Block scheduling meant to get freshmen on the right track, but some stumble

Kate McIntyre

Kate McIntyre (2009)

When landscape architecture freshman Mariae Mendoza arrived at Cal Poly, she expected to be handed a schedule, just like every other freshman attending. But she didn’t receive her schedule because her high school hadn’t sent her transcript in time. The stress most freshmen probably felt at their first day of class was amplified when she had to crash all four of her courses in the same boat,” Mendoza said.

Over the summer, 3,820 freshmen were scheduled into their fall quarter classes. The block-scheduling program worked, as evidenced by feedback from freshmen and by an increase in the average unit load freshmen take – from 12 units last fall to 16.

History freshman Liz Goralka said most of her friends are only liking 12 units now. It’s kind of stressful, freedom in their curriculum, like GPA. "That defeats the purpose of the effort!" Spradlin said. "We have students coming in with numerous AP exams passed. If the university doesn’t receive their scores in time, they can easily be scheduled into classes that they don’t really need," Spradlin said. "That defines the purpose of the effort!"

Spradlin said that block-scheduling works better for majors that are heavily specified, where students have to take certain classes to fulfill a requirement, but for students who have more freedom in their curriculum, like CLA students, it doesn’t work as well. It results in students being assigned a course to meet a GE area instead of getting to choose the course they’d like to take to fulfill that particular area. For example, a student might be assigned ECON 222 for 12 but really would have preferred HIST 213, she said.

Cal Poly making room for “serious” students

Sean Hanrahan

Sean Hanrahan (2009)

Cal Poly is now operating with new policies issued from the California State University (CSU) Chancellor’s Office that limit the number of incomplete, withdrawal and repeat grades students can accumulate per academic record. The new rules, made to "make room for serious students," said Bradford Fely of the Office of the Registrar.

The office of the registrar notified students via an email on Sept. 18 addressing Executive Order 1037 that includes these new policies, but many students are still unaware of the changes, as school had yet to begin when the e-mail was sent.

"The concept of throughput is important in understanding the rational behind the policy changes," said Fely. "(These policies) should discourage students from planning poorly... it will also be harder to get out of a class."

The four major changes in Executive Order 1037 involve incomplete grades, course withdrawal, course repeats for grade forgiveness and course repeats for grade improvement.

Incompletes

Incompletes will not be able to repeat in a course for which you have received an "I" (incomplete) grade. Instead, you have to work out how you will complete the work with your instructor.

Withdrawals

Students will be able to only withdraw from up to 28 units during your undergraduate education here at Cal Poly. They will start with a zero count towards your 28 unit withdrawal limit as of Fall 2009. Any medical/emergency withdrawals after the end of the seventh week of classes will not count towards your 28 unit limit.

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Academic Affairs appointed Cem Sunata early last summer, replacing Tom Zum, who retired in December. Sunata comes to Cal Poly from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas where she worked for more than 10 years.

A Cal Poly news report to faculty in August said the new position would play a key role in attaining graduation, enrollment and retention goals.

Sunata is responsible for insuring the integrity of student academic records by requiring that students have a clear path to graduation.

Instructors are now required to produce a contract with a student who receives an incomplete grade to prove that the student knows exactly what needs to be done to fulfill the course and students will have a harder time dropping classes after the withdrawal deadline.

With the 1037 policies just taking effect this quarter, it isn’t noticeably apparent to anyone that students are experiencing relevant problems. However, the Office of the Registrar is anticipating grievances later in the year. The Cal Poly Portal will not alert a student about hitting a limit.

The health care industry, for its part, said billing problems were rare and certainly unintended. But mistakes were made.

Medical Billing Advocates of America is an association of professionals who help consumers with billing problems; its members find errors in eight out of 10 hospital bills they examine.

With medical expenses contributing to nearly two-thirds of bankruptcies, reduced charges and affordable payment plans could prevent financial ruin.

"Ask, ask, ask. Advocate, advocate, advocate," urged Mark Rukavina, executive director of the Access Project, a nonprofit organization that helps patients work with doctors and hospitals on financially crippling bills.

Don’t be discouraged when a consumer service representative explains over the telephone that your policy doesn’t cover a procedure or a hospital can’t discount your bill, Rukavina said.

Insurance companies have an appeals process. Most hospitals have policies for providing charity care. "Health care providers generally are willing to deal," Rukavina said.

Patient activists are pushing health care providers to be more transparent about their fees and billing practices — a godsend for patients who’ve encountered items like the “disposable mucus recovery system” on their bills.

For the uninsured, that’s a box of tissues.

"Hospitals can charge $15 for a box of Kleenex and say that’s what it costs them to provide it," said Steve Luptak, an expert in hospital billing.

But mistakes were made.

"It’s so important to be calm and diplomatic and pursue your questions until you reach the right person," Luptak said. "If you can’t afford a lawyer or other professional, I always recommend turning to another family member, a friend, or someone who can be one step removed emotionally in fighting for you.

Problems with a doctor’s or hospital’s bills should first be addressed with the billing office. A second step is to ask for help from a hospital social worker or patient advocate on the hospital staff.

Some people find help by asking around their churches or neighborhoods for someone who has worked in the health care field.

Failing that, consumers are hiring professional advocates.

Hircock, an accountant by training, got into the advocacy business after working as an internal hospital auditor. He saw firsthand how billing errors occurred.

"Most consumers don’t have much leverage (over high bills)," Hircock said. "They don’t hold any trump cards."

But Hircock the advocate knew how to scrutinize the hospital charges of Hircock the patient.

He asked for an itemized copy of his bill and combed through it line by line. He discovered that the hospital had charged twice for his stent procedure, both as an inpatient and an outpatient.

Problems like what Medicare would pay. The government program reimburses hospitals based on their reported costs. By Medicare standards, his procedure was worth less than $12,000, Hircock said.

"Unlike any other industry in the world, there is very little correlation between (hospital) charges and what it actually costs," Hircock said. "That (bill) had a lot of profit built into it.

He took the bill back to the hospital.

Patriots can challenge and negotiate through the maze of costly hospital bills

Diane Stafford and Alan Bavy

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Patients can challenge and negotiate through the maze of costly hospital bills

Diane Stafford and Alan Bavy
Health care
continued from page 2

"I showed them in no uncertain terms where they had double-billed," he said. "Initially, I was not

ber."

But the more common challenge for consumers is paying what they owe when the bill comes due.

Doctors and hospitals are increasingly willing to write down

with resistance and defense." He also told his insurance plan, which had paid the inflated bill.

"You guys realize you overpaid? Do you even care?" he asked. "They got very defensive: 'How would we know?'"

Ultimately, the hospital did refund the overpayment, Hircock said.

The need for professional billing deciphering services can be head-
cud off, said Corrie Edwards, executive director of the Kansas Health Consumer Coalition. But patients need to become better-educated consumers of medical services.

When Edwards recently had diagnostic tests at a hospital, she caused a ripple effect at the admissions desk. As other patients overheard her calling her doctor's office and insurance company asking for cost information, they whipped out their cell phones and made similar calls.

"Go in well-informed," Edwards said. "If you're talking about elective procedures, make sure you understand what your doctor is or-
dering, the names of the tests, and get the procedural codes from your insurance company."

Patients also should find out from their insurance company what's covered and what out-of-pocket expenses they can expect.

"If you know your co-pays and coverage, there shouldn't be any surprises (on the final bill)," said Blake Williamson, senior medical director with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City.

If you think your health plan should have covered something it didn't, you can file an appeal to the insurance company.

"Frankly, mistakes can happen. But it's a rare event. Ninety-nine percent or more of things are covered the way they are supposed to be."

Patients also can ask the hospital to review bills when an error is suspected.

"We'll get down to a line by line, nitty-gritty with (patients). Our interest is to get it right," said University of Kansas Hospi-
tal spokesman Dennis McCulloch.

"...With all the computer coding these days, sometimes it's simply someone keying in a wrong num-

Lee Hircock, who works as a patient advocate, received a shock when he received an $85,000 bill for a two-day hospital stay. Their changes now that the health care reform debate has put them in the spotlight, consumer advocates said.

"If the patient is willing to provide information (about their financial need), they're generally willing to negotiate," said Rakavi-

na of the Access Project.

"The bottom line is they want to get paid something," said Lopuk, the professional patient advocate. "But if you negotiate them down, you need to follow through. If you set a payment plan, you need to stick to it. If you work with them, they will work with you."

YOUR NEWS REDEFINED

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SEE IT.
WATCH IT.
CLICK IT.

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For 25 years, Extron Electronics, headquartered in Anaheim, California, has been a leading developer and manufacturer of professional A/V system products. Extron products are used to integrate video and audio into presentation systems for today's high tech boardrooms, presentation/training centers, university lecture halls, and other applications. Our corporate philosophy is founded on three concepts: Service, Support, and Solutions - S3. By following this standard, Extron has become one of the leading providers of products and training to the professional A/V industry.

As an industry leader, Extron Electronics is committed to maintaining the outstanding level of quality services our customers expect. We strive to continually provide Service, Support, and Solutions - S3 to our customers. Our customers are our most important asset, and our employees are essential in maintaining that asset.

We are currently seeking quality individuals who desire to achieve a professional and rewarding career opportunity. Extron offers top industry salaries, and a competitive benefits package that includes medical, dental, vision, a 401k program with employer match, tuition reimbursement, and much more!
**WORD ON THE STREET**

"Do you think block scheduling will help students graduate on time?"

"No, it may help freshman but may have potential to set back upperclassmen and cost them more money."
- Alex Magniotti, ag business senior

"Yes, because it just makes freshmen get on the right track earlier."
- Ashley Ogden, ag business senior

"Not really, especially some of the engineering paths have so many required units they’ll take more than four years."
- Andy Richardson, aerospace engineering senior

"Maybe, because they get some that are harder to get since you start off with more impacted classes. Maybe that will give them a head start."
- Julie Uccelli, food science sophomore

"It probably would. It won’t let you ignore graduation requirements. If I were a freshman I’d be frustrated that I had so little choice."
- Kevin Finn, computer science senior

"Probably, because they don’t know what classes they need to take. If someone tells them they will be more likely to get it done."
- Becky Robles, liberal studies junior

"Not really, especially some of the engineering paths have so many required units they’ll take more than four years."
- Aidy Richardson, aerospace engineering senior

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11560 Los Osos Valley Road
in the Laguna Shopping Center
California's ban on gay marriage back to court

Howard Mintz
SAN JOSE — The legal battle over California's ban on gay marriage heated up again this week as a federal judge considers an attempt to throw out the challenge to Proposition 8, the voter-approved law putting a halt to same-sex weddings in California.

On Wednesday, Chief U.S. District Judge Vaughn Walker will consider a motion from Proposition 8 backers that would scrap plans for a January trial and put a quick end to the effort to overturn the anti-gay marriage law. Proposition 8's defenders cite a U.S. Supreme Court precedent and the historical underpinnings of the definition of marriage negate the need for a trial, an argument strongly rejected by same-sex marriage advocates who vow to present strong factual evidence that Proposition 8 denies gay couples federal equal protection rights.

Based on Walker's comments to date, Proposition 8 backers may have an uphill fight to avoid a trial, even with what some legal experts say are several strong legal arguments. The judge has indicated on numerous occasions that he believes the case warrants a trial to develop a full record for higher court review that many predict could reach the U.S. Supreme Court.

A newly formed legal group, led by former Republican U.S. Solicitor General Theodore Olson and prominent trial lawyer David Boies, sued to overturn Proposition 8 earlier this year, representing two same-sex couples seeking the right to marry. The lawsuit has proceeded in the wake of an Obama administration Supreme Court ruling, which upheld Proposition 8 but left intact an estimated 18,000 same-sex marriages that were licensed before voters approved the law in November.

"They simply can't win under relevant controlling law here," said Jim Campbell, a staff attorney with the conservative Alliance Defense Fund. Lawyers for the couples, as well as a coalition of San Francisco public officials, have cited in court papers that Prop 8 is uniquely irrational. They want to go to trial.

"We think we have very strong arguments on the legal issues," said Theodore Boutrous Jr., one of the lawyers working with Olson. But "we really took our guidance from the court's comments early on. To us, it makes a lot more sense to develop a factual record."

Proposition 8's defenders are relying on two central arguments to get the challenge tossed out of court. The first argument is that the lawsuit fails to prove a violation of any constitutional rights because of what Proposition 8's defenders insist is a deeply rooted tradition of reserving marriage for heterosexual couples.

State

SACRAMENTO (MCT) — California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has signed two gay rights bills, one honoring gay rights law-activist Harvey Milk and another recognizing same-sex marriages performed in other states.

In the last of hundreds of bills actions taken before midnight Sunday, Schwarzenegger approved the two bills by state Sen. Mark Leno, D-San Francisco.

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WALNUT CREEK, Calif. (MCT) — If you drive on the new Bay Bridge's east span after it opens in 2013, you will be safer because of an innovative bridge piece designed to flex, bend and break so the main structure does not sit in a big earthquake.

Once the inevitable Big One finishes shaking the Bay Area, Caltrans crews can replace any broken fuses to re-store the bridge to full strength — much like an electrician replaces a fuse that blows out the $6.3 billion east span from Oakland to Treasure Island is the first bridge to use the breakable metal fuses for added protection against earthquakes. Caltrans officials said Monday during a tour of the project designed to Hex, bend and break so the main structure does not sit in a big earthquake.

Briefs

WASHINGTON (MCT) — Two Americans won the Nobel Prize in economic sciences Monday for their research into the way economic decisions and transactions are made outside of the market.

Elinor Ostrom, 76, a professor at Indiana University in Bloomington, Ind., became the first woman to win the prize for economics since it was established 40 years ago.

She shares the $1.4-million award with Oliver William- son, 77, a professor at the Uni-

ersity of California-Berkeley.

Ostrom and Williamson were cited for their work beginning in the early 1970s that helped to ex- pand economics beyond the tra-
ditional analysis of market prices.

MIAMI (MCT) — A convicted Cuban intelligence agent who infiltrated the Boca Chica Naval Air Station in Key West, Fla., in 1989, but didn't obtain or pass along state secrets to his handlers in Ha-

vana, could see his life sentence reduced to 20 years on Tuesday, but only Antonio Guerrero, convicted of espionage conspiracy in the highly publicized prosecution of the so-called "Cuban Five" spy defendants in 2001, has reached an agreement with the U.S. attor-

ney's office to lower his sentence.

International

BAGHDAD (MCT) — Iraq security forces scored a top goal to the most wanted man in Iraq, capturing him Sunday in a hello- copter raid in Diyala province, an Iraq security official who par-ticipated in the raid said Monday.

Afif Jabal Abdulla, who was working closely with Izzat al-Douri, the vice president under the regime of the late dictator Saddam Hussein, was wanted by the Iraqi federal government.

The security official said Douri is still at large and is viewed by U.S. officials as Saddam's successor in the resistance movement. The Iraqi force that cap-tured Abdulla turned him over to U.S. forces, which brought him to Baghdad, where he's undergone interrogation, officials said.

KABUL, Afghanistan (MCT) — The Afghan government's ap-
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FRIDAY, OCT. 16TH

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FOOTBALL

M O N G Y M

7:00PM

M O N G Y M

7:00PM

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7:00PM

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7:00PM

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Admission for all Cal Poly Athletic Events is FREE for Cal Poly Students.

WE ARE THE MUSTANGS

MUSTANG DAILY NEWS

Tuesday, October 13, 2009

www.mustangdaily.net

Wire Editor: Jennifer Titcomb

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MUSTANG DAILY NEWS

Tuesday, October 13, 2009

www.mustangdaily.net

Wire Editor: Jennifer Titcomb
ASI & CAL POLY ATHLETICS PRESENT:

WHAT IS FANFEST?

a FREE interactive experience for Cal Poly students featuring live music, inflatables, large flat screen TVs showing all other college football games, face painting, food, games, free stuff, & more.

WHEN IS FANFEST?

3:00PM - 6:00PM before each home football game.

WHERE IS FANFEST?

Chase Lawn, College Ave., adjacent to the student entrance to Alex G. Spanos Stadium.

OCTOBER 3RD
(YOUTH DAY)
6:05PM KICK-OFF
Cal Poly vs. South Dakota State
Tribal Seeds
(tribalseeds.net)
Mike Pinto
(mikeypinto.net)

OCTOBER 17TH
(HOMECOMING WEEKEND)
6:05PM KICK-OFF
Cal Poly vs. Southern Utah
Matt Costa
(mattcosta.com)
Nothing Ever Stays
(myspace.com/nothingeverstays)

OCTOBER 24TH
(PARENTS WEEKEND)
6:05PM KICK-OFF
Cal Poly vs. Dixie State
Young Dubliners
(youngdubliners.com)
The Janks
(myspace.com/thejanks)

NOVEMBER 14TH
(ARMED FORCES DAY)
6:05PM KICK-OFF
Cal Poly vs. South Dakota
The B Foundation
(thebfoundation.net)
Chase McBride
(chasemcbride.com)

VISIT GOPOLY.COM FOR MORE INFORMATION ON CAL POLY FANFEST BY VISITING THE UPCOMING PROMOTIONS PAGE!
The Spanos Theatre stage will transform into the Lower East Side of New York, complete with cake-faced drag queens, reckless heroin addicts and starving artists when award-winning rock musical RENT comes to Cal Poly on Oct. 15.

Co-directors Erik Austin and Kristen Towers-Rowles of Kelrik Productions, a San Luis Obispo theater company, will bring to life the story of seven friends, all of whom are living as impoverished artists and musicians and struggling with the physical and emotional impacts of AIDS.

"AIDS is still a huge epidemic, but it’s just not talked about as much anymore," Austin said. "The emotional impacts of AIDS. It’s much more personal than what's going on. It’s about friendships and love and just being in production in Broadway history."

Despite RENT being a new direction for the company, Austin said the fast-paced production process challenging, yet rewarding.

"It is a series of stairs, catwalks, scaffolding and platforms as well as hanging fences and abstract junk street pieces," Austin said.

Despite nerves about the first time to prepare for opening night on Oct. 15.

"The biggest challenge is going to be loading everything into the theater and blending the two companies," Austin said. "Everyone is very excited and ready, so hopefully it will go smoothly."

"It is a different kind of show for San Luis Obispo. It's not new in the musical theater world, it is the first time that a production we've ever done," Austin said. "Everyone is very excited and ready, so hopefully it will go smoothly."

"The biggest challenge is going to be loading everything into the theater and blending the two companies," Austin said. "It's a series of stairs, catwalks, scaffolding and platforms as well as hanging fences and abstract junk street pieces," Austin said.

Despite nerves about the first touch of the process, Austin found that it was very gratifying.

"This is the most different production we've ever done," Austin said. "It's crazy, not family-oriented, and it's a rock musical. It's not happy and perky like most of the stuff we've done in the past. I'd say it's a PG-13 show."

"It is a different kind of show for San Luis Obispo," Austin said. "It's a different kind of show for the San Luis Obispo community, but RENT is also a step in a unique direction for Kelrik Productions."

The company originated in Indiana as a small local theater group established by Austin and his sister Kelly, hence the name "Kelrik." Both pursuing their passion for theater, they moved to San Luis Obispo in 1988 and began producing family-oriented musicals while they were still in high school.

"I remember one incident in particular where I had to have my parents sign a contract for me because I wasn't old enough. That was pretty funny," Austin said.

"It is a different kind of show for San Luis Obispo," Austin said. "It's a different kind of show for the San Luis Obispo community, but RENT is also a step in a unique direction for Kelrik Productions."

"It is a series of stairs, catwalks, scaffolding and platforms as well as hanging fences and abstract junk street pieces," Austin said.

Despite nerves about the first touch of the process, Austin found that it was very gratifying.

see RENT, page 10
“We’re on a break...”

Decoding the stage between happy couple and the inevitable break-up

Isn’t it funny how romantic couples decide they need a “break” from one another? It’s amazing how someone could want a relationship and claim they love a person, but then decide they need to go on a break for a period of time just to test the relationship.

Isn’t the whole point of a break to get away from your significant other for whatever amount of time, and wouldn’t that signify that you are having problems, or maybe even that the relationship should be over?

Couples often defend this concept of a break by saying, “We just need time to figure things out,” but in all honesty, maybe the relationship just isn’t meant to be. And not only that, but why do you have to go on this “break” at all?

It seems a little over dramatic to be “on a break.” Sure, you may just need some alone time, but by putting this title on it, you’re making it more difficult for yourself and your partner.

The title and amount of time isn’t the only issue with the break concept. Another issue is the rules that people form for their so-called “break,” which make this period much more ridiculous.

There are rules such as, you are allowed to date other people, but you’re not allowed to sleep with them. Or you can’t date at all; it should only be a time to think.

In reality, if either partner is contemplating dating other people, the relationship really shouldn’t exist in the first place.

Another way people try to justify their break experience is that they’ve met someone else who they believe might be a better fit for them, or they just want to mess around a little. You know, get that college experience. But the reality of it is that people, both men and women think about messing around — with other people all the time, but actually wanting to follow through with that act should feel completely wrong if you’re truly in love with your partner.

Furthermore, if you are thinking about going on a break to see if it would be possible to live without this significant other, then there are bigger issues to deal with, and it seems a bit unfair to your partner to put their emphasis in your life on trial.

I have seen many couples go through this break up and get back together trend. It turns into one of those annoying relationships that has everyone turned off to dating completely.

It only seems like the best of both worlds: you could go out and mess around, and then after you’re done with that, you could come back to this person who is just waiting for you. In reality, that type of setup is poison for everyone involved.

No matter the case, with any type of “break,” someone gets hurt.

Here are a few hints that should alert you to an impending break:

1. The relationship has become distant.
2. Little fights break out over nothing.
3. You find yourself wondering if there are other fish in the sea.
4. Avoiding one another becomes a regular occurrence.

A break might help to temporarily avoid problems or it might even get that one-night-stand with that hot girl from the gym out of the way. In the end, though, when you return to that relationship, the dynamic will have changed, the problems will still be there and you will likely find that a permanent break-up is in your future.

Cassondra Becking is a liberal studies junior and Mustang Daily relationship columnist.
All-star cast can’t carry "Couples Retreat"

The second film from director Peter Billingsley (Ralphie from "A Christmas Story"), "Couples Retreat" deals with four pairs of friends who reluctantly travel to a resort designed for helping troubled couples. The film stars an ensemble cast which includes Vince Vaughn, Jason Bateman, Kristen Bell, Jean Reno and Jon Favreau. Unfortunately, despite a few amusing moments, even the star studded comedic cast couldn’t save what eventually developed into another predictable failure.

In denial and believing their problems are simply petty feuds, three of the couples seem happy with where their relationships are headed. They receive a wake up call when their friends Jason (Jason Bateman) and Cynthia (Kristen Bell) reveal that they are contemplating a divorce after frustrations with failed pregnancies, and what they believe to be their only chance comes in the form of the Eden Resort in Bora Bora. Upon analyzing their own misfortunes, the rest of the group decides to join in, initially expecting the resort to serve as an excuse to take a vacation in paradise.

Eden is managed by martial artist and love expert Monsieur Marcel, portrayed by the much under appreciated French film legend Jean Reno ("The Professional," "Ronin"). When thinking about both the premise and its notable faces, the story could have easily been translated onto the screen in a humorous and creative manner.

The movie opened at No. 1 at the box office this weekend, and is sure to make a reasonable profit in weeks to come, mainly because of word of mouth between people in search of easy laughs and cheesy comedies. None of the characters are effectively developed, and most of the actors seem to be playing themselves. The story was written by Dana Fox, a screenwriter with a body of work that contains other generic comedies like "What Happens in Vegas" and "The Wedding Date." However both Vince Vaughn and Jon Favreau also surprisingly contributed to the foreseeable plot, whose other writing collaborations include amusing scripts like the cult-classic "Swingers" and box office hit "The Break Up."

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While it’s easy to spot what the filmmakers intended to be the movie’s high points in terms of comedy and suspense (irritating shark attack scene), the only aspect that may make it worth watching is Vince Vaughn’s signature dark humor and sarcasm. To my own dismay the film turned out to be exactly what I expected, a cheap comedy that hoped to rely on an impressive cast rather than an adequate script.

Alex Petrosian is a biological sciences sophomore and Mustang Daily movie columnist.
**WTF? College** was released July 18 by Adams Media Publishing.

This book makes me wish I could go back in time, live at the dorms, and roll ooze out of this survival guide. This book will partner with the AIDS Support Network (ASN), a local nonprofit organization. All money donated to ASN at the performances will help San Luis Obispo residents who live with AIDS.

The production of RENT opens on Oct. 15 at 8 p.m. at the Alex & Faye Spanos Theatre and will run through Oct. 18. Tickets are $25.50 for seniors and students and range from $25.50 to $27.50 depending on seating for general admission. Tickets can be purchased through the Performing Arts Center at Cal Poly.

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I'm willing to guess that the most common way to start a political discussion is with the question "are you a Democrat or a Republican?" From there, the discussion all too often goes downhill.

People generally like more about either the Democratic or Republican party and their inclination might be to answer with the party you most associate with. It's a quick way to identify yourself in a set of views and relate to millions of other Americans.

If you find yourself in the company of a fellow party member then you're in luck; you can commiserate about the insanity of the other party and its members.

But maybe you find yourself with someone of the other party. This situation has the potential to lead to a great amount of sharing of different views, and both learning as well as growing from them. You can have a genuinely constructive discussion in this scenario but too often the process gets derailed by the labels "Democrat" and "Republican."

It's as though answering with a political party automatically means you stand for anything and everything anybody of your party has ever done. What a big burden that is; it's probably not what you were asking for when you asked them their question but it's nevertheless the situation you find yourself in.

You're a Republican? Well then Bush must be your biggest political hero, mustn't he? How can you not care about the poor or informed, and you certainly don't care about the environment at all? You're a Democrat! Well then you must hate the wealthy you must think we all should have to drive hybrids, and you must definitely be a socialist.

See how constructive the conversation has become? It's a bloody nightmare! How can you have a peaceful discussion with all of these stereotypes flying around? It's as though saying you're a Democrat or Republican has given the person the illusion of being able to read your mind — and yet what they're seeing is almost entirely wrong.

Among the Democratic and Republican parties there are many differences of opinions. Many of them are minor differences, but for some, they can be earth-shattering. Some Republicans are pro-gay marriage and some Democrats don't believe that global warming is human-caused. Americans don't simply fit into two categories. There is so much more depth to the American public than two labels that's a shame we all too often act as though it's the case.

In my case, I find not answering the question surprisingly easy, as I really don't see myself leaning towards one party or another. First off there's the fact that so many politicians don't seem to represent the people that elected them — but let's leave that thought alone for now.

What I believe in is freedom and liberty, plain and simple. People should have the right to choose what they want to do with their own lives, so long as it doesn't infringe on other people's ability to do the same. Life is too short for people to be telling others how to live their lives; I want to make my choices. Freedom should be both economic and social. To me, the parties seem to each have one but not the other.

My money should be just that, mine. I'm a person first and foremost and I hope the places that I really think help people. Should I not feel like giving up on parties, well then are you really helping by forcing money from me and giving it to what you deem to be "good causes" or is that stealing?

My life choices should be my own. The government shouldn't be involved in marriages, nor should the government be involved in dictating what drugs people can or can't use. That's beyond long as it doesn't put other people at risk, e.g. drunk driving. My private communications should be private and nobody should be held indefinitely without a trial, labeled a "terrorist" or not.

Please don't confuse me with an anarchist, I strongly believe in the rule of law. As James Madison, the "Father of the Constitution" put it, "the powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the federal government are few and defined. Those which are to remain in the State governments are numerous and indefinite."

So next time you find yourself faced with the dreaded "are you a Republican or Democrat?" question, I'd encourage you to try to define your own views, whatever they may be, without using the words liberal, conservative, Democrat, or Republican. See how many stereotypes you can avoid by staying away from those four words and see how it forces the discussion to be on what your ideas really are — not what the other person guesses them to be from overly-broad labels. Perhaps this way we can have more constructive political discussions that we actually enjoy and feel like we learned something new.

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Cold realities reveal a complicated conflict in Israel

By Frida Ghitis

A trip to this Palestinian town can shatter preconceptions and compel the mind to dream about the possibilities of peace, and then awaken to the cold realities of a complicated conflict.

You may expect to see sparse and desolate in the city that serves as the capital for the Palestinian Authority. Instead, you have to work your way through a bustling downtown of crowded streets and impenetrable traffic jams, complete with vibrant commerce. You can admire the designs of bright new buildings or stop for coffee at a cool "smoozy" at Stars and Soda.

Kamallah is booming, but it is not a normal town. On posters still affixed to crumbling walls, Israeli leaders declare victory over the "terrorist entity." A normal town would have a fence in most places, but near Kamallah is a fence that won't easily disappear.

The reality is that it helped bring an end to suicide bombings that made life nearly impossible for those crossing to Israel. "We don't like it, but it helps," said one man indeed expressed sympathy for the soldiers' right to protect their own lives.

"Ave Maria" means "hail Mary." Perhaps the reason the Everett district's administrators were worried is that they understand that music, like a national flag, carries enormous symbolic value.

In the meantime, Abbas is represented by the students who sued claiming administrative action violates the Establishment Clause. The current boom in Ramallah may mark the start of a long-lasting trend. But it could just as easily prove short-lived. In a recent trip to Washington, Palestinian Authority head Mahmoud Abbas talked to the Washington Post's Jackson Diehl about the.ACCT that would refuse to talk to Israel until Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu agrees to a complete freeze of all construction in East Jerusalem and in West Bank Jewish settlements.

Because times are good, he said, he could refuse to negotiate with Israel and would not help President Obama persuade Arab governments to make conciliatory gestures toward Israel. Netanyahu has made some concessions, but he has rejected the full freeze that would bring down his government. Obama's peace push looks stalled.

In the meantime, Abbas is reportedly close to signing a recognition deal with his bitter rival Hamas. If the agreement comes, Palestinian elections may follow.

Ramallah's prosperity shows how much everyone has to gain if people can look past their narrow interests and see the bigger picture.
Fletcher ties school record with 70 in Lady Aztec Classic

CHULA VISTA, Calif. — For the third time in her four-year Cal State San Marcos career, golfer Jamie Fletcher has tied the school record with a round of 70.

The senior from Los Alamos, N.M., finished two under par with 38 on both the front and back nine Monday at the Lady Aztec Fall Classic being held at the Silt Creek Golf Club.

Fletcher also carried a 70 as a sophomore and junior, leading a quartet of golfers by four strokes heading into Tuesday's final round. She was one over par on the par-3, two under par on the par-5 and led the field with a one-under-par total on the par-4.

Fletcher carded four birdies, 12 pars and a pair of bogeys on the 5,677-yard, par-72 layout. Last week she finished second to the Foothills Grill College Invitational at Mount days.

Rebecca Norris and Hamah Braal also shot 70s in their Mustang careers. No Cal Poly woman golfer has yet to break 70.

Fletcher helped Coach Scott Cartwright's Mustangs to a share of second place with UC Riverside, both with 19-over-par 307 totals, just six strokes behind leader Cal State Northridge.

In addition to Fletcher, other Cal Poly scorers were Julia Heath, in eighth place with a 77, Stephania Vecchum with an 80 and a tie for 14th place; Miquela Bendleton, also with an 80 and a tie for 14th place; and Kristin Locke with an 84 for 26th place.

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Alex Rodriguez brings his A-game to the playoffs

By Bob Klapisch

MINNEAPOLIS — No one wants to pitch to A-Rod, opposing managers and certainly not the Angels who are now fear Alex Rodriguez's bat. The man has been many things in his six years in New York, from club outcast, to Page Six chump to besieged celebrity but the metamorphosis is complete now.

A-Rod has become "the One" Care isn't it, how effortlessly the Yankees' offense has become his. Rodriguez treated the division series like batting practice, 5-for-11 with six RBI and two home runs which is terrible news for the Angels. When Rodriguez is hot, he does more than hit home runs, he sends pitchers to therapy.

It was A-Rod who hit a massive seven inning. He actually was being pitched to move, but Rodriguez reacted clean, as Jorge Posada homered to left two batters later.

With a 2-1 lead, the Yankees deepened the Twins' wound, scoring two more and giving Mariano Rivera all the room he needed to nudge the Yankees a little closer to the ALCS. Of course they had help along the way, Joe Nathan, umpire Phil Cuzzi, the Twins' snappiness on the base paths, but the Yankees now find themselves braving for an entirely different type of struggle against the Angels.

The Yankees have a dark history here. They were knocked out of the playoffs by Mike Scioscia's team in 2002 and 2005. In that last series, Rodriguez stood in front of his locker after going 2-for-15 and said, "I played like a dog." That seems like a million years ago now. Rodriguez has become a remade hitter, a new man, drug-free (we assume) and one with his team mates. There was a moment Sunday night that spoke volumes about Rodriguez's communion with the Yankees. It was in the ninth inning when the game was halted as a fan ran onto the field. He started from behind home plate, near the on-deck circle, and took off on a crazy sprint — targeting no one and everyone.

For the briefest instant, the fan looked like he was heading toward Rivera. The closer was too shocked to move, but Rodriguez reacted instantly, covering the distance between third base and the mound in a half-second.

A-Rod was there to protect Rivera, all he had to do was stand there and the fan zigzagged away. He eventually was caught at the center-field wall, but A-Rod wasn't taking any chances. He remained on the mound until the cops, a dozen of them — had subdued the trespasser.

That's one of the many little signs of the Yankees' unity. As Pettitte would later say, "We have a good team, we have a good bunch of guys who are really enjoying this." The Bombers are the team to beat now, and that includes anyone the National League can throw in their path. But the Yankees will face a unique challenge in the ALCS facing an Angels team that believes they, not the Yankees, are driven by destiny.

Anyone who saw the way they celebrated after clinching the West knows what's fueling Scioscia's players. They've dedicated the season to the memory of the late Nick Adenhart, whose image is imprinted on the outfield wall in Angel Stadium. After the clinching game the Angels congregated at the wall, each one of them touching Adenhart's face in a moving, spontaneous ceremony. One major league executive who saw the replay on TV said, "That's pretty powerful stuff that's the kind of reaction you can't really defend against."

The Red Sox found out the hard way that talent alone isn't the only currency that reigns in October. Something else is usually required, something Rodriguez thinks he's found it's called inner peace, and it manifests itself in the way A-Rod's swing has trimmed away the excesses. He's keeping his hands back, his head doesn't move as his bat comes through the strike zone.

Of course, none of this says the Yankees' work is finished, or that Rodriguez is ready to replace Reggie as Mr. October. But A-Rod, the man, has turned into "the Man." Who said this coming?
Bad beats last Sunday

Scott Silvey
ON THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE

Every once in a while, a gambler takes what they call a bad beat. In sports gambling, a bad beat entails a freak play that causes what you bet on to not come true. Let's just say, my first column last week turned out to be a bad beat. Two of the three things I talked about in this column turned out to be wrong, means they just call the game and go home? (On a related note, when are they going to change this outdated overtime rule to something more fair?)

So the bad beat I took during the Denver Broncos game was that the Panthers' captain didn't realize that tail never falls.

On to some other thoughts of the week that was.

Vegas oddsmakers aren't watching the games
While the aforementioned were some bad beats, Vegas made it a little easier for the hardcore sports gambler to recoup some lost coins with two of the other games last weekend.

As of Saturday afternoon, the Rams were 10 point underdogs at home to Minnesota. This is a Rams team that may not score 10 points the rest of the season, and they've given just 10 points to the score-happy Vikings! Minnesota averaged just fewer than 30 points a game coming in. So according to oddsmakers, they thought the Rams would score 20 points in this game? Here's a tip for next time, St. Louis had scored 24 points total coming into the game and been shut out twice. The Vikings easily covered, winning by four touchdowns.

Well, after a game in which Kyle Anderson finished 2 of 17 for 23 yards and an interception in the win. Take a moment to reflect and read that again. That was the stat line of the winning quarterback.

That was the stat line of the winning quarterback.

To place first at the Big West was in 20(K)3, and as coach, the experience so far has taken me of one of those stone-faced killers you see in movies. This is the same man that dropped his pants to prove a point during halftime of his first game as coach. The 49ers were trailing 26-3 on Sunday they lost 45-10. That's double the whooping. Samurai Mike doesn't take these things well.

All I'm saying, is that if Dre Bly, who intercepted a pass then promptly fumbled while showingboat (down 25-10 at this point I might add), doesn't show up to practice for the next few days and is ultimately discovered to be sleeping with the fishes, I think I might have a suspect. What a win for Atlanta though, the Falcons are making at least 53 new believers each week. Maybe someday even the general public will realize they're a legitimate contender.

Does this man look capable of going into a frenzied rage? Ask San Francisco cornerback Dre' Bly.

Women's tennis holds high hopes for upcoming season

Katie Koschak
ON THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE

The Cal Poly women's tennis team has one goal in mind this season: to place first at the Big West Conference. The last time the team placed first was in the Big West in 2003, and assistant coach Andy Gerst thinks that Cal Poly has the potential to break Long Beach State's first-place run.

"The Big West title is the most important thing to us," Gerst said. "That's our main goal for this year. So far this year, we've had really solid teams in our conference."

The two captains, Matzenauer and Blalock, have experience and can help the younger girls to work to their full potential," Lee said. "Lee is also very impressed with her teammates' skill level."

There are a lot of seniors who have experience and can help the younger girls to work to their full potential," Lee said. "Lee is also very his protective nature over the younger girls."

"It feels like a brand new team, and we have so much talent and much more hard work this year," Matzenauer said.

I've never been in an environment with so much talent, so this is all new for me. Equipped with a strong group of competitors, the women's tennis team started off well at pre-qualifying games at the ITA All-American Championships Oct. 3, hosted at the Los Angeles Tennis Center.

Matzenauer set the bar high with a three-set victory against 86th-ranked Joanna Mather of Florida. "It was very good for her to get a win right off the bat. She competed real hard," Gerst said.

In addition, five players, including seniors Matzenauer, Blalock, Diane Filip, Jocelyn Davis and freshmen Lee and Ashley Pave reached the quarterfinal phase of their respective singles and doubles matches last Friday at the fall intercollegiate tournament host­ed by Cal State Fullerton.

Cal Poly's solid play in the first matches of the sea­son demonstrates the women's motivation and poise, Gerst said.

Lee stayed very active over the summer, playing in the women's open at Cal Poly Pomona and in a Santa Maria tournament, hitting with her new coach, former head coach of the UC Davis men's tennis team, and working out with par­ental trainers.

"It's about maintaining the grind and going to hard in practice," Gerst said. The team practices six days a week and includes weight training, strength training and skills practice in its weekly routine.

"When it's time to play in the toughest competi­tions, however, we need to be able to win right off the bat," Gerst said.

Matzenauer finds an original outlet for her nerves.

"I like to dance around and listen to loud rap music with Jocelyn," Matzenauer said. "We just sing and dance and get pumped up for the match. It takes away the anxiety and just lets you ready to play." While competition against teams such as Long Beach State are not for a few months, the team is gearing up for the North­west Regional Championships, which will be held at Stanford from Oct. 30-26.