

## **Tragedy of the Commons**

Owing much of its existence to the wasteful nature of college students, the University of Colorado is currently facing a “tragedy of the commons” problem of its own. The nature of the problem is surprising given the student body purports to being environmentally conscious. Yet, the presence and extent of the problem cannot be denied. The quandary that is spoken of is the excess printing of materials from campus computer labs.

The University operates a multitude of computer labs on campus openly available to all fee-paying students as an aid for completing their class work. These computers serve as a vital resource for individuals that do not have computers at home or are stuck on campus all day and desire access to a computer. However, the problem has arisen from the fact that it is more than these two target groups that are utilizing the computer labs. The other group, and by far the most numerous, is those individuals that have computers of their own but make use of the University computer labs only in order to print materials. Each University computer lab is equipped with at least one laser printer that is free for students to use at their mercy while they are toiling away in the lab. The result of this policy is quite obvious: students are extremely careless in what they print leading to broken printers, lack of available paper, and an enormous sum of money spent by the university to fund this extravagant activity. The remnants of this wastefulness can be found in each computer lab at the end of the day in the form of an over-sized wastebasket filled to the brim with cosmetically perfect, but unneeded, printed materials. The problem has become so bad that printers are seemingly out of order on a day-to-day basis or a lack of paper is available for printing. Thus, the consequence is that nobody

has the opportunity to print materials whether they are of the necessary or the excess variety.

One would think that students would exercise more thought about what they print considering the problems that such behaviors cause. Yet, this is a classic case of a prisoner's dilemma as demonstrated by the decision matrix below:

	<b>Print Excessively</b> <i>(Person One)</i>	<b>Print Modestly (only required materials)</b>
<b>Print Excessively</b> <i>(Person Two)</i>	Person One: 4 utils Person Two: 4 utils	Person One: 1 util Person Two: 10 utils
<b>Print Modestly (only required materials)</b>	Person One: 10 utils Person Two: 1 util	Person One: 8 utils Person Two: 8 utils

Accordingly, individuals have reason to cooperate, as cooperation would garner them eight utils respectively. However, out of fear that the other person will not cooperate, neither individual cooperates and both print excessively resulting in only four utils apiece. Thus, ensues the tragedy of the commons: printers are used excessively and consequently break.

The solution proposed by the University of Colorado Student Union (UCSU) to solve this problem calls for each student to be allotted a specific number of pages that he or she may print each year – for example 200 – and then once that has been exceeded students will be charged at a rate of anywhere between seven and ten cents for each additional page they print. This solution would thus require software to be installed on the computers in order to keep track of student printing.

While the proposed resolution would certainly curb the amount of excess printing it hardly seems like the most appropriate answer to the problem. Such a solution would hurt those who the computer labs are intended to help: individuals of low socioeconomic status. It is dubious whether the resolution would halt the excesses of those that are

financially well off but are too lazy to purchase and maintain a printer of their own. The proposed solution simply allows those with more financial resources another avenue to get ahead of their colleagues.

A more suitable resolution would be to remove printers from the majority of the campus computer labs and only have printing facilities available in a few central locations. As of now, printers are available in all computer labs regardless of the size of the lab. By removing printers from the majority of the labs and by corollary designating a minimal number of labs as "Printing Labs" the excess in printing would be greatly reduced. Surely this would result in these select labs being crowded but this is precisely why this solution would work. Knowing that the labs will be crowded and that they will likely have to wait to get on a computer, students will only make use of the printing labs if there is something they must necessarily print. Moreover, a lab teeming with students will result in social pressure for students not to print more than they absolutely must. As students are waiting in line to get on a computer, one will feel a burden to print his or her materials as quickly as possible and make way for someone else. This solution avoids the discriminatory effects of the UCSU solution and provides a way for students to achieve the ultimate position on the decision matrix: everyone prints modestly and only what they need.

## **Collective Action**

Each year an increasing number of talented high school and college basketball players forego the remainder of their amateur eligibility and declare themselves eligible for the National Basketball Association (NBA) Draft. This phenomenon has become rife throughout the sport for a number of reasons. First, amateur players have witnessed that those players who gave-up college basketball at an early age often go on to be extremely successful in the NBA. In fact, Kobe Bryant, Kevin Garnett, and Tracy McGrady, who many experts regard as the best three players in the NBA, all went to the NBA straight from high school without playing a single game of college basketball. However, the chief reason for the early exodus of amateurs to the professional ranks is financial. The overwhelming majority of players who make this move come from deplorable socioeconomic backgrounds and view the NBA as a way to escape from these unfortunate conditions. While playing college basketball provides the opportunity to receive a free college education, this benefit is of little avail to these individuals while their families are facing desperate circumstances back home. Thus, indeed it seems that the rational choice for these players is to enter the NBA as soon possible.

However, a predicament quickly arises from the fact that an exponential number of players make what appears to be this rational decision. The larger the number of amateurs that declare themselves eligible for the draft each year, the more grossly diluted the prospects for the group as a whole become. For example, if only a few individuals were to declare themselves eligible for the draft these few individuals would likely maintain a high value because they are in short supply. Conversely, when for example 100 such individuals declare themselves for the draft, problems arise. The first issue

facing these individuals is that there are only 58 draft picks in a given year.

Consequently, at a minimum of 32 of them will not be drafted at all. Moreover, even if 58 of these 100 players are lucky enough to be drafted (graduating seniors and foreign players are also eligible to be picked), there is a high likelihood that few of them will make the 12-man roster of their respective teams. Because of all the amateur players that have recently turned professional, the NBA is heavily saturated with young players. Many more players are attempting to come in to the league rather than go out; as a result many that are trying to make it in the league are finding that there is no spot for them. Once these individuals have given-up their amateur status they may no longer play college basketball and cannot enter the draft for a second time. Thus, the prospects for such individuals are severely limited.

The only way this situation can be rectified is if the players act collectively and decide that no individual will make himself eligible early for the NBA draft. This would eliminate much of the competition by limiting the prospective draft class to only graduating seniors and thus enhance the likelihood that these individuals would find a place in the NBA. Moreover, it would remedy the problem of the over-flowing number of young players vying for a spot in the league. Such a policy would make it so a similar proportion of players would be attempting to enter the league as would be leaving the league.

While this solution looks good on paper, putting it into action requires much more. Just telling players that they cannot or should not enter the NBA draft until they have graduated from college because it hurts the prospects of the group as a whole – and them individually – will sound like nonsense to a 19 year old whose family is starving.

Therefore, an incentive is needed to make this solution possible. The only viable solution is that of money. College athletes must receive a financial supplement in addition to their scholarships if they are expected not to pursue the professional ranks until they have spent four years in college. With additional money to aid their families and loved ones players would not feel the need to enter the NBA as soon as possible. This of course sounds nice but where would the money come from? It would make sense for this aid to come from the players that benefited from such a rule. For example, if only graduating college seniors were eligible for the 2003 NBA Draft, these individual would be greatly benefited and have an excellent shot at making an NBA team. Along with making an NBA team of course comes a guaranteed multi-million dollar contract. It would not be much to ask of these new millionaires to place a fixed sum of their contract in a fund for players that are not yet eligible for the NBA. Because players would reap the benefits from this policy while they are still in college, they would be more likely to participate in the collective action of not pursuing the NBA until they are graduating senior. Furthermore, this action would give each a much better opportunity at securing a multi-million dollar contract of his own at a later date.

## **Negative Externality**

The University of Colorado at Boulder features undoubtedly one of the most beautiful college campuses in the country. Nestled at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, the campus features a variety of striking architecture to go along with its beautiful setting. In addition to the impressive structural design of the campus, the University features a variety of grassy open spaces that serve to add to its attractiveness. Scattered throughout the campus, these grassy expanses – particularly those found throughout the University's various quadrangles – are essential in opening up the campus and preventing it from appearing too clustered. However, in spite of their beauty these spaces have come under attack, albeit unintentionally.

In their haste to get to class on time or to that party on the hill as quickly as possible, students have begun to frequently trudge through these grassy expanses while snubbing their noses at the surrounding sidewalks. While students may reap the benefits of arriving at their destination more quickly, it is not without consequence. Quite simply, these grassy spaces are not designed to be constantly tramped upon. Under this pressure the grass commonly dies and the area becomes muddy. This leaves such spaces, spaces that were at one time beautiful, utterly ugly. Thus, the negative externality that results from such conduct: the spaces become grossly unattractive thus reducing the beauty of the campus as a whole. Nobody is immune to this, be it students, faculty, tourists, or the hobos that venture around the campus.

Yet, in spite of the ill effects of this practice, examining the decision matrix below it is no wonder that such incidents have become customary.

	<b>Walk on the grass</b> <i>(Person One)</i>	<b>Use only sidewalks</b>
<b>Walk on the grass</b> <i>(Person Two)</i>	Person One: 4 utils Person Two: 4 utils	Person One: 1 util Person Two: 10 utils
<b>Use only sidewalks</b>	Person One: 10 utils Person Two: 1 util	Person One: 7 utils Person Two: 7 utils

The matrix demonstrates that happiness would be maximized if everybody used solely the sidewalks. This would allow the beauty of the campus to be maintained and people would not fear being beat to their particular destinations by everyone else. However, because people do not expect others to cooperate, they feel as though they themselves have no reason to cooperate. One person solely walking on the sidewalks will do no good for the beauty of the campus if everyone else walks across the grass. Moreover, the individual that uses the sidewalks will arrive at his or her destination later than the individual that crosses on the grass. Thus, the belief that others will walk across the grass makes it rational for people to do so themselves.

In order to rectify this problem people must be wary of a penalty for walking on the grass. Putting fences around the areas would defy their purpose as it would prevent people from simply lounging on the lawns and would also make the campus seem clustered. Additionally, adding sidewalks cutting across the areas would only add to the problem as such a plan would not only detract from the beauty of the expanses but also result in people walking on to the sides of these sidewalks, on the grass, when the sidewalks themselves become too crowded. This would lead to even greater damage in this confined area. Thus, a penalty that would make people fearful of walking across the grass is the best solution.

While it may make people think twice about crossing the lawns, it would not be ethical to dig holes in the grass so that people would be fearful of breaking their ankles.

Yet, a policy that could create a similar fear among students and others would be to randomly fine individuals for walking across the grass. Signs adjacent to these areas would warn people that crossing them could result in a fine. This policy would raise the price of the behavior and give people a reason not to partake in it. By making the cost of walking on the grass blatantly personal, people would think twice. Clearly this rule would be difficult to enforce but imposing it at random occasions – so that people could not predict its enforcement – would make the policy highly effective and save the beauty of the University's grassy expanses.

In “The Disquisition on Government,” John C. Calhoun argues for a constitutional government based on the concurrent majority rather than the numerical majority. Calhoun defines the numerical majority as regarding “numbers only, and considers the whole community as a unit, having but one common interest throughout; and collects the sense of the greater number of the whole, as that of the community.” In contrast, Calhoun defines the concurrent majority as regarding “interests as well as numbers – considering the community as made up of different and conflicting interests, as far as the action of the government is concerned; and takes the sense of each, through its majority or appropriate organ, and the united sense of all, as the sense of the entire community.” On the face of it, the argument appears legitimate. After all, it is intuitively appealing: nobody wants to be ruled by individuals that do not represent their values and ideals. However, upon closer inspection Calhoun’s thesis falls apart and does little to promote the justice that Socrates discusses in *The Republic*.

In *The Republic* Socrates characterizes justice as a state of affairs that “imparts harmony and friendship.” According to Socrates this condition is reached when a state can be viewed as united and the divisions throughout the state are quelled. Bringing together seemingly opposite sects of the states – such as the rich and the poor – according to Socrates must be done by treating them as equals. A state cannot have an entirely dissimilar set of policies towards different groups and expect a unified populace. While the logic behind Socrates’ thinking appears sensible, a problem arises regarding what actions a state should take in order to bring such an idea into reality. Socrates maintains that a “philosopher king” is essential for such conditions to come about. However, in the

absence of a “philosopher king” can these circumstances be realized? This is the basis upon which Calhoun’s argument will be considered.

According to Calhoun, a constitutional government that relies on the authority of the numerical majority is not sufficient for realizing the justice spoken of by Socrates. Calhoun purports that such a system of government necessarily divides the populace into a majority group that traditionally has its way and a minority groups that is oppressed by the majority. Assuming a state is a diverse entity, consisting of individuals with differing values and ideals, this assertion of Calhoun’s is reasonable. However, it would even be a sensible statement if all members of the state held uniform values and lived in identical situations. A representative democracy inevitably pits one ambitious politician against another. Each politician seeking the position be it for reasons of honor, duty, or any other motives, will do whatever it takes for him or her to be to win that position. If the populace is uniform in ideology the election will become a popularity contest; the individual that is the best looking and most charismatic of the candidates will be elected. Thus, the politician that is not favored by this state of affairs must make issues out of what are really non-issues in order to have a chance of winning. That is, he or she must make the majority of the populace believe that there is something that separates them from the rest of the population and that he or she is the best person to make sure this differing position is enhanced in the government. These perceived divisions only grow larger overtime as people continually hear this message and it becomes fixed in their thinking. Consequently, an inconsistency of values is inevitable in a society that promotes suffrage.

While varying personal values appear to be an essential aspect of any system that promotes suffrage, it is not necessary that this result in the widespread oppression of minority groups, according to Calhoun. However, this is exactly what Calhoun asserts will occur in societies that rely on the numerical majority for their rule as opposed to the concurrent majority. Being the self-interested individuals that they are, those in charge will seek to oppress minority interests. Moreover, nothing will be able to stop their domination of minority groups as the majority will interpret laws and build institutions that favor their rule. Calhoun asserts that the only way this can be avoided is by enacting an “organism” that serves to “effectually prevent any one interest, or combination of interests, from obtaining the exclusive control of the government, as to render hopeless all attempts directed to that end.” Effectually this “organism” would create what Calhoun terms a concurrent majority as opposed to a numerical majority. This system would give “each interest or portion of the community a negative on others” allowing them to veto legislation that does not accord with their ideals. Calhoun believes that such a mechanism would rid society of oppression and consequently allow the state to be unified and just, even with the existence of a slight variance in its population’s values.

Although initially it appears as though Calhoun’s idea would lead to the unification of the state and in turn a just society, upon closer inspection the prospects for his proposal are dubious at best. Throughout his dialogue on how a controlling “organism” would better enhance the prospects for the minority, Calhoun seems to ignore the detriments that it would have on the majority. Sure, the argument could be made that by creating a unified state and by corollary a just state, the position of the majority would be greatly improved. However, on what grounds would such a society be unified? The

only conceivable platform upon which this unification could occur is the notion that since everyone has the same veto power it is unlikely that anything will ever be changed. After all, there is likely to be *some group* out there who does not agree with a particular piece of proposed legislation and they will have the power to nullify it. Thus, individuals would be unified under the concept that nothing is going to change so they must learn to deal with it whether they like it or not. Not only would this create a lack of progression in this state but it would also create a lack of initiative and ambition in its people. The best thing one could be in such a state is a conformist; this hardly seems like a trademark of a just society.

Moreover, furnishing groups with veto power regardless of their size may prevent the oppression of minority groups but it would lead to the oppression of the majority. The majority in a society *should* get more of what it desires than the minority. It seems moronic to think that just because one person out of 200 is not in favor of a particular policy then that policy should be disregarded. By not allotting the majority its just deserts, the same oppression that Calhoun is concerned about occurring at the hands of the majority would occur at the hands of minority. This of course would result in a society that is not just as the majority would feel that they are not receiving what they are owed.

Yet, the most serious deficiency of Calhoun's argument is the fact that it is self-contradictory. In the beginning of his discourse Calhoun asserts as a universal principle that man is clearly a self-interested being. Calhoun purports this to be an absolute truth that cannot be argued with. This principle would fit fine into Calhoun's thesis if there were not any divisions in society. However, because there are divisions, as Calhoun

agrees, there must necessarily be a majority group and a minority group. Being the self-interested group that they are, the majority group will thus inevitably seek to oppress the minority group. Under nearly all circumstances the majority group will be successful in this endeavor, as they will have more resources for such a pursuit than the minority group. Thus, let us assume for a moment that Calhoun's notion of an "organism" in order to provide for a concurrent majority has been adopted by a state (although the possibility of this occurring is doubtful). Under such circumstances, the minority group will constantly veto any legislation advocated by the majority group and vice versa.

However, this will eventually become unacceptable to the majority and they will say, "we have more people, we have more support, things should be shaped how we want." They will also realize that because they have more people and more support they are capable of overthrowing the current system by way of sheer force. Being the self-interested individuals that they are, this is what they surely will do, for it will allow them to enact favorable policy. Consequently, Calhoun's system of a concurrent majority if enacted will inevitably be destroyed at the hands of a civil war.

Although Calhoun's concurrent majority fails at providing for the just society that Socrates speaks of, so too does the idea of a numerical majority. Calhoun is correct in his assertion that this system leads to the division of society. However, this is a consequence of any form of government that allows suffrage. As discussed previously, in order to successfully be elected politicians must necessarily create divisions in society even when those divisions are not truly present. Because man is self-interested, these divisions necessarily lead to the oppression of the minority group and the impossibility of a just society.

The only means of creating a state that upholds the justice of which Socrates discusses is the creation of a state that does not allow for suffrage. Only through this principle can division not necessarily occur. Moreover, the existence of a just state requires that Calhoun's universal truth that *all* men are self-interested be false. A just state can only be realized through the rule of an individual who is solely concerned with the well being of his or her subjects rather than his or her own welfare. However, such a set of circumstances is fathomable. For instance, it is entirely possible that an individual that has amassed the wealth of Bill Gates could rule a state solely with the enhancement of the populace's well being in mind rather than that of his own. Such an individual has reached a place where he no longer must behave in a self-interested manner as it is doubtful that his circumstances can significantly be improved upon. It is an entirely different question whether he or she could rule in such away that would unite the masses, however this is the only sort of individual that has this potential. Thus, Socrates' conception of a just state should not be dismissed as unfeasible, circumstances abound that could create such a state.