opinions

editorial opinion

Securing the rites of spring

Although the air may still be too cold for the sun worshippers who usually mark the coming of spring at the University, two Penn State spring traditions are on the horizon — along with the problems that often accompany them.

Both the Phi Psi 500, to be held this weekend, and the Briarwood Bash, scheduled for May 6, cannot escape the potential difficulties that arise when hundreds of people gather together — especially when they gather to drink alcohol.

More of the trouble is usually caused by the guests and spectators than by the actual participants.

When it began nine years ago, the Briarwood Bash was a celebration for the people who reside in the complex at 681-B Waupelani Drive. However, what started as a private party for residents has become an event attended by hundreds of people.

Those hundreds have caused parking violations, excessive noise, scattered litter and other havoc. And as in all events of this type, enforcement of laws against against serving alcohol to intoxicated or underaged individuals is nearly impossible.

The Phi Psi 500 has been able to avoid some of these same problems.

During the yearlong planning for the race, Phi Kappa Psi fraternity received considerable input from the State College Police Department because the race occurs on borough streets.

Noise is less of a problem for the race than for the bash because the Phi Psi is held downtown during the afternoon. Also, that event's organizers clean the race route immediately after the race, resulting in streets often cleaner than before the race.

However, the Phi Psi has some unique problems. Because some student marshals drink and get drunk during the race, they do not adequately control the crowd. This year members of the Total Alcohol Awareness Program have worked with the marshals to avoid the situation.

For the Briarwood Bash, though, the complaints have increased — and some were voiced at a recent State College Municipal Council meeting. Because the event is held on private property, it cannot be prohibited by the borough.

But the police department could make it difficult for the participants if the situation gets out of hand.

Last year, the department gave 134 tickets for parking violations at the bash. Officers could also cite participants for violations of noise, zoning and alcohol laws and codes.

The department has been working with Briarwood Bash organizers this year to increase awareness of the laws and codes and to make parking arrangements. Also, the organizers have agreed to limit publicity for the event.

Although fewer complaints have surfaced about the Phi Psi, area business representatives have voiced concern about damage to Saturday business, increasing the difficulty organizers faced obtaining permits. Therefore, a broken window, a fight, or a serious injury could endanger the future of the race.

The organizers of the events have done their best to avoid straining the town and gown relationship. But the chief responsibility lies on the shoulders of each person who participates in these and other rites of spring.

The anonymity that a crowd may offer is no excuse for mayhem.

Don't destroy what many have worked so diligently to provide and what thousands should be allowed to enjoy in the future.

"THIS PHOTOGRAPH SHOWS THE MASSIVE BUILDUP OF RESISTANCE TO MY MILITARY BUDGET."

reader opinion

Offer support

Every spring, for the last 15 years, the Phi Kappa Psi fraternity has raised money for a worthwhile charity through their philanthropy, the Phi Psi 500. Once again it's time for this special event, to be held tomorrow.

This year the proceeds will be given to the Association for Retarded Citizens, Centre County, thus enabling them to start a comprehensive jobs program for retarded adults.

We at ARC are most grateful to the brothers of Phi Kappa Psi for their enthusiasm, untiring energy and hard work to help these retarded citizens.

Won't you all come out Saturday and support the 1983 Phi Psi 500. In turn, you will be giving the retarded citizen a chance to succeed.

Delbert McEwen, senior administrative officer, ARC
Linda Hoffman, vice president ARC
April 15

Just rewards

Senator Haack: Boy, are our faces red. We now see the folly of our ways.

USG members, all of whom either run for their office or volunteer for their job, entirely of their own free will, obviously deserve at least a $900 banquet for doing a job they volunteered to do.

But why stop there? Let's have a $900 banquets for all the people on campus who donate blood, are big brothers/sisters, who dance for charity and everyone else who willingly gives up their time but are not in position to reward themselves with a $900 pat on the back. Boy, are you right.

You work so hard for the students I guess we owe you something.

Bill Jacoby 9th-music education
Albert Strausser 6th-accounting
Former political mavericks
April 21

Multi-racial

I'd like to address several of Larry Young's comments concerning black and white lifestyles here at Penn State.

First of all, I find it incredible that, Mr. Young, as the director of the Paul Robeson Cultural Center, can make such a prejudiced, blanketed statement such as: "White students assume the real world is like the University; thus, they beleive they cannot learn from other races."

Come off it, Mr. Young, where did you find the basis for that sweeping generalization? Have you surveyed a majority of the white student population to feel confident enough to voice the opinions of roughly thirty-four thousand white students?

Two facts assure me that this university is like the real world: your asinine comments, and the fact that more than two races compose Penn State's population.

To blanketly say that white students believe they cannot learn from other races is total nonsense. Mr. Young, just how many other races do you interact with or learn from daily? When is the last time you stepped into the International Lounge in Kern and socialized with other races?

If one were to believe your narrow-minded comments, he or she would think that the only two races at Penn State were black and white!

I teach a minimum of five different races daily in my Intensive English course, and each term these races are likely to change; therefore, I find myself learning from other races daily — what about you? I recommend that you get off the Pittsburgh bandwagon and take your sweeping generalizations about Penn State's white student population with you.

And on what grounds can you tell the public that white students don't step into the Cultural Center because we "don't speak the same language — we're afraid."

Until you've spent time in the International Lounge and recognized that many other races exist here at Penn State, then I suggest that you keep your generalizations to yourself.

This university is representative of the real world; we live in an international world, not a world of white students vs. black students. Your attitude and rhetoric are poor attempts at promoting your caude, and you have now convinced at least one white student that a step into the Paul Robeson Cultural Center would be a waste of energy.

I'll continue learning from other cultures not to possess these false generalizations you so profoundly state.

Leigh Thompson, graduate-linguistics
April 15

Homebodies

West College Avenue — it ain't pretty, but it's home!

Residents of 812 West:

Paul Bauerle, graduate-counselor education
Jane Devlin, 15th-architectural engineering
Doug Wrenn, 15th-achitectural engineering
Diane Ellsworth, 14th-English and secondary engineering
Jeannine Fisher, 5th-architectural engineering
April 18

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Plus/minus grading more a minus than a plus

Among the informal gatherings of those who discuss academics and the University, somebody had an idea — a seemingly brillant idea.

"Hey, while we're changing from terms to semesters," the person must have begun, "why not change the grading system too?"

Whose idea was it? No one really knows. No one really cares. Only change seems preferred by the privileged few who, in informal circles, decide on the academic future of this University.

"A plus/minus grading system seems more fair," the speaker continues. I could just see some listeners nodding approvingly without thinking.

"Besides, it's more accurate," would state another individual, who is as misled as he or she is opinionated.

Yes, once again the topic of changing the grading system surfaces. Only problem is that the idea is based more on opinion than fact.

A plus/minus system is not a novice idea to the University; nor is it the latest thing in grading. In fact, it was considered 20 years ago.

But wait — if it is such a good idea, then why has it not been adopted?

The answer is simple. Research and experimentation on grading systems have had only negative results as far as plus/minus systems go. The systems are no good; they would not benefit students or faculty.

Twenty years ago, the topic of grading accuracy and feasibility was more commonly discussed, and it will pay to review some basic thoughts and concepts.

In 1963, the University looked into the grading systems of 540 other colleges throughout the United States. It was then the opinion that the simpler five grade system of A, B, C, D and F was the best available system.

A poll of 556 University students taken in February 1963 showed that 57 percent of those polled preferred the system we still have today.

Compare that to the recent poll in which a slight majority of 251 students questioned supported the plus/minus (suffix) system. However, because only 251 of 34,000 students were questioned in 1983 and 556 of 6,700 were in 1963, it is likely the 1963 poll was more representative of student opinions.

Because of the recent poll's results, the issue may soon reach the floor of the University Faculty Senate.

However, no faculty member or student senator that I talked with has seriously researched the potential effects and feasibility of adding the plus/minus suffixes — surely, though, they would find little evidence to support it.

Let me give a few hints on what they would find and why the plus/minus system would be undesirable.

One likely effect would be a drop in the overall grade point averages of the students.

Two years ago, Donald Neiser, Elizabethtown College's registrar, did a study of 764 grades from 32 courses to determine how GPAs would change when plus/minus suffixes were added. In his report to the Dean of Faculty and Academics, Neiser concluded that "overall . . . grades decreased when applying the plus/minus suffixes to the grades."

A similar study of 2,000 high school students by science teacher James L. Shannon reported that:

"(1) 24.05 percent of the students increased their GPA; 49.10 percent decreased their GPA; 26.85 percent remained unchanged.

"(2) the change in GPA was significant, and

"(3) a student would have a greater probability of lowering his GPA using a twelve point scale."

In my literature research, I have found no studies that showed the opposite effect: that the overall GPA increased.

A general drop in GPAs can be expected, but we first need to address a more basic question: "Would we lose any reliability in grading by using a twelve point scale instead of a five point scale?"

Unfortunately, most discussion and research on grade reliability occurred prior to the 1960s, as Lanny O. Soderberg, associate professor of education at the University of Rhode Island, suggests.

Soderberg aptly summarized the problem of reliability by stating, "Too often the criteria for grading are not comprehensive enough to represent adequate sampling of achievement."

Soderberg's conclusions are similar to what Edward Clark, professor emeritus of Northwestern University, concluded in 1964. According to Clark, it is a paradox that even though "college grades are constantly used in awarding prizes or in determining admissions to another college or graduate school, and even in estimating acceptability for employment, very little has been published about the reliability of individual grade point averages."

Penn State hosted the 58th annual meeting of the American Psychological Association in 1950. At that conference, Clark presented a study of about 3,200 individual grading records comparing the reliability of an eight point system with a five point system.

He concluded that "apparently the grades as a whole were so unreliable that little was lost by changing to a five step system."

The way college grades are issued today differs greatly from the way they were issued 40, 50 or 60 years ago. According to Francis Stroup, who taught physical education at Northern Illinois University, in the '30s North Texas State College would hold faculty sessions to decide borderline grades of individual students. (Could you imagine that happening now?)

These same academic communities, which had more information on which to base an individual grade, recognized the difficulty in estimating grades. "Why attempt to express in grades a precision that cannot be measured?" they reasoned.

Today, with larger class sizes, we have less information on which to base grades. So then, why should we try to express a precision that cannot be measured?

Considering that using a plus/minus system would cause more hassle for professors — it will triple the amount of borderline cases — and considering that it would lower most students' GPAs with no proof of better reliability, why should we adopted it?

The idea of using plus/minus suffixes should remain as it now stands — an idea.

Erik Randolph is an 11th-term political science major and a columnist for The Daily Collegian.

reader opinion

Business, as usual

"The main question is, can we trust the Soviet Union?" — Carol Frank, "Nuclear freeze too risky for now" (April 21).

Can we trust the USSR? Can we trust the United States? The answer to both questions is NO.

The fact is that Mr. Reagan and all other recent presidents have been aced with stiff pressure from the Military-Industrial complex. The issue is money, money, money, not winning an arms race or nuclear war (both of which are impossible).

Our government knows that the Soviets are as afraid of a nuclear war as we are. They also know that an arms race is a drain on their economy. For the United States an arms race is a great boon for industry's profits. It is in industry's best interest to continue and even propagate the arms race, while the Soviets can only gain by stopping the buildup.

I'm sick of hearing about "windows of vulnerability" and "Soviet nuclear superiority." If either of these things were true and the Soviets had any intention of starting a war with us, I wouldn't be alive right now to write this.

If the Soviets are so superior, why don't they march into Europe, take over the Middle East, destroy China and blow us off the face of the earth? What is stopping them? They have nuclear superiority, don't they? Their only interest is destroying the "ever law-abiding" United States, isn't it?

Just because the United States is a representative democracy and the Soviet Union is a totalitarian dictatorship we can't assume that we, the United States, won't ever do anything bad.

Take off your rose-colored glasses, Carol, and take a minute to look up from your apple pie, baseball, home sweet home, mom and the old red, white and blue to see the true nature of our world. The United States is not holier than thou. It is not even close.

Quentin Davis 3rd-film
April 21

Innocent humor

"Port of call — Sea of Japan! Drn-drn-drn-drn, drn-drn-drn, drn-drn-drn!" (Camouflaged men, fatigues whipping in the wind, storm into the trench and man their artillery. A bazooka fires! Four hundred yards away, a birdie flutters to the ground and is handily swatted away!)

"Badminton — it's not just a sport — it's a quiche-eater's pasttime!"

Now, now, Quirt, let's-not be priggish! My letter merely meant to show my displeasure with recent modifications within the Intramural program. It was not my intention to malign badminton players, Bob Hope, or even laundry ticket machines.

A match such as you propose would prove nothing except that fact that I haven't played badminton since I was seven, when I played at a family picnic in Aunt Ruth's backyard. (I wasn't a REAL kid!)

I never realized, however, how enjoyable the belittling of badminton can be! I think it has found its place between crushing beer cans and ripping telephone books in half on my list of things to do!

Being serious for a minute, if my feeble attempts at humor have offended anyone out there, I sincerely apologize. They were intended not for you, but for the enjoyment of those people who believe enough in themselves and what they do that they aren't antagonized by petty jibes on the editorial page. A famous quote reads: "No one can be intimidated without their own consent."

For the record, not only was I not a REAL kid, I'm not a REAL man — just a guy who wanted a theme for his letter! I don't refer to girls as "chicks"; I enjoy listening to Dan Fogelberg; and — heaven forbid — I even like quiche!

In fact, according to the official book, REAL men don't play handball either.

I enjoyed the book.

Bill Gross 9th-civil engineering
April 19

WINDOW OF GULLIBILITY

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announces
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