Students speculate on tying HOPE to SATs

By Viji Sundaram
Contributing Writer

Most in-state students at Tech all have a common bond in that they receive the HOPE scholarship to support their tuition costs. Currently, HOPE awards Georgia residents with a 3.0 GPA (a B average) an out-of-completion of high school full tuition at any in-state public college or university. Students can also earn up to $3,000 a year for tuition at any private in-state university.

However, last week Republican Governor Sonny Perdue proposed the development of a committee to research the future of HOPE and whether in-state students could be required to submit a minimum SAT score to the existing 3.0 GPA requirement.

Not only would this option significantly reduce the number of students the program provides for, but according to Perdue, would create an incentive to do well on the SAT, helping Georgia rise from its 50th placational ranking when it comes on the SAT. Florida’s Bright Futures offers seniors with a 1270 SAT or 28 ACT a full scholarship to any in-state university and partial award for 970 SAT or 20 ACT scores.

However, requiring a minimum SAT/ACT score often creates political controversy. These programs, along with several others throughout the nation, have been criticized for discriminating against minorities, since the majority of recipients are white.

A lot of people feel that the HOPE scholarship is already biased towards minorities,” said Robert Brooks, a management senior. “There were kids who were very bright but didn’t do well on standardized tests due to outside factors. Now they won’t be able to get the scholarship because of the score,” said Brooks.

Critics deny that the test is culturally biased, but suggest that financial background may determine whether students can afford to take the test.

Perdue found that 10 freshmen receiving HOPE in 2000 did have a 3.0 GPA, but scored under 500 on the SAT.

These students knew that despite their SAT score, they would still be able to attend a university.

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HOPE SAT

a look back at Tech History

Dean Griffin’s “slush fund” used to help those in need

In a real-life version of the movie Pay It Forward, former Tech dean George Griffin used connections to secure loans for students—and then, returned loans were used to help others.

By Joshua Cuneo
Senior Staff Writer

“I imagine obtaining college funds without fulfilling scholarship requirements and without paying back an interest-laden loan.”

Interests yet? For students who attended Tech prior to the 1990s, such an ideal system, while not officially endorsed by the Institute, was a reality.

They studied in question was Dean Griffin’s behind-the-scenes Hip Pocket Fund, an informal slush fund that helped financially needy students meet their academic expenses.

It began in the 1920s, when students who were short on funds approached the dean and requested a short-term loan.

“Whether it was to pay their tuition, their check didn’t come from home, they lost their job,” said Marilyn Somers.

Dean Griffin used his personal and business connections to secure money that he loaned to needy students. The loans were always paid back, and he would retain them in his “Hip Pocket Fund” to give to future students.

Photo courtesy 1949 Blueprint

D ear Griffin’s “slush fund” used to help those in need

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Fund

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"He went on record saying no student had ever gypped him," said Somers. "They always paid him back; they always wrote kind letters and he would often pass the letters on to his corporate friends and the bank presidents... letting them know how grateful the students were for giving them that hand up," she said.

Furthermore, Griffin bore personality that demanded students follow through on their word. According to Somers, Griffin was reputed for being abrupt with the student body and could develop a terrible, commanding presence toward anybody who offended him. "In those days, being on the Dean’s List was not a good thing," Somers laughed.

However, Griffin probably could not have effectively executed a similar system today. It was a product of its time. Griffin's solid reputation with the student body—as well as the small, enclosed nature of Tech society in the early to mid-20th century and the sense of honor that strongly pervaded the community at the time—made the system a practical one.

Nowadays, the inherent nature of society both at Tech and within the surrounding community has shifted at a fundamental level. People have become more transient, and the Tech student body is now too large for one person to coordinate the informal exchange of funds.

In addition, the heavy political climate of the more recent decades has discouraged unrestrained provisions of loans, and students seeking such fundsmight find themselves facing a barrage of bureaucracy and red tape.

Also, the exponential increase in the presence of Fortune 500 companies, coupled with the doubling and tripling of Tech's student body since the 1920s, makes it impossible to become familiar with the entire student body and to acquire the social network needed to provide them with loans.

Even the most prominent officials, said Somers, can only maintain connectivity with so many people. "It was a much more informal society; it was a much more enclosed society," she explained. "We didn’t have the internet and email," she said.

"Telephones were considered extremely progressive when [Griffin] started out here in the 20s. Everybody didn’t have those, but they got the telephone, he built his network."

"No single person could do something like that today," Somers said.

That means that, for the most part, modern Tech students are forced to resort to the old standbys—jobs, scholarships, loans and gifts from home.

However, in memory of the good ol' days, Student Affairs does run the Dean Griffin Hip Pocket Fund program, which offers emergency, interest-free loans of up to $250 to students.

The fund became yet another aspect of Griffin’s growth into a Tech legend, and students studying his statue in front of the Frist Center might notice some bills peeking out of his shirt pocket.

He was, said Somers, "a unique man with a unique system at a different time."
A grassroots organization that has spread mostly through word of mouth, the idea to hold Red Pill Forum took seed on Georgia Tech’s campus last spring, through the efforts of staff members from Victory Campus Ministries (VCM), a re- cently formed Christian student organization.

However, its sponsors emphasize that the forums are not meant to be religiously affiliated.

Although VCM promotes the Red Pill Forum, Joshua Harrelson, Campus Director of VCM, said, “Victory Campus Ministries sponsors Red Pill Forum. Red Pill Forum itself is not a campus ministry; it’s a discussion group open for anybody and everybody who wants to come voice their own opinion without a set agenda.”

Indeed, its student advocates say that the forums are meant to simply promote dialogue.

“I noticed on Tech campus that philosophy and critical thinking are kind of a lost art,” said David Harris, a Nutter Engineer- ing major who moderated Red Pill discussions.

The Red Pill Forum began as an idea that came from the University of California at Berkeley with the purpose of “bringing political discussion back to campus.”

Originally called “Brief and Amusing Debates,” the Red Pill Forum has grown into an international orga- nization with 32 sites in the US. Their recently-pub- lished first DVD, Red Pill Volume I, is jam-packed with 12 “pills” ranging from five to seven minutes in length.

Each “pill” is a video clip that combines excerpts from popular culture, news reports and street interviews that display the many different perceptions and issues facing various controversial subjects that are relevant to young people today.

“I wouldn’t find [the forum] very productive. At Tech I don’t have time...I wouldn’t find it very relaxing, either.”

Trevor Christensen
Aerospace Engineering freshman

“Why do you think it’s been going on for about a month?” “I don’t even know what time.”

A mediator is provided to ensure an environment where people aren’t afraid to share their thoughts, but not to dominate or control the discussion. Currently, Harris and another student act as moderators, though more are con- stantly being added.

“The current moderators have been at VCM’s meetings, because we want to make sure they’re good moderators,” Harris said.

The forums, which are held in more intimate, informal areas such as dorm rooms or lounges and hosted by student volunteers, last for 20 minutes each and garner about 10 participants each week. This setup is designed so that the forums “are structured around people’s schedules,” Harris said.

“If they are held in the dorm rooms,” he explained, “they provide a very convenient outlet for people to discuss that stuff that you usually don’t have a chance to.”

Discussions have been going on for about a month. “I’ve mod- erated three weeks ago in Wodcuff,” Harris said, “we had about seven people show up.”

At the beginning of each session, a video clip, reading or speech is presented, and then the topic is opened up for debate amongst all participants.

“Discussion are usually very struc- tured so as not to run over the 20 minute limit, though Harris said, “Obviously, if there’s really good discussion going on then we’ll let it hang for about one or two minutes.”

While the topics provided are great conversation starters, any topic can be brought up to be discussed. At the end of each meeting, a vote is conducted to de- cide the subject matter of the next gathering.

“The current goal,” said Harris, “is to host several meetings a week so that anyone can go.”

The success of the forums is uncertain for now. Harris and others involved with the project plan to involve students and faculty, as well as advertisement. Harris said, “Our immediate scope is to get people interested, have a few regular ones taking place on campus, see how many hosts we can find on campus, see what the response is and gauge it based on that.”

“Research shows this to be a long-term goal...We don’t expect this to happen this year.” How- ever, he added that “within a few years, I would like every dorm, and in academic buildings [as well].”

Harris, who has hosted several forums, said, “I think there are discussions here that are important, and the students are interested.”

“I would have liked to attend a forum because I wouldn’t find that very produc- tive. At Tech I don’t have time, so I either have to do something produc- tive or sleep. I relax on the week- ends, but I wouldn’t find it very relaxing either.”

For example, Trevor Christens- en, a freshman Aerospace Engineer- ing major, said he probably would not attend a forum “because I wouldn’t find that very produc- tive. At Tech I don’t have time, so I either have to do something produc- tive or sleep. I relax on the week- ends, but I wouldn’t find it very relaxing either.”

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LCC professors explore weblogging in English classes

By Jeff We
Contributing Writer

The popular online pastime known as blogging has found its way into the English classrooms at Georgia Tech.

In an innovative approach, Dr. Charles Tryon and Dr. Doreen Piano have both integrated blogging into their English 1101 classes this semester for the first time.

Blogs—short for weblogs—are webpages that are usually made up of short, frequently updated posts arranged chronologically. They can post poetry or fiction. Students in Tryon's classes were instructed to create their own blog at the beginning of the course using the weblogservic eof their choice, whether it be Blogger, LiveJournal, their own website or another service.

Every week, they complete a blogging assignment given by Tryon on his own site. Such assignments can range from writing their own personal journals to forums where aspiring writers can post poetry or fiction. Students in Tryon's classes were instructed to create their own blog at the beginning of the course using the weblogservic eof their choice, whether it be Blogger, LiveJournal, their own website or another service.

Other times, the assignments are traditional English analyses that will become an inherent part of their literary studies.

Tryon and Piano have both integrated blogging into the course just last week, as the course focuses on electronic communications in general rather than blogging in particular.

Up until then, Piano's students used WebX, a system where some English professors establish electronic forums for their students. Piano carried out this transition to help her students observe the difference between the two online forums.

Both Tryon and Piano acquired an interest in blogging earlier this year when the war in Iraq broke out, which inspired a number of writers to start their own blogs.

Tryon in particular learned of a blog kept by a Baghdad resident who went by the pseudonym Salam Pax. Pax was able to provide firsthand accounts of the war in Iraq.

"Electronic communities are a form that is emergent and important to understand," continued Tryon, "and it's important to know how authors are responding to a specific text...I think blogging illustrates that quite effectively."

He added that it helps students learn about and focus on current issues and events as well.

"The blog could very well be the new literary form," Piano agreed.

She also stressed the importance of understanding the new technologies that will become an inherent part of 21st-century communication.

"It makes [the students] more critical of the technology," she said. "It's not this transparent thing [where] you can write whatever you want. Every technology provides different kinds of restrictions."

Tryon and Piano's new curriculum has earned them both considerable criticism and approval from students, as well as attention from those in the online blogging community.

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Financial aid perspective, there may also be cause for concern. Marie Mons, Director of Financial Aid, said that she is “concerned about how students finance their education.”

With a lack of appropriate funds, that students might need with the SAT requirement, they might choose not to attend Tech.

“The will be some belt-tightening,” stated Mons, “not a complete castigation.”

Student opinion on the proposal also varies, though the difficult academic atmosphere at Tech cause many students to agree with the more stringent criteria for the scholarship.

Dave Studd, an Industrial Engineering junior, said, “It’s a good idea. It gets people to study more, since after all, if you have a high GPA, that can’t be beat.”

Janet Moody, a third-year Biochemistry major, pointed out.

Budget concerns may also undermine the proposal to base HOPE on SATs. According to statistics, during the first year of HOPE’s creation in 1993 by former Governor Roy Barnes, 42,807 students were awarded a total of $21.4 million. Now, with the scholarship as an incentive, more students work harder and maintain the crucial 3.0 average throughout high school.

As a result, during this past 2002-2003 school year, the number of students receiving HOPE has jumped to 211,938, with $360.7 million awarded in total.

The cost of the students attending college with HOPE grows longer with each year, and the profits sold from lottery tickets may eventually be unable to provide all students having a 3.0 GPA with the full scholarship.