of high school so I'm one of the more experienced people, because I have taken ceramics classes. It's one of those things, you, you finally are able to be the leader in the classroom. People will come to you, just like with athletics. People come to you when you're an upperclassman, and you're the one that tries to calm them down if they're nervous. It's just like one of those captain kind of things or teamwork.

TVC: Despite being them, to some degree, solo activities.
EM: Like athletic people having their clique? Yes, you definitely see it. Like even in Harris when you go in, it's the athlete section and the non-athlete section. Yes, it is, it's horrible, but then again the team does try, like you try and build your team to the best advantage. So I do have those have meals with your team. You don't wanna just be in the water with your team, you do want to build the sense of a different relationship.

Even in the art studio, there are a couple of us that do other sports too. We see each other down at the trailers, we see each other in the studio all the time, so you can relate on so many things, which makes it nice. But it's very nice to have a person that's in the studio and that's an athlete, but it's a nice atmosphere in the studio. The classmates that you have, even though they might not be on athletic teams, you have such a good connection with them, a nice environment to be in, it's very open. You're working hands-on, but it's like a social class. So you get to know a person a lot better, it's very open. I know some of people's backgrounds, like everyday things. You wouldn't see that at a team event with athletics. So it's two complete different things, and yes, they have these other cliques I guess you could say, but it's nice seeing a couple of us that are in both situations, and how we connect even more sometimes. But it is unfortunate of the different cliques, and I wish people were more accepting of a lot of people. The art community is a team itself. Definitely so, I enjoy that.

TVC: Do you think students from different media influence each other? Are you influenced in some way by people who aren't doing ceramics?
EM: They definitely do influence you and give you a better outlook, an inspiration of different things to do. I did take a printmaking course, which was 2-D based, and it was a challenge for me because I have little exposure to 2-D work, but it did show me different outlook, and especially seeing everyone else's work. It was very eye-opening, thinking, "Maybe I can experiment with this, but in a different sense." I plan on taking a photography class just so that I can experiment taking photography of my own pieces.

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Educator 
& Artist:

Arts Editor
Chiara Cafiero profiles
visiting instructor
David Rau

CHIARA CAFIERO
ARTS EDITOR

“Everybody stand up—we’re going to play a game.”

On my second day of Art History 283: Museum Education, I get the feeling this isn’t going to be a standard lecture in a darkened room with slides flashing from the projector. We rise and engage in a museum-themed icebreaker game orchestrated by our instructor, David Rau. Rau is the director of Education at the Florence Griswold Museum in nearby Old Lyme, and teaches courses in Museum Studies at the College.

Rau was approached by Professor Chris Steiner of the Art History department, who lives in Old Lyme, about teaching Museum Education at the College. Since then, Rau has also taught the courses Museum Methods, Intro to Museum Studies, and House Museums.

Part of Rau’s interest in art museums stems from being an artist in his own right. He works primarily in collage and paper, but started experimenting with 3D pieces through his work at the Florence Griswold—especially the Wee Faerie Village. “I’m not always making fairy houses, though. I participate in whatever the museum does,” he said, “I’m always creating something, whether I’m making something to auction off or exhibiting in a gallery show.” In fact, Rau spent a semester as a student in Cummings when he audited Professor McCabe’s collage class and “just loved it.”

For Rau, teaching at Conn and working at the Florence Griswold are mutually enriching experiences. “Coming to the College really allowed me to have an interaction with a young adult audience. When you’re a practicing museum educator you just do stuff but don’t always explain why, but teaching forces you to reevaluate. Teaching here makes me better at my job because I have to explain why I do what I do. It keeps me on my toes, and I really enjoy the challenge to be fresh.”

Rau thinks highly of the Camels he teaches: “The students at Conn write extremely well and they’re worldly. I can jump right in to my content area and they can keep up. I’ve always been so impressed by their creativity in the classroom.”

When asked what advice he would give to Conn students interested in a career like his, Rau replied: “Great jobs are few and far between, but they’re out there. Really do what you love. It’s a luxury to find a job that you don’t consider a job, but it’s possible.”
NEW IN CUMMINGS

GREGORY BAILEY

TOWARDS A NEW REALITY
FACULTY EXHIBITION

GALLERY TALK + OPENING RECEPTION ON FEBRUARY 19

TIMOTHY MCDOWELL
It might be less about race...

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

songs about ass money and pussy and he doesn't refer to women as bitches or ho's cause he doesn't lack RESPECT like 99% of all rappers.” Ahh, obviously a true hip-hop aficionado.

A lot of the people in the “purist” rap corner look to skin color to explain why other nominees—Lamar, Drake and Kanye West—went home empty-handed as well as why many other black rappers have in years past. It certainly did feel funny when a past-hit-prime Tony Bennett won Album of the Year in a 1994 the year that saw the drop of some of that decade’s biggest hip-hop records: Ready to Die, Illmatic and Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik. But black rappers are not the only ones that have gotten snubbed in the Grammys’ fraught past. The Who, The Beach Boys, and Led Zeppelin didn’t win a Grammy until this year. However, when it comes to hip-hop, some of the Academy’s choices are straight garbage, but the reasoning has less to do with race than you would think. This is why they can’t seem to get it right.

Members of the Recording Academy, also known as the National Academy of Recording Arts and Science, get to vote in a wide range of categories, even if it’s a genre in which the member lacks expertise. A lot of members voting in categories they’re not familiar with means less attention to the music and more attention to the numbers: music video views, radio plays and, of course, sales. The Billboard Top 100, a music magazine that charts radio plays, shows that Macklemore’s “Thrift Shop” peaked at #1 and has spent 48 weeks on the Top 100. Lamar’s “Swimming Pools” peaked at #17 and has only been on the chart for 29 weeks. Drake’s “Started from the Bottom” fared slightly better, peaking at #6. When it comes to music video views, Macklemore raked in almost half a billion views on Youtube for the same single. Views of Drake and Lamar’s singles combined barely amount to half of that.

Unfortunately, this isn’t a new trend. When I spoke to one very own hip-hop connoisseur and Professor of African-American Studies, Professor David Canton, he could sense my dismay over Macklemore’s recent accolades. “It’s an issue of expectation,” he told me. “When Will Smith won in 1996, of course I was upset because people like Big Daddy Kane and KRS-One weren’t nominated. I realized it wasn’t about who’s the best MC... it was about the numbers.”

Canton explained that Clear Channel Communications, a mass media company, owns and controls an extremely large percentage of the nation’s radio stations, giving them an audience of 110 million. A mainstream song like “Parent’s Just Don’t Understand” could be played on both Clear Channel’s urban and pop radio stations—in effect, doubling its airtime. Will Smith didn’t take the Grammy home because of his complex lyrical style or counter-cultural message, but rather because his music was inoffensive and more popular, playing on both hip-hop and urban radio stations. His family-friendly content gave him a huge national audience and Grammy voters looked to that as a sign of success.

Do any Conn students remember Naughty by Nature? I doubt it. Yet, in 1996, they took Best Rap Album against Tupac’s Me Against the World. Old Dirty Bastard’s Return to the Chamber and Bone Thugs – N Harmony’s E 1999 Eternal. Perhaps the Academy’s biggest flop of all came in 1999 when Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power” lost Best Rap Performance to Young MC’s “Fight the Power to Young MC’s “Butt a Move”.

“Tell me which song won the Grammy: the one that rhymes with ‘witty’ or the one that rhymes with ‘Elvis?’”

When it comes down to it, through its system of voting the Grammys allows its members to make their choices based off popularity rather than the quality and caliber of the music. Many hip-hop artists use their anger to fuel their songs, and these eloquent and thought-provoking lyricists (Nas, Mos Def and Run-DM.C) are often pushed aside for pop-rappers like Will Smith, Ludacris, and Macklemore.

It’s nothing against those guys or their style of music; Smith’s “Summertime” will always be a favorite jam of mine. But the Grammys need a new system of nomination and voting that reflects the insight of the practitioners in each genre and doesn’t relinquish power to the uniformed. Let’s hope next time the winners won’t need to apologize for “robbing” an award.
Local Bluegrass Band Gets Right Now, Honey

AYLA ZURAW-FRIEDLAND
SENIOR EDITOR

About a year ago, I had the pleasure of hearing a fledgling bluegrass band play live in the comfort of my own home. A large group of my parents' friends had gathered to celebrate a collective 50th birthday and this private concert was the grand event. My mother had worked for weeks to make sure I cleared my schedule to come home to good old Storrs, CT to hear them play. So one Friday night in March I drove through the remnants of a late snowstorm to catch the beginning of the set that took place in my living room.

The group was obviously young but somehow ageless (perhaps because one of them sported an impressive beard that blew away all my preconceived notions of what facial hair should and could be). I watched them as they hauled up large trunks, and a saw that wouldn't make sense until the end of the night. Cords were plugged in. Guitars were tuned in the midst of happy chatter. And suddenly the mostly crew of five burst into song and no one in the room stopped dancing until the last chord of the night was played. Much merriment was had and I was completely hooked on a band called Poor Old Shine.

Poor Old Shine was formed on campus when Chris Freeman met banjo and mandolin player Antonio Alcorn and they quite literally booked their first gig by accident. The very earliest origins of Poor Old Shine began when Freeman and Alcorn played an opening show for a friend at Toad's Place in New Haven. The band expanded to include Max Shakun on guitar and pump organ and Harrison Goode on bass, as well as the addition of a thumb piano carved out of a gourd grown in their friends' yard. After recording a mixture of original songs and covers from artists such as Woody Allen live at Infinity Theater in Norfolk, CT, the band had the drive they needed to pursue recording their own album, Poor Old Shine.

While the record definitely holds roots in bluegrass, the band defines itself as a "sing-along" genre group on their Facebook page, showing that the music is meant to be people-centric and easy to identify with, regardless as to whether the audience includes any folk aficionados. There is a certain affinity to the American narrative that holds outposts in the great outdoors and simple living, and more generally the human experience of nostalgia for some long bygone past.

The opening number, "Weeds or Wildflowers" is incredibly cheerful and catchy and combines bluegrass themes with some more modern, indie folk sounds. The tune is generally upbeat, but the lyrics offer some insight and pose the question: "Will there be weeds or wildflowers when you're done?" It speaks well to the human anxiety of wondering what you're doing? Will it be remembered? Will it ever do someone, good? Or will it be ripped up by its roots to make room for something else?

The following song, "Footsteps in My Ear" begins with a chord progression that is reminiscent of musicians such as the Avert Brothers and Mumford & Sons. However, where it differs is in its frayed edges and unedited sound. Though this album was recorded in a studio, every song feels as if it is being played live. The lyrics speak of a quiet longing for a love that stays just out of reach: "Maybe you're the moon on the water / Or maybe you're the fog in the field / I reach out to you and you get further away / Maybe you're just footsteps in my ear." The layered harmonies seem as though they could possibly lend themselves to an even more pared down version or a capella rendition (ahem Co Co Beaus?).

The album contains a fairly even mix of upbeat and slower and contemplative numbers. "Punching the Air, "Fear Down the Stage," and "Right Now" are all foot-tapping songs with a banjo-driven melody and a charming sort of half-twang. While we pave passed the days of freight trains going to hell and burning up stages, the imagery their lyrics conjure is very much present in rural American consciousness. Of course there are the slower songs to complement those, such as the haunting "Ghosts Next Door" and the regret of love not given in "Empty Rocking Chair." While most of the songs use a similar array of instruments, they are used differently in each of them.

Perhaps what is so special about this group is that despite their freshness, each song feels worn and comfortable. This may be a result of a creative process based upon "trying everyone's ideas and then agreeing what works and does not work as a group," as Shakun described it in an electronic interview. They spend a lot of time with each song, but not to the point where it feels over-orchestrated or inauthentic. Their sound is rough and sepa toned, like an old photograph that has been carried through the years. It is innocent and wise, pure in its intention and a hybrid in its actual sound and execution, classic and original, and basically any other paradox one can think of that combines tradition and modern innovation. I want to dance and kind of want to cry and call my family and listen to the lyrics and am made nostalgic for my not-so-distant hometown and roots in Mansfield.

Poor Old Shine is slowly gaining a following and will continue to tour throughout 2014 in Massachusetts, Maine, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, Pennsylvania, and even as far as South Carolina and Kansas City, MO. They also took part in a production of Robin Hood done by the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, MA this past January. The band plans to continue booking gigs and performing for as long as they can, and I hope continue spreading more wildflowers than weeds wherever they go.