Physics overhauls course curriculum

By Haiqing Yu
Assistant News Editor

This semester, the School of Physics is bringing some major changes to Physics I and II, otherwise known as 2211 and 2212, as part of an overhaul of its two most widely taken courses.

Class attendance is now mandatory for the over 2,000 students currently taking the intro physics courses. All sections of 2211 and 2212 are also now using the Personal Response System (PRS) to answer course questions during lecture. Undergraduate TA’s have been hired to lead 2212 laboratory classes, and some of the lab periods are now being used as Analytic Tutorials, essentially TA-led recitation time in which more complicated physics problems are worked out by students in a group.

According to Michael Schatz, physics undergraduate coordinator, these changes, along with a change in textbooks last fall, are simply steps in their “continual attempt to improve physics education.”

“It is part of our job as professors here... We are in the process of constantly seeking how to find better ways to teach,” Schatz said. “Implementing new materials, new technologies and new approaches to teach physics better... it’s the driving motivation behind any change we bring into the classroom.”

This semester’s changes in policy, however, are not only a continuation towards “better physics instruction,” but are also a result of the changes implemented last semester.

Last fall’s new textbooks were designed to help students look at multiple ways of solving a problem, while the new course schedule “surgically decreased the amount of material covered in the classroom” to make “the topics in more depth,” said longtime physics instructor Martin Jarro, who was, and still is, heavily involved in the curriculum changes.

PRS questions were also added to some of the lectures. “The point of using this technology,” Schatz said, “is to get students to ask for funding, the [music] department was non-academic.”

By enthnic Joshi
Staff Writer

In a written agreement with the music department, SGA stated that it would discontinue its funding of the department for fiscal year 2005-2006.

The agreement said that the department “has agreed that it will no longer need to request an operating budget from SGA.”

The department will now be receiving university funding from the Office of the Provost instead. The agreement also states that Institute funding from the Provost will be a “long-term” arrangement.

Graduate Student Pelham Norville said that SGA’s move was driven by the fact that the music department is an academic department, and SGA does not fund academic units. “When it began to ask for funding, the department was non-academic,” he said. “It was classified as a Tier II organization consisting of a number of clubs and organizations.

Since the department is now categorized as academic, it does not fit the criteria for a Tier II organization consisting of a number of clubs and organizations. Upon the department’s move to the academic department, SGA is now handling its funding, and the department currently has no plans to request further university funding.

By Michael Handelman
Staff Writer

A “serious health concern” reported by local news station WGNX has sent Housing and Department officials scrambling to respond to the channel’s allegations.

Extensive growth of mold on the walls and ceilings in a dorm room in Monagan Hall was shown in the report, which cited an epidemic of mold growth among many rooms in the dormitory.

A freshman student interviewed in the report said, “I just felt like I was living in this unhealthy jail cell, and I can’t do anything about it... people have been coughing, and [had] stuffy noses, and things like that.”

Although the mold was cleaned up soon after the news report, the Department of Housing maintains that they did not receive a work request to remove the mold prior to the on-campus investigation by WGNX news.

“We have procedures set up for people who have complaints... and these were not used,” said Frank Gillis, associate director for Facilities.

The student who was interviewed by WGNX declined to offer any further comment to the Technique regarding the incident.

Housing cited the web-based “workorder” system, where residents have the capability to file maintenance requests for their residence as the standard means of requesting dorm maintenance repairs.

“We do have a very sophisticated work order system... a student from the dorm needs to make a work order, can track a work order,” said Mike Black, director of Housing.

“We can do an immediate evaluation... We have a system in place,” he added.

The department cited existing privacy policies that would have prevented discovery of the mold without a student report.

“Students are responsible for the living environment... We don’t want to have to go in every day and check... We expect them to notify us by the email work order system or our call center,” Black said.

Although the Department of Housing conducts periodic health and safety checks, current policy does not require residents’ rooms to be inspected on a frequent basis.

According to Gillis, he first learned about the mold incident from the evening news report on WGNX.

“It has been growing for some time... in there for at least for two weeks... it was non-academic.”
On Dec. 13, a student picked up a package from the post office that should have included a Maxtor DiamondMax Hard Drive. When the student returned to his room and opened the package, he noticed that the hard drive had already been taken out of the box. The box he received was taped closed, but he could open it from the bottom and re-close it the same way. The student said he reported the incident to the Postal Clerk.

On Jan. 18, a female on campus stated that she saw a suspicious male on a bike break the window of a vehicle parked on Calhoun Street in Home Park around 3 p.m. Officers located the man near Ethel Street and Hemphill but lost him after he climbed over a barbed wire fence.

A suspicious man was seen snooping around an office in the ISyE building Jan. 19 at 1 p.m. When a faculty member attempted to speak to the man, he ran out of the building and onto Hemp Hill Ave., where he was promptly arrested in front of the GT police department.

On Jan. 14, a non-student on campus said her husband dropped her off at the lower level of Burge Deck. He drove into the lower level to turn around. When he drove through a flooded area of the deck, his oil pan loosened on one side and was dragged on the ground.

This week’s campus crime information contributed by Alexandra Pajak

TechNIQUE

Distracting you every week since 1911

Corrections
The Technique welcomes your comments and suggestions, as well as information about errors that call for correction. Messages may be emailed to nique@gatech.edu. Letters to the editor may be directed to the same address, or to opinions@technique.gatech.edu.
Grads hear Auxiliary Services presentation

By Arcady Kantor
Senior Staff Writer

Tuesday’s short Graduate Student Senate meeting was dominated by a presentation from Melissa Moore, communications officer for Auxiliary Services. The senators also dealt with three bills.

Moore discussed the quarterly status report released by Auxiliary Services in January. The report highlighted some of the accomplishments of the Auxiliary Services department over the end of last year and winter break.

According to Moore, the department is currently offering funding for qualifying organizations and events through Buzz Funds received by Auxiliary Services from bookstore purchases. Guidelines describing the eligibility requirements for the funds were posted on the Auxiliary Services website Jan. 21.

Moore also mentioned the number of available used textbooks last semester. According to Moore, thanks to more aggressive book buyback policies and improved coordination with professors, the bookstore was able to increase the number of used books available for students to purchase.

Moore also briefly discussed the IMPACT scholarships that are sponsored by Auxiliary Services. In addition, she mentioned that various members of the Auxiliary Services staff will be profiled on the website starting this month.

The main portion of the meeting began after the conclusion of the presentation. Kasi David, graduate student president, informed senators of last year’s IMPACT scholarships that are going to provide a $3,000 scholarship to 10 selected students; the deadline for applications is Friday, March 4.

Moore spoke to both houses of student government this week. She began after the conclusion of the presentation. Kasi David, graduate student president, informed senators of last year’s IMPACT scholarships that are going to provide a $3,000 scholarship to 10 selected students; the deadline for applications is Friday, March 4.

The conference committee version of a joint allocation to the African American Student Union (AASU) was passed unanimously. This bill provided funding to the AASU for Black History Month celebrations, including the Black Leadership Conference and Heritage Night.

Also, a new undergraduate elections chair was appointed. Chris Rankine was sworn in to the position. The elections chair organizes and oversees preparations for the spring’s SGA elections.

Finally, Moore reported on other issues such as campus housing, the bookstore and the health center. Auxiliary Services is working with the bookstore to increase the number of used books available for students to purchase.

Moore also mentioned the number of students using the services provided by the health center.
Physics from page 1

to interact more, to pose questions, to interact with the instructor and themselves...to develop problem-solving skills. There are lots of different ways of representing a problem," he said.

While handwritten problems meant more hand-grading for the instructors, the trade-off was that they would have a firsthand look at how well students really understand the problems.

Unfortunately, the experience of grading the problems led some physics instructors to realize that some students really did not understand many concepts that the professors felt to be basic and central to the course.

"We were appalled," said Physics Instructor Eric Murray.

Whether or not it was related to the curriculum change, a small drop in GPA occurred last semester.

According to Jarrio, the poor performance on the handwritten problems was "a major part of the motivation in introducing the new tutorials—our goal is to make sure that students can't get through the course without taking an explicit step away from knee-jerk formula-jockeying and toward analytical problem-solving." The tutorials are held instead of TA-led tutorials are now being held.

"Another consequence of last semester's changes comes from the use of the PRS transmitter. Lecturers using the PRS last semester were able to accurately track the attendance of their students by seeing which students answered questions and on which days. From those numbers, students were placed into three categories according to percentage of attendance: 80 percent or more, 80 to 60 percent, and 60 percent or below.

The data showed that the average grades of those in the highest attendance bracket had significantly higher grades than the lower two, with the lowest attendance group having the lowest average grades.

"There is a strong correlation between people who didn't show up to the lecture and people who didn't do well in the course." As a result, the attendance mandate was established. The details vary between 2211 and 2212, but essentially, students are permitted to miss a certain number of classes. For each class missed over that limit, points will be taken off their respective grade.

However, missing a PRS question also cuts down on each student's PRS or "classroom participation" grade.

Schatz stressed that the PRS is not simply an attendance-taking tool, but that its primary purpose is to engage students in the classroom. According to students, however, the degree of interaction differs from lecture to lecture since there are no set guidelines for teachers on how to use the PRS questions.

"We only got one minute to answer the question," said Angharad Pagnon, a second-year Mechanical Engineering major who took 2212 last semester, and whose instructor used the PRS on a regular basis.

"The questions were either deadly obvious, or didn't demonstrate concepts, or were of a difficulty that was unrealistic," she said, counteracting the effectiveness of the PRS questions.

Pagnon is glad, however, that the TA-led tutorials are now being held.

"Access to help outside of class was lacking last semester," she said.

As for mandatory class attendance, most students hold a negative view towards the policy. "The class lecture and reading are at a much lower level than the homework and quizzes," said Jeff Ely, a first-year Industrial Engineering major currently taking Physics I. Because of that, he said that he doesn't feel that lecture attendance is linked to his grade in the class. He said, however, that the PRS questions do help to foster conversation in class.

"It's helpful that they have us discuss the answers with each other," agreed Toni Clitter, a first-year Architecture major also in 2211, though she finds it "annoying that they make you come [to class]," even though she feels she would come to class regardless.

 Physics students in Professor Robert Sudduth's class use their Personal Response Systems (PRS) to answer questions during class. Attendance in Physics I and II classes is now mandatory.

"The point of using this technology is to get students to interact more, to pose questions...to develop problem-solving skills."

Michael Schatz
Physics undergrad coord.

Making Friday classes more interesting!
Aging Cyberbuzz code to get facelift

By Arcady Kantor
Senior Staff Writer

The Cyberbuzz website, originally created to serve as a central student portal but recently better-known for its student organization listing aspects, will soon undergo an overhaul.

Several parties are currently in the process of meeting to resolve site-related issues, according to Danielle McDonald, director of student involvement. McDonald is responsible for overseeing Cyberbuzz.

The website was originally developed by several students, none of whom still attend Tech today. As these students did not transition of whom still attend Tech today.

It’s one of the problems with programs that are created by students, because our students aren’t here all the time, and then we’ve got to find a more permanent solution,” McDonald said. “From what I understand, it’s very hard to...go in and deal with other people’s code.”

Compounding the problem is the complexity of the Cyberbuzz system, which has made some parts of the site difficult to update. “That’s been an issue that we’ve been dealing with over the years—that transition of information and people. For the past year or two we’ve basically been in upkeep mode for that reason,” McDonald said.

“That’s been an issue that we’ve been dealing with over the years—that transition of information and people.”

Danielle McDonald
Dir. Student Involvement

At the time of the site’s launch, it provided an invaluable resource to organizations. “When Cyberbuzz was created, originally, there was no place for student organization hosting,” McDonald said. However, since the halt of updates, many of its features have been superseded by other on-campus projects.

The portal aspects of Cyberbuzz are now transitioning to BuzzPort, so the most relevant remaining portion of the site is the database of student organizations. This, however, is frequently slow to be updated because the updates to organization information in Cyberbuzz are still done manually.

Despite the challenges, some progress is being made to rectify many of the site’s issues. “We’re working on all of our organization updates being electronic, so [organizations] don’t have to fill out paperwork anymore,” McDonald said.

Other planned enhancements include providing organizations with position-specific email addresses, which would make it easier to go in touch with officers. “You don’t have to know the person, necessarily; you would email that position,” McDonald said. The site is also facing a more fundamental problem with its mailing list functionality. According to McDonald, many of the lists are prone
to bugs.

See Buzz, page 7

GSS

from page 3

that the online bill submission system will soon be active, and warned senators to be on the lookout for an upcoming budget bill.

Senator Pelham Norville asked for volunteers to participate in a meeting to help determine program promotion for the Fine Center for the Arts. The senators then proceeded to vote on conference committee version of a bill allocating $1,600 to the African American Student Union for expenses related to Black History Month events. The bill passed with no discussion.

The senators also tabled the bill allocating funds to the Winterguard Club because no organization representative was at the meeting.

In addition, the senators voted on a spot bill to add a new member to the senate, filling a spot that had become available. The member was sworn in at the meeting.

sliver

www.nique.net/sliver

You Athens can’t drive your caddies on ice, all hail awd. To the blonde girl in my MGT 2250 class: thank you for being so gorgeous... Sigma Tau Delta, the new sorority that’s spreading all over campus.

mardi gras is tuesday - if i throw a girl a bead, will she flash me? Need more seating, lines are fine if your a true fan. I love my piyapooh - im Tata helps me cheat in CS1315.

I have an idea: we cast lots to replace half the guys here with UGA girls... or any girls. maybe then I could get a date. ( c’mon people, more than 3 days without a shower is a little ridiculous.

more than 5 days is just nasty, unfortunately i have to deal with a few nasty people wtf is a palindrome.

Ujala, your tits are awesome Ishmail Muhammad, could you please continue to make free throws like you did vs Maryland? If you’re aiming for a 5 hour assignment try to make sure it doesn’t take 4 hours to decipher the typos.

life sucks, i need sleep, don’t believe everything you learn in class; sometimes the least of learning happens there.

The new Prez of College Dems is hot.

The impact of TV

A Donnie Darko moment in Atlanta: the other day, i saw an SUV painted like a pink pig pull two little piglike trailers behind it selling BBQ.

From the sliver girl: Repeatedly submitting the same sliver an obscene number of times will not increase your chances of getting in the paper. It actually decreases them significantly. You know who you are.

See page 8 for more slivers
to generating email loops, and the software used by Cyberbuzz is not capable of automatically stopping them, which results in downtime for the website’s servers.

“We closed down Cyberbuzz over the Christmas break...because of the list problem,” McDonald said. This problem, as well as the shutdown, have been particularly hard on the student organizations that have come to count on Cyberbuzz.

“I think that people are frustrated with the [email] lists, especially when they go down. Everybody relies so much on their organizational email lists. That’s usually the biggest frustration,” McDonald said.

To facilitate these fixes, McDonal d has hired a student to officially act as the Cyberbuzz administrator.

“I think that people are frustrated with the [email] lists, especially when they go down.”

**Danielle McDonald**  
Dir. Student Involvement

“That person provides support when organizations are having problems with something [or] don’t know how to do something...[and] does any of the upgrading that we’re trying to do,” McDonald said.

The office of student involvement is currently planning to request SGA funding for the position for spring semester.

Some of Cyberbuzz’s issues cannot not be handled by a student alone, however.

According to McDonald, due to the student-created and maintained status of the website, OIT has not played a major role in securing and managing the servers that run the site.

“We’re in a lot of meetings now to figure out how we’re going to deal with that responsibility and whose responsibility it is going to be,” McDonald said. “OIT wants to make sure that all of the security precautions are put in place.”

Other Cyberbuzz functions that OIT may take over in the future include the mailing lists and organization web hosting, which could prove to be troublesome for organizations. “If we’re not able to directly import their lists into [OIT’s software]...they’ll have to recreate their lists,” McDonald said.

Student feedback on Cyberbuzz’s current state has not been positive. “It seems to be buggy and pointless,” said Vasily Vylkov, a fourth-year CS major. “It’s turned into a sea of broken links.”

McDonald hopes that the recent efforts will improve students’ experience with Cyberbuzz, although it may take some time. “There’s a learning curve, and there’s not a lot of downtime where people can wait for someone to learn this stuff,” McDonald said. “A lot of organizations have experienced frustrations with Cyberbuzz in the past, and so we’re really hoping to reduce those frustrations,” she said.
The Weather Outside Is Frightful: The Student Center Programs Council’s Special Events Committee held July in January in the CRC last Friday night. While the weather cooled down just before the weekend’s ice storm, Tech students enjoyed a tropical atmosphere in the CRC leisure pool.

Mold from page 1

Ultimately, the Department cleaned the affected rooms of mold soon after the report was aired. However, citing the significant amount of mold located in the room, Tech’s environmental health office was dispatched to ascertain the potential toxicity of the mold.

After some investigation, Gillis concluded that moisture from the bathroom, combined with excessive heat and open windows in the affected dorm rooms, were contributing factors to the excess mold growth.

Preliminary results, however, indicate that the students were not exposed to any hazardous toxins. Black has also stated that “…(health center personnel) have not seen any rashes from Montag.”

Gillis felt that the Department should have been given an opportunity to address the problem prior to contacting outside media. “[Students] are free to use the news media, but if they are going to be fair...they need to give us a chance to solve the problem,” he said.

Overall, Gillis felt that the work order system would have rectified the situation.

“The work order system is there for you to have a comfortable living environment...but you have to help us by telling us where there is fault in the system,” he said.

Some Institute officials feel that the WGNX news report exaggerated the mold situation.

“The issue was sensationalized,” said Institute Communications and Public Affairs Director Bob Harry. Harry was concerned that the news report may be providing misinformation to students and their parents.

“The only thing that bothers me a little bit is that I think it can give other students and certainly parents...a false sense of crisis where I don’t think that one exists,” he said.

Contacting outside media.

“[Students] are free to use the news media, but if they are going to be fair...they need to give us a chance to solve the problem,” he said.

Overall, Gillis felt that the work order system would have rectified the situation.

“The work order system is there for you to have a comfortable living environment...but you have to help us by telling us where there is fault in the system,” he said.

Some Institute officials feel that the WGNX news report exaggerated the mold situation.

“The issue was sensationalized,” said Institute Communications and Public Affairs Director Bob Harry. Harry was concerned that the news report may be providing misinformation to students and their parents.

“The only thing that bothers me a little bit is that I think it can give other students and certainly parents...a false sense of crisis where I don’t think that one exists,” he said.
Furthermore, according to the agreement, SGA will not fund "any events associated with the music department courses."

David Andersen, undergraduate chair of the Joint Finance Committee, said, "This is a win-win situation for the music department and SGA. The music department will be receiving more money from the Provost than it was receiving from SGA."

Norville said that the Student Activity Fee—the main source of SGA organizational funding—fluctuates, whereas university funding would be more stable.

SGA asserted in the agreement that Institute funding would benefit the music department more than "the smaller and more-limited Student Activity Fee budget, and the music department has agreed."

According to Andersen, the decision will benefit student-led organizations. The elimination of the music department from the budget, Andersen said, frees up about $50,000 that SGA can allocate to other non-academic groups that are in need of funds.

Last year, when SGA had agreed to pay half of the total funding for the department, many student organizations within it did not receive as much money as they had requested, Norville said.

"Because of the change in the new budget structure, he continued, organizations are more likely to get the funding they need."

"It should have been changed before," he said. "In the past we had to cut part of the budgets from the clubs. Now, we will be able to provide more funding for these student organizations rather than for academic courses."

Chorale President Tony Le, whose organization only received about half of its requested funds from SGA last year, expressed confidence in the decision.

"I understand the difficulties in the budget last year," he said, "and I am glad that SGA has taken great steps towards doing what they can monetarily."

The clubs in the music department could either request funds as Tier III organizations, or submit bills to SGA asking for money, Norville said.

"They [the clubs] can now ask and receive money for club expenditures, such as trips, formals, and speakers," he said. "This can be done either by requesting funds as Tier III organizations, or by submitting bills asking for money."

These requests, as the agreement stated, would be reviewed as long as "student government is not fund-"

Members of the clarinet section of the band practice in the Couch building. The music department's newly found funding from the Provost will go toward these and other students interested in music.

"This is a win-win situation for the music department and SGA."

David Andersen
JFC Chair

Amy Phuong, undergraduate student body president, said that the change is beneficial.

"We were initially perceived as not wanting to help the music department, but this is not true," she said.

"We have made the distinction between academic departments and student organizations with the intention of helping both the music department as well as student organizations."

The Technique contacted Dr. Frank Clark, director of the music department, but he declined to comment.

Provost Jean-Lou Chameau was unavailable for comment prior to printing. 