

University

Four-year degree takes longer for many

by Kathleen Bisset and
Tunomukwathi Asino

With the end of another school year looming, Penn State seniors are either purchasing their caps and gowns, or realizing that they will be refused that coveted diploma come May commencement.

Only 58.2 percent of Penn State students graduate in four years, according to The Education Trust and College Results Online.

Universities across the country are experiencing similar trends in graduation rates. Yet, of the Big Ten universities, Penn State is ranked third highest in six-year graduation rates, with 84 percent of the student body graduating in six years or less, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Penn State's University Registrar, Karen Schultz, said that there are many reasons for the increase in non-graduating seniors.

"Many students change majors. Some add minors. If students take less than 15 credits a semester because they have other time com-



Photo by Lace Abel-bey

The Penn State Registrar office is located in the Shields building on campus. Students go to the registrar office to solve problems with course scheduling.

mitments – jobs, families, extra-curricular activities – or take a semester off due to personal or financial issues, it will take longer

than four years for them to graduate," said Schultz. Yet, there have to be other, larger reasons why so many students are not gradu-

ating within four years from a four-year university.

Nicole Papay, currently a senior meteorology major, will not graduate until December 2010. The reason for this, she said, was the combination of transferring to Penn State from another institution, as well as difficult courses required by the major.

"The amount of credits required is just outrageous, and I think the university asks certain majors to take classes that do not at all pertain to the field of study," she said. Papay must take 122 credits to graduate, about average for Penn State undergraduate degrees, but she is required to take certain courses she finds unnecessary.

"Math 251, Ordinary and Partial Differential Equations, is completely pointless for our major," she said.

Tracey Melnick, academic adviser for the English department, said that the majors

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PSU housing shortage will continue next fall

by Toan Mach

Despite renovations for additional dorms on campus, Penn State is in its third year of a housing shortage, and it has already denied hundreds of student contracts for fall 2010.

About 700 students were denied on-campus housing this year, said Kathy Krinks, assistant director of the Assignment Office for Campus Residences.

And the 2010 fall semester isn't looking much better.

"We've already experienced that we couldn't offer housing to several hundred students for this coming fall of 2010," said Judy Ryan, manager of Assignment Office for Campus Residences.

There has been a housing shortage since fall 2008.

"When you're working on one estimated number, we can project that," Krinks said, "but when you're working with five estimated numbers [athletes, sororities, special living options, incoming freshmen, etc.] and only one is constant [the number of spaces on

campus], it is very difficult."

Krinks said that more and more students request to live on campus, but the Assignment Office cannot offer contracts to all of them for several reasons: convenience, the increase of freshmen and lack of land and funding to construct new buildings.

"Living on campus is very popular," said Conal Carr, director of Housing Operations. He said it is very convenient for students. Their dorms are close to their classrooms and labs. The housing charges are applied to the tuition bill, so students do not have to worry about monthly bills for rent and utilities. Also, The CATA buses also provide adequate transportation on and off campus.

The multiple living options on campus are very attractive to students, Carr said, such as Eastview Terrace, Nittany Apartments and suites, which provide single bedrooms and apartment-style living.

Krinks said that more freshmen are being admitted each year and they are required to live on campus. This continuously increases the overall Penn State population.

According to the "Student Housing Distribution: On and Off Campus Report" that the Assignment Office compiles each year in 2006, 7,994 freshmen live on campus, the largest freshman population in the last two decades. In 2007, 6,543 freshmen and in 2008, 6,876 lived on campus.

Krinks said there is also not enough land to build more dorm buildings on campus.

Also, building new costs more than renovating. Carr said the office can do so much to an old building for less money, such as put in new carpets, install dry walls, change the lighting, and replace the bathrooms.

In 2007, Penn State remodeled the McElwain dining hall, which was in south campus, into dorms, adding 75 beds. Beam Hall, which was in north campus, was also renovated, adding an additional 145 beds.

The Housing Assignment Office is working on another renovation for this upcoming year. Simmons Dining Hall, in south, will be turned into dorms as well, Carr said. The project will start in the summer of 2011 and opens for housing in 2012.

He said the project will add 76 spaces into the inventory.

Not all dorms are open to all students each year. Krinks said that 6 percent of housing is set aside for a population of students called Reserve Group, who have their rooms reserved throughout the year. Those students get the option of returning to campus in the regular space before the assignment office does what it calls the general process of filling housing spaces and notifying students whether or not they have a housing contract.

Students who want to live in their current room the following year as well are guaranteed that space.

Krinks said the Assignment Office also reserves rooms for international students, because returning international students do not get housing contracts online. Ryan said that they have to wait until their arrival to Penn State to request a room.

The general selecting process for the

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New health care law offers hope for change

by Jamie Campbell

Okay, let me be honest. I thought I was going to sit down and write some super-articulate, mind-changing piece on why I am happy to see the officials I voted for doing what I wanted them to do.

Well, funny thing about life is it rarely goes according to plan. I became a father for the second time, and all my venom was taken away. So, at this moment, I am in that warm and fuzzy area of new parenthood. Everything is right with the world. The weather is finally warm, and I will be dog-gone if the sun isn't smiling on me a little longer. As I tune, very slowly, back into the world around me, I find everyone else around me is not just upset, they are downright – well for lack of a better term – heart-attack mad. Like stroke level.

The good thing is they are mad about health care, so if they do develop some type



of malady, a brand new health care bill was passed that will cover them. GREAT!

Or maybe not. I heard that all of us who voted for that “hopey, changey” stuff are in for a rude awakening when reality sets in.

I hope so.

I hope that ignorance will no longer be bliss. I hope that people who claim to care about their fellow man really will. I hope people will remember that if you have at the expense and detriment of others, you have nothing. I hope that my faith in the electoral process can remain intact when it seems like the results of the vote is predetermined several months out.

I hope that people can disagree without

being labeled a communist, socialist or any other ist that you can think of. True debate is required for progress, and if you can't stand to hear a strong opposing view, do everyone a favor: Keep your mouth shut.

I am counting on the fact that change will come. Change in the sense that adults will grow up, and not have tea parties that devolve into shouting matches. Change in how we provide examples to our children. No name calling to prove a point or fifth grade tactics Change from the standpoint that males and females will stand up and be men and women.

One part of a party has clearly said the passing of this document is Armageddon, and that society as we have known it will collapse into turmoil. If we didn't fall off the cliff when Medicare was revamped, we

won't fall off now, either. At some point, we have to remember where we have come from. This country does not fall apart in times of controversy. This country, despite its many issues, is still a powerful leader in the world. We would be hard pressed to find a better place to live than in this country. Yet the health of every citizen is considered a burden. We've become an 'I've got insurance, too bad for you,' society.

I have got plans for hope and change.

I am going to continue to hope that change comes with my assistance. I will continue to believe in fighting that good fight. Even if you disagree with me and my thoughts, I hope you do the same.

We can, and we will, make this country of ours a better place by continuing to talk and listen to each other when we disagree, and most importantly, by taking care of each other as valued human beings.

the waiting list for housing the upcoming year.

Despite the recent housing shortage trend, the Assignment Office says it is doing its best to service students.

“It's funny because we often get the question, ‘Why don't you have enough campus housing?’ but how much is enough, you know?” Ryan said. “We are the second in the nation for having the number of students we have living in campus housing. There is no way we can have all 42,000 students, so where do you draw the line?”

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remaining students is random, Ryan said.

The Information Technology staff will activate a program that randomly pulls a number of names according to the available spaces. Then it will send the offer to the student.

“We don't see names. We don't see ID numbers. We don't see anything,” Ryan said.

The office notifies denied students early so they have time to sign a lease before deadline. The office then puts those students on



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requiring the most credits, and the least amount of transferable credits, are those in the sciences and engineering. A major in Civil Engineering, for example, requires 130 credits to graduate. The typical suggested course load for a student is 15 credits in a semester, roughly five classes. Over eight semesters, this number only equals out to 120 therefore making it impossible for an engineering student to graduate on time if he or she takes the average, suggested course load.

Additionally, many of the required courses for these majors do not count in other majors. "It happens a lot in engineering and sciences," Melnick said. "They can sometimes only use a few of the credits taken in their major classes towards other majors."

Allen Harchak, an elementary education major, will graduate with five years of study at Penn State, due in part to his repeated changing of majors.

"I changed my major twice. I began as Music Education, and then switched to Russian, and finally Elementary Education," Harchak said. This setback resulted in an extra year at Penn State for Harchak.

Academic advisers are available to guide students in picking a major, scheduling courses and making sure students complete the required courses in order to graduate.

"Every student has access to an

Although Penn State offers a four-year undergraduate degree, nearly 42 percent of its students take more than four years to receive a bachelors degree.

adviser; although, some seek advice more often than others. Students are ultimately responsible for their own academic progress," Schultz said.

Students have the ability to access advisers regularly, and each major has an adviser attached.

"It's normally the students who are self-advised that are usually the surprised ones come senior year," when they realize they have fallen short of the graduation requirements, said Melnick.

Transferring credits from another institution to Penn State can also prevent students from graduating in four years.

"Courses that differ in content, differ in number of credits, or are equivalent to 400-level courses are only considered for transfer as general credit," said Schultz. Therefore, a transferring student may not be able to fulfill required major courses at Penn State even if a similar course was taken at another school.

Papay transferred to Penn State Abington from Florida State University during her freshman year, then later transferred to University Park. Although Penn State

accepted all of her credits from FSU, the credits were not applied to specific major course requirements.

"For example, my choir credits from FSU did not count as an art credit, only as a general elective, and that doesn't qualify as actual required arts credits here," she said.

Another issue that affects four-year graduation is the inability to schedule required courses due to preferential scheduling treatment. Athletes and honor students are given top priority when it comes to scheduling courses, and are able to schedule before courses open up to the general student population. Athletes are given this opportunity in

order to schedule courses around their athletic schedules, taking seats in some of the more desirable general education classes. After these groups schedule, the remaining students schedule courses based on the number of credits they have completed.

Still, there remains a startling 41.8 percent of students who do not receive a diploma in four years. These students continue to pay tuition, compete for seats in popular or necessary courses and add to the total size of the student body that supports, but also stresses, the local community.

But some aren't complaining. "It has been an adventure, but one that I would not change," said Papay. "Each school offers something different and I feel I gained experiences that others may not have been exposed to."

Harchak saw an advantage as well. "I feel that I'm much more ready to graduate and go out into the real world having done a fifth year," he said. "I don't regret staying an extra year at all."

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