

Drumroll Please

Written by Jes-c Brandt

Camp Amherst

“Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed” is one of those clichéd expressions I never much stopped to think about. This week, however, the phrase has often been on my mind. Perhaps it’s because I’ve returned to a college campus, and everyone knows campus squirrels are crazy. The creatures don’t fear people, and they actively attack passersby with nuts thrown from trees. That’s just not normal.

Critters aside, I believe the real reason for my contemplation of the phrase “bright-eyed and bushy-tailed” is the onslaught of new freshmen at Amherst College.

Campus is crawling with first-years, dressed in their best new college clothes, toting their orientation swag, eyes filled with wonder. I’ve never seen such an eager and enthusiastic bunch before. It’s like Amherst is their playground, and the world is full of possibilities.

As upperclassmen here, we often joke that you can spot the freshmen from a mile away. They travel everywhere in packs. Groups of 20 people are commonplace during this first semester. And it goes beyond the expected places such as the dining hall or student center. Laundry, bathroom trips and reading in the library all become group activities.

Another tell when finding new freshmen is the lanyard. Yes, it’s convenient to put your keys and I.D. card around your neck on a bright purple Amherst lanyard so you don’t lose them. No, it does not look good. For some reason, it always takes freshmen a couple months to realize pockets, wallets and backpacks work just as well.

Within the classroom it’s just as easy to identify the first-years. Again, they come in herds, often filling an entire row with giggly friends. The whole row furiously takes notes and raises their hands in unison to answer any question.

Overheard conversations before and after class invariably consist of casually mentioned high

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school achievements and speculation about how crazy it is to have only two classes a day and to sleep in until a whopping 10 a.m. Before long, I'm sure they will realize regardless of what time the school day starts, it's always too early.

Maybe I'm coming off as a jaded senior, but I wasn't always like this. I still have fond memories of my first year at Amherst. We sometimes refer to orientation as Camp Amherst. It's the time when we first explored the campus, trying to make a good first impression and hoping to find friends ASAP. Students spend the week enjoying all the best aspects of college without worrying about studies quite yet.

Camp Amherst happens to be the best time to eat at the dining hall. The college might deny it, but we're all confident that they prepare their best food during orientation to impress the parents and keep the new students from running while they still have the chance.

Among the unusually tasty food and all the organized freshmen activities, one of my fondest memories of freshmen year was just getting to know the people in my dorm. For much of the year, we kept to a tradition of having a five-minute dance party at midnight in our common room.

Things have certainly changed since then. These days my classmates and I know the ins and outs of campus, and there's a pretty predictable routine. Turns out we seem to spend much more time doing homework, too. Spontaneous dance parties are few and far between and our idea of going crazy is a spur of the moment pizza outing.

No, I'm no longer an excited freshman. Looking around as a senior, however, I still sometimes notice bright-eyed and bushy-tailed members of my own class. Graduating from college carries a number of new possibilities. I can look at the Amherst class of 2014 and laugh about their excitability, but I have to admit, starting a new segment in life always brings excitement, and I'm just as giddy as they are. I just hide it better.