

Noon in the Pit. 8 p.m. at the Smith Center. 2 a.m. on Franklin Street. Here are ...

Thursday, February 22 12:20 p.m.

Due to the wintry weather outside, the Pit at high noon seems deserted – vacated for warmer venues, including Union Station.

Long lines of people with UNC ONE Cards and cash in hand hustle toward the cashier. Harried students juggle muffins, yogurts and snack food while scanning the room for a place to sit.

Junior Jeanette Crets has a comfortable location on a couch facing the television, snugly positioned near her friends. Crets, a management and society major from Winston-Salem, is enjoying her one-hour break between classes.

Crets has grabbed a snack and some laughs with friends to unwind from two morning exams. "I'm anti-doing work right now," Crets said. "I have class in 10 minutes."



12:32 p.m.

Seven-year-old Christopher Nelsen has his eye on some pie.

Leaning on the pizza counter at Mainstreet Lenoir, the silent child seems mesmerized by his options, despite barely being tall enough to rest his arms on the counter.

Nelsen's father, Roger, works with the General Alumni Association and has brought his home-schooled son to work today as a treat for doing well on a state competency test earlier this week.

"It was a tough call between the wraps and the pizza," Roger Nelsen said, amused by his son's preoccupation with lunch. Christopher is helping his dad recycle old files in the office today when he's not reading.

1:30 p.m.

Since 6 a.m., utility groundskeepers Reggi Bland and David Stephens have been prowling campus in their green John Deere Gator, ready to fight ice with salt.

They are one of eight dynamic duos on campus, sent out with Gators by the Grounds Services Department because the usual trucks and plows were not needed to clear up this wintry mix.

"It's not really bad," Bland said. "It's starting to melt now."

Stephens added that it was a preventative measure, as it is predicted that the temperature will be below freezing tomorrow.

"We're trying to hit steps, just in case," he said before Bland backed up the Gator and headed for Murphey Hall.



2:27 p.m.

Nearly halfway through class, division of interest in 011 Woollen Gym is evident.

For the majority of the front rows in the statistics class, students attentively scribble down notes ranging from probability to density functions.

But the real action (or lack thereof) is from the final row. Two students, nearly oblivious to their fellow classmates, sleep peacefully in the final row, with pens in hand but brain in shutdown mode.

No one – fellow students or instructor – attempts to wake the dozing students from their comatose states.

4:04 p.m.

Tidbits of an expanding technology trickle through the door into Starbucks.

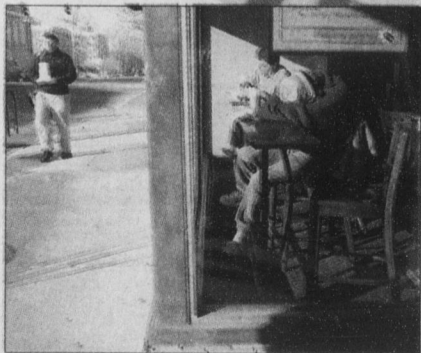
Another cell phone whisks its owner out of the wind and rain and into the coffee shop. "I'll be there in just a few minutes," says the cell phone's owner, and she leaves with the speed of a cable connection.

A metallic laptop sits silently, reflecting the overcast skies. "I was looking at the weather online," drifts a voice from across the room.

The door to the caffeine conglomerate breezes open again, promising more purchases. A voice rises above the din, saying, "... gigantic companies."

Speak of the devil.

"Well, you can reach me on my cell phone." Perhaps the devil has one, too.



5:54 p.m.

Travis Robinson and Jason Priest have already been sitting outside Goodfellows on Franklin Street asking passers-by for spare change for about four hours as darkness starts to set in around them.

"We'll be out here until we go back to camp," Robinson says. "Camp" is what they call their tent and sleeping bags located in some bushes off Merritt Mill Road. They anticipate spending another three hours on Franklin Street before calling it a night.

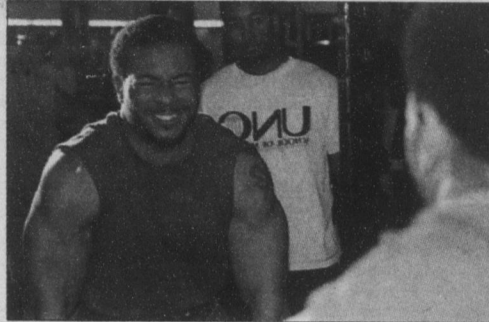
The two men say cold days are especially rough because not as many people are outside to donate. "We're not doing so good today," Robinson says.

6:02 p.m.

It's rush hour at the Student Recreation Center – wait, almost every hour is rush hour at the SRC these days. The noise level is somewhat reminiscent of a marketplace but with more clangs and a pulsing beat of club music coming from the aerobics classes.

Upstairs, the Cardio KickBox class is in an intense squat interval. The members – clad in a melange of spandex, T-shirts, sports bras, yoga pants and muscle shirts – focus intently on the combinations, breathing and sweating heavily in the humid room.

Despite the instructor's encouragement, one woman winces as she feels the burn and simply stops in the middle of all the bending and squeezing to fan herself with her hands.



6:54 p.m.

Hobnobbing on the U-bus.

The U-bus, full of chattering students returning home from dinner or class, becomes more than just a bus ride as strangers strike up conversations with each other and make plans for the night.

One man asks a woman for her phone number before getting off at his stop. The two had hit it off during the ride to South Campus, making conversation about the bar scene in Chapel Hill and the Canadian drinking age.

As the bus passes the Smith Center, which already has a pregame crowd gathered before it, students at the back exchange their UNC basketball experiences of seats in the nosebleed section.

The bus driver, oblivious to all the student interaction, hungrily munches on an apple as he drives to the next stop.

8:03 p.m.

The first sounds characteristic of UNC basketball greet the hoards of people marching down Bowles Drive to the Smith Center.

"Who needs tickets? Lower level. Right here."

The call from one solicitor to the oncoming masses breaks the monotonous diffusion into the arena.

Inside, fans are again assailed with offers. "Get your programs."

Food and merchandise call to the game's patrons. Only "The Star-Spangled Banner" brings momentary silence to the excitable crowd.

Soon, the action of the game rejuvenates the momentary lapse in energy. The lights dim over the fans, and the crowd erupts as UNC center Brendan Haywood tips the ball to a teammate.

8:25 p.m.

The faint chatter of students working on a group project seeps into the hallway on the second floor of Hanes Art Center. Ten smiling students are gathered around a single computer laughing.

A golden-haired dog with a white stripe down his middle slowly rounds the corner into the hallway with his ears perked, listening for the voices. No owner is in sight, and the dog slowly walks down the hall and enters the room with the students.

The dog's entrance creates no audible reaction from the students. After a minute, not finding the attention he was seeking, the dog leaves and continues wandering the building.

8:57 p.m.

A blond girl clad in Thursday's best black pants leans against a concrete pillar, shifting her weight and trying to talk into her cell phone.

Ten people line up at the adjacent ATM for halftime snack cash. Passers-by strain to hear the people they're talking to over the MBNA credit card sign-up girl hawking her wares.

"Free Carolina hat, free Carolina hat if you sign up right here," she cries.

Students in ski jackets carry cups to solicit donations for the UNC Dance Marathon.

Two older gentlemen relax and chat. One carries binoculars and embodies everyone's grandpa.

The MBNA girl raises her voice a notch to be heard over the pep band's bass drums, which signal halftime's end. Her accomplice twirls the free hat around his fist, hoping to attack one more sucker.

The smokers suck one last drag from their cigarettes and come inside. Fans stroll to their seats.

9:27 p.m.

The lobby of Hinton James Residence Hall is full of hungry students. One after another, delivery men are let in the back entrance. The students are scrambling to find which of the five men is holding their dinner.

One brunette has been told to write her PID number on the bill and sign it. She looks confused at the total on the bill. "This isn't mine; I ordered from Ham's," she says. "Did anyone order from Hector's?"

She finds the correct delivery man holding the styrofoam container with her food inside. Another minute passes, and the lobby is empty, but the elevators are full of people and the aroma of pizza and cheesesteak sandwiches.

10:20 p.m.

A Hinton James elevator ferries 13 fans, lucky to be the first in line for transport, after the basketball game against Florida State.

In these pinched claustrophobia-inducing quarters, silence is unforgiving. Someone releases a foggy sneeze into the compacted mass of people, and the last smiles of collective triumph slip from their faces.

On the downward shift, two freshman girls enter talking and graciously turn to enlighten a stranger.

"Yesterday we had this meeting about the purpose of life," one girl says about a Campus Crusade meeting the two attended the day before.

"But we could have been studying for a chemistry exam, so we were just wondering what the purpose of going was," her friend chimes in.

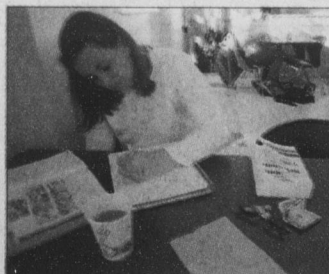
And the stranger answers, "So what do you think the purpose of life is?" "I don't know," the girl answers, exiting, her hands frozen in a gesture of uncertainty.

7:13 p.m.

There is a decent crowd gathered at B W-3's to watch the game. The restaurant, famous for its marinated buffalo wings, is filled with a variety of people ranging from students to enthused alumni and families.

The dim lighting reflects off the tall glasses of foaming beer resting on many tables, making each glass glow various shades of brown. The bar area at the back, guarded by a huge bouncer who looks like Mr. T, is enveloped in cigarette smoke. The laughter of a boisterous group rises above the chatter.

A student carrying a full tray struggles to avoid being the subject of all the laughter. He puts on a balancing act as he teeters his way across the restaurant, carrying a tray of steaming buffalo wings and drinks in one hand and a glass of pale ale in the other.



7:33 p.m.

Kathleen sits alone in the corner of Lenoir, scanning a pile of linguistics books between bites of salad.

"I don't have linguistic nights," Kathleen says. "I have a linguistic life."

After dinner, she'll head over to usher for the play "Marisol." The reason? Raising funds for the Linguistics Club. Afterward? Yep, back to the grind of studying syntax. She has a paper to write.

Across the way from Kathleen, a group of juniors are just as dedicated, although not to the same pursuit.

"I'm just trying to score some weed for tonight," a student identified as "Reginald" says. "I just want to listen to some music and smoke some pot."

Maybe one day "Reginald" will be listening to Derrick, the white-clad dishwasher and aspiring rapper whose musical alias is "McEichin." Derrick uses his time in the steamy bowels of Lenoir Dining Hall to practice his rhymes, with the aid of "Bug," a fellow washer who lays down the beats.

"We use it to keep spirits high in here," Derrick says. "Nobody sees us in here, but they hear us sometimes."