

Editorial opinion

## Step one

### Administration finally shows concern for stumbling CES

Surrounded by photos of the Commonwealth Campuses, University President Graham Spanier announced yesterday an overhaul of the Commonwealth Educational System that will change the face of Penn State and the education the students receive here.

Limited funding had led to severe budget cuts and fewer student services at several campuses, and forced many of them to become "suitcase colleges" or an extension of high school. And although enrollment in the CES did increase this year, past potential Penn State students may have chosen a state school with more resources than their nearby Commonwealth Campuses.

But Spanier and Robert Dunham, senior vice president and dean of the CES, have decided to let the campuses flounder no longer, taking a serious look at the mission of the CES.

Campuses will be able to choose from options including turning some into community colleges or joining with other college cam-

pus in the area to avoid duplication. No campuses are expected to close right now, Spanier said, but that could be a possibility for the future.

The University has taken a step forward by recognizing that the Commonwealth Campuses are not functioning well as they are now. In looking toward the future, however, administrators must see beyond the corporate-speak surrounding the changes and keep the focus on students.

Student leaders at individual campuses and in the Council of Commonwealth Student Governments will share the responsibility for keeping the students informed and passing on their input to the administration. Town meetings are planned for this month, and a strong, unified student presence must be felt there.

Students need to speak up about what they like and dislike about the CES so the "new" Commonwealth Campus system reflects what is best for students. After all, they are the ones whose education is at stake.



## Letters to the editor

### Mean-spirited column

It is truly saddening, in a world in which poverty and hunger not only exist but are endemic, that there are still people wealthy enough to waste precious dollars on the education of Collegian columnist Emily Pecora. Her thoughtless and mean-spirited column offered no proof of her arguments but ample evidence of a pampered upbringing and selfish outlook. She longs for the time when the rich, "... feasted and lazed about ..." and the rest of us, stomach grumbling but otherwise cheerful, knew our place. My tax dollars would be better spent putting grateful felons through Harvard than paying a policeman to protect the likes of Emily and their property on their brief but titillating forays into the Dark Side of the streets.

The harmful effects of poverty on individuals and the nation as a whole have been so well documented that even the most cynical and self-serving politicians would never attempt such an outrageous denial of the facts. As of 1991, federal budget statistics estimated 35.7 million Americans, 14 percent of the population, lived below the poverty level. (Defined as an annual income of roughly half the price of Emily's prom gown). Thirty-five million Americans have no medical insurance and, on any given night, 600,000 homeless individuals go to sleep somewhere. Every year there are more high school dropouts than college graduates. That Ms. Pecora had to come to college to hear about "... these people ..." is proof of the inadequate schooling of America's oppressed affluent. My heart goes out to the professor charged with the inevitable task of expanding her research capabilities beyond the television remote control button. Further research would show that we spend more tax money on a subsidies to corporations than on welfare. It would show a sharp increase in executive salaries while real wages decline. Indeed the system is unhealthy. Something is greatly wrong when companies can pay executives enough to educate their children but won't look to the health and well being of actual employees. Something is greatly wrong when these children of important parents are raised to believe in their hereditary right to the good things in life. Do they owe the world nothing in return?

The real question is not the existence of poverty but what our response to it will be.

It is not even a question of whether or not we can succeed. The real question is whether or not we will continue to try, and what will we become if we quit?"

Thomas Leyde  
senior-history

### Life of discrimination

This is a letter concerning discrimination that I am speaking of can affect any race, religion or sexual orientation. What kind of discrimination am I talking about that could very well effect any of these groups mentioned? The kind of discrimination that I am talking about is the discrimination that fat people (fat women especially) face every day of their lives.

I am a fat woman who has endured discrimination practically all of my life. The discrimination, torture, "teasing" and "making fun of" started when I was about 7 years old, which was about the first time that I went on a diet. From that point in my life until a few months ago my life had basically consisted of off-and-on dieting (yo-yo dieting), primarily brought on by the mental and physical abuse of others. I thought (as I'm sure a lot of other fat people think as they make a new start in life) that more people would be able to accept me for who I am, instead of what I looked like, when I started college. Well, I soon found out that I was wrong.

Although a university is a place where diversity is explored, and people are encouraged to understand others, Penn State barely (if at all) addresses the needs of its fat community. One of the main problems that I face every day is just finding a comfortable place to sit in class. Because of my size I have to plan my schedule not only on what classes I need, but on if I will be able to sit in a particular seat in a particular lecture hall. My problems don't end there ... I have faced outright abusiveness from others. One Saturday night while walking down past a high-rise apartment building in down town State College several men started yelling obscenities and other offensive things at me based on my weight. This particular experience not only happened once, but several times, on separate occasions.

The fat woman's own sense of self and self identity has been eroded primarily by the media, and the media's attempt to squeeze everybody into a pair of size-five

jeans. Men and "thin" women see these ads, and in turn see it as their duty to discriminate against and abuse fat women. If people would just take the time to get to know someone they would realize that it doesn't matter if you wear a pair of size five jeans or size 28, it's the person inside that counts.

Christine Eneyd  
senior-art education

### Stereotyped viewpoint

Oompah-doompah-doopidee-doo is the sound of the single thought that rattles around the head of your star columnist Emily Pecora. She is obviously thin, but what she lacks in girth, she makes up for in ignorance, historical revisionism, and poor writing.

The philosopher John Rawls will be disappointed to find himself in direct competition with the "pure and true and beautiful ideal perfect thoughts" of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. Get out of your glass elevator!

Well Emily, you "romantic optimistic idealist," your stereotypical view of the poor exhibits an incredible ignorance and obvious disdain concerning the welfare state. I'm sure the members of the student body who are single members, financially unstable, or those who are serving you in the dining commons to get through school appreciate your enlightened views on what it means to struggle. All of these people who stand on their own two feet, with more justified callousness, sneer at your privilege.

More disturbing, perhaps, than the ignorance of your views, is the prejudice you exhibit toward the overweight. It is difficult to tell who disgusts you more, the poor or the fat. Discrimination toward the overweight is the remaining socially acceptable prejudice in our culture. It is a stereotype that is fed by the media, and apparently basted by the Collegian in an attempt to establish group cohesiveness in the typical "We are Penn State Proud" tradition.

Clearly, Emily, while you may dine light, you wield a heavy hand against those you do not know and those with whom you would never share a meal. We certainly hope you will choke on the elitist principles on which you have wrongly been fattened.

Susan Kang  
junior-telecommunications

## the Collegian

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Students' letters should include semester standing, major and campus of the writer. Letters from alumni should include the major and year of graduation of the writer. All writers should provide their address and phone number for verification of the letter. Letters should be signed by no more than two people. Names may be withheld on request. The Collegian reserves the right to edit letters.

# General education allows for broad base of knowledge

True confession: Every Tuesday and Thursday, I sit in my BiSci class and memorize poetry. It helps keep me awake; and by being physically present in the class I'm hoping that my subconscious will pick up some useful information. I am learning a lot of interesting stuff — unfortunately, Wordsworth and Auden won't be on the exam.

I'm taking the class not because I have a passionate desire to learn about ecosystems and become well rounded, but because I have a passionate desire to graduate.

I'm trying to fulfill the natural sciences component of the general education requirements.

Last Tuesday, a subgroup of the Commission on Undergraduate Education announced their suggestions for revamping the curriculum. The biggest change they want to implement is a restructuring of the general education requirements. Students have been grumbling about gen eds for years. They're pointless. A great place to sleep. I never go. Now things might change.

## My opinion

Tess Thompson

Why are these changes important? Other than the fact that new requirements will send hordes of perplexed students on quests to find their elusive advisers, these changes are important because they will reveal the philosophy behind education here at Penn State. The general education requirements are what the university considers essential for every student in every college. A change in gen eds is equivalent to a modified philosophy of education.

How well are gen eds working now? In theory, very well; they allow students to receive a broad education. Computer engineering

majors can tear themselves away from their monitors and take a poetry class; actors can learn about the drama that is quantum physics.

I took a computer science class as one of my quantification courses and liked it so much that now I'm a compsci minor. If I hadn't been required to take another math class, though, I probably wouldn't have.

However, gen ed classes rarely work that way. Instead, they usually consist of a bunch of bored students slouching in the Forum, reading newspapers or doodling as the somniferous words of a Psych 2 lecture drift toward the ceiling. Or students blow off the class. After all, it's only a gen ed — if you get at least a D, you're fine.

A benefit of the new requirements is the removal of the Health and Physical Education components. To be honest, those requirements never made much sense. Yes, I'm glad I now know how to jitterbug and tango, but I don't think those skills are as vital as others I could have learned. Most students find some way to get exer-

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cise, whether it's jogging laps at the IM building or trying to dash from COB to Walker Building in less than fifteen minutes. The Health requirement makes even less sense. Sure, the students in Health 46 are learning about sex — but exploring sexuality is an activity most college students will engage in, regardless of requirements for graduation. A friend I know who took Nutrition 100 learned a lot about her nutritional needs — but she continues to live on coffee and Cheese Nips.

The communication and quantification requirements would remain the same; I can't argue with that. It's a good idea to make sure that everyone who graduates is capable of writing a paper, giving a speech or manipulating some numbers.

The main change in the require-

ments would be reducing the number of credits from 46 to 36 and dividing the gen eds into two categories: "Civilizations" and "Contemporary Topics." Taking away ten credits and putting the remaining courses into two vague categories would do little to strengthen the general education component of education at Penn State.

One of the strengths of the American educational system is its flexibility and its diversity. In England, for example, students are expected to pick their area of study at around age fifteen and then stick with it. When I tried explaining to people in France that I was an English major minoring in French and computer science, they looked at me with raised eyebrows. Even at the University level, we're allowed to be unfocused for a while, and

we're able to radically change our field of study. General education classes make a college education broader and allow people to pursue other interests. If implemented correctly, they help students receive an education instead of merely being fed facts.

This Tuesday, the Faculty Senate will discuss the proposed changes. I would urge them to give as many credits to general education as possible.

However, no matter how many credits are allotted to gen eds, as long as students perceive gen eds as easy classes in which they don't have to put forth effort, the purpose of the classes is defeated. I'm in favor of having as many rigorous, interesting gen ed classes as possible — people today need to be knowledgeable about many things outside their narrow field of study. General education requirements are great in theory — if only they were that good in practice.

Tess Thompson is a junior majoring in English and a Collegian columnist.