

ower

New trends: gay applicants, test-score high jinks, women engineers, joint degrees. Don't like the classroom? Hop a boat, take a hike.

DOUBLE THREAT

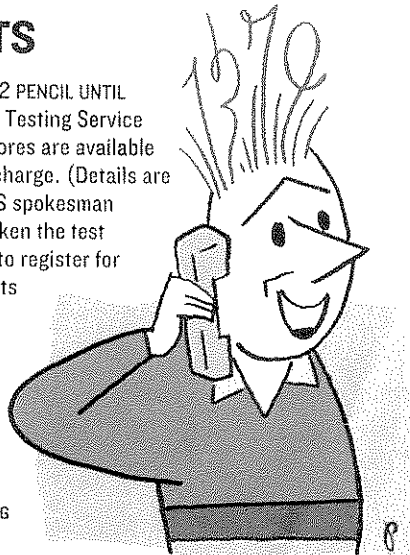
DEMAND IS SOARING FOR cross-disciplinary programs. Undergrads ambitious enough to major in two fields at once can generally earn a supercharged bachelor's degree in four to five years. Example: Penn's management-tech combo. Some schools (Georgetown, for one) also have "accelerated study," a ticket to both a bachelor's and a master's in just five years. "It's easier to find a respectable job, and it almost always gets you a higher salary," says Andrew Steigman, associate dean at Georgetown's School of Foreign Service. "For one more year, it's quite a bargain." Competition is stiff for places in either kind of program. Candidates have to be very focused, showing not only a history of interest in their chosen fields and a GPA above B+ but also stellar recommendations. -J.C.



A HOT LINE FOR THE SATS

YOU DON'T HAVE TO SPEND A MONTH CHEWING YOUR NO. 2 PENCIL UNTIL College Board results arrive by mail. The Educational Testing Service will end your doubts—for a price. SAT I and SAT II scores are available by phone or the Web within two weeks for a \$13 surcharge. (Details are in the test booklet.) "It's for peace of mind," says ETS spokesman Tom Ewing. It can also be useful to seniors who've taken the test in December and need to know immediately whether to register for the January retest. The service has been a hit since its debut in 1999; 17 percent now get results early. The first time it was offered, "it blew our phone circuits in the Northeast," says Ewing. But there are critics. "The ability of students to get scores early only feeds the frenzy," says Christina Perez, a test-reform advocate at Fairtest in Cambridge, Mass. "It's a benefit that low-income students can't or are less likely to enjoy."

-JIA-RUI CHONG



Panetta (third from right) and three Nerd Girls with their solar wheels

TAKE THAT, GEEK BOY!

WHIZZING AROUND IN A SOLAR CAR THEY BUILT THEMSELVES, AN all-female team of Tufts University engineering majors—the Nerd Girls—is out to smash stereotypes. Nationwide, women earned only one engineering baccalaureate out of five in 2001. Why? Perhaps because of old-fashioned attitudes. Most people, says Tufts engineering professor Karen Panetta, "perceive the women who go into this as homely, dateless personalities who like to sit in closets and figure math equations out." You know better, right? If so, the American Society for Engineering Education cites nine schools where you won't feel so alone: Lafayette, Tulane, Michigan State, Notre Dame, Northwestern, Purdue, the University of Colorado, the University of Oklahoma ... and Tufts. You go, Nerd Girls.

-KAREN SPRINGEN

HARVARD: YOU GOTTA BE PERFECT

AT MOST SCHOOLS, SCORING 3 OUT OF A POSSIBLE 5 ON an Advanced Placement test is good enough to qualify for course credit. But most schools are not Harvard College. In years past, it required at least a 4—as did other top-ranked institutions. About half of every entering Harvard class aced the APs in four subjects, qualifying to skip straight to sophomore year. Now even a 4 doesn't cut it. Students entering Harvard in fall 2003 will need a perfect 5 to be given credit. Harvard says it wants to discourage students from "accelerating" a year. Really? The fact is, almost all Harvard students choose to stay the full four years, even if their AP scores would let them save a year's tuition. After all, it's more than a diploma; it's an education. Another reason Harvard changed the rules is that the word "advanced" was becoming a joke on campus. Will other elite schools follow suit? Pride may give them no choice. -K.S.