Editorial

The Behrend College Collegian

published weekly by the students of Penn State Erie, The Behrend College

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EDITORIAL

For the first time in the history of Behrend, there is going to be a musical. Tony Elliot, our one man theater department, has made an ambitious choice with the Pirates of Penzance. With the enrollment at Behrend expected to reach 4000 students in the next few years the pool of talent and ambition is growing. It is phenomenal that a school with limited music and theater classes will be able to perform such a multifaceted production

In a similar light, Behrend's men's and women's basketball teams are both having incredibly successful seasons in their first seasons of play in the new AMCC.

Behrend sports are growing and improving with the men's and women's soccer teams winning the AMCC and other teams finishing with impressive records.

The examples of the theater program and the sports teams represent two of the many notable acheivements that the students of the Behrend College should be proud of, if not want to take part in themselves.

Yet there seems to be only a small number of students making these sort of acheivements possible. Many students are not involved in activities of any kind on campus. In addition to their apathy, these are the same students who complain that there is nothing to do and that their activity fee money is being wasted.

More students are getting involved, as shown by the musical. However, many groups suffer from lack of interest and support. Hopefully, with the rising enrollment, involvement and enthusiasm will grow.

The Other Side — RAY MORELLI

The hidden dangers of caffeine

How many people do you know who say they just "can't get going" without their morning cup of coffee? Caffeine has become the drug of choice among Americans, sometimes as a quick pick-me-up, sometimes as a substitute for sleep itself.

Lack of sleep is a common complaint heard from students. Many routinely stay up late desperately cramming for the next day's exam. A recent study of Cornell and Stanford University students found that only about one percent are fully awake all day. In an attempt to gain back their awareness, many turn to coffee for that quick jolt of caffeine. Coffee bars are a great example of how so many have come to rely on caffeine. Still others resort to over-the-counter "alertness aids" like Vivarin, No-Doz, or Stay Awake.

What many fail to realize is that these are drugs and they do have effects. While billed as "safe as coffee," that may not be the case. While they may supply the same amount of caffeine as coffee, drugs hit your system all at once whereas the body would be exposed to the caffeine in coffee more slowly because of its being ingested. In effect, these drugs throw your whole system into overdrive. Your blood pressure increases, your heart beat quickens, and anxiety levels also increase significantly. Users can even experience mild mood swings.

While the drugs may give you that quick pick-me-up, there's another bad side. When the initial effects wear off, you "crash" hard, often ending up even more tired. People who continually take these drugs can and in fact do become addicted to them. Many people rely on caffeine for alertness because their body has simply become that used to it. As with any drug, there are even withdrawal symptoms: irritability, headaches, sometimes even mild depression.

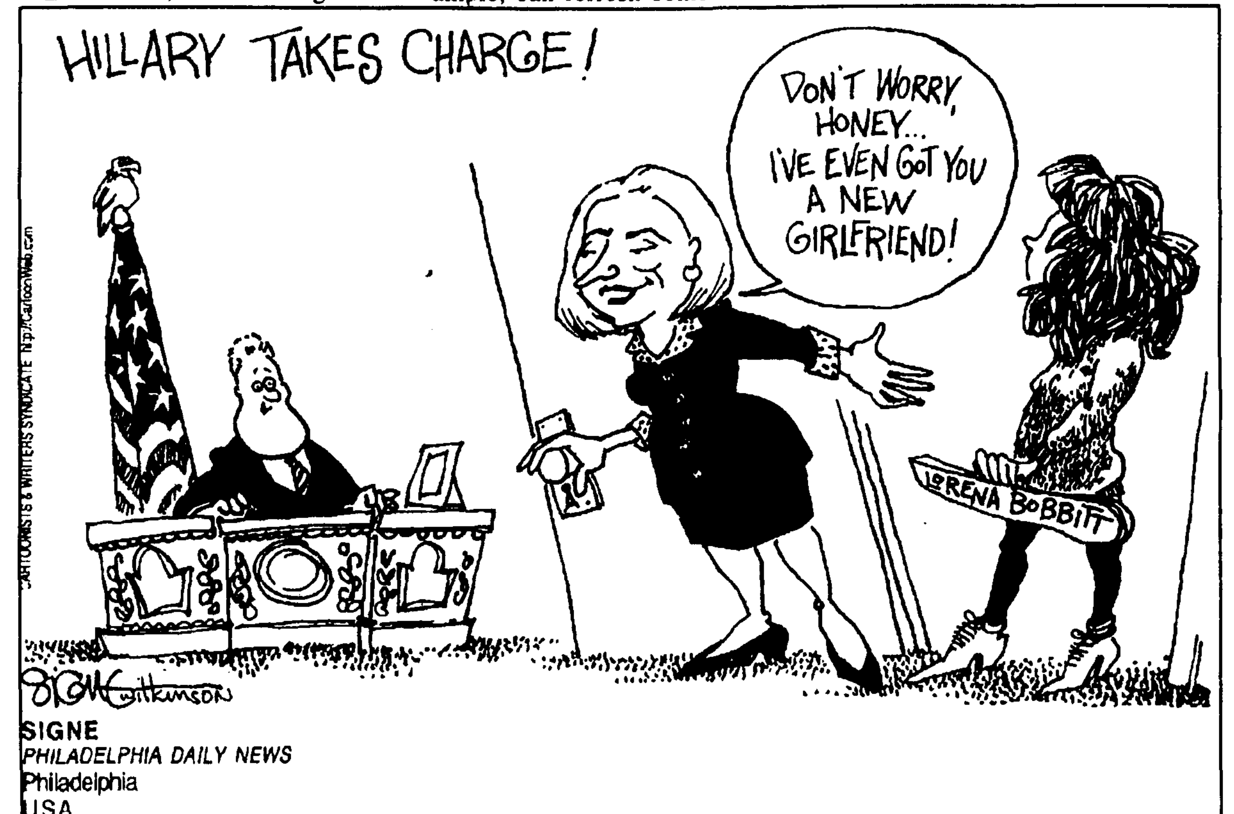
College students specifically need to be aware of the potential dangers in alertness aids. The main reason why is because the companies that produce them single out students as their target customers. On the Vivarin home page, you can find a scholarship competition for students, with the winner receiving a ten thousand dollar scholarship. In an effort to attract teens, there are even romance and personality quizzes, like those found in popular teen magazines such as "YM" and "Seventeen."

Even worse, the marketing is also geared at an even younger audience. At the bottom of the Vivarin page there is a cheery heading proclaiming, "Free Vivarin For Everyone!" In parentheses, underneath this, it says, "Must be at least 12." Regardless of what it is, no company should be offering to send free samples of any drug to a twelve year old child— that is terribly irresponsible. Imagine what a tragedy it would be if a twelve year old with a pre-existing heart condition ordered his free sample unknown to his parents. Such a scenario is hardly unlikely.

The alternatives to drugs like this and caffeine in general should be considered. Short naps during the day-half an hour between classes, for example, can refresh someone well. Also, even if you can't get that eight hours of sleep, try to maintain a steady sleep schedule—even if it is only that six hours.

At the current time, we as a society consider those who suffer from lack of sleep as weak, and this only increases the demand for drugs like Vivarin. In a recent issue of "Parade" magazine, home goddess Martha Stewart, who's idolized by millions as the perfect woman, is said to have only four hours of sleep a night. Unfortunately, not all of us are superhuman, so the rest of us need to reconsider our waking moments. I wonder if Martha takes Vivarin...

The Other Side appears every three weeks in The Collegian



Crime and punishment --and treatment, too

By Joseph A. Califano Jr.=Special to The Washington Post

It's time to open -- in the nation's prisons -- a second front in the war on crime.

For two decades we have been filling prisons with drug and alcohol abusers and addicts and, without treatment or training, returning them to society to resume the criminal activity spawned by their substance abuse. This is public policy crafted in the theater of the absurd.

Individuals who commit serious offenses such as drug dealing and violent and property crimes belong in prison. But it is just as much in the interest of public safety to rehabilitate those who can be redeemed as it is to keep incorrigibles locked up.

More than 1.7 million people are behind bars in America: 1.6 million in state prisons and local jails, 100,000 in federal prisons. Eighty percent -- 1.4 million inmates -- either violated drug or alcohol laws, were high at the time of their offense, stole property to buy drugs, have histories of drug and alcohol abuse and addiction, or share some mix of these characteristics. Among these 1.4 million inmates are the parents of 2.4 million children.

Two hundred thousand of these prisoners dealt drugs but don't use them. The remaining 1.2 million are drug and alcohol abusers and addicts. Some would have committed their crimes regardless of their substance abuse. But hundreds of thousands are individuals whose core problem is the abuse and addiction that prompted their criminal activity. They would be law-abiding, taxpaying citizens and responsible parents if they lived sober lives.

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University estimates that for an additional $6,500 a year, an inmate could be given intensive treatment, education and job training. Upon release, each one who worked at the average wage of a high school graduate for a year would provide a return on investment of $68,800 in reduced criminal activity, savings on the costs of arrest, prosecution, incarceration and health care, and benefit to the economy. If all 1.2 million inmates with drug and alcohol problems got such treatment and training (cost: $7.8 billion) and only 10 percent became sober, working citizens (benefits $8.256 billion), the investment would pay for itself within a year of work. Each subsequent year would provide billions more in savings and economic benefits.

The potential crime reduction is also big league. Expert estimates of crimes committed by the average drug addict range from 89 to 191 a year. At the conservative end, successfully treating and training just 10,000 drug addicts would eliminate 1 million crimes a year.

After three years studying the relationship between prison inmates and substance abuse, I am convinced that the present system of prison and punishment only is insane public policy. Despite tougher sentencing laws, on average inmates are released in 18 months to four years. Even those convicted of such violent crimes as aggravated assault and robbery get out in three to four years.

Releasing drug and alcohol addicts and abusers without treatment or training is tantamount to visiting criminals on society. Releasing drug addicts is a government price support program for the illegal drug market. Temporarily housing such prisoners without treating and training them is a profligate use of public funds and the greatest missed opportunity to cut crime further.

One of every 144 Americans is behind bars, one of every 60 men, one of every 14 black men. If we don't deal with alcohol and drug abuse and revamp our system of crime and punishment, one of every 20 Americans born in 1997 will spend some time in jail, including one of every 11 men and one of every fourth black men.

Politicians camouflage the failure of their costly punishment-only prison policy by snorting tough rhetoric. They talk and act as though the only people in prison are violent black crack addicts and incorrigible psychopaths like James Cagney in "Public Enemy," as though treatment doesn't work and addiction is a moral failing that any individual can easily change.

The first step toward sensible criminal justice policy is to face reality. Prisons are wall to wall with drug and alcohol addicts and abusers. Appropriate substance abuse treatment has a higher success rate than many cancer therapies. (It could certainly help 20 percent of this population: That's a quarter of a million criminals who could be turned into law-abiding citizens and good parents.)

The common denominator among inmates is not race; it's drug and alcohol abuse. Though blacks are disproportionately represented in prison, essentially the same proportion (61 to 65 percent) of black, white and Hispanic inmates are regular drug users. Alcohol is more tightly linked with violent crime than crack cocaine: In state prisons, 21 percent of violent criminals were high on alcohol alone at the time of their offenses; only 3 percent were high on crack or cocaine alone.

Each year the government builds more prisons and hires more prison guards. In effect, governors, presidents and legislators keep saying, "If all the king's horses and all the king's men can't put Humpty Dumpty back together again, then give us more horses and give us more men."

Can immigrants go home again?

By Sam Quinones=Special to the Los Angeles Times

Nothing quite illustrates some basic truths about immigration to the United States, in general, and Mexican emigration, in particular, like Jaripo and its houses.

Jaripo is a village in the northern part of Michoacan, a state in central Mexico that is a major supplier of immigrants to the United States, especially California. Emigration in this region is a well-established tradition. People have been leaving Jaripo in large numbers since the "bracero" program in the 1940s.

Entering the town, the houses are one of the first things you notice. Many are newly painted two-story structures, with marble floors, satellite dishes, sliding glass windows, tiled driveways, ornate arches and gates. Inside, there's plush furniture. One house has an external winding staircase. These are the homes of people who work in the United States.

The next thing you notice is that more houses are under construction. Like hundreds of small Mexican villages in regions of heavy emigration to the United States, Jaripo has an unfinished look. Over the years, returning immigrants add on to their houses, while others lay foundations for new ones. But what's most remarkable about these houses is that they remain vacant at least 10 months a year.

They are occupied for only a few weeks when Jaripo's native children return from Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles and, primarily, Stockton, Calif., where since the 1960s, they have formed the backbone of the state agriculture industry, working in the fields and canneries. The houses are, in effect, retirement homes, to which their owners believe they will return someday to live permanently. That's their dream, anyway.

We like to believe that the immigrants' dream is to go to the United States, make new lives for themselves, assimilate and become Americans. But judging from the Jaripo experience, this may be misleading. Jaripo, and thousands of Mexican villages like it, are standing proof that, for immigrants who travel north seeking economic advancement, the real American dream is to earn money and return home to Mexico so they can show friends and family that they, too, made it in the U.S.A.

Most immigrants from around the world have always wanted to go home -- rich. It's quite natural. Mexicans are different only in that they are among the few groups in history who have been able to realize the immigrants' American dream: They can go home again. Unlike China, Vietnam, Italy, Russia and other sending countries, Mexico, during the time its people have emigrated to America, has combined geographic proximity with relative political peace and consistent poverty.

For Mexicans, going home has always been quick, relatively safe and cheap. But it also has meant that, unlike other immigrants, Mexicans have never had to perform the excruciatingly emotional surgery of severing ties to their native land.

In some sense, this may be good. Jaripenos, for example, have done an admirable job of making sure their American-born children know Mexico and Spanish. Plus, taken together, immigrant families' small investments in their home towns amount to a potent engine of private-sector urban renewain much of depressed rural Mexico. In Michoacan, one scholar has estimated that immigrant investment in houses and businesses outstrips that of local, state and federal governments combined.

Without such investment, villages like Jaripo would have died years ago. Some permanent residents' only consistent work is when the immigrants return and begin adding on to their homes. "You have to work while they're all here," says Enrique Yepes, a construction worker. "When they leave, there's nothing."

Yet, in many ways, this living connection to Mexico has impeded immigrants' progress in America. It certainly has slowed their political integration into the United States, where they spend most of their lives and where their children go to school. Jaripenos only recently _ and only when faced with the threat of Proposition 187 and the possibility of similar measures nationally _ began to naturalize and earn the right to vote.

Their wages don't allow them to invest in the United States and Mexico. So the choice, for many, is obvious. In Stockton, many Jaripeno families rent houses in the city's toughest neighborhoods _ notorious for gangs, drugs and the worst schools _ while maintaining stunning, but vacant houses back home.

Jaripo's immigrants, and their American children, return to occupy these houses in December and January. The last week of every January, they throw themselves one of the best parties in Mexico, with fireworks, dances, bands in the town plaza and nightly pilgrimages to church.

Jaripo fills up. As it does, a subtle social competition becomes apparent. The houses get more elaborate every year. "It's the most common thing we see in these villages," says Gustavo Lopez Castro, a professor at the Colegio de Michoacan in the city of Zamora nearby, who has studied Michoacan immigration for 12 years. "The first investment is in the house in the village. They have to demonstrate that they've had success."

But success also is reflected in the shiny cars and trucks, from which powerful stereos blast as they roll into town for the party. Some people even cart in sleek motorcycles that are virtually useless on Jaripo's bumpy, narrow streets. Women come to the plaza each night in elegant evening gowns. Teen-agers bring their best Nike gear and Starters jackets. Young couples return to get married, in weddings that cost thousands of dollars.

For most families, the return represents a year of hard work and sacrifice in the United States. Often, an entire year's savings is spent in a month. No one wants to come home a miser. Omar Fonseca, a sociologist who co-wrote a book on Jaripo, remembers one farm-worker family who would not come home if they didn't have at least $3,000 to spend. This same family, Fonseca says, would pull the children out of school in order to work the fields and make the nut for the trip every January. Thus, some Jaripeno youths are second-generation field workers in Stockton. Many others have avoided the fields, but have not gone to college.

The immigrants' return also affects Jaripo. Many townspeople faintly resent their returning brethren. "Some of them come back with rented suits, so they can show off to those of us who don't leave," says one local businessman. They complain also that the children return from the United States disrespectful and brash. And while the town does continue on, its sole reason for existence seems more and more to be simply that of a stage for the January party.

The children who have yet to journey north see the returning immigrants wearing fancy clothes and tennis shoes and driving trucks with state-of-the-art stereos; they see houses going up; they see money flashed about. They hear stories about the United States - and they can't wait to leave.

Because Jaripo's first emigrants are reaching retirement age, they soon will have the opportunity to act on their dream of returning home to a nice house, a quiet Mexican village and a dollar-dominated pension. Yet, their dream may, imperceptibly, have changed just as they are able, for the firstime, to make a home of the house they labored so hard to build. Years of living in the United States have likely made Mexico more appealing to them as a tourist destination rather than as a final resting place. They may be hard-pressed to leave their grandchildren in the states.

And Jaripo will likely remain a town of extravagant ghost houses.

Quinones, a correspondent for Pacific News Service, is the recipient of an Alicia Patterson fellowship for 1998.