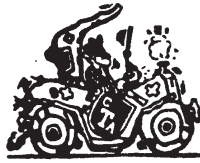


OPINIONS

Technique • Friday, September 16, 2005



"The South's Liveliest College Newspaper"
TECHNIQUE

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Quote of the week:

"I never think of the future—it comes soon enough."
—Albert Einstein

OUR VIEWS CONSENSUS OPINION

Safety First

Tech administrators have once again made a crucial change without soliciting student opinion or making news of the change public. This time the culprit is Parking and Transportation, which has limited the use of the Stingerette service to within the boundaries of campus.

The Stingerette has long operated under the rule of thumb of traveling to areas within one mile from campus. Under this policy, many Homepark residents came to depend on the service to get home after late nights on campus. Students using MARTA late at night also depended on the Stingerette to transport them safely past the questionable areas that separate the transit stations from campus.

Now, with no warning or notice, that service has been cut off from those very people who need it most.

According to the description of the Stingerette on the Parking and Transportation website, "[The] Stingerette is for safe, after hours travel from academic buildings and living accommodations within the service area." By cutting service to off-campus locations, Parking and Transportation staff have affected the areas with the greatest safety concerns.

The annual Campus Safety Walks and the police presence have kept the confines of the Institute relatively crime-free, but the surrounding areas still reflect the reality of Tech's location in a major metropolis.

Understandably, Parking and Transportation needs to operate the service within certain funding and staffing restrictions, however cutting off Stingerette service to Tech's immediate environs negates its stated purpose of ensuring student safety, as students have come to rely on the service for safe transport.

Bob Furniss, director of Parking and Transportation, said that students living in Homepark need to consider the costs of transportation when deciding to move off-campus, but many students do not have the option of living in school housing due to limited space.

Parking and Transportation should strive to find alternatives that do not put students at risk, while still maintaining a balanced budget and efficient service. It is not too late for the department to consider options such as soliciting student drivers, establishing set routes or designating limited off-campus locations for pick-up and drop-off. The department can look towards the many universities around the nation that offer similar programs for more ideas on how to deal with high demand, long wait times and a limited budget.

No matter what happens though, the student body should be informed of any changes that affect our safety.

Consensus editorials reflect the majority opinion of the Editorial Board of the Technique, but not necessarily the opinions of individual editors.

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By Mark Parsons / STUDENT PUBLICATIONS

Tests should promote learning

Tests here are hard. Open book tests here are harder. They make you falsely complacent and then have a way of turning out more complex questions than an ordinary test. Right?

Well, I just took an open book test this week. It was probably the easiest test I ever took in my career at Tech. It had only 25 multiple-choice questions that tested simple, core concepts.

The test was easy, and, for the first time, I came out smiling from an exam hall. Best of all, I remembered the material days after the test and actually understood the logic behind it.

So do easier testing strategies actually make you learn and retain more information?

All I remember from classes with hard, grueling tests, even an hour after I've taken them, are the marathon cram sessions involved in studying and my enormous caffeine intake for each one of them.

Thanks to the wonderful concept of relative curving I have gotten "A's" in some of those classes. But I don't feel I have come away with anything substantial.

I did great, but years from now, will I remember the technical intricacies of the Bernoulli-Laplace chain, or will I remember that the test average in that class was consistently a 45 out of 100?

Getting an "A" in a class does not guarantee that you will remember all the material when you discover you need it.

A brilliant Physics senior recently discovered that after all these years of straight "A's" in advanced classes involving complex mathematical equations, she was unable to conjure up a simple solution to an even simpler math problem.

The issue, she told me, was that while essential techniques for solving problems from those classes



"We can mix and match to find a balance between traditional timed tests and newer, more inviting alternatives."

Swathy Prithivi
Focus Editor

evaded her, she could not forget, in painstaking, excruciating detail, the number of hours she spent not sleeping, every day, in an attempt to master the extraneous descriptions of first and second order differential equations.

While quantitative testing strategies like multiple-choice exam questions are an easy way to rate students' ability and work, what about other factors like testing methodology and information retention?

Shouldn't there be a qualitative approach to our education too?

Why make tests so hard in the first place? Studies show that there is a higher probability of remembering general principles than details and highly specific facts. So why not test just the core concepts that professors want us to come away with?

"The purpose of education is to change the thoughts, feelings and actions of students," said Benjamin Bloom, a famous educational theorist of the past century. Bloom also believed that education should not solely focus on utilitarian, lower levels of training such as transfer of facts and information recall, but rather on core principles and big picture concepts.

I believe in order for that to happen, we need more practical and valid testing strategies in our courses that have student understanding and long-term learning as their ultimate goal.

Open book tests and focusing on the main principles of the material, would achieve this goal by reducing student stress of having to learn dry facts and figures and shift the focus towards having the student actually understand the concepts being presented.

Difficult concepts, ideas and theories that need a longer time to digest can be presented to students through homework assignments, projects and papers.

This would make learning more achievable and also encourage information retention through actual application of concepts.

Papers would be good for liberal arts courses and projects fit well with practical engineering classes.

This does not mean that open-book tests, projects and papers should be the only evaluation strategies in courses.

Maybe we can mix and match to find a balance between traditional timed tests and newer, more inviting alternatives.

In the long run, I would like to see more testing styles where the emphasis is not on cramming the material and being able to regurgitate it in an hour long torture session, but rather on understanding the material and retaining the information long after we have our diplomas framed in our office.

Then, we might actually remember something we learnt.

Redundant organizations cause redundancy

It seems there are a few things students hear over and over when they are just starting college. Everyone is eager to give advice to the incoming freshmen, largely based on the aspects of his or her own college experience which seem, in retrospect, somehow inadequate. Indeed, the *Technique* tends to be guilty of this as well, often spreading the same old "college is what you make of it" message.

Which is, of course, absolutely true: college is exactly what you make of it, no more and no less. In fact, the statement applies to nearly all facets of life.

The problem, however, lies not with the statement itself but with some of the additional suggestions it is used to justify. The biggest offender? "Get involved!" Not that there's anything wrong with that, mind you. The problem, rather, is with the fact that many of Tech's student organizations are somewhat flawed.

Beginning with freshmen orientation, students are pushed in a thousand different directions, overwhelmed by a variety of clubs, volunteer opportunities and other ways to occupy their time. Many of these freshmen come from smaller high schools where the number of clubs they could join did not exceed 10.

Compare that with Tech, where Cyberbuzz claims 370 organizations in its database.



"I believe...that quite a few clubs at Tech could stand to re-evaluate their *raison d'être*."

Arcadiy Kantor
Assistant Development Editor

That's one club, fraternity, service organization or sports group for every six and a half freshmen, assuming 2,400 incoming students in an average year. And that doesn't include the many other opportunities open to students—valuable activities like undergraduate research or the co-op program.

With such a multitude of options, is it really surprising that many students are overwhelmed and end up not pursuing any extracurricular activities? The constant cries of "get involved" do nothing but exacerbate the already-high stress levels facing freshmen.

Interestingly (but not surprisingly), the biggest impact of students sticking to their rooms their freshman year is on organizations themselves. I believe—and I don't intend to single out the groups I will proceed to use for examples, so I apologize to those clubs in advance—that quite a few clubs at Tech could stand to re-evaluate

their *raison d'être*.

Take, for example, the many Christian organizations on campus. In a cursory perusal of Cyberbuzz's "religious" category, I counted 22—and no, that isn't a typo.

Now, certainly, a number of different denominations make up the greater whole of Christianity. But many of these organizations proclaim themselves as non-denominational, making the need even more tenuous.

Another example is among the Indian-focused organizations on campus. What functions do Aarohi (a club "to promote Indian classical music & dance by organizing events on the GT campus," according to their Cyberbuzz description), Asha for Education ("A secular organization dedicated to change in India by focusing on basic education and supporting it"), and the Association for India's Development serve that could not just as well be handled by the India Club?

Clubs with similar purposes and with the same target audience as each other hurt not only themselves but other groups and, most importantly, students. The students who are currently split up into a multitude of minor groups could be meeting more people with common interests, organizing bigger undertakings and generally having a better experience by being involved in larger organizations.

Now I'm sure my detractors will argue that a student who is interested in both India and Indian music can simply join both India Club and Aarohi. This is, of course, completely possible in theory. But what about in practice? Joining two clubs may not necessarily mean double the time commitment, but there is certainly an increase in the time that needs to be invested. Joining multiple clubs also means having to juggle additional meeting times around a student's already-busy schedule. And besides, why should someone join two or three clubs that are so similar when they have 367 other organizations in which to pursue one of their other interests?

The solution to the problem seems obvious: consolidation.

Certainly, a consolidation of campus organizations would have drawbacks. Any major

See Clubs, page 10

OUR VIEWS HOT OR NOT

HOT- or -NOT



Career Fair freebies

This week's career fair was a boon to cash strapped students in need of jobs and paychecks. Oh yeah, and it was nice for those people looking for actual careers too. Over 200 companies showed up to tap into the talent pool of Tech genius. There were freebies galore, from alien pens to free software. Even for those not seriously looking for jobs, the giveaways made dressing up all the more worthwhile.



More info needed

After all the fuss made last semester, one would think that the final unveiling of two new degree designations would come with a certain degree of fanfare. But the only efforts made to advertise this event was an email send out the day before. Interested in knowing more about the international plan and undergraduate research opportunities? We are, but due to the lack of information, we can't say much more.



Thrills and chills

White and gold flooded the park as yet another successful Georgia Tech at Six Flags Night went off without a hitch (though one *Nique* staffer did manage get soaked on Thunder River.) The lines were short, all the rides ran at full capacity and everyone received a complementary return ticket.



Capital damage

\$14,000 of damage done to a tennis court in a week is by no means normal wear and tear. The scuff marks and late night break-ins need to stop. Being able to play at the Bill Moore Tennis Center is a privilege that students nearly lost last year, and if the situation now doesn't improve now, that could very well happen.

YOUR VIEWS LETTERS TO THE EDITOR SGA violates JFC policies

It's hard to believe, but SGA has made another clumsy and hypocritical error. As a representative in SGA last year I witnessed SGA's sign debacle and was glad to see the allocated \$3,000 returned to the students. This, of course, occurred when SGA decided to follow its own Joint Finance Committee's (JFC) policy and ended up finding outside sources of funding to cover the expense of the sign.

Now it's a new year and we're experiencing the same kind of problems: the representatives recently passed a bill that allocated \$150 from SGA's Student Activity Fee to SGA itself to pay for an event's food and drinks. The problem isn't that we've spent \$150, but that we've opened up the door for all organizations to request money for food and drinks and to not seek outside sources of funding.

A fellow representative offered to collect funds to pay for the food and drinks, instead of drawing

from the activity fee, but this idea was quickly struck down.

It strikes me as absurd, however, to witness the cash strapped SGA go against JFC policy that has been in place since 2002 to cover a special event. If this bill isn't reversed, organizations will have the right, because of the precedent we've carelessly set, to argue that their events are one-time special events that deserve the same sort of funding for food and drinks that SGA has just allocated.

This means our tight budget will be more strained or that SGA will be hypocritical and deny this same type of funding to all other organizations. Actually, SGA is acting hypocritically because we denied funding for food and drinks to various organizations last year and now we are allowing ourselves that very luxury.

SGA didn't work hard enough to secure other sources of funding

See Letter, page 10

Letter Submission Policy

The *Technique* welcomes all letters to the editor and will print letters on a timely and space-available basis. Letters may be mailed to Georgia Tech Campus Mail Code 0290, emailed to editor@technique.gatech.edu or hand-delivered to room 137 of the Student Services Building. Letters should be addressed to Kyle Thomason, Editor-in-Chief.

All letters must be signed and must include a campus box number or other valid mailing address for verification purposes. Letters should not exceed 400 words and should be submitted by 8 a.m. Wednesday in order to be printed in the following Friday's issue. Any letters not meeting these criteria or not considered by the Editorial Board of the *Technique* to be of valid intent will not be printed. Editors reserve the right to edit for style, content and length. Only one submission per person will be printed each term.

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Information and rate cards can be found online at www.nique.net. The deadline for reserving ad space and submitting ad copy is noon on Friday, one week prior to publication. For rate information, call our offices at (404) 894-2830, Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Advertising space cannot be reserved over the phone. The *Technique* office is located in room 137 of the Student Services Building, 353 Ferst Drive, Atlanta, Georgia 30332-0290. Questions regarding advertising billing should be directed to Grant Schissler at (404) 894-9187, or Rose Mary Wells at (404) 894-2830.

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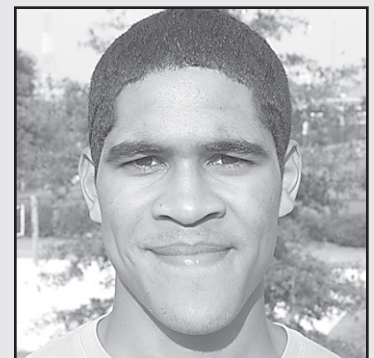
Press releases and requests for coverage may be made to the Editor-in-Chief or to individual section editors. For more information, email editor@technique.gatech.edu.

BUZZ Around the Campus Who would you like to be employed by?



Evan Wimpey
Second-year BME

"I want to work for myself."



Alberto Sanchez
Third-year MGT

"I would like to work for the CIA."



Anna Pavlova
Fourth-year PHYS

"I want to work for Los Alamos National Labs"



Brian French
Second-year UEC

"I want to work for the Atlanta Braves."

Photos by Andrew Carr

Clubs

from page 9

change does. But I don't think the costs outweigh the gains in this particular case. The leadership opportunities lost in a merger could be made up for through greater executive structure in the existing club.

Would writing "Chair of India Club's Committee for Promotion of Indian Music" on your resume really be that much worse than "President of Aarohi Club?" Quality leadership would also preserve the close-knit feeling many clubs generate among the members, as sub-groups would still be able to organize under the auspices of the larger organization.

But let's get back to the freshmen and the pressure they feel to get involved in something. Would a reduction in the number of organizations really encourage more of them to get involved? I certainly think so—as long as what is lost in consolidation is redundancy, not variety, in any case.

Letter

from page 9

for the food and drinks even though we've previously forced other organizations to seek other sources of funding for their equally important events. Next time, let's do our jobs properly and have a fundraiser like almost every other organization on campus.

Rafael Corrales
INTA Rep, Student Government
gtg817q@mail.gatech.edu

Early gaming experiences shape inner nerd

A non-Georgia Tech friend recently asked me about the "boring" notion of playing video games. My friend exclaimed that in addition to being mind-numbingly boring, video games are hazardous to your health. You don't go outside. You just move your thumbs in the same repetitive motions until they rot and eventually fall off. (That's only true sometimes.)

He's clearly not one of "us." Indeed, for most Tech students, gaming is a part of our childhoods. The plight of Pac Man, the existential ponderings posed by Pong, the dinosaur journeying of Mario—these all become part of our personal histories.

While I am not a gaming connoisseur myself, I can sympathize with the gaming culture that is Tech's campus. In response to his criticisms, I told my friend about a particular computer that holds a special place in my heart. It was a good old Apple IIC, complete with a green monitor and a three-square-foot floppy disk.

I was four years old, and my father took me to a local computer store (the only one in my hometown) to purchase a "personal computer" for the family. The shop was dark and small with about five computers on pedestals growing from the carpet like pine trees.

The skinny pale sales guy pointed to the computer at the front of the store, an Apple IIC. "This is the most advanced model we have," he said. And Apple IIC it was.



"The plight of Pac Man...the dinosaur journeying of Mario—these all become part of our personal histories."

Alexandra Pajak
Columnist

We brought it home and kept it in our living room. My dad was an education professor and wanted the ability to type and edit and print efficiently for his first book. He'd type late at night and once the lights were switched off, the moonlight cast a shadow of the monitor on the wall that looked exactly like E.T.'s silhouette.

This frightened me terribly, but my father soon remedied this by introducing me to Alex the Rabbit, a cartoon game that came with the computer. Alex the Rabbit proved to be a fun friend. You helped him through a maze using the four arrow keys so he could eat a carrot and once you led him there, he jumped up and down for joy.

The white pixels on the green background were more alive than any coloring book I'd ever seen.

My father eventually printed the final copy of his book. The paper was the kind with perforated edges. It took him awhile to peel off the strips on both sides of every page. The streams made a pile about a foot deep and two feet wide on our floor. I rolled inside the pile for about an

hour in the kind of delight only four-year olds seem to discover.

We eventually got a better computer a few years later, a new brand called an IBM. The Apple IIC migrated to my bedroom. By this time I had purchased a text-only computer game entitled *Plundered Hearts* with birthday money. Made by the now defunct company Infocom, the premise involved a female captive aboard a pirate ship sailing among the West Indies.

As the captive, you navigated aboard the ship with only a red dress, a white petticoat, a wrist-purse and your sharp problem-solving skills. To survive, you had to steal pirate clothes, dress as a man, float in a barrel to shore, prevent the ship from exploding into flames and attend a splendid ball in a stolen dress. By the end of the game, you found your true love with Captain Jameson, the handsomest pirate on the sea.

As a college student, I read a review of the game that said while it was the one of the first female-oriented games of its time, "Plundered Hearts is a giant step for feminism—side-ways." In other words, yeah a woman

is a main character, but it all involves clothes and falling in love.

Au contraire! What more is there to life than love, wit and fashion? I say little more. I hadn't heard of the West Indies until that game. A geography lesson, for sure. What little girl doesn't want to discover a milky white silk dress to don for a fantastic ball? A Cinderella story, only on a screen instead of a book.

It was in that game I received my first kiss. I remember it well—I stood inside a gazebo facing the strong and handsome Captain Jameson. He plucked a white jasmine from the terrace and placed it inside my hair. He pulled me in close for a firm and determined kiss . . .

At the recollection of my computer kiss my friend began laughing, saying the pirate game sounds hilarious.

Maybe I convinced him video games are as valid a pastime as cooking or reading or trout fishing. Perhaps I didn't, and it'll take more strategy for me to fully convince him of the importance that little computer had in my life.

So, my Techie friends, this column is for you. Stand proud by your gaming units with a hand on your heart and your eye on the evil boss that taunts you with cruel words and occasional fireballs.

I haven't played *Plundered Hearts* for a long time, and yes, I've kissed real guys since then. From dad-daughter bonding to rabbit friends to traveling the world to lessons in romance—let's keep on gaming.