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IN OUR OPINION

Budget cuts hinder higher education

Despite claiming that education is a priority in next year's state budget, Gov. Mark Sanford's proposal betrays educational advancement in South Carolina by failing to earmark any additional funding for faculty pay raises and cutting the USC branch campuses in Union and Salkehatchie.

It is a short-sighted move to prioritize K-12 education budget increases.

In a state that consistently ranks at the bottom for academic achievement, it is a short-sighted move to prioritize K-12 for budget increases, as the effects of such increases will

take years to manifest.

USC's effort to attract and retain quality professors will be crippled if money is not earmarked for salary increases, which would be disastrous for USC President Andrew Sorenson's focus on building a research campus with some of the brightest minds in the nation.

The reduction in state funding of higher education is not surprising, considering national trends, and Sorenson is wise to link the development of a research campus to fund-raising efforts and the cultivation of an endowment. Sanford's budget proposals only serve to underline that to remain successful, USC must emphasize private donations and good investments as the means to financial stability.

While it is doubtful that all of the governor's proposals will make it through the State House untouched by the legislature, the push to eliminate the Union and Salkehatchie campuses highlight the lack of a coherent educational strategy for South Carolina.

The governor has long pushed for consolidation of state services, including reducing duplication in the educational system. Coupled with the merger of USC Spartanburg and USC Aiken, which was completed last year, reducing the number of branch campuses will free up more funding for the main Columbia campus and hopefully reduce the need for massive tuition increases like those seen in recent years.

However, consolidation will only be effective if the state's technical schools receive commensurate increases in resources to make up for the lack of local higher education where the satellite campuses once existed.

OBESITY IN KIDS IS NOW EPIDEMIC IN U.S.



CARTOON COURTESY OF KRT CAMPUS

For social scene, an abrupt about-face

Students trade keyboards for kegs to meet people online

It's spring now, and as the popped collars and wristbands of the past fall semester will be as few and far between as the trucker's hats of last year, it's time for a new trend to hit colleges across America. Welcome to Thefacebook.com. I know you're thinking, "Wait, I've seen you on there," but check out my friends list.

After this column gets passed around the lecture hall, I'm going to be the first ever to have a friends list hit the negative. But whatever. The Facebook is like going to party and not having to leave the house. Unlike a party though, you can't get slapped for being rude or drunk. It's almost perfect. Almost.

The problem is that The Facebook is just that — a face book. It's not like every person on there just puts up the best picture they have of themselves. It's not like anyone's using Photoshop or Facebookers pose like they're trying to get cast in an Oxy commercial. No, this is totally honest self-advertising for personal gain in the contemporary college pastime known as "trying to get laid." Thanks to Thefacebook.com, you don't even have to leave your computer! No warm beer, no waiting for the keg, no \$3 drinks and heels — you don't even have to wear heels to do it. Why pay thousands of dollars a



COREY HUTCHINS

FIFTH-YEAR ENGLISH STUDENT

year in dues for those Greek letters when now all you have to do is own a computer and have a little spare time before "Family Guy" comes on? Just when college students thought nothing could beat Easy Mac, along came AOL Instant Messenger. Just

when college students thought nothing could beat AIM, here comes The Facebook. Remember when we used to pass notes in class?

This is like that on amphetamines and addicted to Spanish fly. I'm hooked. But The Facebook isn't all about hooking up or hanging out on the cyber quad. It's also about bonding without the "Whoa, you're too close" awkwardness. They even have a button you can click to "poke" someone.

Think of insinuation without the restraining order. Think of yanking on the ponytail of the girl in front of you without the Saturday detention. You can also tell a lot about people from the groups function of The Facebook.

It's not really baffling that everyone in the Bow Tie Wearers and Fans Club are also all proud members of Bush Is My Homeboy. Or how

members of Chronic Nappers United probably don't have connected friendships to anyone in Cocaine Anonymous. But groups don't define us. Not in college. Nope, never have. So if you haven't been to Thefacebook.com yet, I encourage you to sign up — not because it's healthy for you and not because it will make you rich or help your grades.

But just like everything else in college, do it because it's fun. Because it's more infectious than Ebola and will keep you up until two in the morning when you should be cramming for midterms or puking in the toilet. Steve Spurrier is on there. USC President Andrew Sorenson, too. So are half the USC cheerleaders (even the guys) and even that kid you only see when you're drunk in Five Points who swears he knows you and you're "totally best friends" until it's his turn to buy the next round. But just like everything else in real life, there are a few simple rules. First, use good judgment. Second, just like cell phones, AIM and your SUV, don't do it when you're drunk.

As a friend of mine said a few weeks ago, "Man, she looked good on The Facebook, but when I met her in real life I started having flashbacks of 'Shrek 2.'" And another thing — please stop sending me messages asking, "How do I know you?" I obviously am not following the second rule.

Bush's Pell policy out of line

Education grant rules cause headaches for S.C. college students

More than a year ago, in September 2003, I wrote a column explaining how the Bush administration's plans for restructuring the federal financial aid formula would screw middle class students out of what they should receive, even as tuition continues to increase.

Well, the president didn't give up after his initial gambit failed, and instead found enough support in Congress to take a shot or two at Pell Grants in December. It was a nice Christmas present to South Carolina college students — South Carolina is one of six states that will be hit hardest by the cuts.

An estimated 1.3 million students nationwide will be directly affected by a smaller grant or no grant whatsoever. The cuts will cause a ripple effect through the entire financial aid system, and students who were relying on not having to pay back a Pell Grant will end up having to pay back a loan, with interest.

The government is expected to save \$300 million a year, but you'd think that the White House brain trust would look elsewhere (like, say,



WES WOLFE

FIFTH-YEAR PUBLIC RELATIONS STUDENT

more cannon fodder to send to that quagmire by the Tigris.

It's really not to be expected that Bush and his people would give a damn about middle class students and families affording college anyway.

Certainly not the president, who relied on the legacy of his father and grandfather to attend Yale, pull C's, get drunk and get coked up. This really is a sick joke, considering that in his campaigns in 2000 and 2004, Bush promised to bolster the Pell Grant program.

Bush claims he's helped the Pell Grant program by allocating more funds, but he hasn't allocated enough money. There are more students

becoming eligible for Pell Grants, and the president's funding hasn't kept up. Now he's cutting back.

His minions in Congress are even worse. I remember that after my column ran, Rep. Joe Wilson wrote a letter to the editor saying that I was employing liberal scare tactics — well, it sure is scary to watch your Pell Grant get cut. He mentioned phrases like "Republican pro-education agenda." I would laugh if it weren't so horrible.

Quite honestly, I don't know if the sick feeling in my stomach is from my hangover from last night or the realization that the leaders of our country are dangerously out of touch and actively pursuing the worst public policy I've seen in my life.

If Congressman Wilson is so fired up about kids being able to afford college, why did he fail to mention education in his front-page column in the suburban Irmo News last week? Instead, he harped on base closings and tax cuts. Well, tax money funds the military.

Of course, maybe they will balance the books after all. They'll just take money from kids going to college and reappropriate it for more guns. That's the message from our president now: Drop out of school and grab a gun — go to war and kill some Arabs. You don't need that degree anyway.

Natural disasters other than Bennifer

Tsunami relief effort deserves more attention from American people

Ah, America, how I love thee. Far across the world, in some little-known locale known only as "Tsunami-land," more than 150,000 people have died

because of a vast natural disaster. Every once in a while, a "Give Money To Red Cross" pop-up appears on my browser as I wander the Internet, but I just close it out. I can't be distracted from my pursuit of the newest Paris Hilton sex video by something

GRAHAM CULBERTSON

FOURTH-YEAR ENGLISH STUDENT

that pedestrian.

But of course, the sports world came to the rescue. The Yankees are giving a million dollars, the NBA and its player's association are giving a million (combined), as are Major League Baseball and its player's association.

But most exciting was the recent clash of Kobe "Don't Call Me A Rapist" Bryant and Tracy "Don't Associate Me With Kobe Bryant" McGrady, who pledged \$1,000 for each point they scored in Friday's Rockets-Lakers game.

Imagine, if you will, that Friday's game took place just a few months ago, with T-Mac, in true Texas style, pledging a thousand smackers for every point he scored to DUBYA's campaign, while Kobe took an anti-Schwarzenegger approach and dedicated his scoring to John Kerry's campaign.

Fights would have broken out across the country — states would have been colored red for T-Mac and purple for Kobe. But since the money was for tsunami victims, the only people who cared were SportsCenter anchors (oh, and presumably tsunami victims, but we don't hear much from them).

But wait! NBA superstars weren't enough to get the public mobilized behind saving millions, but perhaps we could tell them a supermodel is in danger?

That's right, a search on Yahoo News for "tsunami supermodel" returned 11 articles (out of the first 20) written entirely about Petra Nemcova, the Czech supermodel and 2003 Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition cover girl that was injured in the deadly tsunami.

Recently, you'll be happy to hear, Nemcova modeled for Us Weekly from her Thai hospital bed in order that the proceeds might benefit tsunami victims. Now that's dedication (I think).

The upshot of this whole messy tsunami business, with NBA stars pledging aid, injured Czech supermodels posing from hospital beds (hopefully with Paris Hilton) and messages on major Web sites begging for aid donations, is that it takes a whole lot to get us Americans to care.

Hold a presidential election between a pair of meaningless placeholders, and you'll see a country divided. Tell the richest nation in the world that millions are homeless (not to mention the millions here and abroad who were already homeless, most of whom live between the Horseshoe and the Koger Center on College Street), and the result is a collective yawn, unless a Czech supermodel or polarizing sports star is involved. If that's the case, you'll at least get somebody interested (although never, under any circumstances, in international aid).

Right, I don't have any more time to write about the tsunami victims now — I still have that Paris Hilton video to find.

IT'S YOUR RIGHT

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THE CRIMSON WHITE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

Anyone who saw the Music City Bowl knows how referees can sometimes make a few mistakes that could ultimately cost one team or another the game. It would be wonderful if all football games could be called perfectly, but this is not a reality due to a small stipulation called human error. This year, the Big Ten implemented a plan that enabled referees to try instant replay as a form of check, and it seemed to work well.

THE LANTERN OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

While the enemy combatants held at Guantanamo Bay and other military prisons are some of the most dangerous people in the world, they have rights too, both in international and U.S. law. Denying them their rights by holding them indefinitely in violation of habeas corpus just further confirms the idea in terrorists' minds that we are as evil and corrupt as we think they are.