

# ADJUSTING TO BEHREND

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES FACING STUDENTS BEGINNING THEIR FIRST YEAR AT BEHREND? STUDENTS IN THE "WRITING BEHREND" FIRST YEAR SEMINAR OFFER INSIGHTS.

## Culture Shock

by Rehab Elzeney and Nicole Greene

...The gray sky cuddles the tops of trees; the raindrops lightly dance on the sidewalk. Buildings and diversity are merely a myth in this spacious scenery. And if you listen closely, you might even hear the wind blowing. Welcome to Erie, Pennsylvania!

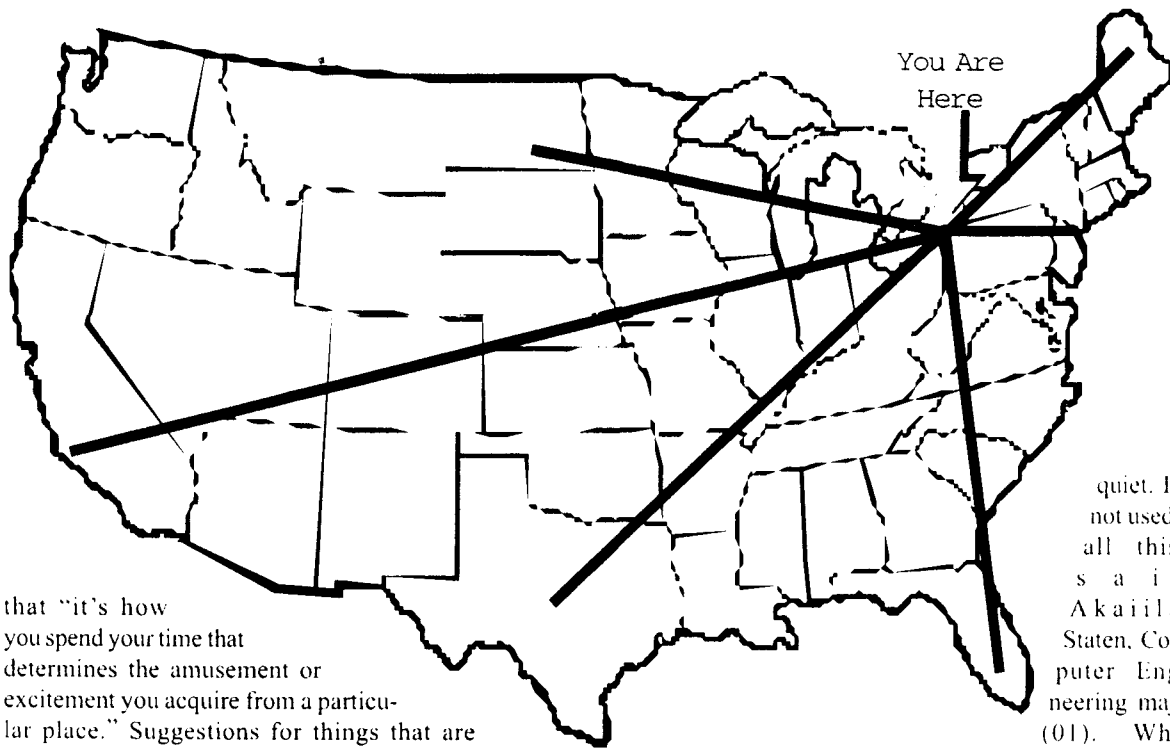
For those coming from foreign countries and urban areas in the U.S., Erie has triggered a series of reactions. These people have had to experience a barely noticeable adjustment. Students all over campus have expressed their 'culture shock' to Erie in different ways.

The changes that many International students have had to cope with ranged from food to the weather to the sense of morality. Abdullah Al-Mutairi, from Kuwait and majoring in Petroleum Engineering (01), says that people "are more individualistic here in the U.S." There is more emphasis on personality and on being distinctly unique in America. Something that was different for Nkiru Chukwumah, Chemical Engineering (01) was the sense of right or wrong here. Being a Nigerian, she was brought up in a more conservative culture, with a clearly defined set of rules. America strikes many International students as a liberal country. Here in the U.S., as a result of much freedom, more actions and beliefs are tolerated. For example, teenage dating is extremely unacceptable in countries in most parts of Africa and the Middle East, but it is more prevalent in America.

People's first reaction to Erie was generally that it was a tranquil city. A mixture of panic, disappointment and bewilderment struck these newcomers. Cathy Tao, Computer Science major (01) from China says that Erie "is a nice place to study, but not a nice place for fun." When asked how their view of Erie had changed, their reactions varied slightly. Andreas Lesjak, a Computer Science major (01) from Germany, now thinks that Erie is smaller than he initially thought.

"It's not as impressive," he says. Nkiru says that the Blue Bus changed her view. She soon realized that there is a K-mart and a zoo here. Although Erie appears to be deserted and lifeless at first glance, time proves to us that there are many things to do in Erie. Chukwumah states

change has been just as significant for them. Making and adjusting from traffic and loud noise to quiet evenings in the dorm has been difficult for many first year students. "Erie is too, too quiet. Being that I'm from Brooklyn, I'm used to hearing things outside 24/7. Traffic here is dead



that "it's how you spend your time that determines the amusement or excitement you acquire from a particular place." Suggestions for things that are needed in Erie included a population, nightlife, a really nice mall, things for young people to do (more clubs), historical sites, cultural activities, and more places to go.

Students from urban areas, on the other hand, had to make the adjustment from the city to the suburbs. The

quiet. I'm not used to all this," said Akilah Staten. Computer Engineering major (01). When asked how Erie differs from home, Melissa Permaul (01) undecided from Patterson, New Jersey responded, "Erie has a lot of open fields and plains. In Patterson, it's the opposite. You're in the middle of everything. There's a lot more to do there."

Adjusting to Erie for urban students has been a slow, gradual change, yet for the most part, it has been a change they don't mind getting accustomed to. For many of the students at Behrend coming from urban backgrounds, there are things missing from the city, as well as from the school. When asked what she thought was missing from Behrend, Twynell Kimble (01) Psychology, from Upper Marlboro, Maryland mentioned black fraternities and sororities, as well as black television and radio stations. Dale Lamb (01), a Computer Engineering major from Mt. Vernon, NY, mentioned that, "People don't integrate a lot. There is too much segregation."

Along with culture shock, many students feel a small dose of nostalgia and homesickness. The absence of things from home has made several urban students homesick. Many have traveled long distances and are not able to go home frequently. When asked if she was homesick, Staten stated, "Very, very, very, extremely; a lot. I'm homesick. I just miss Brooklyn." Although urban students are homesick and miss the environment that they grew up in, many agree that there are advantages to the quiet and smallness that Behrend offers. It promotes better study habits, as well as a focus on education.

Adapting to Erie is something that doesn't happen overnight, especially when you come from the hustle and bustle of city streets, or the completely different environment of a foreign country. Many have traveled large distances in order to attend Behrend, and have found it to be not exactly what they expected. Some have come to find others like themselves, only to find others of a different culture. Becoming adjusted to the Erie lifestyle takes getting used to, yet it is proving to be a very worthwhile experience. Before we realize it, Erie will seem like our own back yard.

## Take the Complications Out of Communicating with E-mail and Phone

by Erin Henninger and Douglas Smith

The beginning of college means leaving home even though it does not leave us. The most popular devices to stay connected are the technologically advanced e-mail systems and the traditional telephone.

It's never been easier or cheaper to keep in touch with friends, family, and school since the invention of e-mail. Behrend tries to keep in touch with students via the Internet communicating messages about new clubs and upcoming events. So do professors who may send test scores to their students e-mail accounts via the Internet. However, most students seem to use their e-mail primarily to keep in touch with the people they left at home, or other friends who went off to college.

There are several areas around campus to check your account, including terminals in the Library, Academic, Hammermill, and Reed. After visiting the terminals in the Reed Union building, we talked to several freshmen to see who they were trying to keep in contact with. We asked Matt Hillwig, (01, Biochemistry) how often he checks his e-mail account, and he replied, "Which one?" It seems like most students here are operating two or more different e-mail accounts, one for school stuff and the other, an AOL or Hotmail address.

When we asked Hillwig if he used e-mail to keep in touch with his parents, he said, "No, 'cause I took the computer."

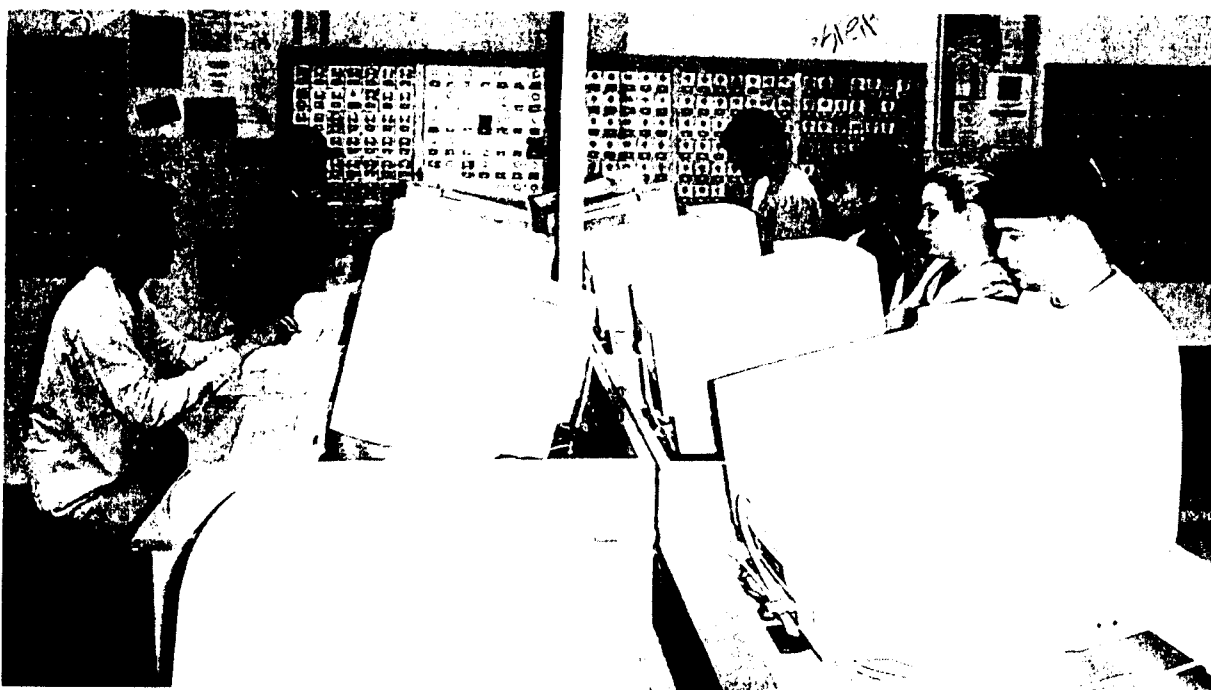
When asked, Hope Woefel (01, Marketing) said she felt more connected to Penn State-Behrend with the messages on her e-mail account concerning activities on campus. Woefel says she checks her e-mail "once a day to keep in touch with friends and family back home." Joe Deibaugh (01, Plastics Technology) says he also uses e-mail to keep in touch with friends and family and checks his account about twice a day.

E-mail helps everyone to stay in touch with his or her loved ones, but for some, it isn't as convenient. For in-

stance, take Jason Smith (01, Computer Engineering) who broke his thumb playing in the three-on-three tournament here at Behrend. He says, "The broken thumb makes it harder to e-mail," but says he still checks his e-mail once a day to keep in touch with friends and also his parents

friend from back home. Also, we try to keep up with those that went to other schools all across the country. Once again, one of the older inventions, the telephone, becomes a vital part in the effort to stay connected.

Students have many alternatives in surviving the



who e-mail him weekly.

For those that find conventional methods easier, the telephone is the main method of communication. The issue of money comes into play because the phone bill finally has our name on it.

Sometimes it's just nice to hear the voice of that special someone. Other times students want to surprise a

trauma of a large phone bill. Some students send the bill home to be paid, others buy calling cards through their local long distance company, and any other possibility to save money is sought.

"I have been through this once already, but having moved eight hours away from home the phone bill was a bit surprising. I'm paying around sixty dollars and that

isn't counting the phone cards. I could have sent it home, but I was the one who called, so I'll pay it," states Jon Fallon, 03, Pre-Law.

However for those that must pay their phone bill there is a website that allows the student to track their bill keeping them up-to-date on the current balance, who was called, and when the call was placed. This site, [www.acus.com](http://www.acus.com), requires your PIN number and account number that has been provided in order to access your information.

You can also get information on the AT&T Student Advantage Card, which works like a phone card. Under the "using your service" link many helpful hints can be found. This link provides a calling guide including dialing instructions, terms and conditions, and customer care. It also provides a student account manager accessible through a toll-free 800 number that gives you the complete menu of the types of account information that can be sought through the voice mail system.

A very important part of the aforementioned link is rate information. Clicking on rate information will lead you to a screen with two text boxes. By simply entering the area code and number from which you are calling and to which you are calling the rates will be displayed on your monitor. Rates for international calls can also be accessed.

Your account balance, billing address, credit limit, current and past calls, billing information, and calling plan can also be found on the site. This is extremely helpful for those living further away because the website makes it easier to keep track of calls made and current balances.

The phone cannot be eliminated as a way of communicating by any means. However, e-mail will suffice in those times when communication has to be constant. If boredom strikes and you are stuck in your room, pick up the phone or write an e-mail and stay connected with the people you knew before Behrend.

## What's Your Major?

by Matt Eaton and Jermaine Hardy

Every year, a new crop of freshmen is brought into college, and every year they are faced with the same question. What is your major? This one query can be the bane of students' lives; after all, they already have to go to class, fill out general education requirements and just face the pressures of daily college life. Picking a subject to study for the rest of college life can be stressful. Some students, however, just prefer to be an undecided.

"I want to try all different types of classes and all types of fields," explained Ryan Mema, a first year student.

Many students might agree, and that is precisely the reason that the Division of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) was founded. The DUS realizes that while some students already know exactly what they want to do with their lives, some students have not made their life decisions, and some do not even have a clue what they want to do. The DUS is available for counseling, advising undecided students and helping them pick a field of study. In a world where academic options

seem almost limitless, this program is designed to make students aware of the choices they have and guide them to a decision where they can be happy and productive.

Another option students have is to go to the Career Development Center and take a test to find out what career might be right for them. "I took a career interest test. That helped me," said Cliff White, a sophomore. Tests like these can help direct students to a certain career and help them in making academic choices. The Career Development Center in conjunction with DUS can be just what students need in order to figure out what they want out of a college education.

The basic idea behind both of these programs is to make sure that students do not feel overwhelmed by academic pressures and that it is okay to be undecided. Students do not even have to apply for a major until the spring of their sophomore year. That leaves two years and four semesters of sampling before a decision has to be made. Put that way, being undecided should not sound like such a problem.



## Getting Involved at Behrend

by Kellie Chase and Julie Harper

Becoming involved in campus activities is a vital aspect of college life that many freshmen overlook their first few months at school. The best way to enrich your life while you are attending school at Behrend is to become an active participant in any of the numerous clubs and organizations.

There are over 70 student activities offered at Behrend, one of which is sure to appeal to you, whether you want to pursue a particular interest or seek new experiences.

There are many academic organizations that can be used to supplement your experiences in the classroom. Students who are enrolled in specific majors have come together to form clubs and societies, such as for accounting or chemistry.

There are also several honor societies on campus. For example, Psi Chi is a national honor society for students at Behrend who are majoring in psychology.

A major part of campus life is determined by the various governing organizations. The Student Government Association has a tremendous effect on what goes on at Behrend, both academically and socially. The Commuter Council is a great source for commuting students who

often feel left out of the college community. Also playing a large role in the Behrend community is the Lion Entertainment Board, which is in charge of running a majority of the cultural events on campus, including the weekly movies and the entertainment at Bruno's.

If you're looking to meet people who share the same interests as you, there are also an abundance of special interest organizations that may be appealing. Alpha Phi Omega is a co-ed fraternity whose objective is to provide service to people who need it while instilling leadership qualities among its members. Or maybe you're interested in showing your Behrend pride. If that's the case, then joining the Lion Ambassadors may be the organization for you, or perhaps being a cheerleader would be a good way for you to express your pride.

There are many organizations to become involved with while you're at Behrend. If any of the organizations mentioned in this article appeal to you and you would like to learn more about joining them (or get a full listing of the activities on campus), contact the Office of Student Activities, located on the first floor of the Reed Union Building, at 898-6220.