

## University of Illinois students complain about defective condoms

By Jenna Linder  
University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. - Since the University of Illinois' McKinley Health Center made a brand switch from Sheik to Premium Blue condoms, some students have disapproved - so much so that they're returning their latex along with complaint forms.

A brown box with greasy edges and several bags of defective condoms sits behind a clerk who helps student visitors. Employees collect the condoms before reporting them to the center's pharmacy. They get the latex from students who have tested its durability and found it unsatisfactory. One student employee said the center gave a student a pack of condoms that had been split down the middle. Disgusted, the student handed the package back.

Employees say they want the center to offer better condoms. They say they try to eliminate as many bad condoms as possible, but fear a few bad ones slip by them. A student employee said she's even afraid to use the condoms and warns her friends against using them, too.

Gina Garcia, head of clerks at the McKinley Resource Center, acknowledges that there have been several student complaints. They have less to do with broken condoms than with lubrication smeared on the outside of packages, she said. The pharmacy keeps track of the complaints and sends the condoms back to their manufacturer.

The center switched from Sheik to Premium Blue condoms last spring to save money. As long as the Food and Drug Administration approve a brand, it is considered for distribution. William Mosher, a supervisor at the center's pharmacy, said he picks the cheapest brand. He said he chose Premium Blue condoms because they were \$55 per 1,000, compared to \$80 per 1,000 condoms manufactured by Sheik.

Mosher said health officials would see if the company could produce a better product. If not, he said the center would consider changing condom brands again.

## Man Confesses To CU Student's Murder

By Christine Tatum  
CPS

Police suspect the killer of University of Colorado student Susannah Chase is still on the loose, even though they say a man in Tacoma, Wash., has confessed to the crime.

Kelly Ray Thompson, 30, pleaded not guilty Wednesday to a first-degree murder charge in connection with the stabbing death of 41-year-old Cathy Jean Jacks-Webb of Tacoma. However, he reportedly told investigators he is responsible for killings in California, Colorado and Texas — Chase's among them. Police decline to say how many.

A Washington sheriff's deputy arrested Thompson earlier this week after stopping him for erratic driving and finding him with blood splattered on his clothes. The deputy reported that Thompson confessed to killing Jacks-Webb and her boyfriend. But when authorities went to Jacks-Webb's home, they found her lying dead on the kitchen floor, and her boyfriend still alive. The boyfriend told police he heard nothing after falling asleep earlier that night. Thompson later told investigators he had slipped medications into the

boyfriend's beer.

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## Education department spots errors on Penn's crime report

By Christine Tatum  
CPS

The U.S. Department of Education has scolded the University of Pennsylvania for omitting some incidents from its annual crime report.

The department's criticism comes at a time when universities nationwide have been sluggish to comply with the Campus Security Act of 1990, which requires schools that receive federal student aid to publish yearly crime reports. The department reviewed Penn's reports for 1994, 1995 and 1996 after The Philadelphia Inquirer wrote that the school omitted crimes on streets and sidewalks surrounding the campus from its 1995 statistics.

The department agreed with school officials' assertion that streets and sidewalks bordering campus are city property, and therefore not necessarily the university's responsibility. That finding is significant because it helps clarify what territory constitutes a campus, said university spokesman Ken Wilde.

"Interpreting the law is very difficult for urban campuses that have city streets running right down the middle of them," he said. "Schools without traditional boundaries are struggling

## Diploma Mills

By Sunni DeNicola  
CPS

Thanks to the Internet, college students can access library holdings, communicate with professors, research papers, and participate in group discussions — all without leaving their room. In fact, many now earn degrees without ever setting foot on a college campus.

Earning a degree from home has particular appeal for non-traditional students who do not want to leave jobs or uproot families in order to attend a particular school. It is also valuable for those who want to stay current in their

to make sense of it all."

But, in many cases, they're also eager to find ways around reporting information that could harm their pristine and public images, said Myra Kodner, a spokeswoman for Security On Campus, a watchdog agency that monitors campus crime.

"This is about getting schools — whether they're in rural or urban settings — the education they need to live up to the law," she said. "And this is about them coming to terms with the fact that they have to report information that isn't always happy news."

Despite its alliance with the university on one issue, the department did chastise the school for failing to include several incidents that happened at its hospital and also an alleged rape that happened in a campus dormitory in 1994. The department also noted that Penn failed to cite eight arrests for alcohol violations in 1996 and failed to report any crimes stemming from bias or hate during the same three years.

Wilde said the university didn't report bias or hate crimes because there haven't been any. He added that the school is working to correct all other problems the department identified.

"The university isn't trying to hide

field, but do not live near a university.

With advancements in technology, distance learning has leapt way beyond the old correspondence school days that strictly focused on snail mail methods to certify trades like plumbing and carpentry. Now there are video conferencing, television courses, and, of course, the "virtual classroom" where classes are held on the Web chat-room style.

But riding on the tails of this distance learning boom are the "diploma mills." Diploma mills are schools that sound legit, even prestigious, but they lack proper accreditation. Although most claim accreditation from some official-sounding agency, they neglect to mention that the agency is not recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. Often it is not until a student tries to enroll at another institution, or apply to graduate school, that he finds out his degree is nontransferable.

Emir A. Mohammed, now a graduate student at the University of Strathclyde in Canada, almost made that mistake. "The school I dealt with told me that I could work on my masters and Ph.D. while still doing my bachelor's degree, and entirely at a distance. And, of course, being completely oblivious of issues like accreditation, I almost jumped into this seemingly flexible and incredible offer."

Mohammed says that he later stumbled across that school's name in a distance education chat group. "I was informed that it was an unaccredited degree mill and it was best to avoid to them."

"The mistake most people make is they ask an online university 'Are you accredited?' They say, 'We are accredited by the World Association of Universities and Colleges.' Well there's no such accreditation," says Vicky Phillips, director of Lifelong Learning, an online counseling center for distance learners and co-author of the soon-to-be released book, "Best Distance Learning Graduate Schools." [Although WAUC is an accrediting agency based in Las Vegas, it is not sanctioned by the U.S. Department of Education.]

"There are scores of unrecognized accreditation agencies. Often they (the diploma mills) create a fake accrediting agency, so when asked, they can say, 'Yes, we are accredited.' They can't be prosecuted because they are telling them the truth, they are accredited. Consumers get burned because they don't realize these accreditations mean nothing."

Phillips says it is important for students to know how to protect themselves. "If they want a degree, there are only two kinds of recognized ac-

creditation and they are not equal. They need to ask if it [the school] is accredited and who it's accredited by; and they need to understand what that kind of accreditation means for them."

Phillips says the first type is regional accreditation. There are six regional associations: Middle States, New England, North Central, Northwest, Southern, and Western Associations of Colleges and Schools.

"Regional accreditation is key," agrees Dr. Timothy Mott, Dean of the Undergraduate Center for Distance Learning at Union Institute in Cincinnati. "(Diploma mills) baffle you with names that imply accreditation and acceptability. They actually send state licensing certificates along in the mail; but being state licensed and being regionally accredited are two different things. Call that association, or call the state higher education board if you aren't sure. If you are interested in graduate school, call potential graduate institutions and make sure they will accept the degree."

The second nationally recognized accreditation is DETC (Distance Education and Training Council). But Phillips says DETC accreditation is still not recognized by regionally accredited institutions — which is important should you want to continue your studies elsewhere. "The agency started out to accredit correspondence programs and has historically been more vocational in nature," says Phillips. "In the last decade they've gotten more involved in the degree business."

Phillips says that she's heard of many a student who earned an associate degree in a DETC-approved school and then decided to go on for a bachelor's degree. "They have a transcript sent there [to the new school], and the school says they can't accept it because it's not regionally accredited. So the student goes 'What??? They won't accept \$6,000 worth of credits?'"

Phillips says part of the problem is that people don't know how to judge the information they see on the Internet. "They do a search... and see a college listed there and they assume that they must be safe since they were listed by Yahoo, but because information is not filtered, it sets people up."

In addition, Phillips says, diploma mills tend to be more savvy about advertising to students. "Some of the virtual campuses look better than the real ones. Their catalogues look better... they put a gold seal on the cover, a photo of an ivy-covered building that doesn't exist. They think about the image that they are selling, where the average university doesn't give it that much thought."

## Campus news briefs

by College Press Service

### Stanford students win bias suit

STANFORD, Calif. - Four former Stanford University students have won a \$300,000 settlement from a couple who refused to let them rent a house because they were Asian. An U.S. District Court judge approved the settlement, one of the largest stemming from allegations of housing discrimination. Property owners Jack and Beverly Hybl, who have since sold the rental house, also have agreed to receive training in fair housing laws. The students alleged that Beverly Hybl took them on a tour of the house, and commented that she had "good, white American applicants," who also were hoping to rent it. The students claimed Beverly Hybl eventually chased them from the house yelling "We white people need to stick together," and "Go back to your country." A woman in the house at the time of the tour later told attorneys Hybl apologized that she had subjected her to the heated exchange but also added: "They're ruining our country." The students, who found out about the Hybls' property from the university's Community Housing Office, pushed school officials to drop the family's properties from school listings. Six months after the 1996 incident, the university did just that.

### Proposal to lower drinking age denied

FT. COLLINS, Colo. - So close, and yet so far away. Eighteen-year-olds in Colorado hoping to drink beer legally will have to wait a while longer. By a tight vote of 5-7, the State Veterans and Military Affairs Committee on Feb. 5 quashed a proposed bill that would have lowered the drinking age for 3.2 beer from 21 to 18. If the bill had been approved, the state would have forfeited \$20 million in federal highway funding. To offset the loss, the bill's sponsor, state Rep. Ron Tupa, proposed that 18- to 21-year-olds be required to purchase an annual drinking permit for \$100. State employment, residency or enrollment in a state school also would have been required for people to be eligible for the permit. "Personally, I feel that when you are 18, you are a legal adult and should be able to do whatever you want," Tupa told the "Rocky Mountain Collegian" of Colorado State University.

## Number Of Black Students Denied NCAA Eligibility Increases

By Christine Tatum  
CPS

Black students and low-income students are having a tougher time meeting eligibility requirements to compete in college sports than other athletes, a recent study conducted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association has found.

The study provides a first look at the effect of Proposition 16, a set of controversial eligibility standards the NCAA approved six years ago in response to complaints that many athletes were not prepared for college-level studies. The stiffer standards went into effect during the 1996-97 school year.

With the tougher standards, the number of black students denied eligibility rose from 16.3 percent in 1995-96 to 26.9 percent in 1996-97. During that same period, the number of ineligible student-athletes from families earning less than \$30,000 annually rose from 14.7 percent to 22.2 percent. And for the second straight year, the percentage of black students from low-income families who failed to meet the standards was the highest of all categories; the number rose from 21 percent in 1995-96 to 34.7 percent in 1996-97.

"We all knew this was going to happen," Dale Clayton, president of the Black Coaches Association told the Chronicle of Higher Education. "History has shown that African-American students don't test well. Individu-

### Student Convicted of Sending Threatening E-mail

SANTA ANA, Calif. - A federal jury convicted a former University of California at Irvine student of a civil-rights violation for sending threatening e-mail to 59 Asian students. The Feb. 10 conviction is the first for hate mail sent through cyberspace and now serves as legal precedent that sets standards for conduct on the Internet, Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Gennaco told Knight-Ridder/Tribune News Service. "It's drawing a line in cyberspace and saying if you cross that line and threaten people with their lives that a jury of your peers is not going to tolerate it," he said. Richard Machado, 21, testified that he sent the threatening e-mail in 1996 as a joke and never meant to hurt anyone. However, he admitted under cross-examination that he blamed his own poor grades on Asian students, who he said had raised the grading curve. Machado is scheduled for sentencing in coming weeks.

### University's admissions guidelines spark debate

ANN ARBOR, Mich. - Being an athlete or member of an underrepresented minority group could get students into the University of Michigan faster than if they made a perfect score on the SAT. The school's recently revised evaluations of prospective students come at a time when it's faced with two lawsuits challenging its use of race in the admissions process. University officials say the changes are "simpler, less complex" versions of old guidelines, but critics say they're more proof that race is still a very large factor in the university's admissions. "It's important for everyone to realize that no one is guaranteed admission because of a particular score," said university spokeswoman Lisa Baker. "While test scores tell us something about an applicant, they don't present a complete picture. The (grade-point average) is truly the most important factor." Students are admitted on a point system and can get as many as 110 points for academic factors - for example, a perfect 4.0 GPA is worth 80 points - and 40 points for non-academic ones. Non-academic factors increase a student's chance of admission. Students who earn perfect scores on the SAT or ACT would get 12 points, but athletes or minorities get 20 points.

als from low-income families don't test well. And many times, these individuals are one and the same."

The new standards require high school students to complete 13 core classes, including four in English; earn at least a 2.5 grade-point average; and score at least 820 on the SAT or 68 on the ACT. (However, students can still get eligibility with a 2.0 GPA if they exceed minimum scores on one of the standardized tests.)

In light of the recent study's results, NCAA officials are meeting this week to discuss the possibility of adjusting the standards, said Wally Renfro, a spokesman for the association. Adjusting the standards does not necessarily mean lowering them, he quickly added.

"These requirements were put in place by (educators) who wanted to ensure the preparedness of their athletes for life after sports," he said. "They wanted to make sure athletes weren't graduating without knowing how to perform at the college level."

While the NCAA is concerned about the hurdles keeping some students from competition, it is pleased with higher graduation rates among athletes, Renfro said. He reported that in 1984 athletes graduated at a rate of 52 percent, compared to 53 percent of non-athletes. But in 1990, athletes finished school at a rate of 58 percent, surpassing the rest of the student population, which finished at a rate of 56 percent.