*The Unlikely Disciple*

Kevin Roose, [*The Unlikely Disciple: A Sinner’s Semester at America’s Holiest University*](http://www.amazon.com/The-Unlikely-Disciple-Semester-University/dp/0446178438)(New York: Grand Central, 2009).

Summary:

“Even in its weather patterns, Lynchburg, Virginia is a fundamentalist city. Unlike the fickle New England winters I came from, where snow, sun, fog, and rain operate on a twenty-minute loop, Lynchburg in February has good days and bad days, and nothing in between,” according to Kevin Roose, a sophomore at Brown University who, in 2007, decided to spend a semester at Liberty University, the largest evangelical university in the world, during which time Kevin, as a secret non-Christian, sang in the choir of Jerry Falwell’s Thomas Road Baptist Church, took a Creation Studies class, went on a spring break mission trip, and dated a Christian girl. In an environment constructed by the leader of the Moral Majority, Kevin at times struggled with rules such as no cursing, drinking, dancing, R-rated movies, or hugging for more than 3 seconds. Two weeks before Falwell’s death, Kevin spoke with the college’s founder and chancellor in an interview that would be distributed at Falwell’s funeral, the same day Kevin left Liberty— Falwell called it “Bible Boot Camp”—to return to Brown University. Over the next year he compiled his notes from his time at Liberty into a refreshingly balanced and nuanced memoir.

Themes:

* Faith. Everyone has faith, but Kevin’s was not necessarily in the God of the Bible. Yet Kevin goes to church, Christian classes, and prays.
* Labels. Kevin labels himself as a secular, liberal Democrat from a left-leaning Ivy League University. Falwell too has been labeled at a conservative, fundamentalist, and even racist Christian. The book attempts to go beyond the stereotypes.
* Friendship. Kevin made many unexpected friends in his time at Liberty and also saw his own friends at Brown react to what they saw as a crazy decision.
* Insider/Outsider. Kevin comes to Liberty as an outsider pretending to be an insider and leaves feeling as if he has forever been affected, saying that while religious conflict might be inevitable, “I have faith…that we can subvert that instinct for long enough to listen to each other.”
* Forgiveness. One student, when reacting to the revelation that Kevin was a journalist who’d come to Liberty to write a book, said, "How could I not forgive you when I've been forgiven so much?"

Discussion Questions:

1. What were the ethical dilemmas with how Kevin went about his semester experiment?
2. Are there times when Kevin’s treatment of Liberty or Christianity is not balanced?
3. Why was the epigraph Hebrews 13:2—“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it”—placed at the beginning of the book?
4. In what ways are Kevin’s stereotypes of Liberty or Christians confirmed? In what ways are they not?
5. How can this book be helpful for both Christians and non-Christians?
6. What chapter most challenged your experience with and understanding of Christianity?