

Returning Students Add Flavor to Classes

Robin Price
Capital Times Staff

One look around the Lion's Den and you know that Penn State Harrisburg is not made up of the ordinary college population.

A recent focus at PSH is on its ethnic and cultural diversity, but perhaps even more apparent is the variation of age on campus--among a student body who's lives and educational goals are diverse.

There are of course many "typical" college students, but 66% of the total student body now consists of students who are over age 25. Students in this age group comprise 44% of all undergraduate students, and 56 % of students in graduate programs, said Dorothy Guy, PSH Registrar.

The last decade has seen such an increase in the number of returning students that the average age at PSH now is about 28, said Linda Meashey, Academic Assistance Counselor.

We tend to think of the returning student as a woman, perhaps recently divorced, or one who possibly postponed her education to raise children, but in actuality, a large number of returning students are men, especially in the science and engineering technology, and business departments.

Only 16% of all returning students presently live on campus--the majority of those live in Meade Heights, according to the Registrar's office preliminary Fall 90 enrollment data.

What brings these folks, some of whom have college-aged children of their own, back to school? Meashey attributes this increase to the employment limits one now faces without a degree. Ten or 15 years ago it was still possible to "work one's way up" in a factory job into a management position, "Now even to manage a McDonald's, a Bachelor's degree is required," Meashey said.

Flexibility of programs and class scheduling, which allow for the juggling of a family and job, makes PSH ideal for the returning student, said Meashey. She also cites the lack of a gym requirement as a factor in enrollment. "The returning student feels comfortable here, and doesn't feel like he or she is surrounded by children."

Meashey should know. She attended PSH as a returning student herself, 12 years after dropping out of main campus to raise a family. After receiving a bachelor's degree here, she received a master's degree from Millersville University.

Meashey describes the older student as typically more highly motivated than his younger counterpart. She says they are usually apprehensive about their competitiveness, but that these worries prove to be unfounded. Their life experiences and willingness to work hard quickly offsets any shortcomings they face from being away from school for a while.

"The older student typically ruins the curve," says Meashey, referring to their

high grades.

Dr. William Mahar, Division Head of Humanities, which houses a large number of older students, has much admiration for the returning student. He calls them an "inspiration", with mostly distinguished academic records.

"The returning student brings experience and wisdom to class discussions," Mahar said. "Their life experience enables them to challenge values and ideas in a way that we in the humanities department particularly encourage. Many of them enter college lacking self-esteem and self-confidence, but after one or two semesters the student realizes that he has significant abilities and accomplishments that are every bit as valuable as the younger student".

"After graduation most returning students realize grand accomplishments and are eminently hireable because of what employers see as probable longevity," said Mahar. "All in all, we are very positive about our returning students."

Although many non-traditional students have clear goals in mind, some students, like Debra Friday, mother of a 24- and 26-year-old, prefer to start out slowly in order to "get their feet wet", and attend school part time. Friday says she just enjoys learning, "To me learning isn't a means to an end, but an end in itself".

Others, like 34-year-old humanities major Bob Fellman jump right into their studies. Bob who attended college previously says, "I flunked out the first time; I just wasn't ready". After nine years of employment as a ballroom dancing instructor at Arthur Murray's, Fellman moved back home at age 30 to attend school full time. He plans to teach after graduate school.

A 32-year-old registered nurse who prefers to remain anonymous says after 12 years of intensive care nursing she needed to "learn to use the other side of her brain." Now she is majoring in literature. "It's made the stresses at work seem more bearable, and given me an outlet to channel some of my creative energies. I enjoy meeting people who are not involved in medicine. It's important to be a well rounded person". She said she enjoys leading a "double life", and that her studies have made her life seem more balanced.

Martin O'Shell, American studies major, earned an associate degree from Penn State Hershey, and now the 50-year-old grandfather attends PSH for "self-enrichment". He calls learning his hobby, and says he wanted something more than watching TV every night.

Professors sing the praises of the returning student and feel they are an asset to the class. Dr. Faulhaber, part time humanities professor says the older student is "better than the average 18-20 year-old because they can better weigh the value of what they're buying". Dr. Parisi, Assistant Professor of humanities and communications says, "They don't have hormonal issues to work out."

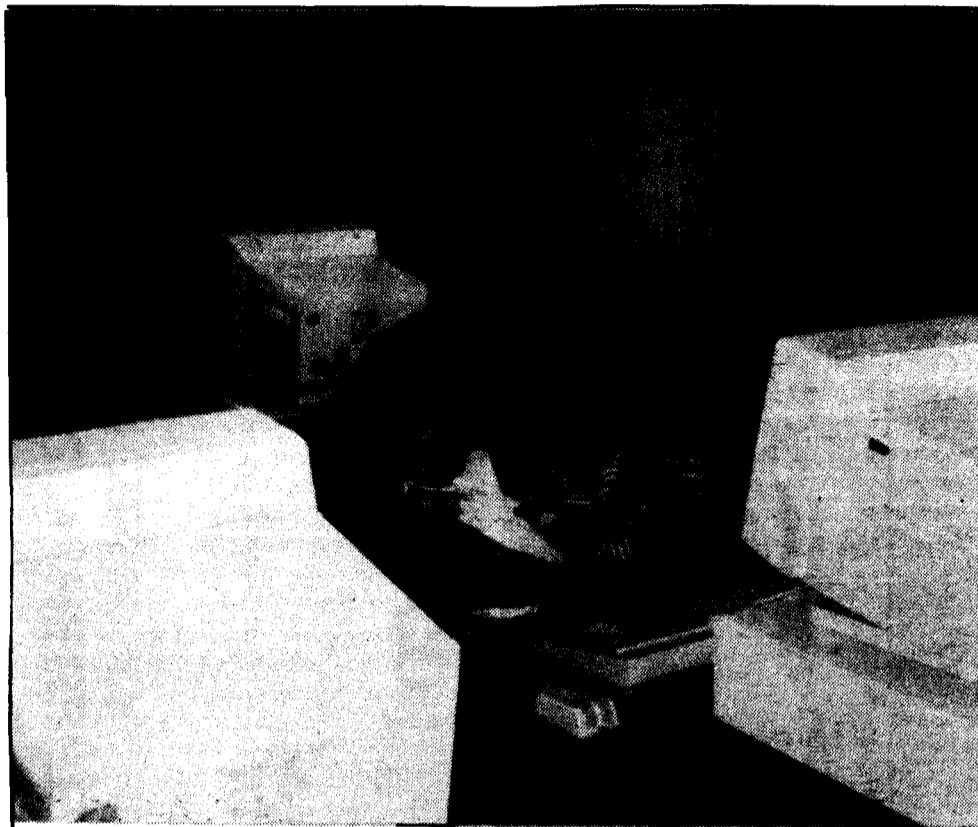



Photo by Janet Widoff

Chris Burns, dedicated father and student, shows his twin daughters how to use a PS/2z. Chris evidently has the "key" to a good working schedule. The girls were perfectly content and happy to be in the Computer Center at PSH!

DOMINO'S PIZZA



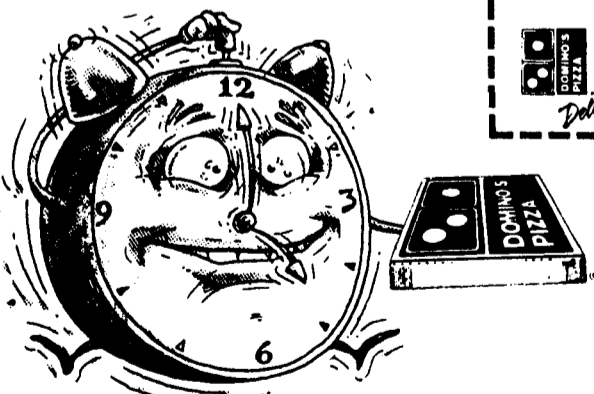
COUPON CRUSHER

CARRYOUT
Matches all competitive carryout coupons plus gives you the greatest pizza in town, with full hearty portions.

DELIVERY
Matches all competitive delivery coupons plus gives you the greatest pizza in town, with full, hearty portions.

Limited delivery area • One coupon per order • At participating stores only • Not valid with any other offer • Drivers carry less than \$20.00

HOURS:
11-12 SUN.-THURS.
11-1 FRI.



TWO ORIGINAL 12" CHEESE PIZZAS ONLY
\$8.88

TOPPINGS \$1.50 COVERS BOTH PIZZAS
Reg. \$12.58
(Price reflects cash discount)

Limited delivery area • One coupon per order • Not valid with any other offer • At participating stores only • Drivers carry less than \$20.00

PIZZABUCK

ONE

DOMINO'S PIZZA

GOOD FOR \$1.00 OFF YOUR NEXT ORDER

This coupon not valid with any other offer. One coupon per pizza. Limited Delivery area. Includes all applicable state and local taxes.

IT'S
DOMINOS
TIME!
944-4141