

## Hitting his prime: Cal State student makes impressive mathematics discovery

By Maggie Welter  
College Press Service

For many students, mathematics is about as exciting as riding an escalator — but not for Roland Clarkson. The freshman Cal State math wizard recently hit his prime, so to speak, by discovering the largest known prime number.

With 909,526 digits, the number is so large it is nearly impossible to write. By some estimates, it would take more than 250 hours to even pronounce. Its discovery is significant to the study of mathematics because it is a Mersenne prime — and only the 37th one found so far. For those of you needing a refresher, prime numbers are digits greater than one that

are divisible only by one and themselves, such as two and five. Mersenne primes are rare forms of prime numbers.

Clarkson secretly discovered the record-setting figure by running a computer program in a campus lab, then again on his own computer, for 46 days. He is the second youngest person ever to make such a find.

The 19-year-old is ecstatic about his find, but shy about sharing it with others. Since the discovery was announced, he has been bombarded with calls from national and local media, including NBC's "Today" show. But Clarkson, who according to one of his professors is a bit timid, turned down all the offers.

"Some people collect bottle caps; I

collect prime numbers," he said.

Clarkson, who wants to be a researcher, isn't the only one fixated on primes. The Greater Internet Mersenne Prime Search, also known as GIMPS, has more than 4,200 enthusiasts looking for new Mersenne primes. A computer engineer in Florida founded the group as a research project. Volunteers are not paid, but are given the computer software needed to search. A professor told Clarkson about the group, and he has been on the prowl for primes ever since.

"I want to find Mersenne primes because they are so rare," Clarkson said. "I want to make my own small mark in the history books."

He already has succeeded, but the

accomplishment isn't stopping him from going forward with hope of finding the next prime. And now he has even more reason to search: money.

In light of Clarkson's discovery, GIMPS has decided to reward the person who discovers the 38th Mersenne prime \$1 for every 1,000 digits.

Garry Hart, one of Clarkson's mathematics professors, said many college students don't realize how complicated making such a find can be.

"Most 18- and 19-year-olds just don't have the commitment to do it," he said. "It takes tremendous determination and a major time investment. Roland seems to have it, and I think he's going to become a very successful researcher."

## Harvard sued by family of slain student

Reuter

BOSTON — The family of a Harvard University student who was stabbed to death by her roommate has filed a wrongful-death lawsuit against the Ivy League school, the lawyer for the family said Thursday.

The lawsuit charges that the university and staff members of the dormitory where the May, 1995, stabbing occurred ignored warning signs that the killer had serious psychological problems.

Senior premed student Trang Phuong Ho was stabbed 45 times by her roommate Sinedu Tadesse, who then committed suicide by hanging herself in a bathroom shower stall.

Ho's family charged in the suit, filed in Middlesex Superior Court in Massachusetts, that a letter Tadesse sent randomly to a Harvard Law School student in which she said she was "desperate" should have alerted school officials that she was a potential threat.

The letter was placed in Tadesse's file, but officials never questioned her

about it, the lawsuit says.

"The grounds of the suit is that (Harvard officials) were on notice that Tadesse suffered from serious psychological disorders and they did nothing to prevent this tragedy," the Ho family lawyer Carol Mallory told Reuters.

"They should have contacted Tadesse, they should at least have made sure she got the necessary psychiatric help that she needed. In addition, they should at least have warned her roommate," she said.

Tadesse, from Ethiopia, displayed other warning signs, including failure to show for three of her four exams just prior to the two murders, the lawsuit said.

Harvard spokesman Joe Wrinn said the university has not seen the lawsuit and would have no comment.

He referred to an August, 1995 letter by Harry Lewis, dean of Harvard College undergraduate students, in which he said "both students were in close contact with their academic advisor and seemed to be managing the ups and downs of college life."

## Law school deans object!

By Christine Tatum  
CPS

U.S. News & World Report's annual ranking of the nation's law schools has deans around the country crying, "Objection!"

They aren't the only academics tired of seeing their graduate schools' reputations bounce up and down with each poll, but this year, they're the loudest ones protesting the practice.

Deans from most of the nation's

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Audrey Ward,  
director of communications,  
University of North Carolina at  
Chapel Hill

179 law schools have denounced the rankings, directly appealing to their prospective clients — 93,000 applicants — with a scathing letter titled "Law School Rankings May Be Hazardous to Your Health!" The heads of 164 schools endorsed the message — including the dean of Yale University's law school, which holds this year's coveted No. 1 spot.

It was once considered a faux pas for those in academia to even let on that they read surveys. But at a press conference in New York earlier this week, several law school deans angrily broke from the conventional silence.

"The rankings clearly matter," said Pamela Gann, dean of Duke University's law school, which slipped from 10th place to 11th this year. "They are widely read and widely relied upon."

In the eyes of many news gatherers, prospective students and alumni, that's not necessarily a bad thing. Especially if the information is coming from U.S. News, which is perhaps the most popular and well respected of a growing field of academic surveys.

"I'm still carrying last year's issue around," said 23-year-old Linda McCoy of Chicago, who's in the process of applying to law school. "I can hardly wait to see what this year's has to say."

That's the type of devotion that sends shivers up the spines of many school officials who aren't convinced prospective students are basing their decisions on sound data. The Association of American Law Schools released a report challenging the validity of the magazine's survey, declaring that most of the year-to-year differences in overall rankings can be explained by only two of the 12 factors U.S. News says it considers: reputation and student selectivity. The association's study found that 70 percent of the student selectivity rating is based on each school's median Law School Admissions Test score. Deans, fearing that human nature could get the best of those who are sensitive to the rankings, say admissions officers

may be more inclined to look at test scores than other important factors — such as a candidate's practical experience or dedication to the profession.

"I don't object to the notion that folks might try to rank law schools because I think it could be a valuable piece of consumer information," said Howard O. Hunter, dean of Emory University's law school, which, this year, shares 25th place with four other schools. "But the methodology being used is seriously flawed. For starters, it fails to differentiate between the varying missions schools have. We're not all trying to accomplish the same, exact thing, much less send students down the same, exact career path."

Law school administrators say it's also tough for them to take the rankings seriously when they can't explain why their school scores higher or lower from year to year. Officials at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill said they're still bewildered about how their school climbed 10 spots to share the No. 25 ranking this year.

"We've not done one thing differently, which we think says something about the arbitrary nature of these rankings," said Audrey Ward, director of the school's communications. "It's nice to have public recognition for a quality program, but it's the same quality we've offered for the last 152 years."

In a statement released a day before the rankings, U.S. News editors stood by their research and said the association has misunderstood the methodology used.

"U.S. News agrees that rankings should not be an applicant's main source of information," the statement read. "The magazine also believes that any debate about rankings should be based on an accurate description of how they are compiled."

To compile the information, the magazine uses a complex formula that weighs several important factors, including LSAT scores, incoming grade-point averages, job placement percentages and starting salaries. The poll's results also hinge on two surveys designed to gauge the schools' reputations — one given to attorneys and judges, and the other completed by the very deans who complain about the rankings each year.

Why aren't law school deans more like most of the nation's 54 members of the American Association of Dental Schools, who simply refuse to respond to the magazine's questionnaires?

"We're caught in a hopeless bind," said H. Reese Hansen, dean of Brigham Young University's Law School, which also shares this year's 25th spot. "U.S. News & World Report has made it abundantly clear that it will continue with or without us. We might as well make sure it has the correct information. If we didn't participate, the results would be reduced by 179 votes — the most informed and accurate ones in the whole group."

To make matters worse, Hansen said, important people — money-giving alumni, university trustees, top-notch students and big-name firms — seem to like the rankings.

## Coed living no big deal for most students

By Tanya Barrientos  
Knight Ridder Newspapers

COLLEGEVILLE, Pa. — It's Wednesday night, just after dinner, and Ursinus College freshmen Mark Bernhein, James Miskiewicz and Kyle Kenyon know what's about to happen. A woman's voice is seductively issuing orders, wafting through the dormitory hallway, seeping through their closed door.

"And push, and squeeze, and push and squeeze," she urges.

The young men throw each other knowing glances. They smile and return their attention to the Internet sites glowing on their computer screens.

"The first time we heard it, we were playing chess," Bernhein recalled. "We heard this woman with a really low voice, and lots of heavy breathing, going 'and push, and squeeze, and push and squeeze' and we looked at each other and said, 'What are they watching?'"

Bernhein said they walked across the hall, to the room that sophomores Sarah Morrissey and Daneen Stamps call home, and began to laugh when they saw their coed dormmates doing an aerobics tape.

They still chuckle at the memory. And, they admit, for a couple of days they hovered around Morrissey and Stamps' door while the women exercised, hoping to catch a glimpse of flexing and bending.

But now, the young men said, they'd rather stay in their room and surf the Net because watching their Zwingli Hall dormmates stretch is about as sexy as washing socks.

That's how it is for this second generation of college coeds, who consider mixed-gender living just another part of campus life.

The 17 men and women living side by side in Zwingli Hall at Ursinus College are like thousands of other students across the nation. They are the children of the founders of the sexual revolution, who defiantly broke the gender barriers in college residence halls more than 30 years ago.

For these offspring, living, eating, even sharing bathrooms with the opposite sex is no big deal.

Today on American college campuses, coed dorms are the norm rather than the exception. And while it is not impossible to find single-sex dorms, students consider them unusual.

According to college administrators, even the most conservative of colleges can't fully compete in student recruitment unless they offer mixed-gender housing. And, administrators say, parents — many of whom attended college when coed dorms were controversial — rarely express concern.

That's not to say that coed living isn't still making headlines.

At Yale last fall a group of four Orthodox Jewish students filed a lawsuit against the university because they did not want to live in coed dorms, contending the residence halls violated their religious convictions.

They claimed that because all freshmen and sophomores are required to live on campus, and every dormitory is coed, they would be forced to witness premarital sex, or at least be in an environment where sex might occur.

In December the university filed a motion to have the lawsuit dismissed, which is where the case stands today, according to Tom Conroy, spokesman for Yale.

Quite another kind of coed controversy made headlines in Mississippi, where no state schools are allowed to mix the sexes in their dormitories.

In September students at the University of Mississippi in Oxford voted in favor of 24-hour weekend visiting hours between men and women, from noon Friday until midnight Sunday. State college officials, however, balked at the request and pressured the university to rescind the plan.

"A story about it ran in the Jackson paper and when the college board saw that, everything hit the roof," said

In 1969, more than 100 women at Barnard College in New York held a three-day "sleep-in" at two male dormitories at neighboring Columbia University to demand mixed-gender housing.

Emily Boling, a reporter for the Daily Mississippian, the student newspaper. "They said that 24-hour visiting would make it a coed dorm," she explained, adding that officials called their decision a "moral issue."

As a result, Mississippi will remain the only state that has yet to join the coed trend that swept college campuses in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The first coed dorm in America actually opened in 1956 at Indiana University in Bloomington, but it took the rest of the nation more than a decade to follow suit.

At the time, the fight for coed living was considered part of the women's liberation movement. Many of the changes in on-campus housing occurred hand-in-hand with desegregation of all-male institutions.

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In 1970 Oberlin College in Ohio became the poster child for coed living, when Life magazine did a 10-page photo story on the phenomenon under the headline "Co-Ed Dorms: An intimate revolution on campus."

The large black-and-white photographs showed blue-jean-clad women and long-haired men playing in hallways together, doing laundry to-

gether, cooking together, and even visiting each other in their pajamas.

"Such revolutionary departures in living arrangements," the story proclaimed, "are startling to many middle-aged parents."

Only two years earlier, students at Oberlin had been allowed to visit dorm rooms of the opposite sex for only three hours each day, and they had to keep their dorm door open and both feet on the floor.

Patricia Benes was a student at Oberlin in 1970, when the Life magazine crew visited.

"I remember them coming through the lobby of our house, looking for students," said Benes, whose surname in 1970 was Leiby. She got the feeling, she said, that the photographers were anticipating more sex on campus than they found. "They seemed disappointed that we weren't all frolicking about," she said.

in 1972, is now an administrator with the Pennsylvania college system and is the mother of three boys.

Her oldest son, she said, attended college in Kutztown and lived in a single-sex dorm.

When coed living was first introduced, parents and college administrators feared that close quarters would lead to rampant sex.

It didn't happen. In fact, studies revealed that just the opposite occurred. Students living together shunned being sexually intimate with one another.

"We find that the men and women work out community living problems with a newfound respect for the opposite sex," said Ron Diment, who for 18 years has been director of resident life at LaSalle University in Philadelphia. All the resident halls at LaSalle, a Catholic college, went coed in 1972. "It's just the natural way of life for these students," he said.

"Think of the most popular sitcom today: It's 'Friends,' and they all practically live with each other. For some reason, community living takes the opposite sex out of the sexual realm."

A 1989 study conducted by a Rutgers University anthropologist concluded that dormmates regarded one another as brothers and sisters, and that getting sexually involved would be tantamount to incest. The study was titled "No Orgies, Please, We're Studying."

At Ursinus — a small liberal-arts college outside Philadelphia — more than three-fourths of students in dorms are in coed situations.

Even in the predominantly single-sex dorms (none are all single sex,

having at least one floor with the opposite sex), the visitation rules are lax. While the college's administrators suggested that men and women have no more than two overnight visits a month, they rarely monitor for compliance.

Eight men and nine women live in Zwingli Hall, a gabled, three-story stucco house across the street from the Ursinus campus.

There are two bathrooms in the dorm, which translates into four toilets, three showers and three sinks. Posted on the door of the first-floor bathroom is a poster of a dead goldfish, complete with a handwritten notice that says: "Men/Women."

The counter of the second-floor bathroom is crowded with five bottles of shampoo, three cans of Barbasol shaving cream and a drugstore's selection of mouthwash, face cleanser, razors, hand cream and toothpaste.

"You get used to it," said Christine Pili, a senior, referring to the coed bathrooms. "It was unnerving for me at first," she said, "since I didn't have any brothers. But now it's OK."

Fine for the coeds, but they admit that their parents seemed unsettled by the bathroom situation.

"I didn't tell my parents about sharing the bathrooms until we got here and they were moving me in," said Stamps. "My mom asked me where the women's room was, and I told her we shared. She was, like: 'Oh, goodness...'"

"I've been in there brushing my teeth while one of the guys is shaving," said Kristen Schumann, a senior.

Outside the bathroom, the routines of daily life are shared by all the housemates, regardless of gender.

Men and women watch television together, gossip, do homework and generally just hang out with one another.

"Even if a guy stays in a girl's room all night, at this point you'd assume that they were just up all night talking," said Pili.

Sean Saroles, a senior who is spending his third year as a resident of Zwingli, agreed.

"After you've lived like this for a while, you just don't see the separation of the sexes so much," he said.

"The only complaint I have about this whole situation is that the women take long showers," said Bernhein, teasing his female housemates.

"Want to get into this?" Schumann asked in retaliation. "Let's talk about the toilet-seat battle."

Her female housemates roared with laughter. The men just groaned.

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