

No more than four

University of Georgia punishes students who stay too long

Recently, the University of Georgia announced tentative plans to persuade its students to graduate faster. Instead of developing more effective ways to encourage students to graduate on time, the university is planning on punishing those students who attend more than four years. In doing so, university officials will fail to address the more probable reasons students may not be able to graduate in four years.

University of Georgia officials feel because the atmosphere around their college is so appealing, students do not want to leave. The students take an average of 13 credit hours a semester and spend an additional six hours studying. Administrators must assume that students spend the rest of their time partying.

In an attempt to embarrass students who attend more than four years, the university plans to change its student classifications from the more traditional freshman through senior system to how many years the students have been attending college. Students who are "fifth-years" or above will be put last in line for privileges such as parking permits and

sports passes.

University of Georgia students, however, are more successful at graduating on time than many other college students in the United States. According to CNN.com, the average time for University of Georgia students to graduate is 4.3 years, an entire year under the national average of 5.3 years.

The University of Georgia Fact Book shows that approximately 35 percent of all freshman that started their postsecondary degree at the university graduate within four years; the percentage increases to almost 60 percent at five

years. The numbers seem low, but once national averages and retention rates are taken into account, the numbers are actually better than many other universities.

An ACT study has shown that just 41.9 percent of public college students graduate within five years, almost 20 percent lower than the University of Georgia.

The percentage of students who graduate within five years continues to drop nationwide for many reasons; partying is not one of them. Some students are not prepared for college and spend their first year taking remedial classes. Students also take a longer time to decide on a major, lengthening the amount of time they spend in college.

According to ACT director Wes Habley, finances are a major reason for a prolonged graduation time.

Students who have to work part-time to support themselves reduce the amount of hours they take a semester. For some students, especially those not as academically prepared as others, it is impossible to work part-time and take 17 credit hours per semester.

University officials said the new plans are an attempt to make room for incoming freshman, but getting rid of a few "sixth-years" will not make enough room. There are simply not enough "sixth-years" to get rid of.

The same ACT study shows only 74.2 percent of freshman return for their second year. Students continue to drop out of college after their sophomore and junior years. The 60 percent of University of Georgia students that graduate within five years represents the vast majority of students who have stayed in college.

Embarrassing students in an attempt to get them to graduate faster not only fails to address the real problems behind longer graduation times, it is also mean-spirited. The University of Georgia, which is doing better than most other public colleges in America, should not be punishing the students that are taking slightly longer to graduate. Trying to encourage earlier graduation without taking privileges away from students would be much more effective.

Jenelle Wilson is a junior political science major.



JENELLE WILSON



ANGELIQUE FORD • THE BATTALION

Death penalty is unconstitutional

The judicial system is finally beginning to recognize the Constitutional flaws inherent in today's capital punishment system. In his Monday ruling, New York Federal Judge Jed S. Rakoff became the first to declare the current federal death penalty unconstitutional in light of the frequency of mistakes. Hopefully, Rakoff's ruling will be the beginning of the end for the current capital punishment system in this country.

The decision came in the case of two New York men, Alan Quinones and Diego Rodriguez, who are facing a trial in connection with a drug-related killing in the Bronx three years ago. Their attorneys argued in pretrial motions that the death penalty was unconstitutional following statements by prosecution they would seek the death penalty. In his preliminary ruling in April, Rakoff told both prosecution and defense he intended to rule the death penalty unconstitutional unless the prosecution could convince him otherwise.

In his 28-page opinion, Rakoff cited evidence that innocent people are sentenced to the death penalty with greater frequency than previously thought. Through DNA technology, which had not previously been available, investigators have discovered the innocence of individuals nationwide who were on death row for crimes they did not commit. Other capital punishment researchers have examined evidence from past cases and discovered evidence supporting the innocence of more convicts who had already been executed.

In his ruling, Rakoff said that since 1993, at least 12 death row inmates have been exonerated through DNA testing. In each case, the inmates had been convicted unanimously by a jury and had the ruling affirmed by an appeals court. This evidence, Rakoff said, showed the fallibility of the current capital punishment system.

As a result of such evidence, Rakoff said "implementation of the Federal Death Penalty Act not only deprives innocent people of a significant opportunity to prove their innocence, and thereby violates procedural due process, but also creates an undue risk of executing innocent people, and thereby violates substantive due process."

The prosecution tried to convince Rakoff that the studies he cited in his preliminary ruling had "serious methodological flaws," which resulted in 42 criminologists, sociologists and psychologists submitting briefs attacking the prosecution's position.

Rakoff was correct in his ruling. DNA evidence has provided investigators with not just a new tool in investigating crimes, but a new way with which to examine the cases of the past and learn whether the proper individuals have been punished for their crimes. So far, this new perspective has shown that the judicial system has failed to prosecute the guilty party far too often for comfort.

In capital punishment cases, it is vital that the proper individual be prosecuted. When the punishment is irrevocable, and to make a mistake means to steal an innocent life, the government must have a better history of success. The failures simply come at too great a cost.

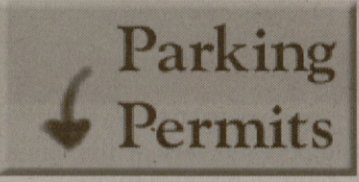
Some have argued that with DNA testing now available, the number of mistakes will decrease. This thinking fails to recognize the lesson learned through applying DNA testing to previous cases — that the judicial system is simply too flawed for the government to be certain the individuals they are executing are guilty.

The murder of innocent people by the federal government must be avoided, and the risk has been proven in numerous studies to be higher than anyone would like. States such as Illinois have already suspended executions until more information can be obtained regarding the number of innocents executed, as well as the greater rate of minority executions compared to whites. With issues like these plaguing America's capital punishment system, the death penalty violates the Constitution. Until the weaknesses in the system can be addressed, executions should be halted throughout the nation.

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RICHARD BRAY



Speedy Gonzales returns to TV

Cartoon mouse wins battle against political correctness

As a result of increased demand from Speedy Gonzales fans, the fastest mouse in all of Mexico has been resurrected after having been placed on hiatus as a result of the Cartoon Network's owner's belief that the popular cartoon perpetuated negative Mexican stereotypes. It appears that Speedy has not only outwitted Sylvester the Cat, but managed to defeat one of today's most formidable nuisances, political correctness. In a time of perpetual euphemistic behavior, especially surrounding race issues, it is refreshing to see cartoon viewers have not traded in their endearing sense of humor for the obligatory hypersensitive political skin that many Americans wear proudly.

According to Hispanic Online, problems surrounding the Speedy Gonzales cartoons include references to laziness, drinking, drug use and womanizing. However, these themes are not unfamiliar to the cartoon world of Speedy's time. Take for example, Warner Brothers ethnic character, Pepe LePew, the suave, French womanizing skunk. Is Warner Brothers concerned this cartoon perpetuates an image of all Frenchmen being obsessive, stalking sexual predators? Given the extreme need for political correctness that exists in our society, it can be assured the matter was at least discussed but probably tabled because Pepe LePew does not belong to an ethnic minority.

Ironically, the cartoon, which contains the likes of Slowpoke Rodriguez, Speedy's perpetually slow cousin, has a strong fan base of Hispanic viewers. In fact, according to Fox News, during the cartoon's hiatus from American television, one of the few places the cartoon still ran was on the Cartoon Network Latin America, where Speedy was hugely popular.

In addition to simply being an entertaining cartoon, Speedy

Gonzales displays a lot of honorable traits. Speedy is a fast, hard-working, clever Mexican mouse, quite the opposite of the typical negative Mexican stereotype. Speedy is always looking out for the enemy "gatos," and is always willing to drag home his fellow mouse friends when they are inebriated. In fact, according to Hispanic Online, there are many

like Adrian Villegas, a Mexican-American comedian, who feel Speedy was ahead of his time and, for years, the sole positive Latino character in cartoons.

At this moment in history, it seems that our detonate buttons that set off anger and offense have been wired incredibly wrong and, as a result, our lives are oftentimes in disarray over benign occurrences. Much turmoil has been created in recent years over things such as simple as a sombrero-wearing cartoon character with an exaggerated ethnic accent or the lyrics of pop music.

Ironically, we are more forgiving when real role models, especially leaders of our nation, engage in activities of deception, slander and immorality. Although a parent can tell their child that Speedy Gonzales is not a real mouse and not all Mexican-Americans speak with his accent, it is a little more difficult to keep kids from hearing about what the former President of the United States was in trouble for or various other political scandals. Therefore, Americans should celebrate the rebirth of Speedy as a small step in the cartoon world but, hopefully, a giant leap in favor of logical thinking over hypersensitive political correctness.

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JENNIFER LOZANO

MAIL CALL

Flag mistreated

The American flag symbolizes the United States of America. An obvious statement, but charged with deeper meaning. How citizens interact with this symbol simultaneously reflects one's attitude about the nation, and makes a statement regarding one's character. For example, to salute the flag is to display respect and approval for some aspect of the United States while making one's patriotic leanings apparent to all observers. In contrast, to burn the flag vividly portrays an individual's disapproval for some American policy, meanwhile labeling that person as an activist of some sort. It is this strong symbolic component of the flag which makes all interaction filled with meaning.

In addition to forcing Americans to rethink our foreign policy, the events which occurred on Sept. 11 have placed the American people under close scrutiny from the world at large. How will

Americans deal with a direct assault from outside? Is freedom really more important than comfort to the average American citizen? Has America become soft? These are the questions being asked.

Last Friday, as I passed the Academic building I noticed two individuals taking the flag down for the evening. Once they lowered this symbol for the most powerful nation on the face of the Earth, they proceeded to wad it up like a soiled bedsheet and carried it inside. Today, when walking between the statue of Sul Ross and the Silver Taps Memorial, I noticed the flag still flying drenched, having been subjugated to two hours of rain.

What statement does this make to those outside our University considering that the flag represents our nation? Is this supposed to illustrate our ignorance or laziness to those outside of Texas A&M University?

Jacob Morris
Class of 2001