

opinions

The Daily Collegian
Wednesday, Aug. 29, 1984

editorial opinion

Admit it, then change it

"System been down long?" That is the caption accompanying a cartoon of a man addressing a skeleton sitting at a computer terminal. The cartoon has recently appeared in several offices on campus.

Students waiting in endless lines while the University's computer system is down are not laughing. Neither are harried office workers trying to catch up with huge backlogs.

The "Nittany Line" is not new to the University. But registration, billing and drop/add by computer are. And although the new system went into effect during the Summer Session, a full complement of students to test its capabilities had to wait until Fall Semester. The results have been far from perfect.

Signs that all was not well with the computer system surfaced last month when recent graduates received tuition bills. Also, many students received their bills less than a week before they were due. The Bursar's Office extended the payment deadline because of this.

Initially the computer pre-registration appeared to be working well. About 21,000 students received complete schedules. Those with incomplete schedules made adjustments over a toll-free telephone line. But those with complete schedules were told to wait until the drop/add period to make changes.

That was when the real problems began. Some students were dropped from all their courses because of an error resulting in the Registrar's Office's belief that their bills had not been paid. For drop/add, slow computer response time resulted in lines extending down hallways and even outdoors at some departments. The waiting time was so long that some departments distributed free sodas and ice cream coupons. In spite of these considerations, some students are

understandably left wondering if perhaps the old system was superior. Any time changes are made in an established procedure, problems are to be expected. And University administrators have offered assurances that the system will operate smoothly in time.

But the problems with the system appear to be so severe that they raise serious questions as to whether the University made wise choices in its selection of computers and software. It appears that at the very least, the system and software were not adequately tested and debugged.

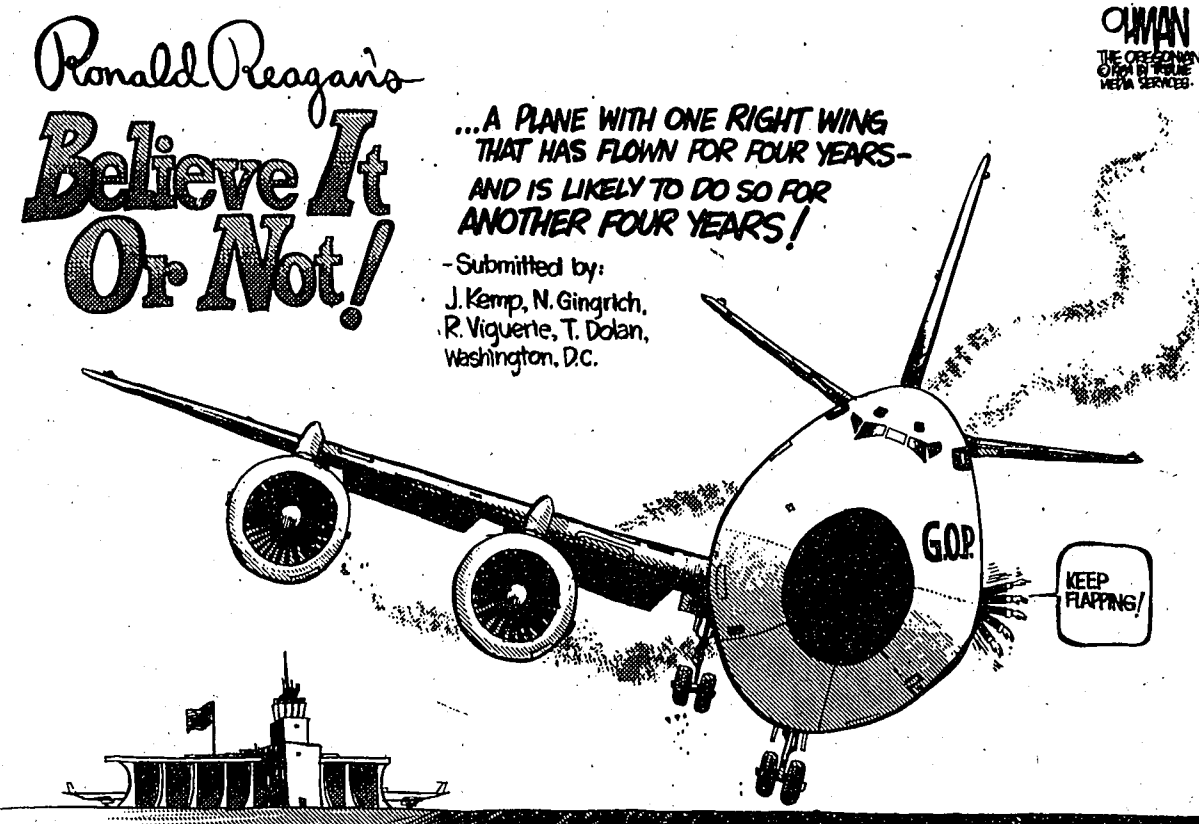
Maybe the University was in too much of a hurry to implement the new system. Or maybe the University simply tried to implement too much at one time. Perhaps a step by step process that would have integrated the new system into full capacity by Fall Semester 1985 would have been a more feasible plan.

Although hindsight is 20/20, the University should have been better prepared to handle the major problems in the implementation of this system.

The computer system was supposed to simplify and speed operations. Thus far, it has accomplished the opposite for many people.

But at the core of the problem is the University's insistent optimism that the system will smooth itself out. Computers don't debug themselves. Those responsible for implementing this new system should admit that mistakes have been made and work toward solving them. Optimism will not get the students through another semester's registration procedure.

Let's hope the next cartoon with a similar caption does not show a line of skeletons sitting in a University hallway. That would not be funny either.



Columnist applications are still available in 126 Carnegie and will be accepted through Sept. 1.

reader opinion

Editor's note: This letter originally appeared on July 31 and is being reprinted here by request.

God's creations

On the first day God created the Board of Trustees. On the second day the administration was created. On the third day God looked down and said "let this be Penn State," and it was, and He was happy, for all was good. Then on the fourth day the Board of Trustees said "We need a town for our school," and God created State College.

On the fifth day God sent the townies to populate the town and surrounding area, that they may prosper from the fruits of their labor. On the sixth day the townspeople and the Board of Trustees said to God "We need students, from which we can thrive, suck dry of all they have, and treat like second class people." To which the Board of Trustees and the administration said "And don't forget that then we can bill them!" And God saw that this is right, and on the sixth day God created students.

Oh what a joy in happy valley! STUDENTS! Someone to roll blind, over-charge, and boss around. And the administration sent nice little notes to the students (prepared weeks in advance) saying, "Dear student, you have one week to pay this tuition bill. If you don't pay in that time, (or we lose the paper work), we will charge you even more for the joys of Penn State."

The administration doesn't care if you don't happen to be at home, or if the mail is slow. As usual, all they care about is the money. Send it in, oh, students! Every penny you have! Don't complain about the mail being slow, or not getting your bill in time, for it won't help. No matter what you do, you have only one week to pay up, or pay more. For on the seventh day you will be charged a late fee.

Harry Goldman, senior-quantitative business analysis President, Penn State Society of Second Guessers and Back Seat Drivers of the Board of Trustees July 31

Fashionable beef

Hats off to the Penn State Dining Services — who else in Happy Valley could pull the wool over the eyes of 12,000 (hungry?) students (give or take 24,000 eyes). While scheduling the major events of our lives around the University Food Services menu for Fall Semester 1984, we were pleased to read on the front page of the menu that those folks at University Food Services want our experience at the University to be "meaningful, rewarding, and enjoyable." They also go on to state "(we) hope that we can contribute by making your mealtime experiences pleasant and satisfying."

Let's get realistic here. "Pleasant" and "satisfying?" Any organization that has the guts to serve Cream Dried Beef on Toast Cups or Hungarian Chicken Paprika to humans sounds a tad sadistic to us. What on earth are "Toast Cups anyway?" The extinction of Taco Dogs, for those of us who can remember them (or those of us who

would like to forget them), was probably the best thing that ever happened to Residence Hall life.

Take note of this: On Sunday, Sept. 2, 1984, Penn State Dining Services promises a "meaningful, rewarding and enjoyable" experience in the University Dining Halls when Roast Beef a la Mode will be featured for the first time this semester. Think about it. Roast Beef a la MODE.

According to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 8th edition, the definition of "a la mode" stands to read: 1) fashionable, stylish 2) topped with ice cream. I don't know about you, but I don't care how fashionable or stylish my Roast Beef is. For that matter, have you ever seen a designer cow? Designer Roast Beef? Come on; pick up the latest issue of GQ or Vogue magazine and I promise you won't find one ad for fashionable or stylish Roast Beef. Anywhere.

Being self-proclaimed connoisseurs of Dining Hall meals, we have sampled Roast Beef a la Mode on several festive occasions. Upon receipt of our main entrée at dinner, we found it to be neither fashionable nor topped with ice cream. THE BIG QUESTION: Would the addition of ice cream to the Roast Beef now being served to students in the Penn State Dining Halls change this one-time mundane entrée into a lavish desert, or protect the credibility of University Dining Services?

As students in our last year here at Penn State, we demand the "pleasant" and "satisfying" experiences initially promised to us. Either dress up your Roast Beef to make it fashionable and stylish or top it with ice cream. Otherwise, give us our money back. That's all we ask.

Steve Amend, senior-marketing
Lauri C. Michna, senior-marketing
Aug. 26

Vibrant community

I am writing to request that "The Daily Collegian" desist from using the words "dormitory" or "dorm" when referring to those buildings where students spend a significant part of their time.

"Dormitory" has generally been used in the past to identify a place where sleeping occurs. The word itself must not be allowed its final resting place for it conjures images of House Mothers and "in loco parents."

I would suggest that "residence hall" be used in the future, for it (in the minds of those of us working with residence hall students) connotes a vital, vibrant community where sleeping only occurs when the exciting aspects of the collegiate experience take their toll and rest is a must. Some of us never sleep, and when we do, it's never in a dorm!

Larry Druckenbrod, assistant director-Residence Hall Programs
Fullock-Nittany-Centre
Aug. 27

No thank you, but I'd rather graduate from Penn State than have "the computer" send me on my way.

Chances are, it now seems, that I will be able to re-register for the classes that were filled. But it could have been worse.

Consider this situation. My professor didn't call the roll yesterday. In fact, none of my professors did. I continue to take the classes, believing I am registered. Now, about the time midterm grading rolls around, none of my professors know why I've taken their exams because I'm not registered for their classes.

But hey, I'm an easy-going guy. I'll grin and bear it.

And after all, I'm in the same boat with the rest of you apathetic Penn State students out there. We'll all be grinning until our lips drop off.

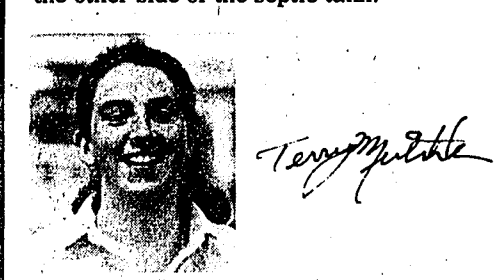
Ron Yeany is a senior majoring in Journalism (at least he was the last time he checked the computer), and is editorial editor of The Daily Collegian.

opinions

Sentencing disparities:

Now is the time for one crime, one law, one sentence

With the chance to play Erma Bombeck of State College for a morning, I've decided to address a problem a bit more severe than whether or not the grass is always greener on the other side of the septic tank.



The problem lies within a system that is representing and protecting all of us — the justice system. Unfortunately, there is a grave disparity in the sentencing of convicted criminals and I believe that it is a disgrace. The hard core reality of the matter is shown over and over again in previous case studies. A prime example of these gross, illogical, injustices is evident in two New York counties.

In Taylor County, James T. was sentenced to life in prison after being charged with rape. Harvey J. is serving three years in Palding County for the very same offense, whereas Elmer E. is serving 17 years for attempted rape.

Is justice prevailing in the courts of the United States or has our justice system become so muddled with "loop-hole" laws that justice is not being administered fairly? Bludny, it turns my guts to see these gross injustices not being corrected. How can we stand for this?

The 50 states are divided into 10 judicial circuits and the difference in the rendered sentences is phenomenal. Case and point, a violation of a narcotics law in the third circuit (PA, VT, NJ, DEL.), can draw a penalty of 33.1 months in prison but the same violation in the tenth circuit (Colorado, Kentucky, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Utah, Wyoming), results in 73.9 months of incarceration. Why?

There is no difference in the severity of the act; should there be a difference in the severity of the punishment? Are these laws upholding the guarantee of "liberty and justice for all" that is pledged daily in our elementary and secondary schools? Perhaps it should read, "liberty and justice for all those who live in the first through third judicial circuits."

I really wouldn't be surprised to see some sort of a pre-planning as to the area in which to commit a crime. The sad fact is that this pre-planning could happen, especially in relation to premeditated crimes.

If one is going to violate the law, why not do it in an area where a more relaxed punishment will likely result. With hard facts glaring off of the pages of past case histories, it wouldn't be that tough to figure out where lax sentencing occurs within the 10 judicial circuits.

Here's a real winner once again demonstrating the haphazard nature of criminal

penalties that say a hell of a lot for those perceptive people making laws governing the land in which we live.

A statute in Colorado states that a 10-year maximum penalty will be enforced for stealing a dog, while the other prescribes six months in prison and a \$800 fine for killing a dog. Needless to say that these conflicting punishments are ironical. Is common sense something of the past?

Definite sentencing is not something with which the majority of people disagree. In fact, it has a broad coalition of groups backing it. Across the ideological spectrum, definite sentencing has an appeal, with the conservatives applauding the certainty of punishment and the liberals attracted by the equity of fairness likely to result.

After all I've read about sentence discrepancies, I completely agree with Giosue' Borsi's philosophy that states: "When a judge is unjust he's no longer a judge but a transgressor."

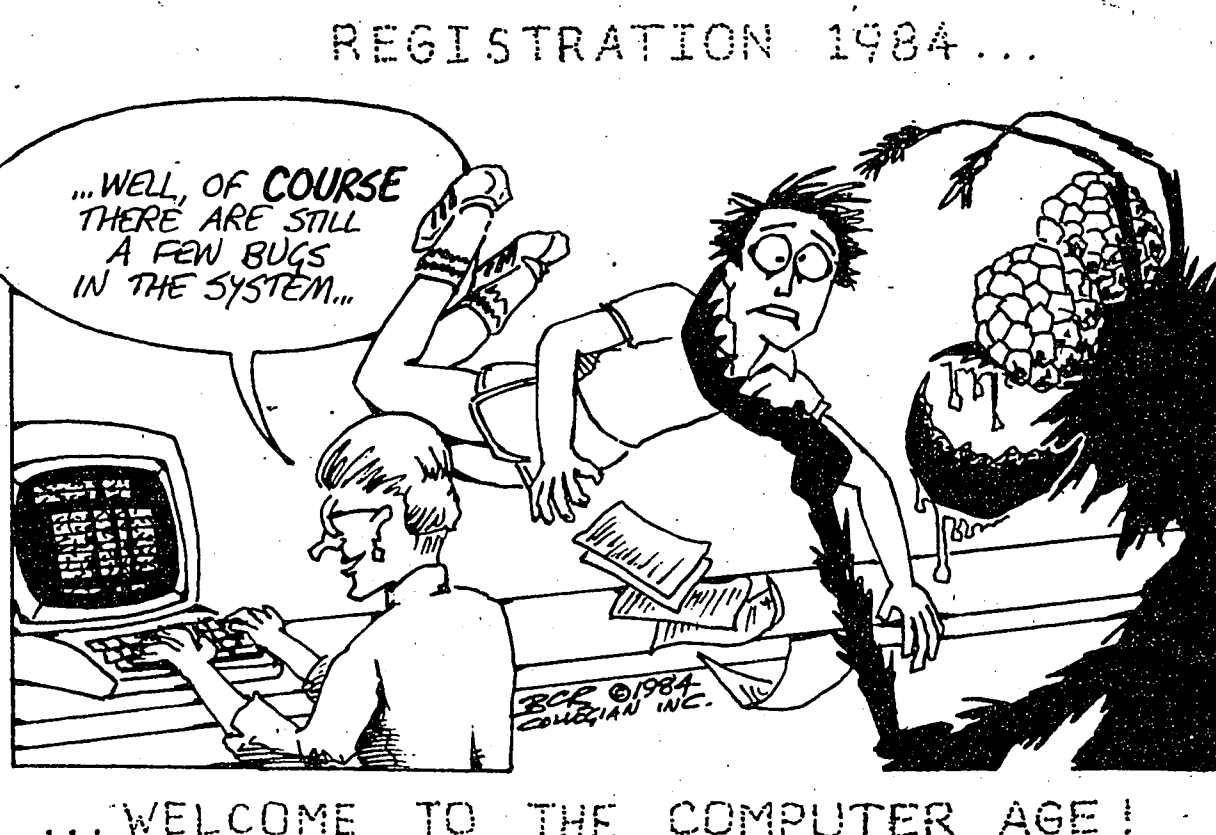
Borsi is right. In essence, judges have a blank check power, so to speak, and unfortunately if this power is wrongly used the account will come up unbalanced.

I just can't believe that our judicial system can govern in such an inconsistent manner. It is time that judges wake up and incorporate common sense when rendering sentencing. Are those appointed to pass judgment on the guilty ignorant of the their colleagues decisions when dealing with similar crimes or are they just ignoring them?

When I hear of rapists and murderers being set free on mere technicalities, and one convicted person receiving a greater punishment than another for identical crimes, I sometimes wonder just who the real criminal is.

Terry Mutchler is a sophomore majoring in Journalism and pre-law, and is a beat reporter for The Daily Collegian.

the Collegian
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Alicia Swasy Susan M. Mello
Editor Business Manager
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The horror stories about 'the computer' are true. Believe me.

It's a nightmare for me that came true. Unfortunately.

When I first came to Penn State three years ago as a freshman, I heard of horrendous tales where "the computer" had put a student between a rock and a hard place. All I had to do was hold my breath for four years and hope I would get out unscathed.



Ron Yeany

No such luck. Being between a rock and a hard place isn't the most comfortable spot to be in. Believe me.

Yesterday, in my first class of the semester where a professor called the roll, something happened to me that had never

happened before. My name was not on the roll. Impossible. I know I had the class scheduled.

I spoke with the professor at the end of class. As we looked over the class roll, it became obvious I was not there, or that I shouldn't be there.

But wait. There was my name on the last page of the class roll, with the word "cancelled" typed in beside it.

I realized that unless there is another Ron Yeany out there (God forbid), things with my schedule weren't too kosher. I spent three days at Shields Building during summer finalizing my schedule, and there's no chance I would have dropped anything.

When this professor told me to go to the department office to see if there were some problems, the plot thickened.

The secretary at the department office punched my name and student number into the computer and we waited.

I'd like to see some of those administrators go into Shields Building and take a little survey. First of all, the place is as hot as a sauna. I would figure with the amount of tuition money we are paying, at least they could afford an air conditioner for the building infamously known for its long lines.

Oh, and administrators, while you're there, ask some students and Shields Building employees how they think the new computer system is coming along. Sure you're optimistic, but have you seen the shirt-and-tie-guys going from terminal to terminal with clipboards in hands and looks of sheer frustration on their faces?

Have you seen the tellers who resort to uttering curses at the cursor and pounding the keyboard for the lack of anything better to do in the five-minute wait or more that it takes to get anything back from "the computer"?

But I'm sure everyone working with the new system is optimistic. What else can they say? Nobody seems to know what is going on.

It turns out the money for my Fall Semester was sitting dormant in my account. The money was there, but "the computer" hadn't registered that money as being paid on my Fall Semester bill. Consequently, "the computer" non-registered me for all my classes.

Why? Well, after I talked to four people at Shields who didn't know, it seemed hopeless to pursue it any further. After all, I had professors to see in my pursuit to re-register for two of my classes "the computer" said were now filled.

And this is not just an isolated case. I met two other unfortunate souls yesterday who "the computer" deleted from Penn State.

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**THE BICYCLE DIVISION
PENN STATE OUTING CLUB**

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Wednesday, Aug. 29, 7:30 PM
306 Boucke Bldg.

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