

The Behrend College Beacon

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

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EDITORIAL

Student Government is holding elections for freshman senators in the next couple of weeks. Petitions are due on Monday for those positions. The election of SGA senators caused a lot of controversy last spring, and the new senators are under pressure to do a good job. For a new student, the importance of SGA may not be apparent. However, it is important to understand that this is one of the strongest voices for students at Behrend. The tremendous campaign of the fraternities and sororities to gain seats proves the impact that SGA has on campus.

SGA has an additional twenty thousand dollars to distribute to student organizations and supplemental budget requests are due on September 16. Organizations should make use of these additional funds because they are generated by the ac-

tivity fee students are required to pay in tuition costs. Student output is required so that the money can be directed to student desires and wants: without the input of the student body, SGA won't know how to spend the funds. To complain about the lack of activities on campus and not attempt to voice concerns at SGA meetings or various other outlets for student forums will no longer be warranted if students choose not to participate.

SGA is a student based organization that requires student support, it is created for and by the students. Involvement from the entire student body is needed. In fact, it is required to fully represent views across campus. Without student involvement, we are left without our concerns being addressed and our voices being heard.

"Smart guns" are a dumb ideaBy Susan Glick
Special to the Los Angeles Times

Suddenly, everyone from gun control advocates to big-city mayors to the manufacturer of Colt firearms is talking about using futuristic technology to make guns safer. Their idea is to encourage the design and sale of "personalized handguns" that can be fired only by their owners. Ideas for such guns include a computerized chip that recognizes the handgun owner's fingerprints and a radio transponder that would detect a special ring worn by the user.

Proponents argue that such technology, also known as a "smart gun," would stop the misuse of firearms by children and render stolen weapons useless. It certainly sounds promising. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that smart guns are a dumb idea.

Smart guns would have no impact on the majority of gun deaths and injuries in America. Suicide is the nation's leading cause of firearm-related death, but people can still shoot themselves with their personalized guns. The vast majority of homicides, the second-leading cause of gun deaths in the United States, take place between people who know each other. Again, personalization of weapons would have a limited impact. Even in unintentional shootings, the category in which the proponents of personalization see the greatest benefit, many cases involve victims who are wielding their own guns. So, even if the technology worked perfectly, this space-age gun would only live up to its name in a small fraction of instances.

Statistics on firearm ownership reveal another shortcoming to the smart gun panacea. A Police Foundation study published last year found that while only one-quarter of American adults owns a gun, 74 percent of these owners have two or more guns. Furthermore, 68 percent of handgun owners also own at least one rifle. Therefore, smart guns would be effective only if owners disposed of all other firearms.

Finally, even if gun owners do replace their current stockpile of handguns with personalized weapons, in many cases they would simply be exchanging one problem for another.

The Police Foundation survey found that more than 77 percent of handguns now possessed by private individuals hold fewer than 10 rounds of ammunition, reflecting the fact that most of these handguns are revolvers. Because most guns produced today are larger-caliber pistols with 10-round magazines, gun owners who switch to personalized guns would generally obtain a pistol of greater firepower and capacity. Widespread purchase of smart guns might, therefore, greatly increase the lethality of the nation's private gun stock.

This potential for customers to "trade up" caught the eye of Ronald Stewart, the president of Colt's Manufacturing Inc., the famous firearm producer. Stewart has broken ranks with the rest of the gun industry to pursue this new technology. Meanwhile, the U.S. Justice Department has awarded his company \$500,000 to develop a smart gun prototype.

Stewart came to Colt in 1996 after 22 years at Chrysler. This month, he will be replaced by Steven Sliwa, a former software executive and president of Embry-Riddle University in Florida. Both men are business professionals, not pro-gun zealots. With their fresh perspectives, they understand what their more narrow-minded firearms industry colleagues missed: Smart guns are smart business.

According to a 1997 survey sponsored by the Johns Hopkins Center on Gun Policy and Research, 35 percent of people who said they were unlikely to buy a gun in the future also said they would consider buying a handgun if it were personalized. Packaged with a slick sales pitch, new technology will create a false sense of security among consumers and boost stagnant handgun sales.

Instead of distracting ourselves with gee-whiz technology that is years away from fruition, we should address the real issue now. Guns are exempt from every federal health, safety and consumer protection law. If handguns were held to the same standards as every other consumer product in America, they would likely be banned, not "personalized." Enforcing such tough safety standards may not sound as glamorous or as easy as building James Bond weapons, but it would certainly save more lives.

Live from Guyana**Is justice truly blind?**

Laws are designed to ensure the safety of its citizens and protect them from the behaviors and actions of undesirables in society. When these laws are broken, consequences must follow, usually in the form of fines and imprisonment. Through our judicial and legislative systems, criminals are reprimanded for unruly behavior, and justice is sought for those victimized by these actions. Dependent on the crime committed, punishment is rendered, and whether or not the punishment fits the crime is an issue many question.

Will Foster, a 39 year old father of one, was sentenced to ninety-three years in prison because he was found guilty of cultivating marijuana in the basement of his Tulsa, Oklahoma, home. He received seventy years for the cultivation of marijuana, twenty years for possession in the presence of a child and three years for supplemental charges. The sentence was

rendered by the twelve citizens who also convicted him. Foster alleges that he was growing the marijuana for medicinal uses; he suffers from the debilitating disease of rheumatoid arthritis. Unable to seek alleviation from prescribed pain killers, Foster, under the recommendation of a doctor, used marijuana to provide relief from his swollen joints and aches. Although I do not advocate the legalization of marijuana, I don't think that Foster's behavior (although illegal) warrants the punishment he received, nearly a century in prison.

In this case the punishment clearly does not fit the crime. Foster was victimized twice; once by this crippling disease and again by the very system that is supposed to support and protect its citizens. Whether or not Foster was truthfully growing marijuana for medicinal use no longer matters; ninety-three years is a ridiculous amount of time to sentence a

person for the possession of an outlawed substance when countless numbers of murderers, rapists and child molesters only receive a fraction of Foster's prison time or even go free.

The "prom-mom" in New Jersey who admitted to the strangulation of her newborn child in a bathroom at the prom and then returned to request a favorite song from the DJ is still out on bail pending her sentencing for which she will probably have to do minimal time. Amy Grossberg and her boyfriend killed their newborn and then threw him in a motel dumpster and yet she received only two and a half years while her boyfriend got two years. Is the possession of an outlawed substance regarded with more importance than that of human life?

I believe in the scales of justice but when violent offenders plea bargain and obtain less prison time than those

found guilty of possessing narcotics, the system must be rectified. The criminals who receive minimal time tend to repeat their crimes without ever fully repaying their debt to society. I am fully aware that our prison system is not one that can fully rehabilitate those who are "socially unfit," regardless they must repay their debt to society, and that can not be fulfilled if criminals are continually being sentenced to a minimal amount of prison time. Serving two years in a minimum security penitentiary for manslaughter and homicide is in great contrast to serving ninety-three years for possession of marijuana. When will this hypocrisy stop and the judicial and legislative systems start making criminals take responsibility for their socially unacceptable actions, instead of having them spend "vacation" time in "Club Fed.?"

Jones is Managing Editor of The Beacon. Her column will appear every three weeks.

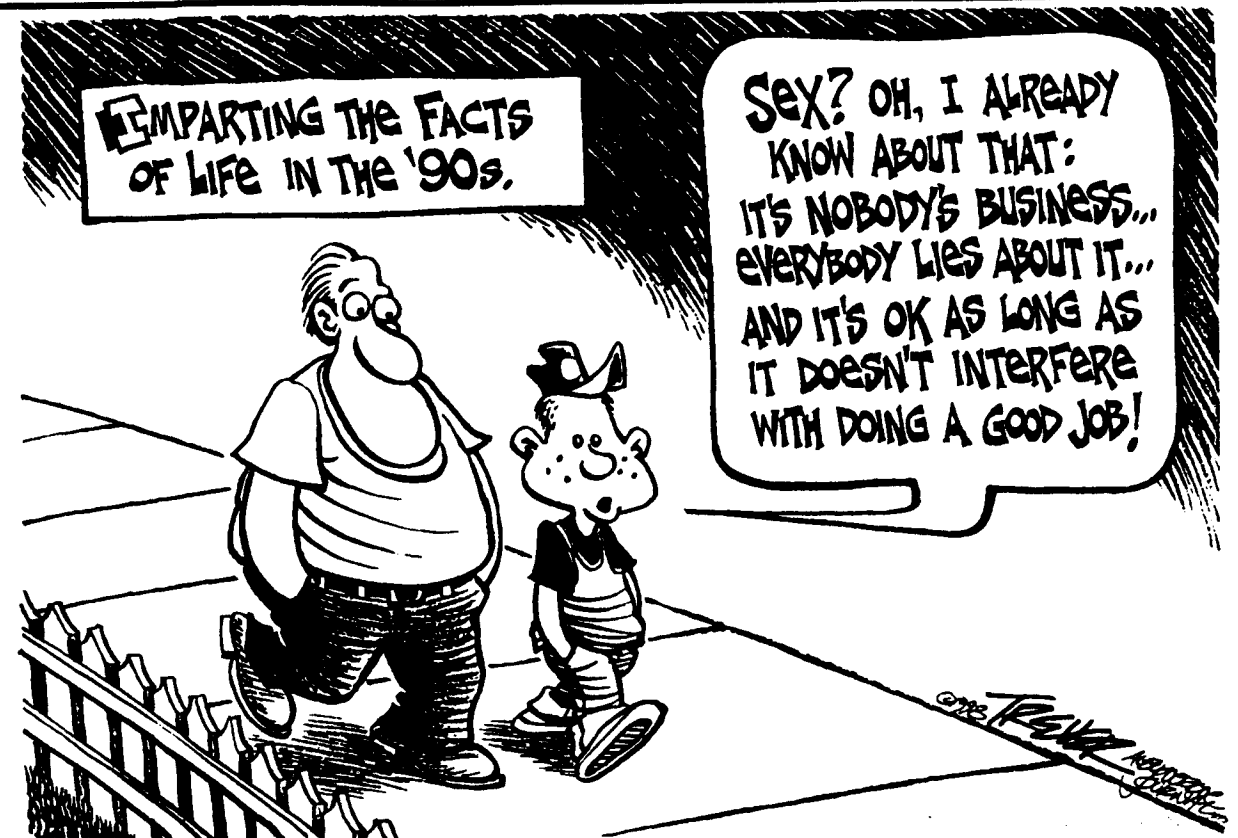
Critics distort perception of Gay LifestyleBy Martha Knox
The Lantern (Ohio State University)

All Americans can now thank Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott for opening the flood gates to yet more prejudice in this country. For those who aren't aware, Lott made a statement in which he referred to homosexuality as a disorder comparable with alcoholism.

Appearing in the New York Times, the Washington Post, and USA Today were countless advertisements calling for gays to seek help for their "problem," and accusing gay activists of using their influence to turn American children homosexual.

These ads reminded me of a Christian film I watched called "The Gay Agenda" that was shown last quarter by Ohio State's Bisexual, Gay and Lesbian Alliance in a presentation called "Images of Hate." In the film, former gay Christians, who had sought help and become either celibate or straight, were interviewed, "proving" homosexuality was a choice and curable. All this was despite years of medical research opposing that claim and the word of the American Psychiatric Association.

Finally, it is ridiculous to claim that what worked for one person will work for someone else. The film mostly focused on the so-called "agenda" of gay activists. It grossly misquoted a famous activist, entirely changing the meaning of his statement and made



him out to be an angry child molester. The film's narrator proclaimed that gay activists were fighting to lower the age of consent, while simultaneously filming a naked infant girl on a man's shoulders.

In actuality, gay activists are only trying to make the age of consent for homosexual activity the same as heterosexual activity, which it is not in many states.

These manipulative tactics and veiled messages of hate which make homosexuals out to be frustrated pedophiles are too prevalent to be excused as mere oversight or ignorance. This is a case of paranoia about gays entering mainstream American culture. These are people afraid of the lesbian couple moving in next door,

or a gay English teacher in their schools. They do not want gay lifestyles to improve or become dignified and socially accepted. They want children to continue using slanderous insults towards gays. They wish to keep gays exiled to the closet of shame, secrecy and degradation.

We should be careful not to blame the Republican party for Lott's statements. Republicans do not suffer as a whole from this extreme homophobia, shown by groups like Log Cabin Club, a gay Republican organization. Nor should be blamed Christians as a whole, shown by groups like the Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries.

Those endorsing the ads are specific fundamentalist Christian orga-

nizations, such as the Christian Coalition, the American Family Association and Family Research Council. These groups, which do not speak for the majority, have proven to have much influence and power.

I worry when a Senate majority leader can publicly denounce homosexuals and get away with it. I also worry when the largest and most respected newspapers in the country run these type of ads.

To end on a happier note, I remember a gay activist saying once that the religious right is actually the gay rights movement's best ally, in that without the publicity it has stirred for gay issues, the movement would have never gotten so ahead, so quickly. So thanks.

The Ordinary College Student

MARK GREENBANK

Lack of resources for on-campus computer users

Have you had trouble getting a computer in any of the labs on campus? Have you had to stand in long lines just to type up a quick paper or check your email? Well, you are not alone. With a push to incorporate technology into education, Behrend is seemingly stretched to the limits when it comes to serving on campus computer needs for the ordinary college student. With the large number of students still living in temporary housing, Behrend cannot serve all those who wish to utilize the computer facilities.

Even though there are computer labs at both ends of campus, we might as well not have them at all. While lines at all computer labs are not yet too bad, the situation will continue to deteriorate. In terms of accessibility the library lab is almost impossible to use. Every semester it seems that by midterms about four to seven of the computers in that particular lab are either broken or reserved. In a large lab this would not be a problem, but with the library lab only consisting of about

thirty-two computers this makes for long waiting lines and frustration.

At the other end of campus the problems continue. Many faculty and staff members encourage computer use and

Even though schedules are posted it seems that the labs are always filled every day.

have to use the labs in Hammermill. This obviously creates a problem because how can a student get into one of the labs to do any work when the labs are filled with classes in session? Even though schedules are posted it seems that the labs are always filled every day. It is extremely frustrating when you have to complete a project and see that pink "Class In Session" sign taped to the door of the Hammermill labs.

It is understandable that faculty

members have no where else to go, but how can a student type up a paper, or work on their resume when they can not gain access to a computer? It is a travesty in our technological age that at any given time, a student cannot get on a computer somewhere, at any point during the day. I'm not talking about playing around on the Internet or sending emails either, but to type up a paper is becoming nearly impossible. Sure, a student can go late at night to the labs, provided they don't have an early class, or that the rest of the campus isn't there hurrying to get work done either.

Yes, all on campus living areas are computer accessible, and that is a great benefit to those with computers. Unfortunately not every ordinary college student can afford a computer or is able to bring one from home. Better measures need to be taken to assist those who rely upon campus computer labs. Just last year a special computer lab was established in Lawrence Hall for the Psychology department. Sign up sheets were posted on the door for

those Psychology majors who wished to reserve a computer. Having lived in that building the largest number of people I ever saw in that lab was four. There are about twelve computers in that lab. Many times the people in the lab were playing games on the computers.

To relieve some of the frustrations in other computer areas perhaps students could be granted access to this Lawrence lab. Also maybe some sort of sign up system could be used to reserve computers.

With the expansion plans for our campus and a move to increase on campus residency to about 5,000 students, newer and larger labs will have to be added. In the meantime, the present facilities to accommodate students is completely unacceptable. It seems that those ordinary college students who wish to use on-campus computer labs will have to continue to wait in lines and fight the crowds. Greenbank is associate editor of The Beacon. His column will appear every three weeks.