

The Daily Tar Heel

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Keeping up with the times

Kudos to the University administration for its commitment to renovating the Undergraduate Library and for the preliminary plans.

Now, instead of merely being the best place to pick up a date, the Undergrad will also provide better access to technology that is necessary in today's ever-expanding intellectual climate.

The library renovations, which could be completed by 1999, call for better computer resources and more hands-on training for future students.

The Undergrad provides a symbolic centris for all undergraduate learning, even if a student never enters its doors. Any undergraduate should be able to be proud of a modern, up-to-date building that represents the learning of the past and a commitment to the learning of the future.

Future students will most likely regard electronic resources as important to them as Webster's Dictionary or Roget's Thesaurus might be to the current scholar.

The necessity of incorporating this modern

venue into the University's learning environments cannot be stressed enough. The research of the future will be done via the Internet at web sites devoted to disciplines or criticism relating to particular subjects. Intellectual dialogue will take place not only over a cup of coffee but also via modem. The University must train its students to take part in this dialogue.

Although some students have complained that the 12 month to 18 month period of renovation will hamper their studies, the sacrifice is worthwhile. The administration has already tentatively agreed to move important resources to Davis Library and to offer 24-hour access at this site. And if plans for off-campus and 24-hour South Campus computer labs come to fruition, this too could ease the burden on students.

In short, renovating the Undergrad can only benefit the University's students, reputation and overall dedication to learning in current and future times.

Learning AIDS

While the ninth annual World AIDS Day took place Sunday, campus events recognizing awareness of the disease stretch out throughout this last week of classes. This week provides the community the impetus to learn about and become active in the fight against today's AIDS.

Statistics show that activists certainly have a strong enemy to deal with — one that has gained a foothold in our own backyard.

Currently, 2,600 North Carolinians live with the disease, and 4,200 state residents have died. This year, 53 new HIV cases and 639 new AIDS cases were reported in North Carolina. AIDS is not merely a sound bite on the 6 o'clock news.

Worldwide, 3.1 million people contracted the HIV virus in 1996, bringing the total number of people with HIV or AIDS to 22.6 million.

Deaths to date total 5.8 million.

The University community should pay close attention as young people comprise one of the groups being hit the hardest by the disease.

That's why it's important to take time out from end-of-the-semester parties and exam preparations to attend one of the World AIDS Day campus events.

Sexual orientation, race and age don't matter — AIDS affects all of us, and it's up to all of us to fight the disease. We can promote education and prevention by volunteering to help patients, by not perpetuating the ignorance that surrounds the disease.

We can — and must — help carry the momentum and excitement about AIDS advances into every week of the year.



Think about it: What is your reason for the season?

The semester is nearly over, and with it comes my last column of the year. In a few days the bane of every college student's existence will begin: final exams. You know what I'm talking about — the weeklong period where pizza and Mountain Dew become the two major food groups and sleep becomes a treasure worth more than gold. Of course, following closely on the heels of exams is my favorite holiday, Christmas.

Christmas is a wonderful time of year. Why do you think that is? What is the "true meaning of Christmas," besides one of the more overused clichés of the season.

To me, an important part of Christmas is the time my family spends together. This past weekend, my family and I decorated the Christmas tree and adorned the house with garlands and lights. As the holiday season approaches, a certain magical quality fills the air. Anticipation grows by the day, although when I was younger I remember thinking that day might never come.

The reason for my anticipation as a child was simple: presents. What child isn't filled with wonderment as the world around them changes into a red and green paradise? Although my parents never taught me the Santa Claus story, I, like my other young friends, dreamed about the jolly old man clad in red and riding in a sleigh filled with gifts.

But I grew up and realized that there was no Santa Claus. Now without Santa, the season seemed somewhat devoid of meaning. If my parents were the ones who put the presents under the tree, then why? How did that start? Why do people give presents? Why did we celebrate this holiday in the first place?

In considering the origins of Christmas, we need look no further than the name itself. "Christ" and "Mass" are the root words behind the word itself. In breaking down the word Christmas, Webster's Dictionary points to Jesus Christ, the Christian messiah and the Catholic mass, which is built upon the celebration of the Eucharist, or communion. So Christmas is a gathering where the Messianic Christ is celebrated.

Hmmmm, so how did we go from this word and its old English origins to the current and

frenzied materialistic world that is the Christmas season? Damned if I know, but it points to one of the most disturbing distortions of the holiday season: materialism. These days Christmas is completely based around the giving of gifts. Many people try to justify this by putting a humanistic spin on it. They point to the joy of giving and talk of how wonderful it is to give rather than receive. But why are they giving?

The earliest example of giving in conjunction with Christmas is that of the three wise men found in the Bible. These three eastern kings traveled a great distance to present the Christ child with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

But it staggers me to think of how far we have come from the point to the rampant commercialism that so permeates the month of December. The airwaves are saturated with enticements to buy this or that product. Children beg their parents for the latest toy. Parents spend far beyond their means in trying to ensure their children's happiness and affection.

The problem is that people are confused as to the heart of the Christmas spirit. The origins of this holiday, obvious in the name itself, are based upon the birth of Jesus Christ. This holiday which has become so twisted has its roots deeply in the tradition of the Bible. If you study the history of Christmas, you will see that it has always been a religious time.

Certainly various cultures through time have put their spin on it. Saint Nicholas or Santa Claus are just one example of humans adding onto spiritual traditions. But throughout history the central theme of Christmas has been a celebration of the birth of Jesus. The example set by the wise men is an admirable one. Selfless giving is at the center of the Christmas

message, the sacrifice of a divine being to become human.

Perhaps you think that the Bible and its stories are nothing but myth. Then why do you celebrate a holiday that has such straightforward religious implications? How can you ignore the various symbols constantly on display? Could it be possible to construe a celebration of Christmas as an embracing of its meaning and origins? Doubtful, because there are far too many people whose entire concept of Christmas revolves around what they are going to get Mom or Dad.

Unfortunately, I still get caught up in the materialism around this time of year. I look forward to Christmas morning when I will open presents with my family. I also look forward to presenting them with tokens of my appreciation for their love and support. I don't think that this is wrong, but when I overly emphasize what's coming to me, I lose sight of the heart of Christmas. For at the heart of Christmas is the greatest gift ever given, God giving his son Jesus Christ so that we might live with him eternally.

I know that it is still nearly a month until Christmas, and it is highly unlikely that any thought sparked by this column will last anywhere near that long, particularly with finals approaching.

But consider this: What does Christmas mean to you? If its entire connotation is wrapped up in gifts, trees and reindeer, then you may want to consider if these are worthy objects to base a holiday around. Further, you might ask yourself why you celebrate a holiday such as this. Is it because of its origins, its deeply spiritual beginnings?

Reflecting back, I can't believe that this is my last column of the semester. I certainly hope that I have not offended anyone. Rather, I hope I have made you think about things in a different light than you might normally see in The Daily Tar Heel. I hope that you have perceived me as someone who stands for something. It seems to me that if we don't stand for something, we will likely fall for anything.

Merry Christmas.

Matt Osman is a senior history major from Charlotte.



MATT OSMAN
OSMANIA



'Bookkeeper' joins 'Tattooee' as deserving of pat on back

TO THE EDITOR:
Upon reading Richard Ray's column, "Letter between h and j makes no appearance" (Nov. 21), I noticed some incorrect information. Ray states that the word "Tattooee" earns a pat on the back as the only nonhyphenated word that has three double letters together. I wondered if there were any other words that fit these criteria when I thought of the word "bookkeeper."

This is my solitary personal contribution to UNC's intellectual climate.

John Caldwell
FRESHMAN
UNDECIDED



READERS' FORUM

The Daily Tar Heel welcomes reader comments and criticism. Letters to the editor should be no longer than 400 words and must be typed, double-spaced, dated and signed by no more than two people. Students should include their year, major and phone number. Faculty and staff should include their title, department and phone number. The DTH reserves the right to edit letters for space, clarity and vulgarity. Bring letters to the DTH office at Suite 104, Carolina Union, mail them to P.O. Box 3257, Chapel Hill, NC 27515 or e-mail forum to: dth@unc.edu.

SHS intended for students; 'Costwise' not applicable

TO THE EDITOR:
Your article "Employees pay more for treatment at SHS" (Nov. 25) may have raised questions among students, faculty and staff about the policies governing nonstudent use of our facility.

As a general rule, faculty and staff are not eligible to call and make appointments at Student Health Service.

However, since its inception, the Sports Medicine section, because of its special expertise, has seen a limited number of nonstudents.

Nonstudents never replace students who need treatment.

This small practice adds to SHS revenues from a non-health-fee source.

All individuals paying the student health fee already receive these services with no associated professional fees or with markedly discounted fees for orthopedic visits.

Nonmembers do not receive these program services.

The article also discusses "Costwise," a

few patient visits, SHS has not elected to pursue this program.

I regret Andrew Brockway's being surprised by this fact as we believe all patients have the right to understand SHS billing practices.

For our SHS members, I wish to state clearly that offering cost-effective services and participating in "Costwise" are basically unrelated issues.

As part of its accountability to its members, SHS constantly examines cost effectiveness. Through an organized performance improvement program, SHS is dedicated to maximal utilization of health fee revenues and negotiation of favorable rates for internally offered specialty services.

Dr. Judith R. Cowan
DIRECTOR
STUDENT HEALTH SERVICE

Time's up

OK all you rabid letter writers and guest columnists, today's the last day to get legitimate — we're talking a weekly photo and 1,000 words on the back page of The Daily Tar Heel.

Yes, applications are due by 5 p.m. today — not one minute later — to be a DTH columnist or editorial writer.

The DTH is looking for four columnists who wish to take on the University, or at least a few stubborn minds. We will choose these individuals for their writing ability and critical thinking skills.

The DTH also has a few open spots on its editorial board, which writes the unsigned editorials on the left side of the page. This position requires attending three weekly meetings, writing two editorials a week and keeping up on current news.

Applications are still available — so if you're reading this before noon, run to a computer lab near you and type away.

Contact Editorial Page Editor-select Julia Corbin at 962-4086 if you have any questions.

THE DAILY TAR HEEL

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