

# Are boys better than girls at geography?

BY DIETRICH EPPERSON  
THE GAMECOCK

A recent study concluded that boys generally perform better than girls in geography, but two USC professors disagree with that conclusion and have their own interpretation of the supposed geographical gender gap.

During the 12-year history of the National Geography Bee competition, only two finalists have been girls.

This low number seems to point to a nationwide problem, some experts fear.

According to an article in The New York Times, of the 5 million students who participated in state geography bees, 77 percent of the winners were boys.

The study found it's not just in competitions that girls perform poorer than males in geography.

The 1990 National Assessment of Education Progress reported that girls score significantly lower on geography tests than boys.

According to the national education project "Finding A Way," this discrepancy carries over to the professional world.

"Finding A Way" states that women are significantly underrepresented in the profession of geography.

The National Geographic Society, which sponsors the geography bees, was concerned enough to

commission a study regarding this geography gender gap.

This study was conducted by professors Lynn Liben and Roger Downs from Penn State University.

Their findings were interesting and controversial.

Liben and Downs concluded that the biggest factor was a difference in "spatial skills" between boys and girls. They say boys tend to have higher "mental rotation skills" than girls.

These skills enable them to mentally rotate or reverse visible images faster than females.

This skill is important in studying maps, which is crucial in preparing for and succeeding in the Geography Bee.

Two USC professors don't agree with this explanation.

Psychology professor Gary Allen concedes that boys are better at mental image rotation. However, he rejects the notion that "spatial skills" are necessary for success in the Geography Bee.

He sees the Bee as requiring old-fashioned memorization.

"The questions are fact-driven, and do not have explicit spatial content," Allen said.

Geography professor Robert Lloyd agrees with Allen. He views the problem as not related to innate ability, but having to do with "interest in the subject."

He said that, at an earlier age, boys simply seem

to be more interested in geography than girls.

"Women are much more involved in the field of geography at the collegiate level. At USC, enrollment in the geography graduate program is divided fifty-fifty between male and female students," Lloyd said.

Lloyd pointed to other signs of female excellence in geography. Nationwide, 38 percent of geography doctorate recipients in 1999 were women. This number reflects a 7 percent increase in the last two years.

"Women are actively involved in the academic and professional spheres of geography, but interest has not filtered down to girls in the K-12 grades," said Lloyd.

Both Allen and Lloyd cite two possible reasons why girls don't do well in the Geography Bee.

First, studies show that boys "explore further from home than girls, and are more active in their environment."

These patterns may foster an interest in knowledge of other places.

Second, boys are often "more motivated to compete and win than are girls."

Allen and Lloyd view these factors as having more to do with societal issues than issues of spatial skills or cognitive abilities.

The university desk can be reached at [gamecockdesk@hotmail.com](mailto:gamecockdesk@hotmail.com).

# USCPD investigates disappearance of VCRs

BY CHARLES PRASHAW  
THE GAMECOCK

The USCPD is currently investigating the disappearance of about 20 VCRs that have somehow disappeared from USC classrooms over the past week.

Officers said there are no suspects at this time, and there is no way to know if the crimes are connected. All the crimes were reported by officials at the USC Distance Education Program and Instructional Support, who discovered the missing equipment.

University spokesman Jason Snyder confirmed that USCPD was conducting a complete investigation into the matter and that he was uninformed about any further developments in the case. Snyder said that Director of Law Enforcement Ernie Ellis had more information about the case.

Ellis was unavailable for comment on the matter.

The possible crime spree started on Thursday, Aug. 31 with two dark gray Zenith VCRs that were discovered missing from rooms 231 and 232 of McMaster College. USC employee Robert Lyon reported that almost \$200 worth of VCR equipment was stolen from the classrooms.

The next day, Craig O'Dell, an employee with distance education, reported that around 5 p.m. 14 VCRs were missing from various colleges. The missing VCRs were: four from Gambrell Hall, one from room 235 of the Law Center, one from room 101 of Hamilton College, five from the business school, three from Physical Science Building and one from the School of Public Health.

In all, police estimate a total of al-

most \$2,000 worth of classroom VCRs are missing.

In most of the cases, the VCRs were located in rooms that were unsecured, and it is believed that someone simply walked out of the classrooms carrying the VCRs.

It's still unclear whether there are additional VCRs missing from other colleges around campus.

All the VCRs were stolen from carts that had TVs with them; a police investigator wouldn't comment of why someone would leave the more valuable TVs and just take the VCRs.

There are nearly 150 such combination of TVs and VCRs on campus that were added to various classroom since last spring in a new program, according to Steven Adams, manager of class technology and distance education.

Adams said all the missing VCRs were part of that program and were of the same make and model.

"We felt it would have been of great benefit for students and teachers to have TV and VCRs readily available in the classroom," Adams said. "We are very eager to take steps to protect the security of these units and get to the bottom of what is going on."

Adams said it's highly unusual for this many VCRs to be missing, and that, during all of last semester, the university only reported two stolen VCRs from classrooms.

For now, police are keeping quiet on whether they believe the person or persons involved in the case are students, non-students or employees of USC.

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## PRAYER

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hind the ACLU's position that "a public school of the government should not sponsor, mandate or organize any religion or prayer," she said taking pre-game prayer before college games to task in the courts could turn out to be a fruitless effort.

This is primarily because attendance at secondary schools is mandatory, she said, while college attendance is voluntary.

"Most people would believe children are more impressionable than adults," Neil said. "As adults, we don't have to participate."

While the ACLU hasn't ruled out challenging college pre-game prayer in the courts, Neil said the civil liberties organization would have to approach any legalities with extreme care.

"It's something we will look at, but we will also take into consideration how the Supreme Court has ruled in the past," Neil said. "There has not been a clear precedent set."

Assistant Athletics Director Kerry Tharp said the prayers have become a part of USC tradition.

"I think it's something we have done at USC for a long, long time," Tharp said. "It's just something we have made ... a part of our pre-game format for a football game."

As far as a court challenge by a group like the ACLU, Tharp said the department wasn't concerned.

"That's not something that we have concerned ourselves with," he said, adding that, to his knowledge, the department has not yet sought legal counsel on the matter.

The Athletics Department plans to continue the ritual "as long as we play the game," Tharp said.

"A pre-game prayer before our football game is something that is important to us as an athletics program."

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## USC student dies; memorial planned

BY BRANDON LARRABEE  
THE GAMECOCK

A USC student who inexplicably became ill the first day of classes has died.

Bruce "Smith" King, a resident of Preston Residential College, died at 12:30 p.m. Thursday.

King had been in a coma at Baptist Medical Center since Aug. 24. He had become ill due to a heart condition.

The exact cause of King's illness is still un-

known, though doctors ruled out drug use and contagious diseases, according to King's friends and university spokesman Jason Snyder.

A memorial service will be held at 3 p.m. today at Rutledge Chapel.



KING

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## Police make three drug arrests

BY JOHN BAILEY  
THE GAMECOCK

Columbia City Police made three arrests Wednesday and Thursday on two crack-cocaine busts on Greene and Pendleton streets.

Two subjects were arrested at 9:30 p.m. Wednesday on charges of possession with intent to distribute at 2200 Pendleton St. They were within a half-mile of Lyon Street Elementary School. Donald Jerome Whitmore handed the responding officer a black container that contained about .5 grams and field-tested positive for co-

caine. Whitmore said that the second subject handed the container to him to hold. The second subject, a minor, was also arrested.

A day later, and only blocks away, officers arrested another man after he dropped an off-white colored rock (weighing approximately .2 grams, and field tested positive for cocaine) after speaking with a responding officer. The responding officer received information that a black male wearing a white sweater and blue jeans was in the area looking for drugs. The subject, Charles G. Walthall, was then arrested and transported to Richland County Detention Center.

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The Gamecock will have a recruitment meeting at 7 p.m.

Wednesday, Sept. 13 in Russell House room 333.

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