

Break debate persists for local school district

By Laurie Stern
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

While spring break is typically thought of as a stress-free time for relaxation with family and friends, recent debate between some members of the State College community has not reflected such a tone.

Some community members are at odds with the State College Area School District calendar committee with regards to the proposed spring break for the 2010-11 school year.

The proposed calendar — which was revised in order to be discussed further at Monday's school board meeting — has the district's spring break set from April 21 to 26.

However, a petition with the signatures of more than 1,300 community members is imploring the board to amend the calendar so that it remains aligned with Penn State's spring break, March 7 to 11.

The petition, which cites familial and educational benefits as reasons for revising the calendar, was created by Sharon Ambrose.

As a State College resident with a husband employed by Penn State and a seven-year-old child who attends school in the district, Ambrose said the lack of vacation days puts the district's academic standards in jeopardy.

"School breaks are critical to [the students'] well being," Ambrose said. "There are almost no breaks in the last 23 weeks of school. There's an unhealthy learning environment in the calendar."

But Assistant Superintendent Michael Hardy said pleasing everyone would be impossible with the many factors the school board must consider when creating the calendar.

Hardy cited the scheduled date of the Centre County Grange Encampment and Fair, and the varying opinions of numerous community members including parents, clergy and retirees as perspectives that must be entertained.

"One of the biggest goals of this calendar is to have a starting and end date," Hardy said. "If you don't know when you'll end how can you do any long term planning?"

With the movement of the proposed calendar to the discussion section of Monday's meeting agenda, State College Area School District Superintendent Richard Mextorf gave a brief presentation outlining the proposed calendar and its benefit of maximizing instructional time.

Several parents and students expressed their support for aligning the district's calendar with Penn State's spring break in the school board meeting, which was standing room only.

As debate continues on this matter, board members are certain to consider alternative options, as Mextorf did mention one option that had yet to be thoroughly discussed.

"This might be a little ridiculous and excuse me if it is, but we haven't approached Penn State or Grange Fair about adjusting their calendars," he said.

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Agatha Wang, on the flute, Mark Ballora, on the accordion, David Stambler, on the saxophone, Anthony Costa, on the clarinet and Robyn Costa, on the oboe, perform under loose directions Monday. The event was the fifth annual digital media variety show.

Digital media variety show immerses audience, artists

By Renée Guida
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER



To check out a video of the digital media variety show visit: psucollegian.com

With an eight-channel surround sound system, a digital media variety show kicked off Monday night, giving audiences the sensation they were immersed in the music.

In its fifth annual performance, which took place in 16 Borland Building, Cross Currents is an event artist Mark Ballora said is a place for students to represent what they are creating.

"It's nice to be able to do something where the audience is maybe in the middle of it or looking side to side," Ballora, associate professor of music technology, said. "It's people who are trying to push the envelope of what you can do with computer software and processing."

Ballora — creator of the event — opened the evening with "Tree Growth," a piece that gave the impression that a tree was growing right in front of the audience.

The students sat and listened to the music and also viewed videos accompanying the tunes.

"Mark Ballora has certain skills he does very well," Alex Heppelmann (junior-music composition) said. "He has something to offer... Hopefully I can get something from that."

Eric Lyon — who is one of the reasons why Ballora said the program is unique and different — performed a variety of pieces including "Trajectories," which used eight speakers to make the audiences were in the middle of the song.

"Eric writes his own software," Ballora said. "He's not working within the box that a commercial manufacture has created. He is creating his own box."

Noise Concerto was Lyon's last piece, featuring accordion, clarinet, oboe, saxophone and flute players. Each player was following general directions through Wi-fi on a computer screen and improvising the notes they played. "There just aren't a lot of events like this that feature a new way of working with digital media," said Ballora.

Other featured artwork was Elliot Kermit-Canfield's piece. Including sounds of people playing with ping-pong balls, the song changed its pace with fast and slow bouncing ping-pong balls, sometimes with just one and other times with several, creating a dramatic effect.

Joshua Zong's video of sound followed, demonstrating visual interpretations of music and sound. Carlos Rosas and Robert Dansby showed "Untitled Mix 12-23-09," and added visuals to accompany the specific sounds of the mix.

Graduate student Matthew Leschinski, who also has Ballora as a professor this semester, attended the event with some of his classmates after hearing there was going to be cool and exciting music.

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6 troops killed in Afghanistan

By Deb Riechmann
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

KABUL — Six NATO service members, including three Americans, were killed in Afghanistan on Monday — the deadliest day for the international force in more than two months, underscoring fears that casualties will rise as more foreign troops stream into the country.

Nevertheless, a new poll says Afghans are more optimistic than a year ago and think the Taliban are losing momentum.

The top U.S. commander in Afghanistan said he thought the rising presence of international forces was blunting the militants. Gen. Stanley McChrystal said the international force is on its way to convincing the Afghan people that it was there to protect them.

"When I sit in an area that the Taliban controlled only seven months ago and now you meet with ... elders and they describe with considerable optimism the future, you sense the tide is turning," he told ABC News about a recent trip to Helmand province where many of the U.S. reinforcements will be sent.

Afghans also think better days are ahead, according to the opinion poll, conducted last month before the suicide bombing that killed seven employees at a CIA base. About 40 percent of Afghans believe the Taliban insurgency is weaker than it was a year ago; 30 percent think it has gotten stronger and 25 percent believe the strength of the insurgency remains the same.

Nearly seven in 10 Afghans support the presence of U.S. forces and 61 percent favor the military buildup, according to the

survey, the fifth commissioned by ABC, the BBC and ARD German TV since 2005. President Barack Obama announced last month that the U.S. is sending 30,000 more American troops to Afghanistan, bringing the total to nearly 98,000. NATO is sending 7,000 reinforcements.

Although polling in a war zone is often problematic, the results suggest that most Afghans neither support the Taliban nor share the concerns in the West about the legitimacy of President Hamid Karzai's reelection after a fraud-riddled election. They also underscore the ambivalence of the public about the foreign forces, which are still held in low regard here.

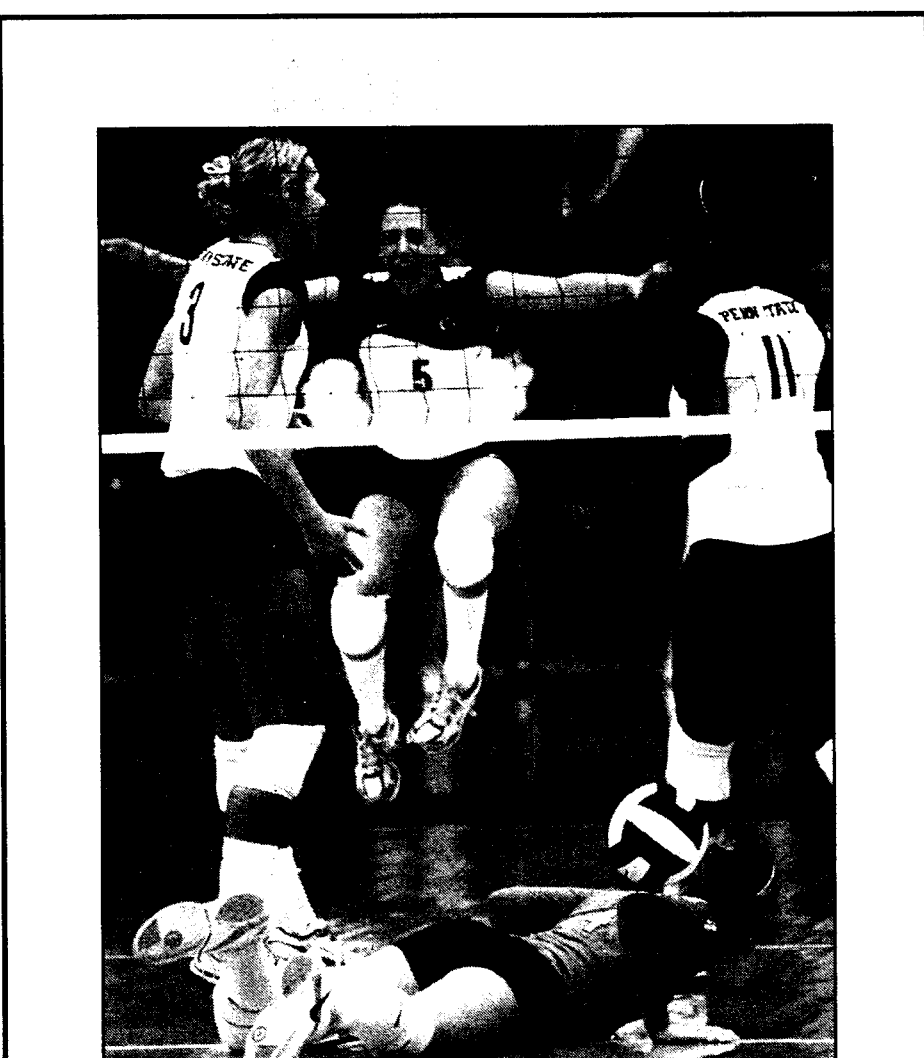
The new violence came despite the onset of winter weather.

The three Americans were killed in a firefight with militants during a patrol in an undisclosed area of southern Afghanistan, the NATO command announced. That raised to at least 10 the number of U.S. service members killed in Afghanistan so far this year, according to an Associated Press tally.

A French soldier also was killed and another was seriously wounded during a joint patrol with Afghan troops in the Alasay district of Kapisa province, an area largely under insurgent control.

NATO said another service member was killed in the clash but did not release the nationality. It said a sixth service member was killed by a roadside bomb in the south.

British authorities later announced the death of a British bomb disposal expert as a result of an explosion in the Musa Qaleh area of Helmand Province. It was unclear if this death was in addition to the ones already announced by NATO.



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