

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE FREE UNIVERSITY

by JoAnne Wallace

The Midpeninsula Free University is in the midst of a crisis--a crisis so deep-rooted that it threatens drastic changes and perhaps even the end of the Free U in the near future.

For the past two years, the Free U has tried in principle to have a dual function. It has been, first of all, a counter university sponsoring and advertizing hundreds of open courses, most of which deal with members' personal development and personal relationships. On the whole Free U courses are taught by the educated upper middle class for the educated upper middle class, though many Free U members would undoubtedly count themselves as hip and "liberated" rather than "straight" upper middle class.

According to Free U organizers, the Free U is successful as a counter university. Courses are flourishing. The number of course offerings and the enrollment have expended rapidly--peaking this spring when some 1200 people signed up for almost 300 courses.

But the organizers of the Free U are discouraged. They wanted the Free U to be something more than a counter university. They wanted a vital ongoing community where everyone would be involved in making the Free U go as a way of life, not merely enjoying its recreational benefits. The Free U's coordinator, Bob Cullenbine, said in a recent Free U newsletter interview that most members now are interested in the Free U only as "a course on Tuesday night and a course on Thursday night and certain weekend seminars." Free U classes are remaining "just 'classes'," he said. "They don't seem to be encouraging people into forming any sort of visible community...or a community I can tap into and touch."

So what happens is that eight or nine paid staff members do most of the organizational work and make most of the day-to-day decisions concerning the Free U. They compile a new catalog of courses every three months. They publish an expensive multi-color 50-page newsletter-cum-literary magazine once a month. They stage be-ins and rock concerts. And they handle a steady stream of personal crises that walk through the Free U door. Essentially the staff holds the Free U together--without much interest or support from the rest of the membership.

Since its beginning four years ago, the Free U has been committed in principle to participatory democracy. Theoretically, important decisions have been made by the coordinating committee, a group always open to all interested members. But the coordinating committee is now almost moribund. Two years ago when the organization had 200 members, between 35 and 40 people would attend coordinating committee meetings. Two years and 1000 members later, the meetings have not only about the same number of people, but the same people. Recently even those original 35 movers of the Free U have begun to drop out. This is the cause of the present crisis.

Added to these organizational problems are growing financial troubles. The Free U charges all members --both course leaders and participants--\$10 per quarter. But this summer membership is down to 900. The Free U has a store in Menlo Park, half boutique, half art gallery, where the wares of local craftsmen and artists are sold on commission. In the last

year, however, the store has lost over \$1000 because of stolen merchandise. The Free U has a print shop equipped to do commercial job printings, but at present it does not even pay for itself.

CULLY MAY QUIT

Cullenbine said last week that because of these heavy losses he and all but one of the staff members soon may have to resign. Their resignation would strip the Free U down to a minimum operation--only volunteer classes and a catalog to coordinate and advertise them. If this happened, he said, the Free U would have no program, no community function, nothing but Free U courses.

But Cullenbine and his staff are reluctant to let this happen. He said in the newsletter interview that what has kept him going in the Free U is the dream that "we are really doing something that's going to have important ramifications." He believes the Free U can provide important cultural services for the community--be-ins, rock concerts, housing lists for members, job listings for members and so on.

To save the Free U Cullenbine and his staff are staging a last-ditch benefit rock concert to raise money. It's planned for Sunday, August 17 at Stanford's Frost Amphitheater. If enough money is raised, he says, the Free U show will go on.

The plan may succeed in getting the Free U out of the financial hole. But unfortunately none of the organization's failings as a community will be solved by money.

In fact, it is difficult to know what could salvage the Free U and make it into an effective communal organization. As it is now set up, Free U members are encouraged to dabble here and dabble there, "doing their own thing" in as many courses as they may want to take--from bread baking to Zen, from touch encounter groups to Jungian astrology. In theory, anything goes. The Winter 1969 catalog explains.

"One of the cornerstones of Free U philosophy is the principle of an 'open curriculum.' This means that every Free U member is encouraged to offer a course on any subject he wishes and in any manner he wishes to teach it. The Free U exercises no screening, censoring, or directing of any class. We feel that in this way the community can best assess its educational needs."

This is essentially a liberal pluralist position. The Free U is opposed to setting any standards or criteria for distinguishing a good course from a bad one. The members of the Free U are not interested in coming together to decide what they should be learning and doing. Instead, the Free U's liberal position implies that every idea, activity, or concern is equally important. And so to thumb through a Free U catalog is to get a sense that all courses are equally valuable and worth pursuing. It all depends on the individual and his particular tastes, the Free U seems to say.

Another aspect of the Free U educational philosophy --which can be drawn more from the catalog's list of courses than from its statement of purpose--is the idea that the causes of people's problems are personal and psychological. Looking through a course catalog you will find only a few courses which seek pol-

itical-economic, or even communal, explanations for human problems. Instead, you find, a lot of courses promise to help the individual adjust to society by helping him to understand himself better and to "communicate" more effectively with others. The blurb for a 24-hour marathon called "Encounter" in last winter's catalog stated smugly:

"All kinds of people are interacting for all kinds of reasons: policemen and black militants, criminals and upper-class society matrons, dopers and abstainers, teen-agers and adults, establishment bigshots and restless activists, clergy and laity, libertines and rigid conservatives, gay and straight, you and what-have-you. These people come to this encounter group to learn, to get loose, to acquire self-awareness, to communicate with others, to deal with hang-ups, to enjoy themselves."

What a beautiful solution for blacks constantly harassed by police in the ghettos. Just sit a black militant down with a cop, let them shoot the shit a while, let them each see the other as individual human beings, and poof--antagonisms disappear. Why hasn't this technique been used in Vietnam?

But of course my sarcasm is absurd. Confrontation techniques and encounter techniques were created for upper-middle-class individuals to use on each other. Encounter troupes and confrontation sessions attempt to convince those participating that they can solve their problems individually if they'll only try harder and better. The essence of such therapy is the way it cures problems: the individual confesses that problems exist, he faces up to them and then he waits for them to go away while he feels virtuous for having admitted them publicly.

Consider this firsthand account by Peter Smart (an intern working with Husain Chung, a leading influence on Bay Area encounter groups) which tells how a special kind of encounter session called a psychodrama marathon can make a person confront his real problems.

"It is a stripping away of psychic layers, a going deeper and deeper into the self. You come in wearing a face, but it is not your real face...All the psychodrama, the merciless zapping (why do you lie? why are you so weak, so impotent? why are you such a bitch?), all this is designed to strip away the mask and reveal the real face, the face contorted with hatred and rage, the face with all its marks of weakness and shame. The marathon is a true mirror and for once, you must look at your real face..."

It brings you right up against that monster in you, that dragon, that you've never dared do battle with. It takes you into that secret place in yourself, that ultimate fear of shame, that place you do not want to know, that place you cannot confront, but must confront if you are ever to be whole, to be free.

And of course...you run shrieking from it. The psychodrama brings on a terrible crisis, an agony of self-knowledge...But what you find is that you can always get beyond that place, the dragon can be overcome. That on the other side, there isn't disaster, disintegration, madness, loss of self, but rather self-realization, strength, wholeness, peace. That underneath that ugly face there is yet another face, your true face, and it is a strong, loving face. After the hell, comes this incredible joy, love and peace. Every psychodrama is this kind of trip into the self, a purgation, a cleansing, a trip through your hell to realize your true humanity."

The middle class individualistic bull-shit is all there. The individual is responsible for his fucked-up life. All he has to do is face up to the demons

inside him. Once he acknowledges his hatreds, his fears, he can find peace. Despite the risk of sounding pompous, I can only say that this bit of self-indulgence will work for only a privileged class of people. It is absurd, of course, to think that the Vietnamese peasant whose children have been napalmed is going to make the war go away by stripping off his psychic layers and coming face to face with his hatred for the United States.

Last week, while doing research on the Free U, I asked a leader of one of the more than 100 encounter groups what he thinks the value of such groups is. "I think people become radicalized," he said, "because they are opening up and becoming more aware of their environment. It's impossible to be turned on to more and more things around you without becoming more radicalized." What did he mean by radicalized, I asked. "I mean, aware of the repressive nature of our society," he said. Many of the Free U courses make people see what the society is doing to them, he continued. Once people understand that, they begin to make "cultural demands" on that society--like changing the way they dress and wear their hair, or people drop out of straight jobs, such as jobs with defense contractors. And this radicalization process is necessary for upper-middle-class people, he insisted, because upper-middle-class people can't relate to blacks in the ghetto, for example, if they don't feel their own oppression.

I suspect that not many middle-class people radicalized by the Free U in this way ever do move into any collective political activity--either in support of their own interests or any one else's. Whatever radicalism they may acquire is likely to be a privatist kind of radicalism.

A story the same encounter group leader told me confirms this theory. In one of his recent courses, there was some discussion of the housing problems in Palo Alto: the fact that rents are soaring and that it is becoming increasingly hard for people, particularly hippies, to rent houses there. Several months after this discussion, a man from the group phoned the encounter leader and told him that until the group experience, the man and his wife had never realized before what a problem housing was in Palo Alto. And now they wanted to do something about it, he said, so they were going to buy a large old house in Palo Alto and rent it to hippies at reasonable prices.

"This shows that people can be radicalized in Free U courses," the leader said. He didn't seem a bit impressed when I pointed out that one couple buying one large old house in Palo Alto will hardly fight the growing crisis in housing, or that Palo Alto financial interests are trying to squeeze all those big, low-rent houses out of the downtown area.

In the last analysis, it seems impossible that the Free U can succeed when it both encourages people's middle class individualistic tendencies and also hopes to attract them to communal relationships. The two concerns are antithetical. And so, it is completely understandable that members of the Free U are unconcerned and uninvolved in the Free U as a community--most of them are taking courses which encourage them to concentrate on self-awareness, self-fulfillment, and self-gratification.

One final note. Some old Peninsula heads are fond of harking back to the days from 1965 through 1967 when the Free U was first beginning and had a large number of "politicos" as members. These people remember how great the Free U was then and speculate

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about what the Free U might have become, had the political people only remained.

But according to Barry Greenberg, who was one of the early Free U organizers, it is important to realize that the Free U had the same basic deficiencies then that it has now. "Its politics then were middle-class radicalism," he explained recently. The Free U then was essentially a homogeneous middle-class group--though there were more students then, whereas now there is a preponderance of 25 to 30-year-olds. "The primary view of radical organizing back in the old days was to set the Free U down in the middle of East Palo Alto and educate the blacks and poor whites there to struggle for greater local autonomy within their existing community. We were very naive or very condescending or both," Greenberg continued, "but we thought we had an important message to bring to that community."

Still, the politics of the Free U might have developed and matured had it now been for the liberal anarchistic notion that people should do their own thing. According to Greenberg, this tendency not only made it impossible for the members to debate and collectively decide which courses and political actions were valuable and which should be thrown out; it also made it harder for the political people doing "their own thing" to operate within the Free U. "There were very strong pressures by many people in the Free U then to keep others in the organization from taking political action. Membership was used as a stick to keep people in line--the argument was that the large membership of the organization might be jeopardized if the organization or individuals in it took public political stands," Greenberg said. The political emasculation of the Free U might never have happened if the organization had not suspended its critical judgment.

It is this single characteristic, I think, that is responsible for fragmenting and isolating individual members of the Free U. If the organization's leaders are serious in wanting the Free U to become a real working community, then the luxury of middle-class individualism will, at times, have to be abandoned in order to create an organization with a wider communal perspective. Not until that happens can the Free U serve more than the interests of a thousand separate members. And not until the Free U serves more than just the interests of the upper middle class can it become truly political.

POSTSCRIPT: ON RIPOFFS AND COPYRIGHTS

JoAnne Wallace's article, above, first appeared in the Peninsula Observer as an attempt by that paper to start a dialogue on Free University directions. She was sabotaged by her own staff, however: Observer editor Marlene Charyn asked Menlo Park photographer Liz Hecker for permission to reprint a copyrighted picture appearing recently in the Free You, Liz (who is trying to support herself with her talent) asked for printmaking expenses of \$15, and the Observer replied by jumping Liz's copyright, printing the picture over the head of JoAnne's article with a caption saying, "One thing wrong with the Free U is the mentality of the photographer who took this picture." Got it all straight, so far? What followed was a week of angry disputes among various members of the MFU and the Observer, both of

whom, as Jon Buckley points out in his following article, have substantially better things to do, and do together. The Free You editors have argued endlessly before with the Observer over copyrights and reworted reprints; and at one point during the latest dispute, feeling all other alternatives exhausted, I promised legal action if any Free You contributor had his copyright violated in the future--we don't encourage copyrights, by the way, it's up to the writer.

In the end, Marlene apologized in print, an apology we wish to accept with the same grace with which it was made. Marlene remains opposed to copyrights, however, on several grounds, and her article on the subject, appearing in the Sept. 8 Observer, will be reprinted in the next Free You. The unfortunate victim of the affair, however, was JoAnne's article; the various reactions to the photo ripoff precluded adequate reflection on and response to the article itself. Critical commentary by two Free You editors follows, and we urge all Free U members to participate in the Observer's dialogue. **FN**

From Gurney Norman

I've got a feeling I'll eventually have a lot more to say in response to JoAnne Wallace's article last week than I'll be able to squeeze in here. But briefly: the trouble with you as a political thinker, JoAnne, is that you seem unable to imagine freedom for human beings in groups of less than 10,000. The idea of one man, alone, "individual", freaks you out entirely. It threatens your vision of mankind as essentially a collection of groups, of "parties", rather than a throng of separate, unique, individually complicated creatures. The Free U disgusts and troubles you so much because it is a group, not out for itself as a group, but looking for ways to enhance individual liberty, liberty not only in the economic sense, but sexually, morally, psychologically as well. It bugs you that the Free U is naive enough to try to operate on the premise that free men can be trusted to make up their own individual lives in ways that also create community. I think your article, and particularly the "theft" of Liz Hecker's photograph (not the theft itself so much, but the arrogance behind the deed), are indicative of an incredibly limited, simple-minded notion of how the world is, and could be. Last week's Observer left me with the distinct and uncomfortable feeling that if you and Ronald Reagan were free to carry out your ultimate political schemes, your scheme implied in the tone and style of your prose, Ronnie's implied in his frozen face and dead language, that you'd all create virtually identical worlds. Where the two of you are in the same bed together is in your inability to make distinctions. You look at an artist in the Palo Alto community and see a "capitalist" because she asks \$15 for her work. "Down with copyright!" you shout. What cheap shit. What are you going to do when someone shouts, "Down with charging 15 cents for a radical newspaper," and empties your street racks for you? In the name of revolution and liberty, let's all start stealing Observers from the stands. Is that where it's at?

And then you look at psychodrama, and a man like Kusain Chung, and all you can see are loathsome "individuals" playing with themselves. (Have you ever been to a psychodrama, JoAnne?) If you are unable to recognize the revolutionary spirit and power growing out of things like psychodrama, and

coming from men like Husain Chung, then how can you expect intelligent men to trust the accuracy of your eye, and the depth of your perceptions on other matters? It all makes your entire analysis of the nature of politics and the nature of this historical moment not only suspect, but boring.

The message I get when you come down so hard on "individuals" is that finally you don't give a shit for people. You're hung up on categories. If you don't give a shit for people, you don't give a shit for me. If you as a politician can't get interested in me personally, if forever I and other individuals must remain anonymous to you, a mere fraction of your entity (that is to say, a non-entity); then we are truly on different trips.

The Observer and the Free U are on different trips. They may even be enemies, in the long run. Certainly your arrogance toward Liz Hecker is the arrogance of an enemy. This saddens me enormously, and it's the thing that's got to be hassled out if the Free U and the community you stand for are to maintain anything like a common point of view. It's sad because suddenly, with all I've already got to be paranoid about, now I've got to be paranoid about you and the Observer, which all along I've counted on as a friend.

If you aren't interested in individuals, that has to mean you aren't interested in Vietnamese individuals, or individuals on, say, the local police force, either. You seem capable of feeling in generalities. Your article is full of "response" to large categories of people. But response to categories is response to abstractions. They don't really exist, except in your mind. Reduce people far enough into group abstraction and away from individuality and finally you get so you are willing to do anything to them, because they aren't "they" anymore, they are "it". To Hitler, the Jews were "it". To radicals, the cops are "it". And now, apparently, to you and the Observer, local artists are "it" too.

And you ask me to participate in a revolution like that? That's no revolution, that's a syndrome. I guess the final difference in the Free U's radical orientation and the Observer's is that in the Free U, people remain interested in themselves. Since you aren't interested in individuals, JoAnne, I take it you aren't interested in yourself. But if you're not interested in yourself, then how can you know very much about yourself? If you don't know much about yourself, then how can you account for where your politics come from, and be responsible for them? Do your politics truly grow out of an objective analysis of objective realities in the world? Or do they, perhaps, grow out of something inside you that you don't know about, and don't want to know about because introspection is a lot of middle-class bullshit? Think about it.

Observer Staff Reply

The opinions and criticisms contained in JoAnne Wallace's article, "What's Wrong with the Free U", reflect those of the entire Observer staff. JoAnne was selected to research and write the article after it had been thoroughly discussed in several informal meetings. It was the third article in recent months which dealt with the problems within the Free U. One article contained an editor's note: This article by a past and present MFU member and worker is meant to open discussion on the current state of the MFU and its future. We hope the community will join

in." That statement reflects best the reasons that JoAnne's article was written.

Although many fragmented reports have come to us about the Free U membership's response to the article, Gurney Norman's letter is the only answer we have received to date. Unfortunately it does not answer any of the specific criticisms raised in the article. It is instead an attack directed at JoAnne's total personality (a technique used heavily in psycho-drama marathons). The staff agrees that no one who knows JoAnne could have made the statements about her personality that Gurney makes. We urge our readers to read JoAnne's article before forming an opinion on the criticisms contained in Gurney's letter.

From Jon Buckley

So we come to the bare granite teeth of it, right down to the first rule of the street: you don't fuck your friends.

We got people in jail for A3M actions, grass, and other political "crimes", we got people with no decent place to live; we got Bodi and his shit-slingers twisting all the news until it fits; we got smooth civic double-talkers lined up with the downtown merchants-geriatrics-shuck-hospital-cartel slicing open the soft underbelly of Palo Alto to insert concrete, cancerous sores. And we don't have too many friends to stand up with. So now in the heat of the summer, with all the above obscenities going down we find the Observer (shining torch of journalistic truth) and the Free U (radical educational endeavor of the "the upper middle-class") getting on to some kind of feud while we all wait anxiously for the Fall and a new series of Burning Issues to arise from the Bowels of Stanford to excite our adrenalin and get those old political juices flowing again.

But for those of us who live here, there are better uses for our energy now. The Free University (after seeing to its continued survival) could very righteously turn its attention to radicalizing its membership via explosive coordinating council and general meetings with all facets of the movement represented, if they'd deign to come. We could also compile (with the aid of the Observer Staff and the A3M) a really compelling line-up of communally and politically aimed courses for the Fall season. A basic tenet of the MFU since its birth has been an open-ness to all segments of the MFU community to come and take part in forming the direction that the Free U moves in. Perhaps it's time for some Observer people to get involved and add their voices to that direction. In other words --put your energy where your mouth is.

As a publication, the Observer could perhaps dedicate itself to the proposition that a more attractive layout and more readable and relevant copy for all segments of the community might serve the Movement better than the present ghostly format, vaguely reminiscent of the People's World. A valuable cross-fertilization of talent could happen between the Free You staff and the Observer if people could get over the hurdle of nit-picking each other to death. But things are sliding 180 degrees in the wrong direction with this copyright-feud-rip-off

(from p.25)

with anger, Ralph continues, "When somebody says something to me that I don't like, I know enough to stay away from that person. But what do those Free U people do? According to them, arguing is a sign of caring. Boy, they sure must care a lot about each other, because they're always fighting with each other, like little kids!"

Bewildered, Ralph continues, "Those Free U people want to transform people into something they're not. They act as though they are, sort of, well, - Messiahs. Instead of trying to solve all the pressing problems, one by one, with direct, straightforward answers, they're trying to refashion mankind. They act as though they've taken on God's work. Crazy." And meanwhile I wonder whether the questions that Ralph presents aren't too baffling to resolve, whether the answer lies in just countering, or whether the answer must, ultimately, come from encountering. In a fantasy I wonder how it feels to be an Olympic athlete who has to choose between either racing in short dashes or trying to win the grand Marathon.

(from p.13)

ends under. This makes 3 loaves. Let rise again till double, about 30 minutes. Bake 25-30 minutes at 425°. (Bake these loaves on a cooky sheet.)

RICH WHOLE WHEAT BREAD - Very Healthy!

Soften 2 packages yeast in 2½ C warm water
Add: 4T honey or molasses
2 T shortening (oil or margarine)
2 eggs
1 T salt
½ C powdered milk
½ C wheat germ
Half of 6 to 7 C whole wheat flour (more if needed)

Beat till smooth; add rest of flour and knead on floured board about 10 min. Return to bowl and let rise till doubled, about 1 hr. Punch down and shape into loaves; put into greased loaf pans. (makes 2 loaves). Let rise again about 30 min.; bake at 425° for 15 min., then cool oven to 375° and bake 30 more min. Brush the tops of the loaves with margarine when you take them out of the oven to soften the crust.

Lesley Tabor

To the Free University:

Let us live by consensus.
Consensus requires universal participation;
Consensus requires mutual understanding;
Consensus requires agreement upon motive and goal.

But how can we go forward if universal consent is required?
But how can we go forward without understanding?

Voting is a method for reaching decisions; consensus is the life that is to be lived.

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(from p.32)

business. The article on the Free U contains some fairly objective observations but strikes out in the final analysis of the present crisis and the solution to that crisis.

The picture rip-off is absurd. It serves no other purpose than a slap in the face of Fred Nelson, whose threat of possible court action on the matter is equally ridiculous.

A suit by the Free U against the Observer? Using the System to come down on your brothers? The P.A. Times would have a field day.

It's important that the bad vibes and the back-biting stop right-quick. Everyone concerned has proven to be committed to parts of the movement and has backed that commitment to the gritty dregs. And as it stands we may yet find ourselves on the street tryin' to get some room to breathe in.

And that brings us full circle to the people who are already there. Talk about Relevance? Man, the street people don't even know what all the fuss is about. This whole thing is a middle class game with middle-class rules that means nothing in the real world. Which hits at another sore spot: how many street people are into the Observer? Or the Free You? If the Free You can drop some of its literary magazine slick, if the Observer can get behind loosening up a bit, and if both can zero in on the younger, tougher, rock hard/hard rock politics of the street-- if we can get it together at that level, this Community that everybody's always rapping about could be a lot stronger and a whole lot more visible. All I'm saying is" Think Unity -- we got no time for quarrelin', there's shaking to be done. Or maybe the capitalists will end up on top after all -- at least the fuckers know who their friends are.

Letter

I just received your Summer '69 catalogue and really support what you are doing and would like to know a lot more about MFU. I am enclosing a money order for \$20 to support your cause while I'm unable to contribute directly. I would like in return to receive all the publications that you can spare so that I may attempt to enjoy MFU at least vicariously. How about a membership also?

I also seek information about your mailing secretary, Al Barclay, who may be the Alexander S. Barclay that was a good friend of mine while I was in graduate school at U of Oregon. If this is the same fellow please ask him to write me. I will be returning to the States in January of '70 and would like to stop by on my way to the East.

What is non-index flute? I play flute and recorder but maybe I'm on the wrong track in my interpretation of "non-index."

I'm anxious to hear from anyone willing to write, since the atmosphere over here is really stifling.

By the way, I got the catalogue from Roger Petersen in Chestertown Maryland, a long time friend, and he may want another copy sent to him.

I think what you are doing is grand and it really depresses me that I can't share the venture with you, but in another year I will once again be free and would like to participate more actively at that time.

Love, Willian L. Carroll
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