

Students might be getting ripped off

by Andrew Festa

College is an institution of higher education. Its main purpose is, or should be, to teach its student population everything necessary for a smooth transition into the "real world."

As students, we're taught many things: how to write, how to communicate, how to operate computers, and how to apply ourselves. We're taught engineering, history, drama, politics and law. We're shown how to appreciate music and art. But are we getting everything we need?

There is one area I haven't seen covered at Behrend. Students write stories, essays and poems. We produce research materials for papers, reports and projects. Some students work on marketing concepts or create new uses for old materials. How many students are taught how to protect what they produce or create? Where is the course which covers the areas of copyrights and patents, how to obtain either or both, or who to contact?

In a world as market oriented as America, (even

Penn State has to sell itself and its various programs to prospective students and investors), one had to wonder why such a basic, fundamental course isn't offered, if not to fresh(people), at least before the Senior year.

Another point: without a contractual agreement between the students and the university's teaching staff, students might tend toward submitting less than their best.

If a student has several marketable ideas, (and many of the ideas created during college and beyond are marketable,) he or she might not submit the best of those ideas for fear of losing some or all control of an idea once it leaves her or his possession.

The return on a good idea presented to a teacher is a grade. The return for that same idea, if put on the open market, could be much more rewarding.

While I'm not at all suggesting any wrong-doing by the teachers or professors, I am suggesting students, seeing teachers come and go quite often, might feel

uncomfortable presenting their best ideas without some assurances of protection, such as an agreement of confidentiality between themselves and the teacher.

Such agreements are commonplace in the "real world" and, that being so, the University should have a course offering information on how to protect ideas, creations, projects, reports, inventions and so on. It

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would be in the interest of the University and the students.

In such a class, students would be learning something they could take with them beyond college. With a contractual agreement guaranteeing confidentiality between students and teachers, students would benefit by the removal of hesitations born from the very natural need to survive (which, itself, produces a lack of trust where none is

offered).

Further, teachers would be better able to teach their students, because students would be more open to optimizing their potentials. The students would learn based on their best works. Plus, the University would benefit with every successful, shining student.

High schools have been increasingly accused of not properly preparing students for college. Colleges should avoid this by maximizing the preparation given students for the world that hungrily awaits them beyond graduation.

Companies are fast learning a relatively new principal of existence: interaction with their customers is a crucial aspect of survival. If a company is not in touch with its customers, it risks losing those customers.

Colleges and universities are different in that they need not worry about knowing their customers' needs or wants. They have a captive market. They know there will be students tomorrow and next year.

The problem with that line of thinking is it risks

devaluing the very system of education upon which it exists. While the fact that there will always be students wanting to get in, it's in the best interest of the school and the students to get as much feedback as possible. This feedback, as with an increasing number of businesses nationwide, would be a two way street.

The Universities might choose to disagree with or ignore the feedback, but little is learned without it.

Andrew Festa is a ninth semester English major. His column appears every other week in The Collegian.

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If you rock the boat, you could drown

by Mike Royko

Before you condemn the hard-line Commies who tried to squeeze out Gorbachev, put yourself in their state-produced shoes. Ask yourself how you would feel if threatened, possibly for the first time in your life, with the terrible prospect of having to do something useful. In other words, do some work. Even worse, to think.

Imagine for a moment that about 75 years ago we had changed our system of government and became the United States of Bureaucracy.

Let's say we made the postal workers the ruling elite. Maybe sharing power with the Internal Revenue Service nit-pickers and later the Social Security desk jockeys. And those people who tell you to take a number and sit down and wait to be called to answer phones at government buildings, then transfer you to someone else, who transfers you to still another faceless one, who puts you on hold and goes down the hall to get a cup of coffee until your sad little hold light blinks off.

Imagine that they have run the country for so long that we are now in our fifth or sixth generation of bureaucratic mule rule. And they are everywhere,

not just in government. A deputy postal supervisor is running the nation's factories. A Simplified Form E-6 Internal Revenue inspector is running the nation's utilities. A driver's license bureau Chief License Laminating Coordinator is in charge of the nation's agriculture.

Even the corner store. You go into a White Hen to get a carton of milk, a magazine and a frozen pizza, but there is no milk, no magazine and no frozen pizza. And it isn't even called a White Hen. It is a Gray Hen. Or a Dead Hen. Slouched behind the counter is a relative of the Fourth Deputy ZIP Code Developer, who is in charge of food outlets, and he tells you: "Get in line." So you get in line, and when you finally reach the counter, you are told: "We have nothing." You ask: "Why did you tell me to get in line?" You are told: "It is the rules; I can't tell you we have nothing until you get in line and it is your turn to be told we have nothing."

You go home to your little apartment that is in a building designed by an architect who was trained to be a Widow Death Benefits Review Agent at Social Security. The building is managed by the National Housing Director,

who was promoted to that post from a job as Third Deputy Driver's License Eye Chart Examiner. The elevator doesn't work. It is under the supervision of the former



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National Director of Rural Mail Route Coordination.

So you try to telephone someone about the elevator. But the phone doesn't work because the local company is under the directorship of the bureaucrat who was behind the counter at the

Dead Hen and has just been promoted. And his phone doesn't work, either, but he doesn't care because he doesn't want you bothering him.

You go to your job, but you don't know what you're supposed to be doing. So you ask your supervisor. And he says: "Do what you always do." And you say: "I don't do anything." And he says: "Good. Then do it faster; production is down."

The day finally comes when your bureaucratic skills are recognized, and you become National Director of the Office of the Production of Nothing.

You move to a large apartment and are given your own car and a spacious office and have shopping privileges at the fully-stocked Great Walton Bureaucrat Discount Boutique. And because of your influential position, your son, a highly trained Staple and Rubber Stamp Engineer, is in line to run the National Health Program.

And just when you have settled comfortably into this position of authority and have memorized the entire Bureaucratic Handbook, someone comes along and becomes head of the government and betrays you. He says that things are going to change. From now on, you will be expected to do something useful. You must produce. Produce? You look in your

Bureaucratic Handbook, but there is no Produce. There is Procrastinate, which you understand, followed by Prolong, which you are familiar with. But no Produce.

So you make discreet inquiries. What does it mean to Produce? Someone says: "I think it means he wants us all to get off our butts."

What would you do? In that position, you would probably react the way the ruling bureaucrats did in Moscow. They waited until Gorbachev went on vacation. Then they announced that he was no longer in charge because he had, in effect, gone nuts from overwork.

And in their eyes, he probably did appear to have lost his mind. After all, like them he had a big apartment, a car and could shop in the Bureaucrat Boutique.

With a deal like that, only a crazy man would try to ruin it for everyone else.

Mike Royko is a Chicago-based, nationally syndicated columnist. His column appears weekly in The Collegian.