

Dead Air

WGA strike puts stopper on new episodes of many popular shows

By Alana Gibson
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Television is fast approaching disarray. Before the writer's strike, students sat comfortably in dorm rooms and lounges across campus loyally following their favorite television shows. Now many sit, eyes scrunched and fingers crossed, hoping that Grey's Anatomy got in as many scripts as they could before the strike. They cry alone at night without The Word from The Colbert Report.

The bedlam is over contract negotiations between Writer's Guild of America (WGA) and Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP). The focus is new media content. Writers of the evolving webisodes would like to get paid when their material is watched.

"What we must have is a contract that gives us the ability to keep up with the financial success of this ever-expanding global industry," Patric M. Verrone, president of WGA, said to Time magazine.

Pickers from Hollywood to New York

lined up to protest, BlackBerrys and water bottles close at hand.

"Who's got the Power?" was hollered through a bullhorn in Los Angeles.

"No money? No downloads. No downloads? No peace," was chanted in Rockefeller Center, New York.

Pickers included Tina Fey, the creator of NBC's 30 Rock and Steven Peterman, an executive producer of Hannah Montana. A handful of shows like Two and a Half Men, and The View have also felt the wrath of this strike.

What does this mean for the weekly gatherings that take place across campus, as viewers anticipate each week's cliff-hanger? Re-runs and reality television seem the only consolation.

The last industry-wide strike, in 1988, left thousands of people out of work, and some estimates claimed strike-related losses as high as \$500 million.

J. Nicholas Counter, president of the Producer's Alliance, said to the New York Times, "We were on strike for five months in 1988. The issues this time are more difficult



Pickers at a WGA rally in Culver City, CA on Nov. 9.

and more complex."

Now, media is in much more competition regarding viewer's attention with the advancement of the Internet, and invention of MP3 players, and DVD's. Face it, there are better things to do.

Viewers can expect more foreign

programming from international writers not covered by the WGA, or they can expect to be bombarded with more tasteless material until an agreement is made. If worst comes to worst the remote just might get substituted for a good, old-fashioned book.

NCLB

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our most challenging schools."

This proposal has been criticized as an attempt to displace accountability from the state to individual teachers.

"I think (providing incentives based on test scores) makes a really negative impact on teachers," said Assistant Professor of education studies Julie Burke. "In my experience as a teacher in public school and as a teacher-educator it's very detrimental. It causes a whole chain reaction of unsustainable pressure that gets put on the kids because the teachers have pressure on them because the principals have pressure on them, because the superintendents have pressure on them."

The Bush administration introduced NCLB in 2001 in an effort to increase the accountability of teachers for their students' progress, and provide parents more freedom in selecting their child's school. It emphasized reading and math skills and mandated that all children read at grade level by 2014.

"Seems like a reasonable thing to ask, to have every child reading at grade level by 2014, or being able to do math at grade level by 2014," said Bush in a recent statement addressing his plans for reauthorization. "So now is the time not to roll back the accountability or water down standards."

Individual states are required to develop standardized assessments in math, reading, and as of this school year, science, to be given to all students in a particular grade.

An adequate yearly progress (AYP) for each school is assessed and

funding is based on which schools have shown improvement.

"Measuring results helps teachers catch problems early, so children who need help - extra help can get that help," Bush said. "In other words, you can't determine whether a child needs extra help unless you measure."

Critics of the AYP system claim that schools with large populations of students with social or cultural backgrounds that set them at a disadvantage are the ones that need extra funding to attract better teachers and tutoring programs, and their test scores may not qualify them to benefit from extra federal funding.

"If you want to improve student performances instead of penalizing teachers

and penalizing the schools by taking away money because they're not meet the average yearly improvement they need to throw money at those schools to provide tutors and resource officials," said Assistant Professor of Political Science Robert Duncan.

The National Education Association (NEA) has been especially critical of the AYP requirement and has asked Congress to re-evaluate its effectiveness.

The NEA Web site states, "The adequate yearly progress (AYP) formula is a highly inaccurate and arbitrary yardstick for measuring progress. The law sets predetermined benchmarks for students' proficiency without taking into account schools' starting points. Furthermore, its testing of students with disabilities and English language learners is neither valid nor reliable."

Many scholars believe that the requirement to fulfill testing quotas encourages teachers to "teach to the test," focusing on a narrow area of skills specific to scoring high on the state's standardized tests. States develop their own standardized tests, which means they can make the content less challenging to boost their scores. A study done by the Department of Education in 2007 indicated that the rigor of the states' tests account for most of the observed differences in scores between states.

In order to provide proof of improvement, NCLB has strongly emphasized statistics and test scores.

"It turns knowledge that's worth knowing into a measurable commodity," Burke said.

In shaving the curriculums down to the bone, "core" knowledge, not coincidentally knowledge that is measurable by a number such as math and reading skills is now taking up time that used to be reserved for history, art, music, and social and cultural exploration.

"We've lost a lot of opportunities for kids to develop on a social level," said Associate Professor of Education Studies David Hildreth. "Right now (kids are) being expected to do things that take away from their opportunities to play, to be creative, and to mess about. It's good to have high expectations, without a doubt, but not at the expense of a kid's being a kid."

Under NCLB, schools are given incentives to meet yearly achievement requirements and receive bonuses for scoring exceptionally high. Some scholars claim that this rewards system provides an incentive for

schools to push out disadvantaged and non-English speaking students.

Many parents have argued that under the pressure of NCLB, teachers are not differentiating among different student ability levels. They focus their efforts on those students who are performing below the standard, because that is where the incentive lies.

"Because it's all about bringing people up to that minimum level of performance, we've ignored those high-ability learners," said Nancy Green, executive director of the District-based National Association for Gifted Children, to the Washington Post. "We don't even have a test that measures their abilities."

One of the chief criticisms of NCLB is that it has been severely under-funded. On one side, federal funding for education increased almost 60 percent between 2000-2003. However, Bush's budget for 2008 includes \$61 billion for the Department of Education, a \$1 billion cut from 2007's allotted budget.

"The government's not putting its money where its mouth is," Duncan said. "You could probably cancel one B-2 bomber and pay for this for years."

Many states have struggled financially to keep up with the demands for highly qualified teachers and rigorous tutoring programs that are required under NCLB.

"Why should states have to spend their own money to promote and to implement federal mandates," said Reg Weaver, president of the NEA.

The Bush administration maintains that statistically, the achievement gap in reading in math between minority

students and white students has been slowly but surely closing. According to NAEP assessments, math scores for fourth and eighth graders have reached all-time highs, and reading progress for nine-year-olds has improved more in the past five years than in the previous 28 years combined. Bush and his administration remain resolute that the program is working, though they admit it is "a work in progress."

"In theory it's a great idea, because who would want to leave a child behind?" Hildreth said. "The actual implementation of that has not been followed through very thoughtfully. There has not been enough funding and enough research about how to best do that."

Whether or not NCLB gets reauthorized this year is still up in the air. Without the bipartisan support that the act initially had in 2003, and in wake of the criticisms it has received from respected organizations like ATF, NEA and the National Health Association, which claims that the profound pressures put on the teachers and students is creating unhealthy classroom environments, Bush may have a hard time pushing the renewed NCLB through congress.

"The House education committee is rushing forward at reckless speed, and, if this keeps up, the result is going to be a sloppy law that is worse than the current law," said Edward McElroy, president of the American Federation of Teachers. "It is clear from the just-released discussion draft that lawmakers have a lot of work to do before anyone can say they have gotten it right."