

USA WEEKEND - May 2-4, 2003

HIP-HOP SCHOOL

IN ADDITION TO defining music and fashion, hip-hop is becoming an intellectual pursuit. Courses are offered now at Duke, Stanford and Harvard. There are also how-tos such as *Turntable Technique: The Art of the DJ* by Stephen Webber, a professor of music production at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, who's lobbying to get "scratching" added to the curriculum. At Widener University near Philadelphia, teacher Richard Cooper's freshman seminar on hip-hop fills up quickly. It's overdue, he says: "Hip-hop is a multibillion-dollar industry. As academics, we study everything. Hip-hop, while not maybe worthy of being deified, is worth studying."

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As popular as the courses are, getting one OK'd is tricky. Even at schools such as Berklee, where students study Jimi Hendrix. The question of whether manipulating a vinyl record by hand should be considered an art form is fraught with controversy. Rap is an oral tradition, Webber says: "There's a bias in college toward what's been written down. This represents a collision of two worlds." Stay tuned.