**Sit List**

Mattie Oelschlaeger, M2

Does where you sit on test day affect your performance? While exam seating may seem an innocuous issue, it is my experience that your seatmates are of paramount importance and should be chosen carefully to maximize concentration (and scores). Over the past two years, I have catalogued a wide variety of distracting behaviors (and their corresponding perpetrators) that I strive to give a wide berth when the no. 2 pencils and bubble sheets come out.

**Disturbers of the General Ambiance:** The desired positive atmosphere in the exam room may quickly be transformed into a chaotic, detrimental environment by several types of mood-spoilers.

The *Mannequin* receives his test and proceeds to stare at the first page for an uncomfortably long interval without moving. He may also convey his displeasure with manifestations such as loud, dejected sighs, laying his head down on the desk, slumping with his face in his hands, or staring off into space. This behavior becomes increasingly distracting as the end of the period approaches. As you bubble in your final answers with 20 minutes to go, you can’t help wondering what he will do. Will he finish his test in the time left? Has he just given up? Is he asleep (should you wake him up)? Did he finish when you weren’t looking? It’s tempting to stick around and witness the conclusion of the dilemma, but not quite as alluring as the option of getting the weekend started posthaste. Good luck, Mr. Mannequin.

The *Practical Dawdler* is the colleague to avoid on any exam in which station rotation is required, including practicals, microscope exams, and lab finals. As the tone sounds and every student shifts one seat over to the next station, the dawdler turns his body in the appropriate direction but *doesn’t move*. Instead, he cranes his neck toward the structure in question and squints at it before fumbling hastily on his clipboard and shuffling slowly along. In the meantime, you’ve politely cleared your previous station for the classmate behind you, but are unable to move forward. The Dawdler fails to realize that he is receiving the exact same amount of time at each station as he would have if he rotated in a timely fashion. You, however, are getting 55 seconds instead of 70. The only solution, if subtle hints such as throat-clearing and foot-tapping fail to speed him along, is to avoid this slowpoke in the future.

The *Basilisk* is consistently stressed-out and doesn’t care who knows it. If you sit within a three-meter radius of this student, be prepared not to breathe, sigh, advance your pencil lead, or turn pages on your exam. Otherwise, you will be rewarded with an alarmingly venomous death glare that can freeze you and kill your brain cells on the spot. The Basilisk may make plenty of noise herself as she sighs and frantically flips through pages of her exam packet. She also is prone to popping gum maniacally as she burns holes in her test packet with her eyes, trying to decide between foils b and c. If her noise disturbs you and you look up, be prepared for another death glare.

The *First One Done:* it is a little unnerving to sit next to a student who scrapples his chair back and marches to the front of the room, completed test in hand, before you’ve gotten past the third page. What’s really distracting is when you inadvertently sit in a cluster of these speed-readers, and thirty minutes in you’re sitting in the corner of the room by yourself. At this point, it’s hard not to wonder if you are grossly underprepared for the exam, or worry that you are over-thinking every question. The peer pressure may trigger you to hastily finish the exam, without going back and checking your answers. This, in turn, may cause you to lose three points because you didn’t double-check those three questions you had planned on changing (guess how many points you miss honors by?).

The *Walking Plague:* As you struggle to focus on a difficult question regarding sequelae of pneumonia and upper respiratory infections, the girl in the seat directly behind you is struggling to breathe as she hacks and coughs with that hollow-sounding bark of bronchitis. It’s not the noise, so much, that serves to distract as the fact that you can’t help but cringe continued on page 2

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**Frolics: A Light-Hearted Look at Education in the Healing Arts**

Mattie Oelschlaeger, M2

The 108th annual Aesculapian* Frolics was held at the Englert theatre on Saturday, April 17 in front of a large crowd of students, staff, and faculty. In traditional order, the M1 class presented first, with the festivities brought to a conclusion by the graduating class of 2010.

*Aesculapian: adj., relating to medicine and the healing arts.

And relate to the healing arts the show did, through a medium of drama, dance, music, and humor. Interspersed throughout the skits and songs, awards were presented to various faculty, residents, and staff members by representative members of the performing class. The festivities were brought to a close by the announcement of the winners of the evening’s performances: the M4 class won first place in both overall performance and best band, while the M2s took second place in both categories.

Twenty judges decided the results, though general opinion among students has varied widely with respect to who should have won. Here’s a rundown of the evening’s highlights:

**M1 Class Presentation: Faculty-Focused Fun**

The M1 skit spun out the fantasy of how much subject matter from the M1 curriculum I obtained at home on the computer. This fully automated medical school featured professors lecturing students from the comforts of their own homes, while participating in their favorite hobbies. HOS’ Dr. Schmidt gave his physiology lectures astride a bicycle, with a bevy of M1 beauties performing a baton routine (with bikes for batons) behind him. Immunology’s Dr. Jerry Weiss told it like it is, accent and all. A rap-happy Dr. Cassell taught neuroscience lab. Dr. Pizzimenti of the Anatomy and Cell Biology department was a popular source of material for skits (as a kindergarten/anatomy teacher at storytime) and songs (‘Pizzimenti,’ a re-lyricized tribute to anatomy set to the tune of Lady Gaga’s ‘Paparazzi’).

While coy and clever, the M1 performance evoked a keen feeling of angst as I realized just how much subject matter from the M1 curriculum I need to review prior to the USMLE this summer…. Overall, I look forward to even better coordinated performances from this class in the future. Well done, M1s, and good luck next year.

**M2 Class Presentation: Time Travelin’ Test Takers**

The plot of the M2 skit focused on fellow M2/MSTP students (Dan Fox, Taaj Khan, Mike Haugsdal, Matt Noble, and Colin Buzza) and their genius plot to avoid the most difficult subjects on the upcoming boards by traveling back in time using the forthcoming boards. The students’ travel back in time was indeed quite liberating, freeing them of the worry that they are over-thinking every question.

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The Honor Stars

It was first term in form two (9th grade) and we would have to learn math from a foreign teacher. He was white, an American who had answered a call from an inspiring leader of his country to serve a greater good and promote the image of his country. He was a lean, tall and very calm man, very different from his colleague, another Peace Corps volunteer who was often agitated. He did not speak like what I hear today because he had been trained to talk slowly for us to comprehend. In our class, a group of three students had detached from the bulk and were fiercely competing for and revolving at the top spot in overall ranking.

In retrospect, it turned out that this new teacher would leave a permanent alignment in the class. His tests were unusually easier, more students passed, and some of his fellow African colleagues at times seemed disdainful. Then, there were those barely prestigious sticker stars he gave to the top students. The higher your score, the more honor stars you got. Little did he know that this would inspire one of those three students to work even harder in order to earn more stars. Nor did these students know that striving to win more stars reflected their increasing strength in math. One of the students would eventually match his challenger’s grade in math, the only class he lagged in and consequently led the class for the subsequent two years until he parted from his mates. I remember so well a beautiful American Asian Peace Corps volunteer who used to visit our teacher. She taught in another city. Math was taught the following two years by another nice Peace Corps volunteer who continued using the honor stars.

The peace Corps experience for this class therefore became a life changing experience – an intriguing experience very vividly remembered by this writer through the honor stars which I still have today.

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as far away from the deluge of disease as possible, and try not to think about the sequelae of pneumonia and URIs. Oh, wait….

The Sneeze: snot is not directly distracting, per se. He just’s really bad luck. Imagine that you’ve rocked a certain course all semester long. You backburnered the other two cumulative finals you have this week to prioritize studying for this one. You’re going to honor in this class. There’s no way you can miss honors in this class. Your good friend in is a similar situation. The Score Sphenon has thus far had a very marginal performance and hasn’t studied much as the possibility of honors looks pretty dim for him. He sits between you and your buddy. You and your buddy get the lowest score you’ve gotten in any class, all semester, and he ends up honoring?! Clearly, the atmosphere around this student is a score-sucking whirlpool that explains why you got a 79 on an exam you should have received a 97. The only solution is a complete avoidance of this guy on future exams. When he tries to sit next to you on another final four days later, smile and say he’s bad luck. When he laughs and starts to sit down anyway, drop the friendly grin and say “no, really” (a Basilisk-worthy glare may help you get your point across).

Interestingly, the class you completely blew off since you didn’t think you’d honor and knew you couldn’t fail? As in, didn’t review anything, and watched each lecture once without taking notes the night before the test? Yeah, 10% above the mean. Maybe the real siphon is overpreparedness.

The Auricular Assaulters: these colleagues distract by virtue of disruption of the desired silence.

The Cough is a colleague who is clearly ill and barks like seal every 45 seconds (yes, I timed it) to clear her throat. Unlike the Plague, the Cough is sitting far enough away that the primary concern is the frequent sound disruption, and not the preoccupation with wondering what the infectious dose of her particular illness happens to be. It’s hard to resent someone who’s sick, after all, it’s not like she wanted to be ill on test day… so no hard feelings. Just get well soon.

The Cough Chorus gets together with alarmingly predictable regularity every winter, and comprises The Cough, times ten. The sound barrier is broken, on average, every 10 seconds during the exam period, because, like yawns, coughing is contagious: one hacking student triggers the urge in the sick student two rows over.

The Shoes: While explaining the general categories of distracting classmates I try to avoid when testing, a few friends informed me that I am a personal perpetrator of the sound barrier. And a repeat offender, at that. “I can always tell when you finish with your exam, Mattie,” a fellow late alphabet/ upper Beisner tester told me. “You have a very distinctive tread. And you always wear loud shoes. So it’s stomp, stomp, stomp…then, ‘have a great weekend!’ in a really cheerful voice to the proctor as you leave.” I apologized, but didn’t worry too much about it. He’s an observant guy, and a little bit distracting while testing, and resides on upper Beisner and thus can see when I’m finished. Until another pal, an early alphabet classmate from the lower Beisner test zone added, “That’s you!!”

A couple other lower Beisner folks rolled their eyes at me. On behalf of my un-shelthy shoe collection, I’d like to apologize to anyone I’ve distracted during exams. Also, I’m whispering my weekend well-wishes now, very quiet-like.

The Spaz: there are always a few classmates who are particularly prone to knocking over chairs, dropping practical clipboards, pencils, and other items while testing, and/or tripping over people in an attempt to bend in exams crowded 1110 MERF. Also, apologizes to anyone distracted by an earring being flung across upper Beisner during the last exam. And my subsequent (successful!) retrieval mission. In case you missed the vasodilation across my zygomatic arches bilaterally, I regretted the disturbance.

The solution to dealing with noise disturbance: earplugs. Wear ’em. You won’t be alone.

Visual Violators: it’s kind of hard to keep your eyes focused on your exam when your peripheral vision is continuously violated with motion…

The Fidget-Foot is almost invariably female. During stressful exams, a latent turbo-foot situation emerges. It’s not so bad if the movement is periodic, or relatively slow, but when you have a constant fluttering of motion in your peripheral vision, it’s maddening. It’s doubly maddening that by the time her foot goes off, every single seat is taken and you have no relocation recourse. Compound the situation by making the violator oblivious to attempts to draw her attention to the distraction by counter-jiggling your foot at similarly ridiculous speeds. Solution? Turn sideways in your seat with your back to her and apologize later to the guy on your right who was a little freaked out by your facing him during the exam.

The Chain Chewer has been known to chomp through an entire 17-piece pack of chewing gum within two hours. Her desk features a pile of rapidly accumulating gum wrappers. While you watch, she (noisily) unwraps a fresh piece while removing the piece she inserted five minutes ago.

Solution: When someone has a movement, tic, or other habit that is visually distracting, it’s best to look the other way. Switch seats if you can. And because peripheral vision blinders only look acceptable on individuals of an equal complexion, try to sit somewhere in front of the person next time.

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The 2010 Aesculapian Frolics. Photos by Bekah Case and Alex Nothern, M2.

before the subjects were invented. The first discovery to predate was the invention of modern biochemistry by Watson and Crick in 1953 (played by Trevor Wild and Ryan Schultz). A bearded Austin Baehr appeared as Dr. Freud, rapping about mother-lovin’ issues, as the travelers decided to avoid neuro and psych material on the boards.

Attempts to avoid pharmacology resulted in a trip to 1692 Salem, where a witch hunt centers on beautiful songstress Alex Notherrn, who laments her fate at the stake to the tune “I Will (Survive) Prescribe” with the M2 chorus performing a very be-sequined dance in the foreground. Amy Domeyer and Dylan Murray sang a babuncic-plague themed duet in medieval Europe as the M2 team decided they would be better off skipping the Infectious Disease section of the boards, as well. Flash back to 0 AD, the year which featured the birth of future cardiologist and award-winning FCP IV cardiology lecturer, Don Brown, aka EKGesus (Brandon Whalen). The performance was concluded with a toga-clad Matt Downen, who hammed it up as Hippocrates, hitting on the young doctors-to-be in their attempt to solve all subjects but anatomy. Dr. Pizzimenti made a similarly toga-clad appearance as himself, with a looooooong list of anatomical objectives in Latin.

M3 Class Performance: Rotation Woes and Urology Foes

Derrick Fenchel played the role of a desperate M3 student at the end of his third year, who somehow slept through all his rotations and is now in a panic to make up the credits. He turns to rheumatologist Dean Rothman (MSTP student Mark Hoegger), who manages to outline a brief alternative to-do list in between repetitive mentions of his prestigious Ivy League education, grumbling about his rivalry with Chris Cooper of urology, and playing with toys at his desk. Derrick Fenchel dashes off to accomplish his objectives in a few departments before his deadline expires and he fails his M3 year.

Various interludes in the included game show sequence featuring a strapping orthopedic surgeon contestant on an episode of Medical Jeopardy! along with psychiatrist actress Lyndsay Harshman and a tag-team of drugged-up anesthesiologists who were too busy solving crosswords and imbibing in dissociatives to pay much attention to the game. Frustrated Alex Trebek threatened to kill himself at the conclusion.

Derrick Fenchel obtained his first objective in Internal Medicine and earned his white coat from a chorus of Manly Men in tights and short coats. The surgical rotation objective (Don’t Let Them See You Cry) was nearly thwarted by the ego-tastic drill sergeant/ Emergency General Surgery team leader berating his incompetent underlings while wishing for a busy scrub nurse on the budget instead.

A rotation through Homeopathic Medicine resulted in a badger attack, a chiropractic consult, an explanation of the oh-so-logical dilutions system of herbal remedies, and one dead trauma patient before Derrick Fenchel moved on to his next rotation. A wild romp in the neurology department resulted in a rousing rendition of the Black Eyed Peas’ ‘Boom Boom Pow’ with a seriously sexy amount of floor-shaking bass.

Despite accomplishing his rotation make-up list, Derrick Fenchel is an hour over the time limit and Dean Rothman is going to fail him but at the last minute allows one more chance at redemption: to pass, he must accompany Rothman on a moped mission to Dr. Cooper’s house. A flandering sack of feces is lit on fire and stamped out by none other than Chris Cooper in a hilarious cameo as himself.

The M3 performance was consistently hilarious and thoroughly entertaining in my opinion; however, several students disliked the lack of creativity demonstrated by ripping most of their material from old Saturday Night Live sketches.

M4: Exit, Pursued by a… Council?

The M4 class delivered a poignant performance as a gang of down-and-out medical students, harboring a bitter grudge against the class of 2012 for their unexpected upset victory at last year’s Frolics, who turned to “study guides” in their distress and subsequently earned the wrath of the honor council. The parody of the real-life drama of using previous classes’ notes and test tips on various rotation exams resulted in the entire class getting matched into Urology (except for the one guy who actually wanted to match to urology).

The M4 class performance was ranked highest by judges both in overall quality and best band. The musical accompaniment to the class was indisputably excellent; the class took the high road of working with musical numbers from a variety of sources, including classic productions such as The Music Man, and didn’t fully rely on roughly re-lyricized versions of current pop tunes. In fact, the rewriting of the lyrics to suit their skit was consistently clever.

While I don’t know many members of the M4 class, I appreciated the casting of female students in many lead roles, unlike the other three classes, who showed a preponderance of male performers. Females were scarce in key roles, especially in the M1 class skits, and instead were mostly to be found in formation on stage, dancing in a semi-coordinated way while wearing scrubs and sequins. The M4s turned the tables on the tired theme of girls-in-tight-clothes-as-eye-candy by using a male student in a leotard as an interviewing candidate for a urology residency.

Some students were offended by the class of 2010’s cavalier attitude toward their use of “study guides” to essentially cheat their way through rotations. A member of the honor council who wishes to remain anonymous wondered “why we even bother to have an honor council” at CCOM if gross infractions of the rules are trivialized, and the cheating students who perpetrate them are glamorized, and rewarded for bad behavior at an official school-sanctioned event. The councilmember further stated that although the student performers portrayed their abuse of the system as a mere use of so-called “study guides,” they actually had copies of previous tests, including exams that were not modified or rewritten year to year and thus remained the same.

Despite the offensive nature of parts of the performance, and the open hostility toward the honor council, anti-cheating measures, and the class of 2012, the performance of the Class of 2010 was well rehearsed and all the more impressive for being planned and performed by what are essentially full-fledged physicians. Well done, docs!