

Clark's Real Deal

A Top-to-Bottom Look at Where You're At
(and a survival guide for new students)

By the Student Formerly Known as Bill Evans

*Please note that all of this is only my own worthless opinion— please don't take it too seriously.
If I've offended you, please let me know. It (probably) wasn't intentional.*

SECTION I: "Let's Get Oriented"

The University Center

Originally called the Student Center, this building serves as a gathering place for students, faculty, staff, administration, alumni and members of the community. It is *not* a Student Center. It is composed of seven conference rooms, two dining halls (one not in use), eight student offices, the General Store, two postal areas, a photocopying business, several offices for Bon Appetit, offices for Clark staff and administration, the Craft Studio, storage, Tilton Hall and the Pub/Grind Central.

A poorly designed but well-intentioned building, it does little to foster any sense of community or provide a central location for campus life. The University Center (UC) is overseen by the hopelessly overworked and underempowered staff (Director Linda Connors, Eileen Macey and Anne DeSorbo).

The University Center is useful if you need a place to hold a meeting, but for some reason can't do it in your room, your dorm, or anywhere else on campus. You can get your mail there, but don't try to send a package, because you can't. Meals are a staple of this facility, probably because you are contractually required to eat there. But don't dare try to hang out— aside from the Pub (Grind Central, when it's open) there's no place to do that, either (unless, of course, you like Tilton Hall).

Safety

Main South is not always a safe place for college students. Clark University is not mandated to tell you about crimes committed against Clark students when they are off campus (say, a block away) and they usually don't. But several times a year, students are beat up on campus and we do hear about that. Of course, most of the crime at Clark (sexual assault, domestic abuse and theft) is strictly between students.

Where to Go For Help

Despite the shiny brochures, perfect teeth, and colorful flags, things can suck at Clark. If you have a serious concern or problem, one of the best places to go is the Dean of Students, Denise Darrigrand. Just go to her office (the Dean of Students Office) and tell someone you'd like to make an appointment with her. You don't need to give a reason.

Other good people to speak to are Area Coordinators, Dean Milstone and Chief of Police, Stephen Goulet (bring crullers). Often your faculty advisor can be really helpful, but sometimes not. You'll know soon enough. Speak to your RA as a last resort— at least he or she will probably know who to refer you to.

If you don't want to work the Clark system, there's six million options in Worcester. Ranging from Rape Crisis centers to candlepin bowling alleys, they are frequently enumerated in those annoying pamphlets plastered to RA's doors. They are generally very good, even for Worcester.

SECTION II: “Big Wheels Turnin’”

Student Council

Although the members of StudCo change from year to year, the incompetence stays. Council has several important jobs. The first is to represent the students’ wants and needs, and to communicate them to the Administration. It’s not much of a secret that they don’t do this, nor make much of an effort. (And yes, representation takes effort).

Another job of theirs is to distribute the Student Activity Fee fund (a sizeable \$400,000) to student groups to create some semblance of Student Life. As anyone can tell you, they don’t allocate it well. In fact, you’d be amazed at some of the things they fund. Some recent examples have been custom-made mugs for an exclusive leadership conference, custom frisbees for the radio station (and shitty ones at that), and *WheatBread*.

In fairness, there are a few well intentioned folks on it (like the Vice-President), but they are hopelessly outnumbered by smug, self-centered puppies.

The Administration

Clark has a small administration. Overall, Clark’s administrators are a good-natured lot, and claim to care deeply about Clark and its students. Unfortunately, as a whole, the administrative is not terribly effective, partly due to the management structure. Its decentralized model leads to parties with overlapping areas of responsibility, and other areas (such as space allocation) with no responsible party at all. Poor communication, a Clark hallmark, keeps various administrators in the dark about what is going on around the school. (I once asked a senior administrator what the Provost did. He didn’t know.) The result is a fibrillating miasma of activity, with no clear focus, and no mechanism to ensure it.

Clark’s current strategy is targeted at ensuring Clark’s future instead of improving its present. Consequently, many students feel that the administration is not concerned with them. A lot of them leave Clark. Last year, so many left that it caused a serious budget shortfall and a

hiring freeze. This compounded Clark’s already serious financial problems. Fortunately, there are some administrators who have finally woken up, but it remains to be seen whether things will truly change.

If you choose to approach an administrator, do so with care. They can be timid, but usually respond warmly to student interaction.

Residential Housing

Talk about controversial, I had to wait until I moved out of housing to write this. This summer saw changes to the structure of Housing, with Dana Heller assuming much of David Milstone’s former jurisdiction. Under them are several Area Coordinators, and then the dreaded Residential Advisors.

Dean Milstone takes his job very seriously, and it shows. Clark has an excellent (though far from perfect) residential system. For instance, the implementation of Area Coordinators places experienced professionals where they can actually help students.

No question about it, the weak point in the housing system is the Residential Advisors. Though you will find the occasional gem, you’ll also find your typical over-empowered moron. Believe me, it’s not intentional. Part of the reason is a lack of training: it just isn’t possible to provide the amount of training that RAs would need to provide the services they are (or believe they are) supposed to perform. Hopefully, the Area Coordinators will take a strong role in improving this area.

Here’s some handy housing info:

- Despite all logical evidence, RA’s don’t want to write you up— doing so involves paper work.
- Don’t wave a housing violation in their face— if you’re going to burn incense, have the decency to close your door.
- Some RAs really work hard and deserve at least a modicum of respect. Also, remember that, on occasion, an RA can actually be helpful.

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- If you find an RA intimidating, remember they're just another student, no different from you. They're there to help, and you're the one paying for their housing. Don't be pushed around.
- If you have a problem or complaint with an RA, take it to the Area Coordinator. If all else fails, make an appointment with Dean Milstone. He's a nice guy. Really.
- If you have a serious problem, try other avenues before speaking to an RA. Their job is usually to refer you to the appropriate source, only.
- Don't be afraid to go their events—there's usually free food.

Physical Plant

Of all of Clark's subcultures, Physical Plant is perhaps the most distinct, and the most intriguing. This institution is run by one Paul Bottis, Jr., a controversial but competent administrator who started there many years ago as a carpenter. On average, the folks at Physical Plant are completely disconnected from anything going on with the University, and are the nicest, most helpful people you will find here.

A word of warning, though, they are always overworked, and as Clark's largest department (not to mention under-paid and non-unionized), are likely to be downsized in the future (given the latest Academic & Financial Plan) so be patient in your dealings with them. The rewards are many and fruitful.

University Police

Contrary to popular belief, University Police is not here to break up parties. Their duties are wide and varied, covering everything from maintaining the card entry system to assisting in emergency medical situations. Basically, it's their job to maintain order and ensure the safety of the University and its people.

Make no mistake, though, these aren't exactly donut-eating rent-a-cops. Technically, the officers are state fuzz— all of them highly trained and experienced. Besides the chief (Stephen Goulet), there are three sergeants and nine officers, two or three on duty at a time.

One final note: however you feel about them, remember that it's their job to be there when the shit goes down. And even at Clark, it most certainly does. When something serious happens, they are the most professional and effective group of people in the University, and would risk their lives without hesitating for the people they have committed themselves to serving and protecting.

SECTION III: "LIFE AT CLARK?"

Student Life

Contrary to popular rumor, a semblance of student life does exist at Clark. It's just elusive. In true Clark style, activities are spread all over campus, with little common awareness of them, and little interest in finding out. (Example: last year, a band was paid thousands of dollars to play Grind Central and seven people showed up.) There are many reasons for this.

The responsibility for activity is placed almost solely in the hands of student groups and Student Council. Student organizations are handed huge sums of money, but are not actually required to do anything useful with it (example: Equestrian Club) and, big surprise, they often don't. Some "choice" events from last year were a speaking engagement from Tanya Flynt-Vega (price: a lot) the band God Street Wine (price: a lot), and all the comedians that weren't funny (price: how can you put a price on dignity?).

There's also a serious space problem. For starters, there's no student center, and the spaces that do exist for student activity are generally the spaces that no one else wants (example: Grind Central). Anytime something comes along that the administration deems important, student space is yanked away (example: the space that used to exist for bands to rehearse in Dana Commons now belongs to the I.D. department). No space means no activities, so no wonder students complain.

Where are the Parties?

Off campus.

What is There to Do?

Avoid the parties; they're mostly havens for cheap beer and date rape. Clark's theater groups are surprisingly proficient, and the Pub Entertainment Committee books a lot of bands in Grind Central, some of which are good. Open-mic night, the Clark Music Cafe, is every Tuesday evening in Grind Central, and only sometimes features poetry. The Craft Studio is a great resource, and the help there is often reason enough to go.

Speaker's Forum brings all kinds of speakers, and CUFS generally has good films, but don't look for anything with Pauly Shore or Sinbad. SAB sponsors some good things, like the drive-in movies (which are actually on video). The radio station provides hours of creative entertainment that no one listens to, and *Wheat Bread* provides hours of controversial conversation for even the most seasoned didact.

If you're feeling adventurous, you'll find a surprising amount of high-quality activity off-campus. Gilrein's (21+) is a fantastic (and inexpensive) blues club right around the corner from Clark. The Space (16+) is a great place for live music, run in part by Clark's own Will Burdette. The Espresso Bar is one of the few 18+ hang-outs with bands. If your taste runs to Alanis Morissette and Billy Joel, there's the Centrum or peyote. Malls provide a refreshing look at the minimum wage jobs you went to college to avoid. And don't forget the other colleges in Worcester, which almost always have their shit together better than Clark (a free Consortium shuttle can take you around). This is totally incomplete, too, so check out the two weekly newspapers, *Worcester Magazine* and the *Worcester Phoenix* for full listings.

Academics

Departments at Clark vary widely, from the sprawling Psychology department to the oxymoronic Environmental School (there is no school). Although there are certainly exceptions, over-all the faculty is excellent.

Each department has its own personality and culture, and I won't attempt to enumerate them here. Some departments are mostly filler so Clark can claim to be a liberal arts school

(i.e.: Visual and Performing Arts). Generally, faculty (especially tenured faculty) will be honest about their departments. Interestingly enough, one of the Administration's most suicidal acts involves the denying of tenure to some of Clark's best faculty. It's how we lose some of our best faculty, and ultimately, some of our best students.

The work load at Clark is standard, but like most other liberal arts schools, you can shake the President's hand with the best of them at the end of four years without learning or doing shit. In the end, it's a matter of choice. And \$96,000.

Student Organizations

Student Organizations are the life blood of activity at Clark (somebody get a strecher). There are basically six types of groups at Clark: Academic, Entertainment, Cultural, Peer Advisory, Media, and Resume.

ACADEMIC: Pretty much as sounds. For those who can't get enough in the classroom, or who are desperate to go to graduate school somewhere else.

ENTERTAINMENT: Provide activities (programming) such as live bands, films, dances, etc. They spend over \$100,000 every year and often have very little to show for it. (Just ask anyone who was here last year). Avoid them unless you want to book speakers that no one wants to hear, or want to flirt with bands.

CULTURAL GROUPS: These are sort of funny in that they proclaim a desire to enhance the Clark Community by sharing their culture, but they mostly throw parties at the expense of the SAF. If you can find them, though, some of them are great. The other purpose of these groups is to provide a "safe place" for members of a particular race, culture, religion, etc.— an important and often overlooked function.

PEER ADVISORY/EDUCATION GROUPS: An eclectic bunch, they range from the well-intentioned BACCHUS to the bizarre hubris of Choices (a self-proclaimed student "counselling service").

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Some of them provide the opportunity for personal and communal growth. Others are for people who didn't get to be RAs.

MEDIA GROUPS/ARTISTIC GROUPS: The media groups at Clark form the Multimedia Center, a structural and spiritual conglomeration that has assembled itself for the school's benefit and despite the administration's determination not to get involved (for the most part). The artistic groups perform music, dance, and theater. These are some of Clark's most valuable groups, for they consume few financial resources and produce an enormous quantity and variety of entertainment. Generally all of these groups work very hard and are a great experience.

RESUME: These groups exist primarily for the purpose of noting involvement (or even better, executive board positions) on one's résumé. Examples include the Pre-Law Society, honor societies, Student-Alumni Relations Committee, the Economics Society and SPOC.

Conclusion

Well, you're stuck here. Might as well make the best of it.