



'We're not asking people to walk through' the club to get to church.'

Michael Robinson, director of promotions, Ken Wood Enterprises

The Gamecock

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Out to Lunch can be awkward for students

Out to Lunch, the program implemented by university Housing and Marriott Dining Services that allows students to treat their professors to a free meal on campus, has been in place since February 1998. The program is intended to help foster a more personal relationship between students and their teachers by allowing social interaction outside the classroom.

But Out to Lunch is drastically underused, according to USC Dining Services District Manager Liz Bohlke. By her estimate, only about 20 people took advantage of the program last semester.

Housing and Marriott obviously have good intentions in continuing this program. In fact, for students in smaller classes who have developed close relationships with their professors, Out to Lunch provides an interesting way to maintain those bonds and make them stronger.

But the formality and distance inherent in most teacher/student relationships make it awkward for many students to develop such open relationships with their professors. A student in a class of 200 isn't likely to even approach his professor, much less invite him to lunch. And if that student should somehow work up the nerve to extend such an invitation, his professor is likely to suspect him of brown-nosing.

A strong teacher/student relationship is important. We applaud the efforts of Marriott and Housing, but we also think they should continue devising easier and more realistic ways to reinforce that relationship — programs with which both students and teachers can feel more comfortable.

Delegation right to honor Shoeless Joe

South Carolina's U.S. representatives have jumped on the political bandwagon to get "Shoeless" Joe Jackson back into baseball almost 50 years after the slugger's death.

Jackson, a Greenville native, was banned for life from baseball when he and seven Chicago White Sox teammates allegedly threw the 1919 World Series. Major League Baseball commissioner Bud Selig agreed last May — at the request of Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin — to review Jackson's case, and he has promised to make a decision soon.

The representatives wrote a collective letter to Selig last week encouraging him to allow the slugger his place in the Baseball Hall of Fame, joining such supporters as presidential candidate Bill Bradley and U.S. Sens. Ernest "Fritz" Hollings and Strom Thurmond. And we hope the letter does its job.

Given that Jackson was arguably the most productive player in the Series that year — he batted .375 and committed no errors — and that he accepted his ban with both grace and dignity, it's time to honor Shoeless Joe's legacy properly.

Jackson was acquitted of all criminal charges after the incident, and it's not anyone's job to decide his guilt or innocence today. But after eight decades, it's time to remember the slugger for his accomplishments and not for a scandal in which his involvement was never proved. If Selig can sort the facts from the myths, he will make the right decision and allow Jackson his rightful place among the greats in Cooperstown.

ABOUT US

The Gamecock is the student newspaper of The University of South Carolina and is published Monday, Wednesday and Friday during the fall and spring semesters and nine times during the summer with the exception of university holidays and exam periods.

Opinions expressed in The Gamecock are those of the editors or author and not those of The University of South Carolina. The Board of Student Publications and Communications is the publisher of The Gamecock. The Department of Student Media is the newspaper's parent organization. The Gamecock is supported in part by student activities fees.

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Letters to the editor or guest columns are welcome from all members of the Carolina community. Letters should be 250-300 words. Guest columns should be an opinion piece of about 600-700 words.

Both must include name, phone number, professional title or year and major, if a student. Handwritten submissions must be personally delivered to Russell House room 333. E-mail submissions must include telephone number for confirmation.

The Gamecock reserves the right to edit for libel, style and space. Anonymous letters will not be published. Photos are required for guest columnist and can be provided by the submitter.

Call 777-7726 for more information.

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SOCIAL ISSUES

Computers no substitute for M.D.s

Most rational people would argue that modern medical treatment owes a great debt to the computer age. Nearly every area of health care has been enhanced by the memory- and processing power of computers. Computers are hardly in danger of replacing physicians (as machines did many factory workers in another era), but I fear they have already begun to cloud some doctors' judgment.

According to a recent *Newsweek* article, an emergency room physician telephoned the regular doctor of woman he'd just treated. He wanted to hospitalize her to be on the safe side. Her regular doctor, however, didn't think that was so safe; he had a prognosis calculator. "By punching in a few basic facts about the woman, he determined that her odds of dying would be 2.2 times higher if she checked into the hospital."

A "prognosis calculator"? Since when was a prognosis something that could be calculated? Sometimes, symptoms may be quantified — a temperature, a white blood cell count — but many times, they must be described. You can't perform a statistical analysis on the itchiness of a rash, or the severity of pain.



Emily Streyer is the Viewpoints editor. She can be reached via The Gamecock at gckviews@sc.edu

Here I was, thinking of dropping a hundred grand on four years of medical school, when I could be spending that money on a prognosis calculator. Have these doctors set up practice in a "Star Trek" episode?

If prognoses were a matter of "punching in a few basic facts," doctors wouldn't be particularly useful to sick people. Do the doctors who use InfoRetriever's prognosis calculator realize how inexact computer modeling is? The quantification of a qualitative property is not always meaningful. Just because a number can be placed on something doesn't mean it provides useful information.

And furthermore, what are the chances of an "otherwise healthy" woman "in no immediate danger" dying anyway, either at home or in a hospital? Is a multiplier of 2.2 really significant in this case?

I can't say. I'm not a doctor, and only the "basic facts" in this case were presented in the *Newsweek* article. It seems that the doctor made the right decision about the woman's treatment. But what concerns me is that, according to *Newsweek*, the woman's doctor used a computer to make his decision rather than his experience and knowledge of medicine and the woman's history. And the ER physician responsible for her release discharged the woman based on that number, which might or might not mean anything.

It might be true that patients with identical symptoms for an identical condition sometimes receive quite different care from different physicians. The admirable aim of InfoRetriever, a computer program that compiles research information and us-

es the data to answer health care questions, is to standardize health care, but its danger lies in the often unknown fact that, for any computer program, the algorithms that make it work are not infallible. And inaccuracy in medical care can cause death.

It's one thing to assign numbers to the health care process for the purposes of creating policy (for the data must be presented for judgment by people who otherwise would not be capable of evaluating it), but shouldn't doctors make diagnoses one patient at a time?

Broad generalizations, such as the assumptions that go into any computer simulation-type program, are for making laws and policy. And more importantly, laws and policy should be flexible enough to allow individual decisions to be made on an individual basis. Would we be impressed, for example, if a judge could punch statistics into a computer and come up with the proper sentence for a criminal? And these are our lives at stake.

It's true that no physician could possibly stay on top of all the research published — but this is one reason we have specialists. And a means of organizing this information so that more physicians have access to the latest findings is no doubt valuable. But isn't letting a computer program make a diagnosis going a bit too far?

InfoRetriever is reputed to be powerful enough to transform the practice of medicine, should it take off. (Right now, only about 200 physicians use the palm-top version.) Let's be careful what we celebrate.

LETTERS

Evolution letter plagued with false assumptions

To the Editor:
I am writing in response to a letter to the editor on evolution, "Evolution not accepted as proven, scientific fact," Sept. 24, in which I feel the author, Donnie Pritchett, is mistaken on several points. The first is his definition of a theory. A scientific theory explains an observation that is supported by a considerable amount of evidence. It is definitely not an "unproved assumption: conjecture." Open any science textbook; you will find that there are many theories in all fields of science, not just biology. Atomic theory, big bang theory, relativity theory, and the heliocentric theory (that the sun is the center of our solar system) are just examples. Not many people question the existence of atoms or that the earth travels around the sun, yet these are "just theories."

The second mistake is that evolution is "plagued with assumptions," pointing specifically to uniformitarianism. All sciences are "plagued" by this same assumption. Uniformitarianism is the idea that the physical and chemical laws and geological processes have remained relatively constant throughout time. For example, gravity works the same now as it always has, and chemicals react the same now as they did in the past. Without this assumption, science cannot work. What would happen to the field of chemistry if tomorrow salt no longer dissolved in water?

Finally, Mr. Pritchett ends his letter with a pair of poorly researched comments. He facetiously states that "science KNEW" that the earth was both the center of the universe and flat, which of course were later proved wrong. The only person who

is wrong is Mr. Pritchett. The idea that the earth was the center of the universe was based on theology, not modern scientific method. Copernicus (i.e. science) was declared a heretic by the church when he proposed that the earth revolved around the sun, coincidentally marking the birth of modern scientific thinking.

I agree with Mr. Pritchett that science can be wrong. Nothing is ever proved in science; findings are simply supported by repeated observations. However, intelligently thinking about "theories" is more beneficial than repeating unsubstantiated rhetoric.

Matt Gilg
Biology Graduate Student

Gamecock failed to cover pertinent event

To the Editor:
Representatives from Alpha Lambda Delta Honor Society have attempted to make arrangements with you and members of your staff over the last few weeks regarding our Sept. 17 Order of the Torch Reception (Outstanding Chapter in the Nation). Prior to the event taking place, agents from the organization issued two press releases about the significance of the event to *The Gamecock*. These press releases were followed by several phone calls to your office so that we could confirm that a small article publicizing the event would be run prior to Friday, Sept. 17.

It is our understanding that because of that week's severe weather, some articles were not used in their originally intended slots to make room for hurricane coverage. While we understand the importance of covering major national, state and local events, we also think that it is important

that *The Gamecock* fulfill its commitment to cover issues and events relevant to student life at USC.

Prior to the event, a representative from our office once again contacted members of your office after we had failed to receive any inquiry regarding our previous press release. This time, we were instructed that if we took our own photographs of the event and submitted them to you by Sunday afternoon, a write-up and picture would be included in Monday's edition. It was also our understanding that if space was limited in Monday's paper, the article would be run Wednesday, Sept. 22.

In reviewing the Sept. 22 edition, we sadly note that Alpha Lambda Delta and its national award have yet to be mentioned in *The Gamecock*.

If you refer to the letter "Students not the focus of *The Gamecock* News, in Sept. 22's "Letters," I think you will see this to be a strong example of the argument made by Ms. Selvig. Alpha Lambda Delta is a student organization that consistently and successfully promotes academic achievement among freshmen students to the point of receiving an award of recognition from the national organization. Unfortunately, that student organization is unable to get coverage in the student paper, even when they go out of their way to work with the paper by making multiple press releases and phone calls, and supplying pictures.

We ask you to review this incident and take the appropriate actions so that your paper serves the students of USC in an informative and meaningful manner.

Patrick M. Heaton
David Rielley
Alpha Lambda Delta Graduate Advisers

LOCAL ISSUES

Changes needed for DMV

I spent Wednesday, trying to transfer title and tags after buying a car. It took four hours and four government buildings; it should have taken one building and 10 minutes. Trouble was, no one whose job it was to handle such transactions agreed on the process. So I started wondering: Are there actually laws concerning title and tags transfers? If so, are they written down anywhere? If so, have they been provided to people who actually work with those transactions? If so, why don't they hire people who can read?



Kiki McCormick writes a column every Friday. She can be reached via The Gamecock at gckviews@sc.edu

This isn't the first time I've had problems with the folks in the general "cars and driving" category of the law. The story you are about to read actually happened, though it never ever should have. Basically, I had my license suspended over a string of paperwork errors. I'll start at the beginning.

One day in the mall, I was writing a check when I realized I didn't have my driver's license in my purse. I had taken it out the night before in a bar in observance of our asinine drinking laws, and had left it in my pocket. Naturally, being a law-abiding citizen, I interrupted my busy day to drive home and get my license.

On the way home, I was pulled over. Apparently, my tags were expired. "Well, officer, I paid my taxes, and the Highway Department failed to send them to me. Do you think you could find out what the problem is?"

But no, this public servant would rather give me a ticket for his colleagues' mistake. He also fined me for not having my license, of course. He did say that when I showed up on my court date, I could bring my tax receipt and he would drop the no-tags ticket, as that would prove the situation wasn't my fault.

So, weeks later, my daughter had to miss her music class so that Mommy could haul her all the way to Lexington for court. Lo and behold, court wasn't even being held that day. This didn't faze the moron cop. He happened to be hanging around the court's lobby, so I showed him my tax receipt. He insisted that I still had to pay. And I said: "No, I have proof in my hand that I paid my taxes on time." Him: "Uh, uh, you just got your tags."

Through an arduous process that involved teaching him that those little numbers with slashes indicate dates, and that this particular date indicated taxes paid months ago, I introduced him to the light and he dropped the ticket. He said, "I'll take care of this," and put the ticket in his pocket.

Of course, he didn't take care of it; his wife probably found my ticket crumpled and washed free of ink when she dried his laundry. In any case, I got a notice in the mail informing me that because I had "failed" to come to court, my license was going to be suspended, and I had to pay additional fines.

So I called the courthouse and informed them that they were mistaken. "Ma'am, if the computer says you haven't paid it, you haven't." I replied: "I don't have to pay it because it no longer exists." "Yes it does, the computer says so." And on and on.

So I tried to get in touch with the officer. He didn't call me back. In the meantime, I spoke with supervisors and supervisors' supervisors, all of whom were convinced of the omniscience of electronic devices.

Finally, I got the officer. He said he'd correct the problem. So I relaxed. A few weeks later, I had no license and a bigger fine. And on, and on, until one day, I walked him through the process of actually changing the information in the all-knowing computer. (By the way, they sent me my tags, which they said must have been destroyed when the mail returned them for some reason. Why destroy them? And why not notify the person to whom they belong?)

I have no solutions. I'm just recording the problem and wondering why the people we pay to serve us can't or won't. Does anyone have any idea what's going on here, and how it can be fixed?