

STUDENT

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### The Place for 'Whatever'

Alexander Hall has, like most dorms, a dedicated room set aside for studying. However, it is much more pleasant than the dim, claustrophobic enclosures that one might expect. Soaring windows, the sort that one might find in a cathedral, let ample sunlight in or let the bright, internal lights blaze forth into the night. The floor would hold a good-sized, Southern-Baptist congregation, were it called upon to do so. There is even a large projector screen for late night movies or power-point presentations, depending upon what function those present wish to use.

It is most often a place of quiet, though not even that captures the many aspects in which the room appears. There is the empty, peaceful silence that comes when one is the only one sitting in the room. It is the pleasant feeling of being in an open, airy, and bright space. There is the contemplative (yet slightly frantic) quiet caused by others in the room reading through notes and briskly writing out assignments. There is even the 'listening quiet' during lectures, the kind that speakers fill with words and wisdom when the folding chairs are out and the place becomes a makeshift lecture hall.

However, when the Whatever meets there on weekends, it is not quiet. They are a local club dedicated to doing, in their own words, "whatever!" Loud voices and laughter fill the room and spill over into the hall. Squeals of delight, very much unlike the sounds one expects to hear from college students, greet anyone entering. The volume of the festivities may rise and fall, yes, but it never disappears entirely. Sometimes, it is music. Other times, it is lines from a play. Occasionally, it is the loud voices of thirty people shouting at once, overlapping and trying to

speak over one another in a game of Charades or Pictionary or even a rousing round of ‘Ultimate Hangman’. Sometimes, there is the cacophony created when they cheer each other on in one of the many quiz shows that their leader, Nathan Smith, creates for their benefit.

When they meet and gather, the silence that often rules slowly gives way first to pleasant conversation. Next comes the swapping of friendly banter. Then, when enough members assemble, the fun begins. A particular favorite seems to be “Who’s Line is it Anyway?”, which is a loud and raucous affair. Other times, movie night is the order of the day and some classic or not-so-classic film appears onscreen in short order. On these occasions, a scramble of furious activity . Cries of ‘Where’s the USB cord?’, ‘Which movie are we watching?’, and ‘Nathan! Come turn the screen on! I don’t know how this works!’ heighten the excitement and contrast with the relative calm once the movie starts.

They fill the room entirely. In the quiet moments, when they are not present, it can seem too large. It is the sort of space a few hundred people might be able to fit comfortably and have room left to spare. Yet despite their low numbers, the Whatever never seems too small for the space. They possess a life in them that few others can match. Those entering the room can feel it. The joy in their laughter, the happiness in their faces, one truly feels that one has stepped into a kinder, friendlier world, even if only for a few hours. This feeling is constant, no matter what activity they choose for their evening entertainment.

In truth, there is no set way the Whatever uses the room for there is no set way in which the Whatever operates. Technically, the group could meet anywhere. They are dedicated to spur-of-the-moment hijinks and spontaneous fun. Yet the Alexander Reading Room remains one of their favorite places to meet. Perhaps it is the central location on campus. Perhaps it is because

the founder once lived in the dorm. Perhaps there is no particular reason other than it is a very convenient meeting space. It might not matter at all. Still, whenever there is a larger-than-average event, and sometimes when there is a smaller one, the various members of the Whatever gather for the crazy adventures the leadership conjures up. However, everything contains a high level of energy and good cheer, the sort of feelings that can only come between either good friends or total strangers who are determined to become good friends.

Perhaps another thing that attracts them to the room is that it is easy to reserve. A simple email to the dorm's office will often suffice. Sometimes, not even that is required. Simply walking in when no or few people are inside is enough. For a group whose activities rely on spontaneity and unpredictability in order to set itself apart from other clubs, this is very convenient. It allows them the freedom that they desire and value so highly.

Truthfully, it seems they have no particular attachment to the room and it has no particular attachment to them. It is not decorated to accommodate them. As for them, they do not attach any special sentiment to the room. It is the scenery upon which their play is set, but they are the ones who bring that scenery to life. Any similar backdrop would do and often does. There is no one set place which they do meet. However, the Alexander Reading Room is one of their more frequent haunts. They always come back to it, no matter where else their wanderings take them. It is a constant, always ready, always waiting, and is there whenever they need it.

In short, the Alexander Reading Room is the Whatever's place to celebrate friendship. The room is there for everyone, of course, and all are welcome to use it. Of all those who use the Alexander Reading Room, the Whatever are those who need it least yet use it best. High praise, yes, but it is true. When they are there, it becomes for a short while the best place in the world.