

More letters to the editor Applauds column questioning diversity

Dear Editor:

I am an international student in the graduate program in American Studies at Penn State Harrisburg. I am writing to react to the tremendously well written and enlightening article of Makito Yurita that you published in your January 22 issue of the Capital Times.

First, I applaud Makito for being a courageous voice that raises the complex issue of the lack of communication between U.S. students and international students at Penn State Harrisburg. Common sense and facts make it obvious that there is a detrimental and incommensurable lack of communication between U.S. students and international students in our campus. Though this is true, we have to recognize that this type of problem is present in almost all colleges and universities in the U.S.

The sad part is that, we students should start a new heroic action by breaking the ice of denial and stereotype that we develop about one another. At first, the lack of communication between us is a direct effect of a common stereotype that we develop because of the cultural and linguistic differences that exist between us. From my daily informal discussions with some of my fellows, I have found that some U.S. students are often reluctant to interact with international students because they are afraid of making comments or cultural "faux pas" that may hurt the feelings or sensibilities of the international student.

In the same way, some international students do not fraternize much with U.S. students because they are afraid that their foreign accent be misunderstood or mocked afterwards. By holding these irrational stereotypes, we all detrimentally reinforce our lack of interpersonal communications. As Makito suggests, one way of overcoming the problem is to throw away our unjustified beliefs and start building bridges.

I sacredly agree with Makito when he points the invaluable exchange of knowledge that we can learn from one another. I recognize that without my personal interaction with U.S. students, I could not have acquired much of the intellectual, cultural and folkloric knowledge that I often use in my personal diary and my American Studies research projects. In the same way, a few U.S. students are happy when I discuss with them issues touching the literature and the politics of my beloved Senegal.

I wish other students of our campus will follow Makito's path by investigating further the issues that he has already raised. We can learn a lot from these issues and help build the bridge of communication. Thank you very much for your attention.

Sincerely,
Babacar M'Baye

Yin and Yang, Fung Shui and fish tanks?

by Makito Yurita

Have you ever visited the home of a Chinese family? Even if you have not, you have probably been inside of a Chinese restaurant at least once. Whether you were in a Chinese household or restaurant before, you may have wondered about its unique design and furnishings. For example, were you curious about the small, octagonal mirror hanging above the entrance? Did you wonder about the pair of bronze lions that you saw?

Since there are many superstitious beliefs within the Chinese culture, much consideration and planning is put into the design, furnishings, and layout of any building. In Hong Kong, despite the rapid Westernization that took place during British colonization, nearly all buildings are designed in consideration of fung shui, or "wind-water beliefs." The Chinese believe that there are eight essential elements of nature and spirit related to Yin (female-passive) and Yang (male-active) forces which rule everything in this world. They feel that these eight elements must be carefully balanced in order to maintain harmony in their lives.

Thus, whenever businessmen arrange their office, or a family moves into a new home, they must first consult a master of fung shui to find the best alignment and location for their chairs, tables, and other furniture. The location of walls, doors, and bathrooms

within a building are also carefully examined by fung shui in order to find the right balance of elements. It is thought that, without the right balance, disharmony will occur.

In many Chinese households, restaurants, and offices, you will probably find an aquarium somewhere. The Chinese believe that if you do not have a view of water from

government auctions off car license plates at charity events, license plates which contain these "lucky" numbers are often sold for over a million dollars!! Can you imagine paying over a million dollars for a license plate?

By now you are probably wondering about the significance of the mirror and lions found within a Chinese home or restaurant. Most

Chinese households or restaurants will have a mirror hanging above the doorway because it is believed that evil spirits will be scared off when they see their reflections. The mirror deflects any evil influences from the house. Likewise, the bronze pair of lions also serves as a protective barrier: lions looking toward the outside will protect the wealth and occupants of the dwelling or place of business.

After learning these interesting aspects about the Chinese culture,

"Most Chinese households or restaurants will have a mirror hanging above the doorway because it is believed that evil spirits will be scared off when they see their reflections."

your house, restaurant, or office, you must bring water inside. This is because water represents the pool of wealth in fung shui. Thus, it is not unusual to see large numbers of fish-tanks in places wherever money is involved, such as restaurants and offices.

The Cantonese, or Southeast Chinese, have many superstitions about numbers too. Some numbers that are considered to be particularly auspicious are three, eight and nine. In Chinese, the number three sounds like "life", eight has a similar sound to "prosperity", and nine recalls "eternity." When the Hong Kong

you may want to apply some of its ideas and beliefs into your own life. If you are worrying about the growing pile of bills arriving at your doorstep, perhaps a little aquarium of water is the solution you are looking for. No guarantee is promised here of course, but it wouldn't hurt to try, would it?

Makito will help present the Japanese cuisine on the menu for the next PSH "Lunch with an International Flavor." This month's dinner will be held in the Gallery Lounge on Wed., Feb. 25.

Thank God for computers . . . I think

by Devin Graham

I enjoy getting mail. I think everyone enjoys peering into their mailbox to see what the mailman has brought them. Several weeks ago I went to my mailbox and had a look. Oh glorious day, there were several letters inside, each one bearing my name. It was the usual assortment of junk mail, credit card applications and a mailing from Penn State. I opened it on my walk back from the mailbox and discovered my semester bill. I scanned down through the itemized list and noticed the unusually high tuition rate. Next I saw the amount of student aid that has been subtracted from my tuition; that made me a little bit happier. Finally, I saw \$75.00 listed as a computer fee.

I would not mind paying this fee if the computers at Penn State actually worked, or if the fee went to fixing or buying new equipment; but it doesn't seem to be. More often than not there is a problem with not one, but several of the computers.

My main use of the school computers concerns my e-mail service. I have used Eudora from the time I started attending Penn State York to the present. The whole time I used the same disk. It functioned flawlessly for two years. Shortly after my arrival at Penn State Harrisburg the computers began telling me they could not read my disk. I asked the computer lab assistant to help me. He

told me that my disk was "fraudulent" and I should buy a "name brand disk" which the computer center conveniently had on hand.

I buy the disk and it works fine. Splendid, my troubles are over, or are they? About an hour later I returned to the lab to finish mailing people and my brand new, name brand disk could not be read by the computer. This time, I went across the hall to talk to Terry Majzlik. She wasn't there. So, I was put on the phone with a "computer expert" at University Park. He took a look at my mail, decided that I had no important mail and then deleted it for me. His advice was to wait an hour before using my account again.

Hours later my account was still not working. I found Terry Majzlik and asked her to help me with my problem. She ran a diagnostic test on my disk that would have put the launching of the space shuttle to shame. It was determined that there is no problem with the disk—even though it still will not work.

The next day I entered the computer lab full of hopes of using e-mail and what happens? My new disk is fraudulent. I am not sure whether I want to cry or be violent.

I planned to go through an elaborate set of tests designed to protect my disk from any and all possible modes of deterioration. I purchased a pair of latex gloves. To my advantage, I do not live under any high-tension

electric wires. And the only nuclear testing occurred thousands of miles away, so the electromagnetic pulse should not have affected my disk.

This experiment may have yielded some interesting results, however, it took only two hours for this disk to become fraudulent. This in turn leads me to the conclusion that either this is an elaborate conspiracy on the part of Penn State to get the students to buy more disks, or the computers are junk. I am inclined to believe the latter.

I am not the only person who has experienced trouble with the school computers. Expletives can be heard coming from numerous students on a daily basis. They have lost papers, files, even entire projects.

This raises various questions, such as what happens when a student is turned loose to look for jobs? How many qualified computer instructors are going to want to teach here once they see the outdated computers they will be working with? And finally, why should I have to pay the \$75.00 computer fee if the equipment only works part of the time? I feel I should only pay part of the fee.

The computer fee is not negotiable, all students must pay it. I would gladly not pay the fee and in return never touch one of the school's double-booted, non Windows 95 supporting computers. Unfortunately, I have no choice and neither do the rest of you.