

Crowded prisons jeopardize safety



Toby Hausner

Running frantically from his pursuers down an alleyway, Derrick ducks behind an old, rusty dumpster. He peeks around the corner, nervously wondering if he has escaped captivity. The red and blue flashing lights beam all around. The sirens cut deep into his psyche, striking fear and remorse. Moments later, Derrick is arrested. The charges are possession and distribution of illegal substances.

Derrick is a local pot dealer who was recently sold out by some of his longtime clientele. He had no previous record, yet he is staring at years in prison — Or is he?

Truth be told, there is no room for our newly captured delinquent. While this might not be the most disturbing epiphany — after all, he was not arrested for a violent offense — would his fate be any different if he had

raped someone or physically assaulted his employer? It is really hard to tell who will actually serve time behind bars these days because, frankly, we have run out of room, regardless of the crime.

The overcrowding in the Department of Corrections is staggering, and the result is criminals returning to our streets in droves. Who are the people currently in jail, and how are we prioritizing who gets harsh sentences and who does not? I would like to say that we are dealing with the problem by prioritizing violent offenders over non-violent offenders, but this really is not the case.

In 2004, more than half of the prisoners in state prisons were held for non-violent crime. This equals 640,000 nonviolent crimes — 250,000 of which were for drug offenses. During the last 20 years, our total number of incarcerated criminals has ballooned from 600,000 to 1.6 million. We spend nearly 50 billion dollars on corrections yet we do not have room for any new offenders, according to nolanchart.com. The overcrowding has forced the state to dismiss cases, abandon rehabilitative programs due to lack of funding and

lower sentences for purely fiscal reasons.

We as a country imprison criminals at a higher rate than any other country. Yet even with a focus on deterrent-oriented sentences, we still cannot keep violent criminals behind bars. I believe the main problem with our system is the way we prioritize. The system is broken when we jail a 22-year-old first-time offender for a non-violent offense and release a sexual assault repeat offender back on the streets because we do not have room in our prisons.

Our desired strategy for coming down hard on drug-related offenses is blowing up in our collective faces. We have valued this ineffective deterrence at the expense of our public safety. Approximately half of the people sitting in our prisons are not there because they were convicted of hurting anyone. Have we forgotten the very purpose of incarceration? It is not meant to be an easy fix for storing delinquents but rather a safety net to save society from greater harm at the hands of the criminals who cannot be rehabilitated.

This is first a matter of safety. If we had the means

to use imprisonment for every crime, I could understand incarcerating nonviolent offenders. But it is time to realize that all crimes are not equal in the threat posed to society.

It is time to realize that we can no longer use our prisons as a quick fix for our crime issues. With funds shrinking nationwide, departments everywhere must reevaluate their priorities, and the Department of Corrections is no different. Serving hard time is no longer a deterrent threat when criminals know receiving a sentence of seven years could easily become a mere fraction of that.

The real dangers to our society should be locked behind bars, but we must look to a means of deterrence other than incarceration, or perhaps pursue other rehabilitative policies. We must be smarter with our policies, not bullheaded in maintaining a failing status quo.

Toby Hausner is a senior political science major from Kansas City, Mo.

AROUND THE 'VILLE

Why do you vote?



"The issues — I wish they wouldn't slam each other though. It should be illegal."

*Sandi Simler
Kirkville resident*

"I don't vote, but I think we need a change in politics."

*Christopher Miller
Kirkville resident*



"I grew up in a family that voted. It's just something I was taught to do."

*Kay Beach
Kirkville resident*

"I think I should. It's my job as a card-carrying Democrat."

*Joann Harwood
Kirkville resident*



PowerPoint inhibits learning



Molly Skyles

They can have sound, pictures and an unlimited amount of words and facts. And with a few short clicks, they swirl, jump, fade in and out and they can fly, they can fly, they can fly. They sound cool, right? Wrong.

PowerPoints. I loathe them. They are the dream of every lazy lecturer and the bane of my existence. I don't need a slide show to dazzle me into caring about the material. I am not impressed by the extensive number of fonts, colors and animations. The simpler, the better, folks. What happened to the days of teaching using chalk and innovative narratives to catch my attention? Now I just struggle to keep my eyes open while copiously taking notes, or should I say copying, from the PowerPoint.

I am not alone in my hatred for this specific Microsoft Office program. Col. Sellin of NATO's International Security Assistance Force was fired after he bad-mouthed officers who apparently gave more attention to slide shows and bullet points in PowerPoint than actual bullets, according to an Oct. 15 article on CNN.com. Sellin's complaint, however, was just one in a series of many grievances with PowerPoint use — or

overuse — in the military.

There are some good ways to use PowerPoint. The problem is that most people don't know how. There is nothing worse than sitting through a lecture where the presenter or professor reads directly from the slide. I can read on my own, thank you. I have been doing so since I was six.

I have a few great professors — some who use PowerPoint and some who do not. The thing that separates the good PowerPoint users from the bad is their ability to teach outside of the words typed on the slide. Good lecturers use a slide show to enhance their already superb presentation. They will use the slides to list the talking points of their lecture and refer to it for specific dates and tedious facts. They will not use it, however, to list every detail of every battle and every general in World War II. When that happens, my eyes have no choice but to close, no matter how interesting the material may be.

Not only does a grueling PowerPoint put me to sleep, but it also hinders my learning. I try, don't get me wrong, but learning is not fun or effective when I'm just listening to someone read at me. The best types of learning are when the professors connect with the students. They share anecdotes that explain the material and help relate it to something easily comprehensible. A good lecturer is what makes the class fun, not a colorful PowerPoint with an extensive number of different fonts.

Presentations are important outside the classroom as well — they decide elections, close business deals and, when done well, even provide entertainment. If a presentation goes wrong though, it can be disastrous. A poor presentation can leave little or no impact on its audience and thus be easily forgotten. This might not be a big deal on a small scale, but think of an important military presentation. If a message is not properly conveyed, the safety and security of many could be at risk. Whereas, if the presenter focuses more on connecting with the audience in order to leave a lasting impression and a clear message instead of using confusing facts and a lifeless communication style, a disaster could be averted.

So here is some advice for all future presenters: When using PowerPoint, do not ever use animation (it is more distracting than cool), stick to basic colors and fonts (a PowerPoint presentation should never be considered art), limit the number of words per slide and never read directly from the screen. Now, for all the progressives out there, I encourage you to close your computer and try giving a presentation without PowerPoint. It may sound scary, but when done well, a good oral presentation can leave a lasting impact on the audience and maybe even keep them awake the entire time.

Molly Skyles is a junior communication major from St. Louis, Mo.

Reducing accent harms identity



Nicola Fish

As you're all probably aware, registration for the spring semester is now upon us. I began thinking about what courses I should take. One course that is not on my list is a suggestion received through my e-mail account — Accent Reduction.

Why? Well, first, I don't qualify. It's an English as a Second Language class and, being from England, English is my first language. You might find it funny that I thought it necessary to clarify my native language, but I have been asked on more than one occasion what language they speak in England. Second, and most important, I don't want to reduce my accent, and I find the suggestion very disconcerting.

On one hand, I can see the appeal of the course. In it, students can practice their English and receive help to make it sound more natural. It has proven to be a popular course in the past and received positive feedback from students, which is why it is being offered again.

In this course, students are taught how to speak with a "standard American accent."

Here is my problem

with this class: What is a standard American accent? The number of times I've heard my American friends say they don't have an accent is ridiculous. Everyone has an accent, whether they like it or not.

During my time here, I've heard that the standard American accent sounds Midwestern. However, if I asked this question in England, the answer would probably be that it is a Californian-sounding accent because of the American media we are exposed to.

A standard accent is hard to qualify. For instance, in England, the term for Standard English is "received pronunciation" or "the queen's English." In simple terms, it's like "Harry Potter," which is probably why I receive so many complaints about my lack of an accent, because I don't have the Standard English accent.

But even if I was offered the opportunity to acquire the Standard English accent, I would refuse. My accent is a part of me and it's something that is unique to me. An accent is a means of self-identification, so the idea of getting rid of it seems repellent. I understand that accents can change and that gradual changes are expected, but deliberately changing an accent seems unnatural.

I'm not the only one who thinks this. Think about the negative reaction celebrities and politicians receive when they abruptly change or

modify their accents. This happens because people see changes in accent as a way of denying one's culture and background. I've already been warned that if I come back with a faux American accent when I return home at Christmas, I will be disowned. I'm exaggerating, but my family and friends would see this as a type of betrayal, that I would change who I am just to fit in.

That is also the underlying implication of the accent reduction course — that one language is superior to another.

It's almost like peer pressure. When you spend time in a new place around new people, you often find yourself trying to be like everyone else so as not to stand out — and taking this course seems like a way to fit in. This notion goes against the concept of diversity. This is why I'm against the forcible change, because it should happen organically.

Just as people change gradually, so should accents. In a way, the change of an accent could be part of the learning experience of being in a new place and reflect the change in you as a person. Viewing an accent in this way makes it a manifestation of everything you've learned, and the change is an expression of that achievement.

Nicola Fish is a freshman undeclared major from Consett, England

Four Loko proves more dangerous than fun for students



Anna Meier

The creators of Four Loko certainly got one thing right: They named their product aptly. You would have to be a lunatic to want to drink one.

Four Loko, for those who avoid the strung-out, drunk social scene, is one of a few brands of popular energy drinks smoothly blended with malt liquor and conveniently put in a can for mass consumption by, mostly, college-aged students. Drinking one can of Four Loko, which is 12 percent alcohol by volume, is equal to drinking six light beers while simultaneously drinking two 12-ounce cups

of coffee. It also has the same amount of calories as a McDonald's cheeseburger and a Coke, according to an Oct. 27 article in the Huffington Post.

The drink was banned at Ramapo College in New Jersey shortly after 23 students went to the hospital for alcohol poisoning due to the consumption of Four Loko. Similarly, police were under the impression that dozens of students at a party at Central Washington University had been slipped some sort of date rape drug, based on the condition they were in, but actually the people at the party had just been drinking Four Loko, according to an Oct. 27 article in the Los Angeles Times.

Nine of those students were hospitalized. Another young man who was hospitalized was a 19-year-old in Philadelphia who came to the doctor with chest pains. He was otherwise healthy, and the doctor reported that his symptoms mimicked those of someone who had overdosed on

cocaine or speed, according to an Oct. 25 article on ABCNews.com. The young man was suffering a heart attack, and he admitted that he had been drinking Four Loko.

Urban Dictionary's definition for Four Loko is "legalized cocaine in a can." The reason doctors believe Four Loko to be so dangerous is the high amount of caffeine in the drink, which prevents people from realizing exactly how inebriated they are while also helping them to stay up and drink more, long after they would have naturally passed out from drinking, had their drinks not contained caffeine.

It's no wonder the drink has earned the popular nickname "blackout in a can." Among the nine students who were hospitalized at Central Washington University, their Blood Alcohol Concentrations ranged from .12 to .35, according to an Oct. 25 article on msnbc.com. Multiple university health websites explain that a .35 BAC is equal

to having surgical anesthesia, in which case a person with this BAC might stop breathing.

I'm not shocked that Four Loko exists. Lots of bad things exist, like heroin and the Jonas Brothers.

What I am shocked about is the drink's continuing popularity. When I was out at another Missouri university's Halloween parties, I was taken aback by the number of girls either drinking Four Loko or complaining that they were unable to find it at any of the local convenience stores.

One of them asked me if I had heard that someone died from drinking it. I couldn't find any news reports with evidence that someone had died as a direct result from drinking Four Loko. I was still surprised, though, that the girl who believed someone had died from the drink was also laughing and raising a Four Loko to her lips, as a rainbow of brightly colored empties littered the floor around us.

I understand the mentality of drinking and partying in college.

I have yet to understand the mentality behind binge drinking, to say nothing of the mindset behind drinking caffeinated malt liquor, which a doctor from the ABCNews.com report said was similar to stepping on the gas and the brake pedal at the same time, only in your body instead of a car. This stuff is liquid crack, people.

So the next time you think about hoisting that shiny, colorful can the size of a pony keg up to your mouth to chug, think again. Don't be loko. And if that doesn't stop some of you, think about the fact that it contains the same amount of calories as a Coke and a McDonald's cheeseburger. Drinking too many might keep you from fitting into another slutty Halloween costume next year.

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