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Education:

Institutions of higher learning fail to make the grade nationwide

By SHELDON JONES
Collegian Staff Writer

Each year millions of undergraduates enroll in institutions of higher learning. They do so for various reasons: to further educate themselves, to advance their training in a specific discipline, to increase their earning power in the job market. Typically, in four years — barring unforeseen circumstances — they graduate. But whether these undergraduates, totaling 5 million in number, have received a thorough and sufficient education in their four years of college is an issue of front-burner concern, according to a report released by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. It essentially says that colleges and universities in the United States aren't doing the jobs they were designed to do.

Released early last month and authored by Ernest Boyer former U.S. Commissioner of Education and Chancellor at the State University of New York, the report is still stirring concern among education officials about whether undergraduate students are, indeed, receiving a quality education. The 242-page document levels stinging criticisms at the nation's 2,100 colleges and universities. "Driven by careerism and overshadowed by graduate and professional education, many of the nation's colleges and universities are more successful in credentialing than in providing a quality education for their students," the report states. "The college suffers from conflicting priorities and competing special interests. During our study we found deep divisions that dramatically diminish the intellectual and social life on campus and restrict the capacity of the college to effectively serve its students."

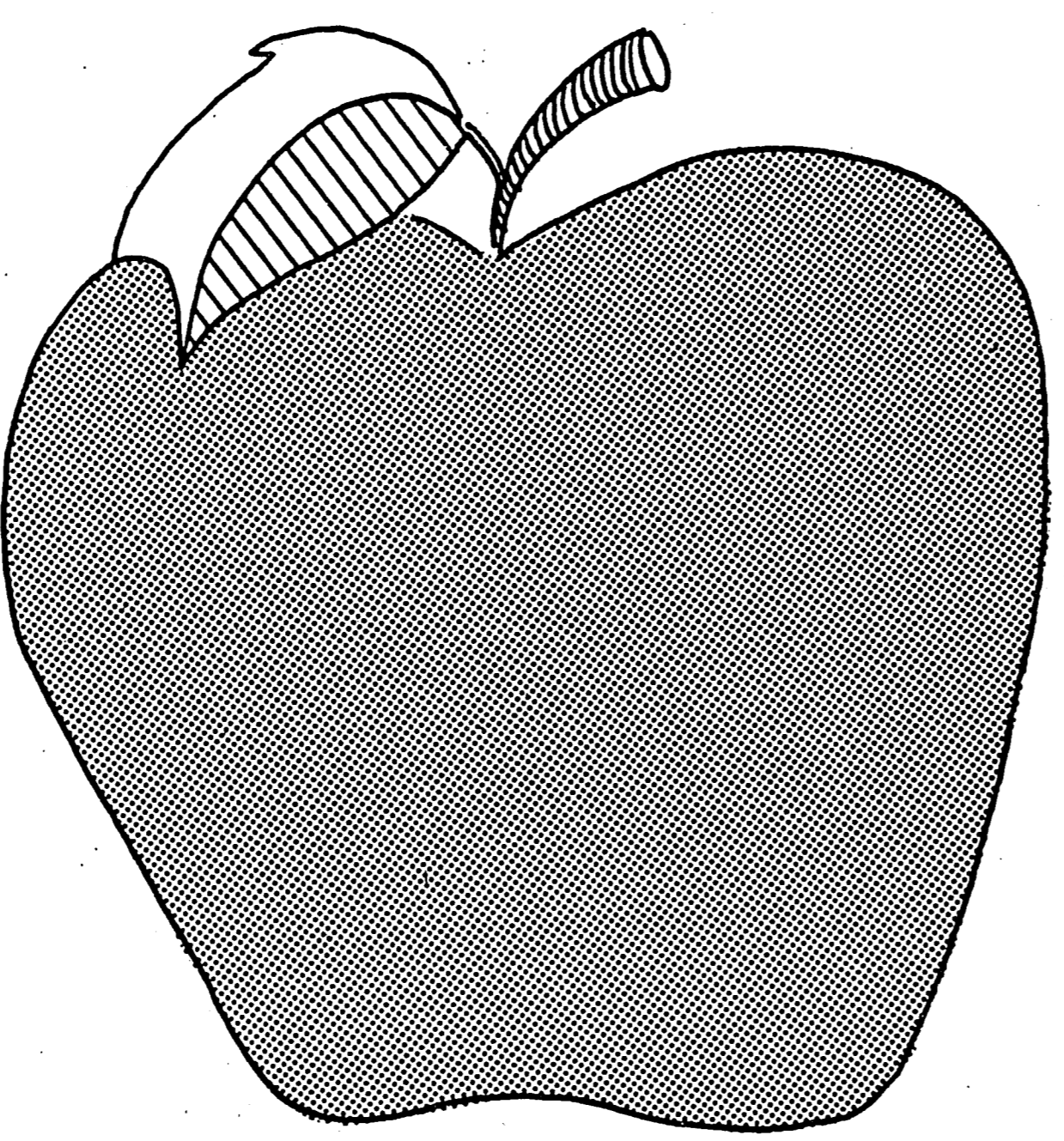
The report, drawing on site visits to a carefully selected sample of 29 colleges, surveys of students, faculty, and administrators and broad consultation with higher education researchers and scholars, found the following: • Today, educators from the separate levels, with few exceptions, carry on their work in isolation. Curricula are disjointed and guidelines inadequate. Students find the transition from high school to college haphazard and confusing. They are, dissatisfied with recruitment procedures, unclear about requirements for admission, and troubled by the costs of higher education. "These factors cause discontinuity between schools and higher education. The report added that the separations found between high school and college have led to a disturbing mismatch between faculty expectations and the academic preparation of entering students. It said many young people who go to college lack basic skills in reading, writing and computation — essential prerequisites for success in college. • In the scramble to recruit more students and pressured by market place demands, many undergraduate colleges have lost their sense of mission. They are confused about how to impart shared values on which the vitality of both higher education and society depend. The disciplines have fragmented into smaller and smaller pieces, and undergraduates find it difficult to see patterns in their courses and to relate what they learn to life. • Faculty members are torn between the competing obligations of commitment to students and effective teaching vs. researching and publishing, on which their promotion and tenure often hang. • There is tension between conformity and creativity in the classroom. Faculty have complained about the passivity of students whose interests are stirred only

when reminded that the material being presented will be covered on a test. An absence of vigorous intellectual exchange seemed to be the norm at many colleges / universities.

• There is a great separation between academic and social life on campus. Colleges often speak of the campus as community, and yet what is being learned in most residence halls today has little connection to the classrooms and may even undermine the educational purposes of the college. The idea that college acts as a stand-in for parents, "in loco parentis," is no longer true. • There is a disagreement over how the college should be governed. As the complexity of higher education has increased, confidence in the decision-making process appears to have declined. • As a result college presidents are caught in the cross-fire of conflicting pressures. Faculty feel more loyalty to their discipline than to the institutions where they teach. Students asked to participate in campus governance do so infrequently at best. • The assessment process for evaluating how much a student has learned is not necessarily a good one. Today, academic progress of students is assessed by each professor, course by course. Class grades are dutifully recorded. The final mark of achievement is the diploma, which presumably signifies an educated person. • But good teachers aren't necessarily good testers, and the college has few ways to evaluate the quality of educations overall. • A disturbing gap seems to exist between college and the larger world. There is a narrow-mindedness that seems to dominate higher education, an intellectual and social isolation that reduces the effectiveness of faculty and limits the vision of the student. • But, one of the more dramatic conclusions which came out of the report said the nation's undergraduate colleges were becoming more successful at handing out degrees than in educating students. This assertion drew fire from one Pennsylvania education official. "We do not have diploma mills in Pennsylvania," said Tim Potz of the Education Department in Harrisburg. "We have high standards in Pennsylvania. I don't think the new administration (under Gov.-elect Bob Casey) is going to doubt that at all. According to U.S. News and World Report we have the largest number of prestigious private colleges and universities in the country. "We also have a tremendous tradition of excellence in Pennsylvania that has nothing to do with politics; it has more to do with Pennsylvania being one of the first states in the nation to develop an educational system."

However, Potz did admit that it was difficult to evaluate just how well a school is educating its undergraduates because colleges / universities are screened by independent accrediting organizations, the largest being the Middle States Association, he said. Potz added that it is the job of these organizations to pass judgment on curriculums and hand out accreditation, not the state governments. "It would appear that it takes more than the use of surveys or statistics to accurately gauge how well colleges and universities educate students. According to Loye Miller, spokesman for Education Secretary William Bennett, the key lies in a thorough system of "assessment."

"Assessment," says Miller, "would mean some method of testing, for instance, if a student graduated from Penn State, whether they were taught anything. It might be as simple as a test that you take as a freshman and again as a senior and the important thing to be considered is what is the 'value added' in terms of intellectual knowledge and capacity that you received from four years of education." Miller said the feeling in the Bennett administration is that this type of "assessment" might go a long way in



shoring up some of the weaknesses in America's educational system, but he added the administration also believes that the federal government has no place in setting up a system that colleges and universities must follow. "They should be in the business of doing that on their own," he said. "We should not be in the business of setting up another federal regulatory system to act as a watchdog over education." University President Bryce Jordan said, in reaction to the report, that many of the matters Boyer touches on need to be looked at further by most institutions including Penn State. Jordan said he believes some of the report's criticisms do apply to his university, but that the extent to which they apply varies. "I disagree that research is not important at any university and here at Penn State," Jordan said in response to the report's criticism about whether research was being prioritized over teaching in many universities nationwide. "You don't have something called a university unless you have faculty who are constantly pushing the frontiers of their discipline." Jordan said he thought the "publish vs. perish" criticism leveled at many undergraduate colleges by the report was less prevalent here than at the four previous major public research universities in which he has worked. "I believe there is more attention paid to undergraduate teaching here than at any of those other institutions," Jordan said. According to Jordan, a general education at Penn State consists of certain basic goals. Jordan said he believes education at the University should, and is, leading the student to examine the meaning of human existence and teaching the student to see where he or she fits in history. He said general education should educate the student about the natural world through disciplines such as physics, chemistry, biology, geology while also educating them in the realm of aesthetics or the arts. One way the University is looking to further strengthen undergraduate education is through the University's Faculty Senate — a policy-making group that represents the University faculty as a whole and that sets policy which pertain to the educational interests of the University. Jordan said the Senate has recently taken decisive action in an effort to evaluate and, if necessary, to improve general education at the University. He said this is encouraging because when he first arrived at the University there didn't seem to be a strong enough "core" requirement for undergraduates. "I thought undergraduates were based too much on a 'cafeteria core requirement,' meaning there was a lack of required basic courses in the undergraduate program," Jordan said. "The Faculty (Senate) is right now taking steps to provide a bit more cohesiveness to the core curriculum. Other steps are also being taken. The two-week-old Alliance for Undergraduate Education — a consortium of 12 of the country's major public research universities — is already working on three projects geared toward examining criticisms made in the Carnegie report, Jordan said. Another project, Jordan said, will look specifically at the discontinuity between schools and higher education — one of the "eight points of tension" outlined in the report. The project will seek to find ways of encouraging the public school to better prepare students for college, Jordan said. Another project will focus on measuring the effectiveness, or ineffectiveness, of the teaching and criticism of writing in courses other than those designed to teach writing, such as sociology, physics and history, he said. Improving the teaching capabilities of teaching assistants, which Jordan said has been a major problem at the University, is also high on the Alliance's agenda. Jordan added that he does not yet know the specifics of how and when these projects will be completed. "These projects are underway and the Alliance is currently looking at ways to fund them," Jordan said.

ARHS porn resolution

Members not allowed to speak for group

By RICK WOODWARD
Collegian Staff Writer

The Association of Residence Hall Students passed a motion last night to prevent any member from speaking for the organization about the showing of pornographic films by the Penn State Cinemas. Members also discussed a plan to make Atherton Hall an all-University Scholars building. Penn State Cinemas, a subcommittee of ARHS, had already passed a resolution that no member of the organization will be permitted to engage in debate on the subject of pornographic films on campus without the prior consent of the board, said John Dalrymple, ARHS executive vice president. Members discussed a possible debate sponsored by the Undergraduate Student Government about PSC's showing pornography. Dalrymple said the motion passed at the meeting specifies that ARHS will not take part in any such debate

and that any member who does so has no authority to speak for the whole organization. Todd Reale, president of East Halls, said any debate that pitted USG against ARHS would hurt relations between the two organizations unnecessarily. ARHS has already taken a stand on the issue — that it is a service for the residence hall students — and demonstrates that stand by showing the movies, he said. "Our purpose is not to be a scapegoat in anybody's crusade against pornography," said Heidi Thompson, president of Pollock Halls. "I feel that ARHS's main function is to be a service for (residence hall) students." She pointed out that the money made from the pornographic films is circulated through ARHS and back to the residence areas for use in their programs. Patrick Paul, president of North Halls, said the issue that should be debated is not the morality of showing pornography on campus, but the

right of students to watch it. The issue is one of censorship, he said. On the subject of Atherton Hall, Dartan Gill, a non-University scholar who lived in the hall last year, said he believes that giving the whole building to University scholars or any other group would be unfair because of the special facilities Atherton residents enjoy. "University scholars don't pay any more room and board than anybody else; they shouldn't get special privileges," he said. Stanley Latta, ARHS adviser, said the plans for developing Atherton as a scholars building were supported by ARHS three years ago, but that support is no longer present due to the turnover of membership in the organization. Gill said he had no objection to the use of a number of floors as a scholars house. "I just don't like the idea that any group would be getting a whole building," he said.

Senate to discuss changes

Constitutional changes that will "reshuffle" student representation on the University Faculty Senate are expected to be introduced for discussion by senate members today at 1:30 p.m. in 112 Kern. The merger of various colleges, along with the formation of the School of Communications last summer, have required a redistribution of the 17 student senators, which will allow

for specific representation from each college, senate Executive Secretary George Bugyi said yesterday. This change proposes a reshuffling. Bugyi added, because "no differences in numbers" of students will be involved, the changes will be made by the Undergraduate Student Government. Currently, student senate representation includes one student representative from each of the 10 University colleges, four graduate students and three Commonwealth campus student representatives. In other action, senate members will also be asked to respond to an informational report regarding the status of construction projects at the University and proposals for improving the classroom.

— by W.M. Mason Jr.

Scientists say fidgeting burns calories

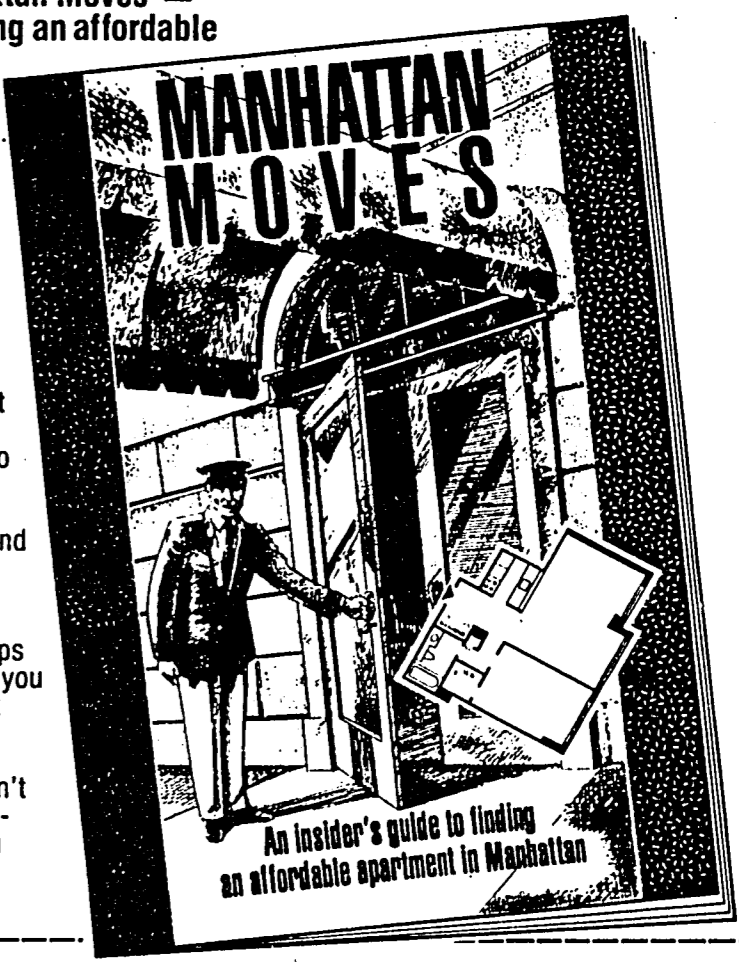
BOSTON (AP) — Fidgeting is an important way of burning up calories, and some people squirm and wiggle away the equivalent of juggling several miles each day, research has found. Researchers have also found that a tendency to fidget, what scientists call "spontaneous physical activity," varies greatly from person to person but seems to run in families, just as obesity does. The latest research is part of an

effort to figure out why some people get fat and others stay slim. The scientists, based at the National Institutes of Health's labs in Phoenix, Ariz., have also found significant differences in people's metabolisms, the rate at which they burn up calories while lying still. And this, too, is passed from generation to generation. "Gluttony and sloth have been blamed for the increasing obesity in

our affluent society, and I don't think anybody can quibble with that," said Elliot Danforth of the University of Vermont. Scientists are looking for the answer to that question in the national institute's respiratory chamber, a furnished room that can measure how much energy people expend. A report on their work was published in the December issue of the Boston-based Journal of Clinical Investigation.

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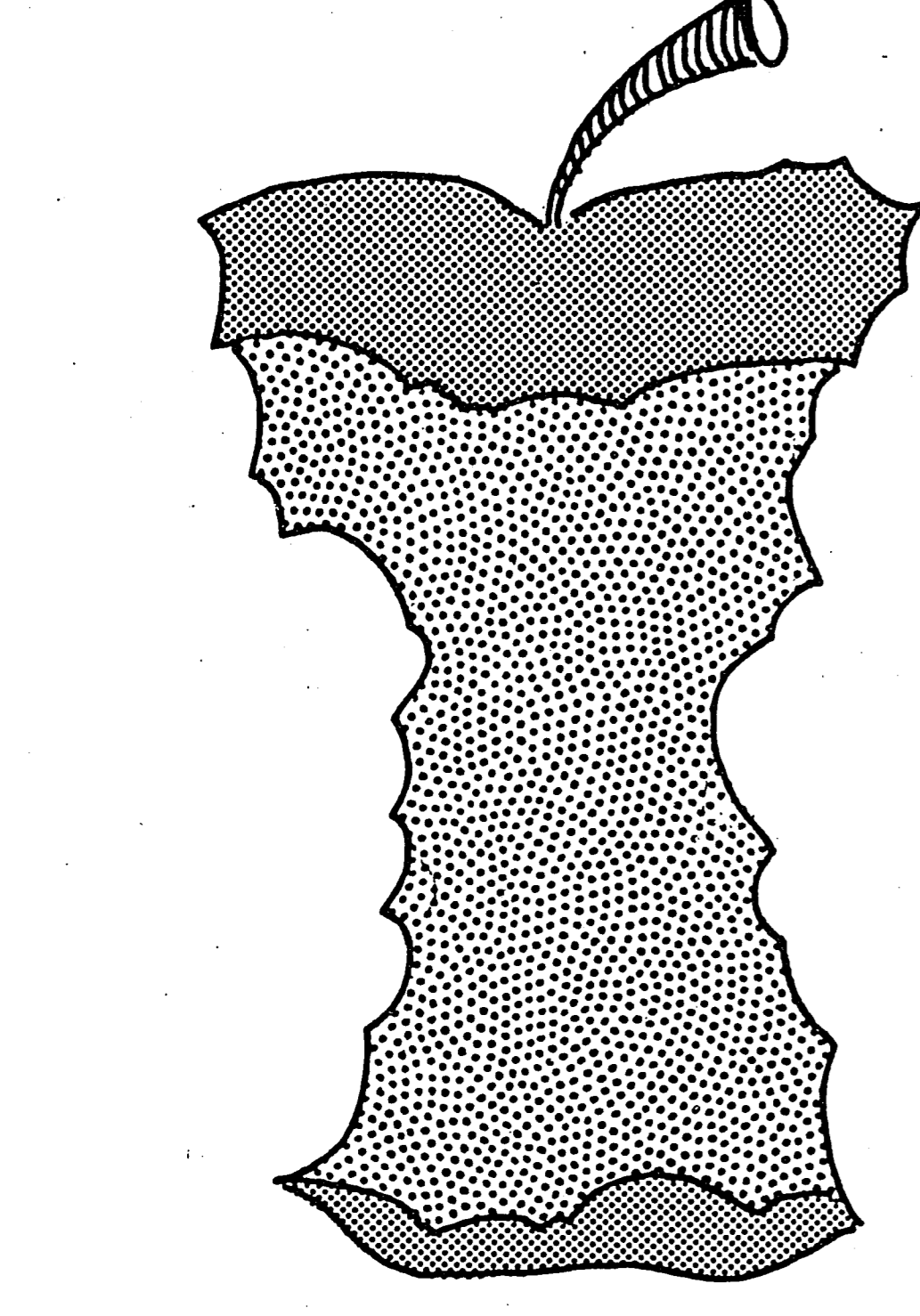
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