

**AIDS testing:**

# Student confronts personal challenge

*(Editor's Note: This is the second in a three part series from The Collegian about HIV/AIDS awareness from an anonymous contributing writer.)*

If I must be labeled, I would consider myself an idealist. I look for good in everything and am naive enough to believe that no matter what happens, it is positive in the end.

Each and every moment of my life is defined by a struggle and no matter what, that struggle is a learning lesson.

Last week, I went to the Health and Wellness Center for an AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) test. Waiting patiently, I have two weeks to ponder the steps in my recent past leading up to the test and whatever consequences I will have to face after learning the results.

No matter what though, I have learned a lot.

The biggest lesson was not anger or regret, but a realization that today does affect tomorrow. One ill-fated night may or may not alter my future, but either way I will put it to a good use.

No, I'm not going to stand in front of hundreds and pass my story along to them. Instead, I have opted for my confession prone style and write to the Behrend community hiding behind my anonymity.

My hiding is not in fear; I have submitted this article confidentially to stress that testing at the Health and Wellness Center is strictly confidential.

Some students at Behrend and across the nation shy away from testing because they want to keep their health record clear and clean from potential employers, administrators, family and friends.

I wasn't attracted by the free testing (courtesy of the Erie County Health Department) or the convenience (on-campus), but that no one would ever know that I was tested except for the tester and myself.

I consider myself lucky; at least in Pennsylvania testing is confidential.

According to the Center for Disease Control Clearinghouse, in North Carolina, state health officials have attempted to discontinue anonymous HIV testing, because reporting would allow state agencies to contact both HIV-positive individuals and people that may have been exposed to the virus.

A proposal to end anonymous testing in 1991 met with public opposition, and as a compromise, such testing was discontinued in 82 of the state's 100 counties on Sept. 1, 1991. On Jan. 1, 1993, however, anonymous testing was re-implemented in all 100 counties by court order.

The elimination of anonymous testing was again proposed in 1996, but lawsuits have prevented the proposal from moving forward.

Researchers at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill,

evaluated the impact of the restriction on anonymous testing in 1991 and 1992.

They found that HIV testing increased throughout the state during the period, but that it increased 64 percent in counties where anonymous testing was maintained.

The findings agree with other reports that elimination of anonymous testing has a detrimental impact on testing rates.

Back to the situation at hand... I feel that the best way for me to stress the importance and impact of the HIV/AIDS test is to take you step by step through my test.

It took a long time for me to finally get enough courage to go and get tested. After finding that courage, I went to the Health Center and did not look back.

I am not what most would define as a promiscuous person. In fact, I can count the number of people I have had sexual relationships with on one hand - and none of them

long term.

In fact, this is one of the reasons I opted to get tested - most were what people label *one night stands* and *friends with benefits*.

But I thought it only fair to myself - and those people - to be tested.

to strike me down, she smiled and said "OK."

*WHEW - someone up there does love me!*

The nurse whipped out a piece of paper, checked some lines and explained that I was to give it to the receptionist (Eileen - the nice

ever really return.

After a few restless nights on fighting my consciousness, I did.

I returned with an empty stomach (for fear I'd throw up on the poor tester) and a lump in my throat.

Once again, I went through the motions of any other student waiting for treatment.

This time, I was ushered into an examination room where I was greeted with a hello and a friendly smile. After the preliminary chit-chat "How 'ya doing?" we got down to business.

Surprisingly, it was quite painless.

The nurse explained that she had a series of check lists which she went through for each HIV/AIDS test.

She showed me pink computer printout sheet similar to the test sheets students have to use a *Number 2* pencil with.

This sheet is the actual paperwork processed with the blood sample defining sex, sexual history (easy questions folks: Sex with male, female, victim of sexual assault, sex with anyone who has AIDS, etc.).

Then, the nurse went through a list explaining ways to practice safe sex, she asked me why I came to the Health Center for the test, how I would cope with the results (positive or negative) and what I would do in the future to prevent possible exposure.

She showed me six stickers at the bottom of the page with the same long number typed on each other them. This number is put on my blood sample and all of my paper work distinguishing me from others getting tested. Instead of having to send my name with the blood, I am given a number (and no, it's not my social security number).

The only thing I put my name on was a sheet for the doctor on-campus herself which is locked in a cabinet so that she can find my specific paper with my signature if I ever have questions about my results. It's all very confidential.

Wiping my brow, I answered the questions with gusto and felt relieved - it was easier than skipping class.

Then came the hard part, having to lay back on the table and give a teeny, tiny vial of blood (you don't understand - this is hard for me!).

Over and done with, the nurse filled out another sheet of paper just like the one a few days before which I handed to Eileen and scheduled an appointment for two weeks later.

This time I walked away from the Center slowly - I don't know if it's because of relief or just the fact that I was woozy from the close encounter with the blood sucking needle, but either way from some reason I felt much better.

While I was with the nurse, she explained that two weeks is not necessary for the test, but just a safety measure.

HIV/AIDS testing first involves an ELISA (Enzyme Linked Immunosorbent Assay) test which is used to determine the presence of antibodies to HIV in the blood.

An antibody is a protein molecule in the blood serum or other body fluids that destroys or neutralizes bacteria, viruses, or other harmful toxins. Antibody production occurs in response to the presence of foreign substances (antigens) such as bacteria or viruses that invade the body. These antigens cause the immune system to produce the antibodies to combat them.

So basically, in non-science terms, the ELISA tests for antibodies which are trying to fight the antigens of HIV in the body.

If this test is negative, than there are no HIV antibodies in the blood. However, if the test is positive, the doctors then perform a Western Blot.

The Western Blot tests for specific antibodies; more accurate than the ELISA, the Western Blot is used to confirm the test if an HIV ELISA test is positive.

After mucking through all of the scientific terms, it easy to see why is *really* easy to get lost in all of it (see the table I have provided).

But so far I haven't, and the staff at the Center has been very helpful and courteous.

All I have to do is wait - easier said than done though.

**"I thought it only fair to myself -and those people- to be tested."**

Once at the Health Center, I went in, signed the sheet, and waited my turn to see the nurse like any other ailing student. I was ushered into the room where the nurse usually says "How can we help you?"

I explained that I would like and HIV/AIDS test.

Waiting for a bolt of lightning

lady on the other side of those panes of glass in the waiting room) and she would make an appointment for me without anyone in the waiting room every knowing.

I did just that and ran away from the Health Center wondering if I'd

## Helpful medical terminology

*\*courtesy the National AIDS Treatment Activist Forum and the University of Minnesota\**

**AIDS:** (Acquired immune Deficiency Syndrome)

Severe form of infection with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists numerous opportunistic infections and neoplasms which, in the presence of HIV infection, constitute an AIDS diagnosis. In addition, a CD4 count below 200/mm3 in the presence of HIV infection constitutes an AIDS diagnosis.

**CD4 COUNT:**

The number of T-helper lymphocytes ("Helper" T-cell, responsible for coordinating much of the immune response. CD4 cells are one of the main targets damaged by HIV.) per cubic millimeter of blood. The CD4 count is a good predictor of immune health.

**T-CELL:**

A thymus derived white blood cell that precipitates a variety of cell mediated immune reactions. Three fundamentally different types of T-cells are recognized: helper, killer, and suppressor.

**LYMPHOCYTE:**

White blood cells that mature and reside in the lymphoid organs, and are responsible for the acquired immune response.

**ANTIGEN:**

Any substance that antagonizes or stimulates the immune system to produce antibodies, proteins that fight antigens. Antigens are often foreign substances such as bacteria or viruses that invade the body.

**ANTIBODY:**

A protein molecule in the blood serum or other body or other body fluids that destroys or neutralizes bacteria, viruses, or other harmful toxins. Antibody production occurs in response to the presence of an antagonistic, usually foreign substance (antigen) in the body.

For more information or to schedule a HIV/AIDS test call the Health & Wellness Center at 898-6217.

**OPEN**  
Mon. thru Fri. 9:30am to 5pm  
Sat. 9am to 4pm

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## Behrend Briefs & Events Calendar



### Bookstore Notes

**Professors:** Book orders were due in the bookstore at the end of October. All book orders should be turned in immediately so that students will get more money for books to be used during the Spring semester.

Bob Truit, Police and Safety Officer, was the winner of the Pepsi Mountain Bike Giveaway. Congrats Bob!!

### Toronto Trip

It's not too late to reserve your seat for the Toronto Trip on April 5-6 to see *Phantom of the Opera*, the *Glass Menagerie*, or just to sightsee. Open to all students, faculty, staff and guests. This annual trip is sponsored by the Penn State-Behrend Honors Program. The deadline has been extended to Nov. 15, 1996.

### 17 - Sunday

**Protestant Campus Ministry Interdenominational Worship Service**  
8:00 p.m. Reed 114

MOVIE: Phenomenon

### 18 - Monday

**14 - Thursday**  
Communication Club  
12:20 p.m.  
Academic 55

IVCF  
7:30 - 9:00 p.m.  
Music Room

**The Collegian**  
5:45 p.m.  
Academic 41  
ALL STUDENTS WELCOME!

MOVIE: Phenomenon

### 18 - Monday



### 15 - Friday

**Friday Fiesta**

9:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m.  
Reed Commons

Sponsored by OLAS

Women Today  
12:00 p.m. MCC Office

MOVIE: Phenomenon

### 16 - Saturday

**Bruno's Nightclub:**  
Tom Acousti  
musician

MOVIE: Phenomenon

### 20 - Wednesday

**Biology Club**  
6:00 p.m. Reed 3

**BACCHUS**  
7:00 p.m. Reed 112

**SGA MEETING**  
5:15 p.m. Reed 114

### 19 - Tuesday

**Amnesty International**  
12:20 p.m. 41 Academic

**Opening of Women's Resource Center**  
12:00 p.m.  
Treehouse, behind Health and Wellness Center

**TRIGON**  
5:30 p.m.  
Multi-Cultural Center  
Eco-Action  
4:00 p.m. Reed 112

**Volunteer tutors needed for the Spring 1997 Diehl Elementary School After-School Tutoring Program.**  
Just one hour per week can make a difference in a child's life. All majors welcome - no experience necessary. help children with homework in grades 3-6.  
**Tutors needed Mon. through Thurs. 2:30 - 3:30**

During the month of Nov. a walk-in flu immunization clinic will be held each Monday from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Health and Wellness Center.  
**Cost of the vaccine is \$10.** Anyone wishing to make an appointment for a different time should call the Center at 898-6217.

### Library Schedule

The library has made changes to its Fall schedule.

The library will be open both Saturday, Nov. 23 from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. and Wednesday, Nov. 27 from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

FUNDED BY SGA

This calendar is for student organizations to advertise their event or organizational meeting to the Behrend community.

Submissions for the calendar should be mailed to *The Collegian* by the Monday before publication.