

Melinda Gates And husband Bill give \$20 million to Duke

By Christine Tatum
College Press Exchange

DURHAM, N.C. (CPX) - Melinda French Gates and her husband, Microsoft founder Bill Gates, have given \$20 million to Duke University to support a new interdisciplinary studies program designed to encourage the university's brightest students - regardless of age or degree - to work together on a variety of projects.

The University Scholars program, scheduled to accept its first students in the fall of 1999, eventually will accommodate up to 80 scholars - at least half of whom will be undergraduates. Participants, characterized by a "rare level of intellectual brilliance and ... fearlessness," will work along a new

interdisciplinary theme each year, school officials said.

The program is unique because it "will provide for interaction between 19-year-old undergraduates and 28-year-old students pursuing the Ph.D. or professional degree and 45-year-olds at the peak of their scholarly study," said university President Nannerl O. Keohane.

Scholarships will be provided for program participants who need financial aid, and research grants will be given to those who do not. Each student selected for the program also will receive "generous fellowship support," university officials said. Duke's 1998 undergraduate tuition is \$23,220.

"Bill and I hope that our gift will ensure the best and brightest students have access to an outstanding

university experience without regard to economic status," said Melinda Gates, who was named to the university's board of trustees in 1996. "Some of the best years of my life were spent at Duke University, and I look forward to sharing that experience with other young people through this gift."

Much like the students she's hoping to reach, Melinda Gates' own academic pursuits traversed the disciplines. She earned a bachelor's degree in computer science and economics at Duke in 1986 and graduated from the university's business school a year later. Had she been able to take advantage of the University Scholars program, Gates said someone on faculty could have helped her understand how best to combine and use her studies.

Campus favorite Conan O'Brien now TV's hippest host

By Ken Parish Perkins
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

It's easy to remember the time before Conan O'Brien was CONAN O'BRIEN, scrappy late-night survivor, after-hours star. That was when O'Brien seemed like NBC's worst nightmare, a jittery, red-haired kid with a cartoon face and a head shaped like a partly bulldozed skyscraper. He'd amble onto the "Late Night" set with a wicked, sly smile; after a barrage of biting but wildly uneven comedy bits, he'd slither into his seat and face the day as the interviewer with no clue.

You can't seem to talk about O'Brien these days without speaking of his rather unnoticeable rise ("Has it been five years?" was a comment I heard the other day; "Is he still on?" was another). Or how his slow, methodical crawl to respectability is now measured by a fawning, apologetic press and a network confident enough to trust him.

More than four years after a horrible debut and a string of near-death experiences at the hands of NBC executives who wanted nothing more than to right their wrong, "Late Night With Conan O'Brien" is as hot as it has ever been.

In some ways, O'Brien, now 35, has become the David Letterman of a generation who think that the gap-toothed one on CBS is an outdated old fogey. College kids flock to O'Brien's World Wide Web site and to his show, which now attracts nearly as many 18- to 49-year-olds as Letterman did in his last season on NBC, amid fiercer competition, mind you.

Part of O'Brien's appeal to young adults is the return of the host-as-bully approach. There's a reason CBS

snatched Craig Kilborn from Comedy Central's "The Daily Show" to go toe-to-toe with Conan next year.

Also, after spending time with the other court jesters of late night, Letterman and Jay Leno, you can't help but notice O'Brien and his steadfast refusal to operate from their political correctness guideline - that one that states you ought not offend the delicate sensibility of even one person in our fragile land.

Let's face it. Letterman is more or less a pop culture irrelevancy, and Leno's "Tonight Show" has become so traditional it verges on the archaic. With such blandness darkening the landscape, it's no wonder O'Brien has emerged.

And how resilient he has been. When he began hosting "Late Night With Conan O'Brien" in 1993, media members (myself included) brought out long, sharp knives to cut him to pieces, ripping NBC for hiring a man whose claim to fame was writing for "The Simpsons" and "Saturday Night Live," and whose on-camera experience was practically zilch.

Criticism mounted after O'Brien went on. He was visibly nervous and awkward. He often looked down at his notes instead of at guests. Comedy skits were inventive but flat, edgy but uneven, irreverent but often tasteless.

O'Brien admits now that he was literally in a state of panic, a place he doesn't mind being because it keeps him focused. He kept the faith even though NBC kept him on a string of short-term deals while privately searching for a real host.

Such ambivalence gave O'Brien time to build. Slowly, "Late Night" developed a soul and direction, becoming a regular haunt for

comedians such as Janeane Garofalo and musical acts such as Green Day, Goo Goo Dolls and Jewel. Soon Conan was the clever hotshot, bent on getting buttoned-down guests to step out of their personas, quite the Letterman thing to do. (Seeing NBC anchor Tom Brokaw pulled from his anchor desk by a Godzilla-size creature was priceless.)

O'Brien's producer, Jay Ross, insists that even during the bad days they never wavered. All they had to do was stay afloat long enough for the host to learn how to be one.

Indeed, O'Brien is far more relaxed and inventive with his comedy skits, and has improved vastly as an interviewer. His follow-up questions are witty and logical, not stilled and mechanical; his comebacks are snappier than ever.

Just last week, O'Brien got "Buffy the Vampire Slayer's" Sarah Michelle Gellar to talk about the lameness of horror films. Gellar found it "weird" for slasher victims to be sitting at home wearing high heels and then delivered the punch line, "I don't know about you, but I don't wear heels in the house."

This prompted O'Brien to quickly re-punch the punch line: "Well, I do. It's comfortable and makes me look more attractive."

It's this air of improvised looseness that stands out.

But what do you think of this: Many "A"-list stars plugging their latest whatever may begin to sidestep O'Brien for Letterman and Leno, where they are certain to find hosts far more agreeable to their often self-serving, empty chatter.

As O'Brien would mutter, "Who ever would have thought it?"

Binge drinking no better than it was 4 years ago, study says

By Christine Tatum
College Press Exchange

CHICAGO - More than half of American college students drank to get drunk last year, and the number of binge drinkers is virtually the same as it was four years ago, according to a study released Thursday by the Harvard School of Public Health.

The survey of 14,521 students is the sequel to a 1993 analysis of students' alcohol consumption. Both studies were based on responses from randomly chosen students attending 130 colleges across the country.

The latest report, published this month in the Journal of American College Health, shows that 52 percent of students drank to get tanked in 1997, compared with 39 percent in 1993. Overall, the number of students who binge - defined as five drinks in a row for men and four in a row for women - dropped slightly, from 44.1 percent in 1993 to 42.7 percent last year.

However slight, that drop is basically the study's only bright spot, said Professor Henry Wechsler, lead author of both studies. The decrease, he said, could be attributed to a rising number of students who abstain from drinking altogether. Nineteen percent of students reported that they hadn't had a drink in a year, compared with 15.6 percent in the earlier study.

Wechsler said more students may be abstaining because they're repulsed by the behavior of their drinking friends and tired of vomit-filled bathrooms, unwanted sexual advances and late-night disturbances.

That makes sense to Dan Meade, a senior at Georgetown University who said his struggles with binge drinking prompted him to quit drinking more than a year ago - a decision, Meade said, that has made his life "immeasurably better."

"I would get so drunk I'd black out and not remember a thing I'd done," he said. "I had to make a lot of apologies to people for things I didn't remember. At first, my drinking was largely limited to weekends ... then it started to hurt my grades."

Both of Wechsler's studies say the biggest beer-guzzlers on campus are in fraternities and sororities, where four of five of those students binge. While many fraternities have announced plans to go dry, Wechsler criticized the one caveat usually attached: in the year 2000.

"Postponing things until the millennium is not the way to handle the problems of today," he said.

While the study did not show which colleges had the most drinkers, it did indicate that bingeing students are more likely to be found on campuses throughout the Northeast and Midwest. Students at historically

black and women's colleges and commuter schools where few students live in dormitories tend to drink less, the study also indicated.

Identifying the problem of binge drinking is far simpler than finding ways to stop it, Wechsler said. And to make any change, everyone - including alumni who toddle back to "tailgating parties on campus so they can get intoxicated" - needs to assume responsibility in the fight against unhealthy drinking habits, he added. Campuses shouldn't necessarily ban alcohol, just ensure that students of age are drinking responsibly, he said.

"We have to know all the contributing factors to this behavior - the fraternities, the tradition surrounding athletics and the sale of alcohol for dirt cheap in bars and stores throughout the community," Wechsler said. "This is a call for college presidents and students to develop codes of behavior that is acceptable on campus. And as people transgress those codes, they have to be dealt with accordingly."

The crafting of new policies should be interesting, Wechsler said, noting that one in five students are frequent binge drinkers, while another one in five abstain from alcohol consumption. Falling between the two extremes is one-fifth of students who binge occasionally and two-fifths who drink but do not binge.

UC Senate joins in drive to move student off campus

By Chuck Squatriglia
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

BERKELEY, Calif. - In an unprecedented move, the UC-Berkeley student senate will tell David T. Cash Jr. he is not welcome at the school and should leave.

Wednesday night, the senate is expected to endorse a resolution denouncing Cash for failing to prevent the killing of 7-year-old Sherrice Iverson and demanding that he withdraw from the university.

The resolution continues a grassroots campaign to drive the 19-year-old sophomore from campus and marks the first time student leadership has joined the fray. Although the resolution will be debated one day after Jeremy Strohmeyer, Cash's former best friend, pleaded guilty to killing Sherrice, it has been in the works for more than a week.

Supporters of the resolution said there is a rising sentiment on campus that Cash must go.

"People don't want him at Cal," said Patrick Campbell, chief of staff to student body President Irami Osei-Frimpong. "They don't want him

associated with the university."

Although anti-Cash graffiti has appeared on campus and police continue to keep a close watch on the embattled sophomore to protect him from harassment, student anger has waned since a fiery Aug. 26 protest to demand his expulsion. But the campaign to force him out could be jump-started by an attorney's suggestion that Cash was involved in the killing.

On Tuesday, Strohmeyer pleaded guilty to killing Sherrice and most likely will spend the rest of his life in prison.

His attorney, Leslie Abramson, blamed "evil influences," including Cash, for Strohmeyer's actions, and suggested Cash "is not a witness but a co-perpetrator in this case." After Strohmeyer pleaded guilty, Abramson said she would provide unspecified evidence to those who want Cash punished. She did not elaborate and was not available for further comment.

Cash could not be reached for comment, but his attorney, Mark Werksman, told Associated Press that Cash was not involved in the killing.

"At the end of the day, Jeremy Strohmeyer must take responsibility for what he did and he can blame anybody he wants, but he and he alone killed Sherrice Iverson," Werksman said.

That doesn't matter to Cash's detractors, who question the morality of doing nothing to help a child and want him held accountable. But others question whether senators elected to represent students have any business asking one to leave.

"The ramifications of this action are huge," Osei-Frimpong told the Daily Californian student newspaper. "Senators are supposed to represent the student body. I hope they vote 'no' for this bill. I believe in the right to due process."

So do university administrators. Although Chancellor Robert Berdahl has expressed "heartfelt sympathy" to Sherrice's family and called her death "a brutal and senseless act of violence," he said UC cannot punish Cash because the sophomore nuclear engineering major has not been charged with a crime.

Campus News Briefs

Norwich University's Top Cadets Sent To Their Rooms For Year

By Christine Tatum
College Press Exchange

NORTHFIELD, Vt. (CPX) - The two top military cadets at Norwich University have lost their rank and been confined to their rooms for the remainder of the school year for participating in a secret society banned by the school.

For their insubordination, Ross Rapach and Ben Finkelstein also face losing their scholarships from the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps.

The two were among eight students punished for participating in the Skull and Swords, a group once praised by the university for its community service but banned in 1995 after it was found to have engaged in acts of hazing. School officials said the students did not participate in the secret society's hazing but were being punished for disobeying orders.

The punishment, handed down Sept. 8 by the nation's oldest private military college, will allow the students to complete their senior year with no privileges. They will be allowed out of their rooms only to attend class or other official school activities, school officials said. The students also must sign in and out of their rooms and secure special permission to leave campus.

And as if that's not enough, all eight students must do 60 "tours," or marching exercises.

The punishment, a school spokesman said, will let the delinquent students to finish their academic work, but not do much more.

"We're hoping this type of punishment sends a strong message that this type of society has no place at Norwich," said Tom Greene, a spokesman for the university.

U. Of Tennessee At Chattanooga Accused Of Hiding Campus Crime

College Press Exchange

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (CPX) - The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation is looking into allegations that the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga deliberately underreported the number of crimes that happened on campus last year.

University officials said an internal review of the school's reported crime statistics did turn up "a few" incidents that never made it into the record because of "human error." But they largely deny the allegations and blame them on a group of disgruntled campus police officers who are angry about a recent reorganization within the department's ranks.

Nevertheless, state investigators are reviewing a complaint filed Sept. 9 by Security on Campus, a national watchdog organization that monitors campus crime. Officials of the organization, which has an office in Tennessee, said campus officers gave them police records that support the charges. The organization has accused the campus of failing to report several crimes - including one sex offense, three robberies and nine drug offenses.

Investigators said they would visit the campus before October to determine whether the campus police department's records match the number of incidents reported by the university.

Tennessee law requires police departments, including those on campuses, to publish annual crime statistics. Federal law mandates that colleges and universities publish annual crime statistics or face stiff fines. Officials at Security on Campus said they've also filed a complaint against the university with the Department of Education.

Purdue Fires Prof Acquitted Of Stalking Student

College Press Exchange

LAYFAYETTE, Ind. (CPX) - Purdue University announced Thursday that it is taking steps to dismiss from its teaching ranks a professor recently acquitted of stalking a student.

Dong X. Shaw, an assistant professor of industrial engineering, was charged in 1996 with two counts of felony and misdemeanor stalking, but a jury cleared him of those charges last week.

Nevertheless, university officials, who had barred Shaw from the classroom until the case was resolved, said they're pursuing formal action to dismiss him. While Shaw hasn't broken the law, he has violated university policies, school spokesman Joseph L. Bennett said in a statement.

Prosecutors said Shaw invited the student on several dates, called her repeatedly, sent her a Valentine's Day card in 1995 and even paid an uninvited visit to her out-of-state home. Shaw said his interest in the student was "misunderstood."

"Professor Shaw admitted clear violations of university policy during the investigation and during the trial," Bennett wrote. "Each of these actions is inappropriate for a Purdue faculty member and constitutes improper conduct injurious to the welfare of the university. Purdue has an inviolable obligation to ensure its students a safe and non-threatening environment."

Shaw, who was on an accelerated tenure track at Purdue, said he will fight the university's decision.

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