

The Dean's Almanac

The Long Road that is April

April 13, 2008

This week marks the first anniversary of the Virginia Tech shootings, and even without the heavy media coverage, I know this would be on my mind. The hardest part of my job, by far, is the time I have to spend thinking about death, specifically the death of students. And when you have a job like mine, the death of any student on any campus stings badly because on each of those campuses, there is someone with a job like mine for whom that death is profoundly painful, someone who knows it is his or her responsibility to somehow help a community of students make sense of that death when really, it makes no sense at all.



Lee Burdette Williams

In the almost-three years I've been here, we have lost students to accidents, suicides, illnesses. Nothing, of course, like what Virginia Tech experienced a year ago, or Northern Illinois two months ago, or the University of South Carolina when it lost six of its students (and one from Clemson) in a fire at a beach house last October. But I also find myself thinking about the single deaths—a student here, a student there—the loss of whom leaves a campus broken, and costs that campus all that student might have accomplished. Eve Carson was a senior, the president of the student body at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill when she was senselessly murdered in March. In her role as president, she made a tremendous contribution to her campus, initiating programs, counseling others, representing the students' voice when decisions were being made and influencing those decisions. She made people feel important and connected to UNC, and motivated them to succeed. What if she had been murdered at the start of her freshman year rather than the end of her senior year? What would have been lost to that entire community?

Lauren Burk was a freshman at Auburn when she was murdered the same day as Eve Carson. I find myself thinking a lot about these two women and what their campuses have lost—Eve Carson about to begin what no doubt would have been a remarkable life beyond college, Lauren Burk early in her college career, anticipating all the fun, the learning, the friends that usually come with four years on a campus. And of course I think about Carlee Wines, like Lauren, a freshman, lost to us at UConn over a year ago, and wonder how we are, and always will be, different because she is not here.

As I have said too often in my career, the loss of any one student diminishes us as a community, keeps us from being what we could have been. It might surprise you to learn that I think the same thing when a student is suspended for conduct-related reasons, or dismissed for academic problems. It is not the *right* or the *wrong* of that person's actions or loss that saddens me as much as it is the loss of that person's potential to contribute to the lives of others in this community.

And that is the enormity of Virginia Tech's loss that I can barely comprehend: students and faculty still with contributions to make to their campus that now will never be known or felt.

So let me just offer this as a reminder to you: *every one of you matters to us*, to me. Every one of you has a part in this place. Some of you may be among those being feted and celebrated and awarded for your accomplishments this month and next. Others of you are making a difference in quieter ways: taking care of a troubled friend, bailing your organization out when something has gone wrong, helping someone study for a particularly important and difficult exam, offering words of encouragement to someone who is about to give up. I am really proud to be the dean of students like yourselves and am grateful for the many more safe days than tragic days we have known here in the last few years.



The calendar in April is stuffed like a sausage casing, with parties, banquets, concerts, performances, and, oh...right...final projects, exams and enormous papers. I know you're busy, so thanks in advance for procrastinating with me while I write (and you read) this month's Almanac.

Let me try answering a few questions to distract you while you really should be studying.

To **Erica, Erik, Chris, Benjamin** and the rest of you who wonder about this but don't take the time to email: Look, I know you Yankees and Mets fans are frustrated that we don't carry their games on campus TV. The problem is not a UConn one. It's a Charter Communications one (and they would say it's a YES or SNY problem). Charter is our cable provider. They do not carry these channels. For us to add them would require an exorbitant amount of money that UITS just doesn't have. Charter could decide to provide them, but my guess is these networks want more money than Charter can or will pay, since that cost has to be passed on to its customers. In 2009, our contract with Charter will expire, and UConn can then seek services from other cable providers. Believe me, carrying YES and SNY or whoever is covering the Yanks and Mets will be a high priority. But please know these networks are counting on that demand and will likely increase their prices to cable providers. You could also contact your favorite Yankee or Met front office person and gripe to them.

A question about graduation tickets came in from **Gregory**.

I was wondering why students in the School of Business get eight tickets to graduation and those in CLAS only get four? I know it can't be simply that I'll probably be working at McDonalds after graduation and they will be rotting away somewhere in the business sector (I kid, I kid), but seriously what gives?

Greg, I think I'm much more optimistic about your future than you seem to be. Anyway, I sent that question along to Michael Darre, Professor in the College of Agriculture (a poultry guy, actually, so knows something about McDonalds), and also the University Marshall (he carries the mace at commencement and swings it at any of us who get out of line). He responded:

The reason that Business students may obtain up to eight tickets for graduation and CLAS only four is the number of students graduating from CLAS is almost 2000 and the number for Business is under 600. The seating in Gampel is limited, so do the math. 5 x 2000 (one seat for grad and four for family/friends) = 10,000. That is pushing the capacity.

Thanks to various questions of yours, which I have sent on to people around campus, the following things have been done:

- Volume of the public address announcer at baseball games has been reduced in order to create less of a disturbance to nearby residence halls.
- Windows in the Student Union food court area have been cleaned more thoroughly.
- The weird sculpture on the library patio is coming down.
- The starting time for some repair/construction crews in the residence halls has been pushed back to a later hour (10 am) so you can sleep a little longer.
- From now on, the Facilities Department will notify Residence Life when a path or road is going to be closed for some reason, and Residence Life will notify you so you can plan an alternate route.

Several students wrote to ask about dining halls having a reduced schedule over Easter Weekend. This is not a religious statement by Dining Services. It is a matter of responding to a significantly-reduced number of students on campus that weekend. Students were notified in multiple ways that certain dining halls would have reduced hours, and were told which dining halls would remain open. All three meals on all three days were available in several locations, even if it meant you had to put your shoes and coat on to get there.

In answer to **Lauren's** question, Dave (Head Facilities Guy) Lotreck told me that the dirt road between Husky Village and Charter Oak will likely stay a dirt road, off-limits to non-official vehicles. It's wetlands, and so can't be paved or improved.

Rumor update: Yes, Farmer Brown's parking lot has been sold. It will continue to be privately managed, and apparently, prices are going up. I wish we could do something about it, but hey, this is how capitalism works. As long as there are students willing to pay \$800 to park there, that's what they'll charge. And as long as they turn a profit (it's not like overhead is very high), private owners will hang onto it, thwarting my dream of a campus-based day spa and vegan café.

The following things are known by someone on campus in addition to you and me, and are being worked on:

- Huskymail is not what everyone dreams of. Improvements continue, but not at the pace you might want.
- Drainage is an issue in various locations on campus. Your feet will get wet. Wear boots.
- The Housing Lottery makes some people very unhappy.
- Washing machines that don't take cards probably have a wiring problem and should be reported to Residence Life through their [website](#).

And of course, the Really Big Question everyone's been asking: Lee, what are *you* doing for Spring Weekend? Well, what do you think? I'll be undercover, cleverly disguised as an eager freshman trying to sneak into your parties. So be on your best behavior. That blonde 18-year-old woman wearing Uggs and a lace-trimmed camisole? Could be me. That six-foot tall 19-year-old guy with a two-day stubble and flip-flops? Could be me, too. I'm very adept at disguises.

I'll also be on the Oozeball court with my fellow administrators, collectively known as "Sloppy Leadership." We'll be looking for some unsuspecting undergraduates to intimidate (which didn't work in the least last year) and spike on, so come check out the fun.

Stay safe and have fun (in that order, okay?). Remember what I said: every one of you matters.