

Some see campus as obstacle course

University should renovate to help disabled students.

The college selection process is not easy for most people. But it is even more difficult if you are on wheels and reach the towering height of everyone else's elbows or navels. I rolled

Kelly Murdoch-Kitt
GUEST COLUMNIST

through the college visitation process in a wheelchair and encountered many an unfriendly flight of stairs, inaccessible dorm, bathroom that was definitely not designed with the bladders of disabled people in mind, and clueless personnel. Certain aspects of our beautiful campus obviously fit most of those disgraceful categories, so why did I come to this university?

Accessibility was an issue at every school I visited. While some had marvelous ideas towards the improvement of campus accessibility, most of the physical plants are wheelchair-unfriendly (not to mention unfriendly to pedestrians!). This university needs serious help implementing Americans with Disabilities Act regulations on campus, but with extreme diligence (read: perspiration, frustration and exhaustion), the campus is somewhat navigable, which is better than the other, more restrictive options I had at the time.

Therefore, one reason I chose to come here was that there was a possibility of negotiating the campus in a wheelchair (At the time, I had no idea if I would be immobile by the start of freshman year, which is why the accessibility was such an important issue). Of course, I would have needed a motorized chair with about 400 horsepower, and some amazing insurance for when I would inevitably flip myself over on one of those Everest-like speed bumps.

Did you ever notice that Collins Residence Hall is the only real wheelchair-accessible dorm? Some of the other residence halls have ramps, but they only lead to the one-way exit doors and are of no use to a disabled person living there.

Collins also has a modern, fairly operational elevator. Anyone who has ever seen the Babcock elevators probably believes that the ERAs should keep the jaws of life handy in case someone dares to brave them; the heavy door and stubborn grates of these stunning 1950s models also render them utterly useless to someone in a wheelchair. Automated doors are a must.

While there are automated doors on the elevators in Scales Fine Arts Center, Benson University Center and Tribble Hall and Reynolda Halls, the entrance doors to the buildings and doors

within them, are another story. There is not one automated entrance on campus, though there is a convincing decoy on the courtyard doors of Benson. (Push it sometime — nothing happens!)

What about trying to enter Benson or Reynolda? These are not the only buildings on campus that would prove to be enigmatic labyrinths to mobility-challenged individuals, but places as crucial as the Pit, Food Court and Magnolia Room should all be easily accessible to any student. The long and bumpy trek up from Collins to civilization would mean a wild goose chase around these buildings to find the entrances and elevators. Though this university currently lacks a specific center or program to cope with the physical needs of disabled students, they could start to improve by borrowing an idea from Princeton University.

Princeton's hilly campus makes outdoor wheelchair navigation nearly impossible, but it provides an accessibility map at the information desks and visitor's center. This map shows the relative accessibility of all the buildings on campus by color-coding (darker buildings are most accessible; the lighter buildings are less navigable). Every ramped entrance, curbcut and accessible restroom is marked as well. Other campuses have tour guides who are specifically trained to know the handicapped entrances to buildings, as well as the location of elevators and toilets. These are two simple, low-cost adjustments that this university could employ to facilitate the lives of disabled students and prospectives.

Returning to the epic "Rolling Journey from Collins," it would certainly have to be a long, bumpy wheelchair ride: While Collins is the only accessible dorm, there is a curious lack of handicapped parking spaces in close proximity.

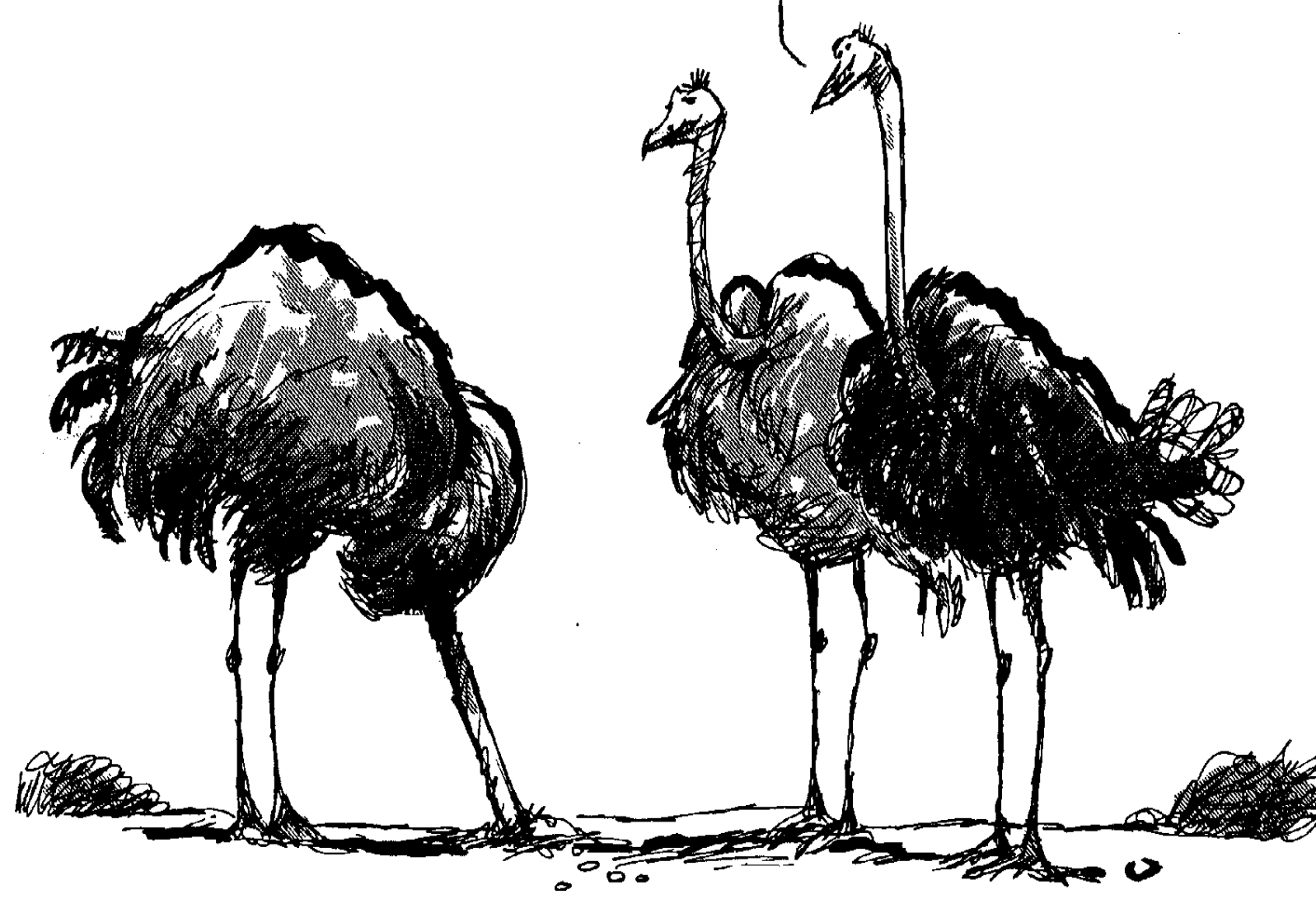
Parking is a pain for every car-owner on campus, but it becomes particularly grueling when one cannot take a mile-long hike from the lot across the road from Wingate Hall. The extra space recently added to the front of Scales is helpful, but there is a need for more reserved spaces everywhere, not only for people who have long-term disabilities, but also for injured people who have temporary handicapped parking tags.

Seeing the world from a seated position as I have for two and a half years changes one's perspective. Though I am no longer confined to a wheelchair, I continue to deal with the disability of chronic illness on a less conspicuous level and must remain conscious of the issue of accessibility.

The next time you rush up the stairs to class though the maze of Tribble or run to the post office to pick up a package, consider how you would manage if stairs, doorways and curbs were impossible barriers. The ability to walk should not be a prerequisite for a college education.

MIKE LUCKOVICH
ATLANTA CONSTITUTION

CHECK OUT THE COMEDIAN DOING THE JANET RENO IMPRESSION...



Campus must foster homosexuality dialogue

Gay rights issue has spawned hostile environment for all.

Last week I wrote an editorial, "Homosexuals should seek American rights, not gay rights," focusing on the extent to which the Gay Rights Movement seeks American rights. Contrary to what some would wish, I am not retracting a single point of my argument on this issue.

Matthew Smith-Kennedy
STUDENT COLUMNIST

However, I must admit that I made one mistake regarding the publication of my editorial — I should have never written it. Rational and unemotional discussion regarding homosexuality seems impossible on this campus.

In the past two weeks I have witnessed firsthand the enormous hostility by various people about homosexuality. For many students, this fact has been blatantly obvious. For others, this column may serve as an exploration of some attitudes regarding homosexuality on campus.

My first wake-up call regarding this issue occurred at an Oct. 10 InterVarsity Christian Fellowship meeting. IV hosted a speaker who addressed a large audience about homosexuality and Christianity. It wasn't the speaker's message that disturbed me, but the reaction by some members of the audience.

By this time I had already submitted my editorial; however, I seriously considered retracting it. I did not wish to incur unnecessary wrath onto myself for stating a view which slightly opposes elements of the Gay Rights movement.

Still, I moved forward with the editorial and hoped that the people I risked offending would

remain rational. I was wrong. Within 24 hours of the printing I was called by some a "white supremacist" and by others a "homosexual."

One student e-mailed me with these thoughts: "Your argument was more effectively presented in a different context by white supremacists in the 1960s. Perhaps you should review the 'Southern Manifesto' and research the Ku Klux Klan to solidify your position."

Just to set the record straight — I am not a white supremacist. Being called such things has really opened my eyes to the discussion about homosexuality. There is so much hostility, confusion and emotional baggage that much discussion about homosexuality is meaningless.

This became fully evident to me when co-hosting (with sophomore Sam Newlands) a show called "Politics Unplugged" on WAKE TV. For three straight hours we received calls concerning the issue of homosexuality on campus. Many of the calls were both insightful and tasteful; however, some students chose to impersonate homosexuals in jest and make statements like, "All homosexuals should be burned at the stake."

I hope that most of the negative and hateful comments directed against homosexuals were not felt in the hearts of the students. Such a hope is probably a bit optimistic.

Meaningful discussion about the issue I raised is improbable because of the extreme antagonism against homosexuals by some students and the extreme hostility of some homosexuals towards anyone who criticizes part of their "mission."

This fact is evident in my own dismissal from the Gay and Lesbian Bisexual Awareness list-serv. Although not a homosexual, I am interested in any group fighting social stigmatism and oppression.

However, the leaders of GALBA decided that I should be removed from the list-serv because I expressed a different point of view. GALBA leadership was also concerned that I did not have proper GALBA representation on

Politics Unplugged, even though anyone could call in. Please note that I do not equate the Gay Rights movement with GALBA, and therefore my previous criticism of the Gay Rights movement is not applicable to GALBA.

It seems — at least with respect to the GALBA list-serv — that no meaningful discussion is possible since GALBA leaders have decided to eliminate those with questions and alternative opinions.

The GALBA leadership's action seems inappropriate for one major reason — someone on this campus needs to promote a meaningful discussion of attitudes towards homosexuals. Ironically, some of my views were actually changed by GALBA members through positive discussions, yet I was still dismissed from their list-serv. How can GALBA accomplish the goal of changing the views of heterosexuals by excluding different points of view?

There is something very important I have not explained thus far — why do students need to be concerned about hostility towards homosexuals?

Well, as a community we need to decide what sort of attitudes we want to promote for the harmony and integrity of our university. We must ask if hating homosexuals or any racial minority fits in with our university motto: "Pro Humanitate." We must ask ourselves if the honor code system can function when some students don't recognize other students as human beings.

Finally, we must work for a climate in which people can express opinions about homosexuality and society without receiving messages just shy of death threats. If tolerance and acceptance are to grow on this campus, they must come from both sides.

Unfortunately, my confidence in GALBA's ability to assist in such an endeavor is shaken. It may be up to others to effectively promote the change homosexual students so desperately deserve.

MORE LETTERS

Columnist unfairly insults student

I am writing in response to sophomore Nathan Kirkpatrick's opinion column in the Oct. 16 issue titled "Students' lives should embody honor always." He expresses his personal disappointment in the honor code, and specifically attacks the two sitting members of the Honor Council and/or Judicial Board that have a prior violation of university policy. He encourages these members to resign for the betterment of the system as well as to clear their own consciences.

A message to Kirkpatrick: Step back and get a grip on reality. Sure, maybe Student Government should screen candidates in the future, but it did not in this particular case. Let me fill you in on some details that you maybe should have known before you

expressed your opinion.

One of those people whom you claim "dishonorable" has been a close friend of mine since nursery school; we grew up together and are one month apart in age. How dare you insult my friend's honor when you know nothing about his character?

The honor that a person embodies is not a tangible concept; it cannot be put on paper. Simply because someone has had a minor violation at the university does not always mean that he is a fraud or a bad person. Most importantly, it does not mean that he violated your so-called "honor code of life." If this is what you truly think, then you need to distinguish between life here at the university and life beyond the gates.

There is no better judge of character than someone's best friends. I have seen this person from all angles at all times.

him only on paper.

My friend has endured enough because of this incident. The university has since stripped him of his academic scholarship. One thing is for sure: until he is given no choice, he is not resigning. Why? Because he is an honorable person giving his time and energy to the students of this school in order to leave an impact.

Either run for a position or confront the system face to face, but do not unjustly attack the integrity of my friend behind the shield of an editorial.

Michael Simons
Junior

Men should realize the horrors of rape

I would just like to send a short message to all of the males here at

the university, and maybe to guys beyond this school.

Each of you is probably very close to at least one female in your life. She could be your mom, sister, daughter, girlfriend or whomever.

I would like for you to think of her now, and think how special she is to you and what her place in your life means.

Women are possibly the most special creations on this earth, and my soul is crying because they are not treated like the most precious entities in the life of a man.

I am not talking about rights, or movements or job equality. I am talking about sexual offenses.

I am wondering how guys can force themselves on girls and not even realize that they have extinguished the fire of life.

I stand lost in the cold when I think of what has happened to the special creations, whose hearts have been broken, and whose souls have been spent crying over the greatest injustice of which I have ever heard.

Men, I do not think most of you realize what it means to be forced. I do not think that most of you

realize how long it lasts.

Maybe you can imagine one hundredth of the pain women feel, like the sting of death or the loss of faith.

But you do not know the pain of a woman who has had her innocence stolen by the devil himself or the shame of a young girl that is with her always, like scars on an old, worn face.

The pain and the shame of these evils fade more slowly than the memories of war and death itself, and they never, ever leave their numbed victim.

I wish to God that women could be flown away by angels before they ever had to feel the anguish of being forced.

I guess God trusted men to care for women, for all women, like we do for our mothers, sisters, daughters and wives.

I am crying for the victims who are struggling to love themselves again. And that is the bitter irony of rape.

A man forces a woman, kills her spirit and goes on his way without a glance back, and she blames herself for years to come.

She loses herself in the painful memories, forfeits herself to the next man in a production of empty motions, and sometimes, when the pain comes, decides that it isn't worth it anymore.

I hope that maybe men will understand one day that not even the worst criminals on this earth deserve that.

Please treat the blessings of life, the women of our world, like the daughters and sisters and friends that they are.

Hold them and protect them as sacred. They are sacred.

I know that my words cannot make you understand.

You will never know until you have seen and heard the tears and cries of pain of a girl who is reliving the indelible agony.

That, I will promise you, is the most horrible, soul-wrenching, agonizing thing to witness that you have ever, ever seen, and I hope to God that one glorious day those tears will never be cried again.

But that will probably never happen.

David Hall Jr.
Freshman