Our Views Consensus Opinion

Cents-less

After weeks of speculation, Governor Sonny Perdue has announced that the University System of Georgia will face a $68 million budget cut in the upcoming year. The budget cut represents 38 percent of the total cut of $179 million overall, despite the fact that the University System only receives 10.9 percent of the state’s annual budget. As a direct result, Tech will lose $7.3 million in state funding, in addition to the $45 million it had already lost in recent years.

Unfortunately, the Institute will almost certainly have to handle the budget crunch by increasing tuition next semester by as much as 10 percent. While we understand that increasing revenue is the only way to maintain the quality of our education, it is unfair to expect students to pay 10 percent more than with only a few months notice. Most students plan their budgets for the entire academic year. This increase will leave many students cash-strapped because federal financial aid and most scholarships are doled out on a yearly basis without adjustments for unexpected midyear increases.

The tired, old arguments that Tech’s tuition level is a bargain and much lower than our peer institutions are losing their credibility with each additional increase. The higher tuition rates climb, the more difficult it will be to attract top students. Students should take an active interest in state politics. If we do not make our voices heard, the state legislature will continue to shift more and more of the burden of higher education costs to students and parents. Write letters to the Technique and the Atlanta-Journal Constitution. We urge student leaders to organize a campus-wide petition stating the adverse effects that a midyear increase would have. The petition should be submitted to the Board of Regents before their Oct. 12 meeting.

There is a way out

If you or anyone you know ever have suicidal thoughts, we urge you to seek help at the Counseling Center or the Dean of Students Office. Both are located on the second floor of the Student Services Building. The center has walk-in hours at 8 a.m. and 12 p.m., during which students can be seen for free without waiting for an appointment. The 24-hour hotline number is (404)894-2575.

Don’t be afraid or embarrassed to talk about the issues surrounding suicide. The social taboo associated with this tragic reality only serves to prevent those in need from seeking help. Keep your eyes and ears open—you never know when someone may need you the most.

Consensus editorials reflect the majority opinion of the Editorial Board of the Technique, but not necessarily the opinions of individual editors.

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Quote of the week:
“The cost of living is going up and the chance of living is going down.”
—Fip Wilson

Technique • Friday, September 17, 2004

Budget cuts leave students scrambling

Tuition’s going up. Again.

With a 32.9 percent in-state rise in tuition over the last five years (not to mention the whopping 56.7 percent rise in out-of-state tuition in the same time period), this probably comes as no surprise to anyone by now.

What is surprising, however, is that this hike will hit us in the middle of the year. As such, students who have carefully budgeted for the school year, based on current tuition levels, may find themselves in a bit of a bind.

While it is tempting to pass this off as the typical hike, throwing blame for the Tech administration is, in this case, unfair.

The tuition increase, as well as its amount, will be determined by the Board of Regents when it meets in October; the increase will be effective statewide.

I should note here that no tuition increase is final until the Board actually makes the decision. However, the majority of official opinion seems to indicate this as the most likely course of action.

This does not change the fact that the state’s schools are yet again thrown into budget trouble despite the improving economy. To make matters worse, the problems come after Tech has signed contracts and finalized the fiscal year’s expenditures.

In short, cutting jobs is not only an unattractive option due to implications on the quality of education at Tech, it also won’t save enough money at this point. If cutting costs is not considered a viable alternative, Tech must turn to raising revenue to offset the $7.3 million hole left in its budget.

Does this mean students should accept another tuition hike? Especially the first ever midyear tuition increase in the state of Georgia?

I think not. What we should do instead is turn to the source of the matter. What tore this gaping hole in the budget in the middle of the year?

The problem goes beyond Tech, beyond the University System… and right to the state capital.

Statewide budgeting policy and the scrambling done to balance the budget have left Tech and other schools in the University System of Georgia taking a $68 million share of a $179 million hole in the state budget.

While I am not debating the change in budget policy (which amounted to a recall of the “payroll shift”—basically shifting some of this year’s costs to next year), the timing of this change could not have come at a worse time.

Tech has already endured $45 million in cuts in recent years due to state budget problems. The far has been trimmed, and problems have still arisen lately due to skimper and skimpy budgeters. We are now in the midst of a school year as well.

Changing this policy now seems like altering the rules mid-game, and it leaves Tech and other schools little option but to scramble for ways to compensate for even further cuts. Students, however, end up being the real losers here. Either tuition shoots up more, quality of education decreases or (most likely) both.

Students need to realize, then, how the political process has affected them in this case. Upon realizing this, they should consider trying to make a difference.

Politicians always seem loathe to openly reduce any number of huge entitlement expenditures. I don’t see Social Security taking any cuts from the federal level of government.

Virtually unanimous political support of recent policies like the prescription drug plan further shows the directives politicians take to heart.

Why is it, then, that there are no qualms about throwing more financial burdens onto college students, one of the poorest demographics out there?

Perhaps the answer becomes clearer when one considers who votes.

Voter turnout in the 18-24 age bracket rose from roughly 49.6 percent in 1972 to 67 percent in 1996; during the same time period, the 18-24 age group fell from a once-decent 49.6 percent to a dismal 32.4 percent.

If you were a politician aiming for votes, which group would you care about more?

If students take lessons like this to heart and show they actually care, perhaps we won’t have high costs heaped on us again and again. Maybe, just maybe, voting and even expressing one’s feelings to his or her representative in the state legislature will prove that student welfare should also be considered when it comes time to cut the budget.

With its current apathy, however, the typical college student may soon pay the price of indifference, and we will see just how high that price is.

“Why is it, then, that there are no qualms about throwing more financial burdens onto college students...?”

Stephen Baehl

News Editor
Recently a sophomore from Colorado State University was found in a Sigma Pi frat house after dying from alcohol poisoning.

Samantha Spady, 19, had a blood alcohol level of .43 percent when she died. This is over five times the legal limit for driving in the state of Colorado and is equivalent of a 210 lb. person having 13-15 drinks in one hour.

As a result of this tragedy, the CSU chapter of Sigma Pi has been suspended and Colorado State is considering the rules for serving alcohol in all of its Greek houses on campus.

This raises a few questions. Would banning alcohol on campus really fix the problem of alcohol abuse among college students? How much should colleges be doing to protect grown adults students? Are there better alternatives?

Let me first say that I think that a 19-year-old dying with a blood alcohol level of .43 in a fraternity on a college campus is extremely irresponsible — both on the part of the young lady and on the part of the fraternity brothers at the house who should have known when to say "enough is enough."

For that, I believe the suspension of that chapter of Sigma Pi was justified. That said, I believe that the proposal to ban alcohol in all on-campus Greek houses is just an oversimplified, knee-jerk reaction to a more complicated problem. The real problem here is some college students’ irresponsible social drinking habits.

A couple of factors could possibly contribute to this. Two of the most significant that come to mind is that college life is changes for the first time. Combine these factors with the reckless social atmosphere of a lot of typical (read: unsupervised) college gatherings and you have alcohol abuse waiting to happen.

On the surface, this proposal by CSU seems like a logical step in fixing the problem with alcohol abuse on campus. It will surely win Colorado State points with its critics and alcohol abuse organizations, but will it actually help? Such a ban is never going to stop anyone who is determined to drink. Most students who want alcohol will find a way to get it, legally or illegally. This was true even in high school and it is even more true in college.

If students who want to drink cannot drink on campus, they will go off campus to drink. The problem is not being fixed; it is only being displaced to another location. Anyone who thinks this is going to stop alcohol abuse is just being naive.

Additionally, there is only so much that should be done to grown adults who have the legal right to drink. Citizens 21 years and older have the legal right to consume alcohol whether they are a student or not.

Controlling the legal habits of adults in their own living space (on-campus or off) is a step that should be taken with extreme caution.

In the case of banning alcohol in Greek houses, I believe it is a step in the wrong direction. It would be much better for the administrators to enact policies that promote responsible drinking than to take away the option entirely.

The University of Maryland (www.studentorgs.umd.edu/phsa/social_event_monitoring.html) already does something like this. They have what they call "Social Event Monitoring" and it includes the following at all social events where alcohol is present: two sober officers per chapter, hands of legal drinkers and counting for maximum capacity; one bartender per bar serving area; no glass containers; food and non-alcoholic beverages located at each bar.

Such monitoring would still allow students to drink and have fun, while keeping much closer eye on any abuses that might take place at these events.

While I’m sure such a program would be met with at bit of popularity at first, I believe that it would work well for any organization that had an honest desire to protect its members and visitors. That is ultimately more important and more effective than banning alcohol altogether.

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Letter Submission Policy

The Technique welcomes all letters to the editor and will print letters in a timely and space-available basis. Letters must be submitted to the editor at Georgia Tech Campus Mail Stop C4290, emailed to editor@technique.gatech.edu, or hand-delivered to room 137 of the Student Services Building. Letters and handwritten to Daniel Atchison, Editor-in-Chief.

All letters must be signed and must include a campus box number or other valid mailing address for verification purposes. Letters should not exceed 400 words and should be submitted as a word document. No response letters are accepted. Letters may not exceed 400 words. Letters on the following Friday’s issue. Any letters not meeting these criteria or not considered by the Editorial Board of the Technique will not be considered for publication. Letters must be signed and dated. Only one submission per person will be printed each term.

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Leave cell phones at home

By Dallas Hammer
Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma State U.)

(U-WIRE) STILLWATER, Okla. — It never fails. Not once have I been surprised this semester. I will be sitting in class listening intently to an instructor’s lecture. Suddenly, a phone rings. Cheerful chirps erupt in a cacophony that only vaguely resembles anything fit to be called noise.

Still, the consistency of the experience has set to curbing the irritating cell phone ringing in classes. Those little electronic crooners have quite a repertoire too.

My personal favorite is the “silent” vibrating ring that sounds as though students have concealed hives of killer bees trying to escape from their backpack prisons.

I own a cell phone myself. Who doesn’t have one these days? They are handy devices, and in this age of instant communication I can see how it is vitally important to find out what Bobby and Jane are doing tonight as soon as humanly possible.

On a more serious note, I realize cell phones are useful tools that aid us in our daily lives in myriad capacities.

I don’t understand, however, why it is so difficult to make sure that the little Gizmos are turned off during class or other times when hearing Linkin Park’s new song in electronic format might be deemed inappropriate.

I am hard pressed to believe that the vast majority of these calls are so dire in consequence that they cannot wait an hour to be checked.

I am sure that these are just honest mistakes by people forgetting to turn the phones off, but disregard is what it communicates. All I am saying is if remembering to turn the cell phones off before class is that difficult simply leave them at home.

I have yet to see a professor stop class to admonish these offenders. That is as it should be. Such graciousness from superiors, however, is not a luxury that we will enjoy for long.

Imagine yourself in the professional world in which we are going to enter. We are not children, and we should be treated accordingly.

Leaving a phone on in any audible form is simply rude and a sign of immaturity. So let us please take it upon ourselves to make sure our cell phones are silent during classes, and keep those oh-so-intriguing conversations, and the endeavoring rings that announce them, where they belong.

This week I was going to write about how being a graduate student is a lot like being an indentured servant. But alas, the events of last week have persuaded me that perhaps that particular column can wait a week or two.

As a student in her eighth year at university, I’d like to think that I’ve learned a thing or two about how to handle the stresses that life, and professors at Tech in particular, throw at you.

So this week I’d like to discuss something far more important than the academic fiefdom: how to survive your college career, and maybe even life.

It is a couple of rather simple tricks that almost every upper-classman at Tech knows about, and successfully employs to some degree.

First, take each day as it comes. Don’t worry too much about tomorrow, or next week, or next month. Just do what you need to do today, and with proper planning, extreme diligence and some luck things will work out in the end.

Of course some students take this method to extremes: they either plan out every minute of every day (me, my freshman year) or they are the people that can be found rushing in just before the end of class to turn in an assignment.

Secondly, for all of the first and second year students out there, seek help if you need it. Tech is of course inherently difficult. I have not met a person yet at Tech that made it through alone or who required help from no one to pass every class.

No, that is not how things work at Tech. During freshman Convocation they used to say, “Look to your left. Look to your right. One of these students won’t make it.” Now they really ought to say, “Look to your left. Look to your right. Without these students you won’t make it through.”

I’m serious about this. A fellow eleventh year suggests there is a certain amount of pain and suffering in the studying process.

Only when you’ve studied the material long enough to understand what you don’t get, will seeking help actual improve your understanding.

But once you are at this point, continuing to stare at equations or re-read math books is not necessarily the best way to spend your time.

I remember winter quarter my freshman year (yes we were still on quarters then). After midterms I had a B, C, and two Ds. I panicked.

I can remember blabbering on the phone to my parents about how I didn’t know what was wrong.

I didn’t know if I could make it. I remember the rather unnerving way that my father told me to get my act together and stop feeling sorry for myself (okay so his words were tinged with a good helping of tough love).

And so I sought help. I found the physics tutoring sessions and went every week. I went to my profs’ office hours and asked them questions. I shadowed my TAs, peppering them with questions.

Yes, I do believe that I was not the most popular student with either my professors or TAs and am not doubtful that many an alcoholic drinking session was caused by me.

But I actually learned the material and made it through with the grades I wanted.

And one last thing: words life balance. Roughly translated this means that for your own health and well being, you need to have a life outside of studying and homework.

Find a hobby. Go out with friends. Sleep. Tech has some great opportunities for you if you are bored, lonely or in a procrastinatory mood.

So get out from behind the computer or book and try to enjoy your remaining time here. For those of you who are not Ph.D. students, the time will pass all too quickly.