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Sex and today's university

Freshmen at colleges across the country were surprised this year when they turned up at their campuses and found that the cultural agenda was set by two main themes: reverse racism and sexual perversion.

The point of the agenda was to initiate them into new ideas about equality and about the nature of eros. We will leave reverse racism — affirmative action and all that goes with it — aside for the moment and consider only sexual perversion.

When freshmen arrived this year at Dartmouth, for example, they found a package hanging on each door titled "The Other Student Handbook." The so-called handbook described a number of sexual acts in detail, many of them exotic. It came with a condom of the Lifestyles brand.

A disclaimer printed on the back of the handbook says that it is "not an official Dartmouth College publication." The disclaimer is a response to the furor that erupted a couple of years ago when a "safe sex kit" was distributed to all freshmen by the college itself. Its printed matter went into such sexual acts as "water sports" (or pee-

ing on each other) and "rimming" (I don't suppose I can print here a definition of that). The safe sex kit supplied equipment to use for such practices, as well as lubricants, a condom and whatnot. The printed material was realistically illustrated.

I myself had never heard of "water sports" as a sexual act, nor did I then know what "rimming" is, or much else proposed by Dartmouth for the edification of its freshmen. Every freshman I talked with about the kit was nonplused, amused in an embarrassed way, or felt that he or she was dealing with kooks. Alas, they were dealing with official Dartmouth and its new norms.

When the feisty and independent

campus newspaper the Dartmouth Review publicized the college's epistle to its freshmen, the college was embarrassed, parents and alumni were outraged and the kit disappeared, for a while.

Now it has re-emerged, as not "an official Dartmouth College publication." Except that it was "prepared in consultation with the Department of Women's Health and the Health Resources Department of Dartmouth College Health Service."

That information is a bit incomplete. The handbook was funded by a grant from the college's clinic, known as "Dick's House," and was "proofread" — as the Dartmouth Review found out — by one Jan Sundas, the manager of the Women's Health Program.

So the handbook was an unofficial but official offering from Dartmouth to its freshmen.

The handbook includes information on "rubbing any non-petroleum-based body oil or lotion on each other or yourself" and — I kid you not — "dry humping."

If this is too tame, the handbook offers descriptive details of various other erotic practices, and consequences to be avoided.

Things rapidly become more, er,

sophisticated. Under "How to Use an Oral Dam," the freshmen learn "There are some steps you can take to free your hands during oral sex.

"With a little creativity and a sewing kit you can easily transform some elastic and garter clips, or a pair of erotic panties, into a fun and effective oral dam holder that can be worn over the vulva or the mouth."

The freshmen are instructed that "powdered sugar" and "non-fat Hershey's syrup" are safe lubricants for graphically described activities.

Welcome to Dartmouth College. The distribution of the handbook is one more way of separating freshmen from the customary norms and reticence with which they grew up. In other words, Dartmouth desires to drive a wedge between the freshmen and their parents.

Where sexuality is concerned, the handbook's underlying theory is all wrong and very dangerous. Its theory holds that eros is safe, innocent and recreational.

It is a utopian view. All of human experience says the opposite. Eros

is a powerful and therefore dangerous god, and we surround it with custom, ceremony, vows and seriousness precisely because of its power.

Othello and Desdemona, Antony and Cleopatra, Tristan and Isolde, all the great lovers of history and legend, knew that sex is not "safe" or inconsequential.

All societies have some sort of marriage custom. (Of course, marriage goes unmentioned in the Dartmouth sex handbook.) The reason is that sex is hardly ever innocent and uncomplicated.

It almost always involves inequalities of power, status, wealth, age, intelligence or beauty. The inequalities and tensions, combined with the power of eros, can be an explosive mixture if not contained within the equalizing tendencies of marriage.

That is part of civilized knowledge. Only the fools and mischief-makers who run Dartmouth College and places like it across the country behave in ignorance of such knowledge.

Jeffrey Hart is a nationally syndicated columnist.