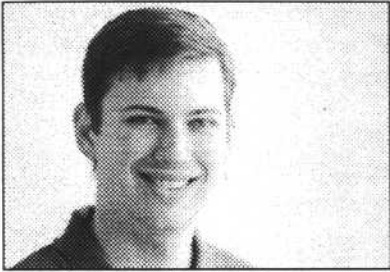


Fashion victim

Student's choice of attire sparks unnecessary uniform debate



It just doesn't pay to be a Pittsburgh Steelers fan. Especially if you want a decent education.

Eric Nutter, a 10-year-old fifth-grade student at Western Reserve Middle School in Norwalk, Ohio, wore a jersey of his favorite player, Steeler quarterback Kordell Stewart, on Cleveland Browns' spirit day.

His fifth-grade teacher, Brent Maillard, was not amused (Pittsburgh is a fierce rival of Cleveland). So as an attempt at humor, he had Eric turn his desk around in the back of the classroom and keep it that way for the duration of class.

Unable to see, Eric had to turn around constantly just to know what was going on in his class.

Eric changed into a Cleveland Indians T-shirt during gym and left it on for the rest of the day.

Yes, it sucks to be a 10-year-old Pittsburgh Steelers fan who wants an education. Not only do you get flak from your Cleveland-loving classmates, you get flak from your teacher as well.

And little did Eric Nutter know, but he sparked a little life into advocates of school uniforms.

These advocates have said this is just one example of how school uniforms would eliminate "dress" problems in today's schools.

Using a 10-year-old who did absolutely nothing wrong as fodder for a school uniforms policy is sad.

Eric Nutter was wearing a jersey because he was a long-time Steelers and Kordell Stewart fan. He wasn't wearing a mini-skirt, see-through blouse, jeans so loose they fell halfway down his buttocks or a ripped tank top.

He was wearing a football jersey. And he was wearing it because he wanted to support his team. He probably hasn't learned about the First Amendment right to free speech in his classes yet, but by putting on the Stewart jersey, he was exercising it.

To school uniform advocates, I say this: First find some decent morals, and next find a different

amendment to attack.

Eric and every other student in this country should be allowed to wear what he or she wants (within decency limits). What people wear partly makes them who they are. It says something about what you like, what you don't like, and it says a whole lot about your personality.

For many people, starched shirts and slacks will be the dress code every day of their lives after they get a permanent job. Let the kids enjoy casual clothes while they can.

If Eric Nutter was wearing a starched white shirt on Cleveland Browns' spirit day, there wouldn't have been an incident.

But Nutter also wouldn't have had the opportunity to show that, no, he doesn't like the Browns.

Instead, he would have just wandered around the school in his white shirt and dark pants, looking like every other overdressed bee in the Cleveland hive.

Beyond the school uniform argument, Eric's punishment also seems to have reinforced the idea that education still has a long way to go.

Eric's teacher had to apologize the next day to Eric, his parents and school officials for acting like a 10-

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year-old with a power trip.

Mr. Maillard was supposed to be teaching lessons; instead, he got to learn one.

Simply put: Never let fat-headed pride over a 0-2 football team get in the way of what you're supposed to be doing — teaching.

Many teachers let personal distractions and biases get in the way of their teaching.

Back in high school, I had an algebra teacher who seemed to be more interested in football trivia than teaching us about equations. Not only did he waste class time asking us for answers to his trivia, but he would go next door to a trigonometry class and waste class time there.

Maybe there needs to be a chapter in an education textbook about not letting personal feelings or distractions get in the way of teaching.

And if there already is one, maybe some teachers need to re-read it.

Thankfully, this story has a happy ending.

Kordell Stewart, the quarterback whose jersey Eric was wearing when he was punished, gave Eric a call after hearing about the incident.

“He asked me how good I was doing in school and told me if I have any more problems with his jersey that he'll come down and help me,” Eric said.

Thankfully, something good came out of the incident.

It just goes to show — everyone should be allowed to speak out with their clothing.

Because when people start telling you what to wear and not wear, it won't be long before you're sitting in a desk turned against other freedoms as well.

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Building a career

Engineering major provides challenges, unusual situations for women



Being a woman engineer is fun. You get to contemplate eternal questions like:

Why is there a sign that says “This Restroom is For Women Only” in a women's restroom on the second floor of WSEC (Walter Scott Engineering Cave) and ...

With a 10-1 male-to-female ratio, why do I not have a date for Friday night?

I don't know why that particular restroom is such a hunk magnet; as to the second question, ever since I hit the big double-two a couple of weeks ago, I've decided to stop worrying about the matter, since most people in my classes are now way younger than yours truly.

There are plenty of other things that make the engineering world attractive to women.

People rarely care how you dress, especially if you're a programmer, so there's no need to invest in an expensive wardrobe.

Be aware, though, that sloppiness, desire to disassemble things and periodically running around yelling, “Eureka!” are all part of the image, and people may not thank you for trying to dispel it.

Also, most engineers I know have no interest in golf, so you won't need to invest in expensive lessons in this rather boring game in order to network.

The networking function is covered by the large number of “professional organizations.” Since all of their names are abbreviated, some use a different sequence of the same let-

ters (like ASME and SAME), and a lot of them aren't really very different. You should just boldly “point and join.” Who says there's no adventure in this wonderful field?

Another great thing about engineers is that they don't really care what gender you are (or even what planet you're from), as long as you can use words like “isentropic efficiency” and “multi-dimensional pointer array” and “neural transducer.”

One of the previous three terms is an invention of mine, aka technobabble. You get to figure out which one it is.

Speaking of technobabble, you will need to brush up on your “Star Trek,” “Babylon 5” (you can skip the awful sequel), “Sliders” and numerous other series and movies. Seeing “The Matrix” and a few others (list provided upon request) is an absolute must.

Engineering terminology is what won me over. In my statics class, I've learned that the reason engineers aren't romantic is because “couples” and their “moments” just don't evoke the same images to them as they do to the rest of the world.

On the other hand, some of the definitions provide startling insight. For instance, a “couple” is defined as “two forces of equal magnitude and opposite direction that do not lie on the same line of action.”

That's sort of like getting a fortune cookie that says, “Your date will have a headache.”

Since there are so few women engineers, there aren't very many stereotypes about them (this is probably just wishful thinking).

Had I been a women's studies major, I would likely have been labeled a “radical lesbian.” Since I'm an engineer, I expect I'm a “man-hating calculator.”

People certainly manage to look taken aback when I tell them what my major is. All things being equal, I'd

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So I guess the moral of this story is: Become an engineer! Just be sure you brush up on Murphy's Law.

prefer to be a radical lesbian, but it probably won't pay nearly as well.

On one of those interminably long and loud rides in the campus shuttle, Gene, the shuttle driver, asked me what my major was. Upon receiving my answer, he made a remark like, “With that earning potential, guys better grab you fast.” (I cannot offer a direct quote, since the noise of the inefficient shuttle engine prevents effective communication, but you can always ask Gene. He's a very friendly guy, and he admits to reading my columns.)

I think he was being optimistic, but you never know.

I cannot figure out whether standards are a good or evil part of engineering. This quote by Andrew S. Tanenbaum (no idea who he is) sums it up quite nicely: “The good thing about standards is that there are so many to choose from.”

I'm convinced that no self-respecting engineer retires (read: dies) without having created a standard, be it good, bad or pointless. So I guess this brings us to the “con” part of the column.

Well, you have to like math. At least, you'll have to take a lot of it, even though most of the stuff you do will be solved by computers.

On the other hand, if Spanish is not your forte, there is no foreign language requirement. Of course, that's because you'll have plenty of other classes to worry about.

You will also have to use the (evil) British units to contend with, which even the Brits have wisely stopped

using.

Every time the 4th of July rolls around, you will think, “I could have been using SI units now.”

Just remember — this gives you a competitive edge. All those European-taught people can't convert Btu/lb to ft²/s² in their sleep.

There is also the fact that engineers are either very stupid or very devious about scheduling classes. You will likely have to take several 7:30 a.m. or 8 a.m. classes.

I find that stupid because I don't really enjoy hearing someone talk about fluid mechanics in my sleep (my eyes are wide open, professor).

However, I'm convinced that there is a more devious plot behind the scheduling. There are several schools of thought on this matter.

One theorizes that the reason they have so many early classes is so we don't get cocky. I cannot be half as clever as I usually am at such a ridiculous hour, especially if I woke up at 4 a.m. to write this column.

Another offers that this is done to discourage students from having any sort of sex life. Nothing puts a damper on things more than unstoppable yawning.

There is also the possibility that this is really done to entertain the faculty members, who enjoy all the creative ways students pretend to be awake.

One of my professors observed that a lot of students staggered into a 7:30 a.m. class he used to teach clutching a bottle of Mountain Dew, although sometimes there was no

actual Mountain Dew, their empty hands still wistfully shaped around an imaginary bottle (yet another reason why this will never be a Coke campus, much to my dismay.)

One of the challenges for me is that since I didn't play with fire trucks and never got to take cars apart, I rarely have an idea of what I'm actually solving.

It's easy to talk about efficiency in a power plant and how most of the loss is in the boiler, but you do feel a little stupid when you don't know what a boiler actually looks like and have never taken one apart (that's the fun part! Really!).

Of course, it also took four burly mechanical engineering students to explain to me what a rivet is. I certainly hope the situation will improve, because otherwise mayhem will ensue shortly after my graduation.

So I guess the moral of this story is: Become an engineer! Just be sure you brush up on Murphy's Law.

And also: Never trust an engineer anywhere near a mechanical device, especially if you have any hopes of ever having it work.

There is a reason why I don't try to fix things in my car, like the speakers that make me question my sanity by randomly cutting in and out. It's because I can't afford to get it fixed by a professional after I screw it up.

On the other hand, if you're interested in attracting an engineer's attention, dangling an appliance in front of him or mentioning your broken computer will get him salivating. Even my unflappable self has been seduced by gleaming machinery upon occasion.

To be fair though, this “being published” thing is going to my head. Next thing you know, they'll invite me to be a regular columnist, or KRNU will decide to let random people in front of the mike.

When that day comes, I just might get in line for my advising folder. Until then, I better go study for my C++ test.

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