

opinion

Police may abuse task force plan

The Emerald holds reservations regarding the city of Eugene's recommendations on vagrancy as they may have special impact on University students and residents of the West University neighborhood.

Transients have been an ongoing problem for the city. Following a preliminary research report in January on the transient problem by Mark Lindberg, the City Council formed a task force and studied the problem with an eye toward finding solutions.

After eight months the task force presented a 16-page report with 24 points intended to alleviate the transient situation. For the most part the 24 points deal with the transients and vagrants who frequent the downtown mall area, city parks and live in abandoned buildings in certain sections of the city. These areas appear to be the most "blighted." Though the emphasis of the task force push against vagrants isn't in the campus or West University area, it still leaves us a little queasy.

The Emerald's objections initially stem from the classification of "vagrant" or the other term "transient." No where in the final report are these terms defined. Perhaps the omission was the result of an oversight. Perhaps the city believes the terms too difficult to adequately define. Herein lies the problem.

An early study (in November 1982) also by Lindberg, the basis for the final report, profiled vagrants as the homeless, "deinstitutionalized," teen and pre-teen runaways. While this profile is more than likely true in some cases, it lacks the specifics to define what is a vagrant or a transient.

According to the Oxford American Dictionary, 1980, a vagrant is "a person without a settled home or regular work."

We don't mean to make light of the plight of transients, but that is a definition befitting a large number of students. And a transient, defined as "a temporary visitor or worker," could also be a student at this University.

Nitpicking for a specific definition serves only to point up how generalized is the conception of transients and vagrants. This generalization bothers us — and has bothered Dave Fidanque of the Eugene American Civil Liberties Union.

Fidanque's group was appeased when the citation-in-lieu-of-custody provision was written into the task force recommendations. The ACLU was concerned over "selective enforcement."

However, the Emerald's concern stems from the possibility the Eugene police may not be selective in their enforcement.

The difficulty with the primary emphasis on the Eugene police controlling the vagrant and transient population is that it, after a fashion, allows them *carte blanche* to stop and cite any person or groups. This does not imply Eugene police would abuse this authority, only that the backing of the vagrancy task force recommendations seem to advise them towards indiscriminate.

The West University neighborhood is noted for its mix of people. On 13th Avenue on any given evening there are any number of lifestyles on view, from hippies, punks and conservatives, to Greeks and tweedy academics. What's to prevent Eugene police from citing as vagrants anyone that happens to be "hanging-out" on 13th Avenue? What's to prevent police from searching the individuals while they are detained?

Police harassment of people with a lifestyle individual officers may not approve of is a very real possibility.

There are also people who live hand-to-mouth, the bag-ladies and sidewalk philosophers, who are for the most part harmless. Some of these characters have been living a transient existence for many years. A number of these people are not a "blight," but are colorful characters whose friendship with University area students enriches their lives. The police could continually harass and cite these harmless characters until their fines put them in such a position they are jailed.

Overall, we applaud the recommendations of the vagrancy task force. There are some excellent humane aspects among the 24 recommendations. The expansion of shelter facilities for the homeless and alcohol detoxication centers for the street alcoholic show a consideration unlike any other city. The coordination of social services, if successful, could help transients to find work and become settled.

But, we hope that this spirit of consideration for others is foremost in the minds of Eugene police as they patrol the University area.



letters

Socialism

Last year, OSPIRG, a Ralph Nader supported "public interest group," was cleverly voted mandatory student financial support. Through a carefully worded ballot, this organization managed to gain even the financial support of students opposed to this group. No voluntary support here — they have us by our pursestrings (or wallets) whether we like it or not. Sure we voted on it. But if we had been given the option, a majority of students would have voted for voluntary support of this organization.

Now we have OSPIRG using their ill-gotten funds to fight a legal battle to keep themselves on campus, all the while sapping off the financial veins of the student. They have accused the College Republicans of unethical tactics in merely trying to give the students back the right to keep their money if they so wish. Is it unethical to oppose socialism? If not, then where has the CR been unethical?

The function of student government is not to force students to become financially involved in quasi-political groups. The ASUO should be representing the students in the most democratic way possible, including reserving to the students the freedom to decide for themselves as individuals which groups they wish to support and how "socially aware" they want to become. OSPIRG is not entitled to our money even though they would have us believe so. Even if one admires OSPIRG, one still can see the unfairness of requiring all students to support a group that perhaps 60 percent of us would support voluntarily. If OSPIRG is legitimate, they will be able to gain the support of the student not through the show of political force but through their works. Students who agree with this viewpoint should show up at the ASUO Constitutional Court hear-

ing the first week of October to denounce mandatory fees.

Brandon Shepard

Angered

As a host in the New Student Host Program, I was more than a little surprised by and angered at ASUO Vice Pres. Kevin Kouns speech at our Sept. 19 grand inaugural activities. Kouns seized upon this opportunity to give a speech that was totally out of context with the spirit of NSHP and the event.

Granted, Kouns made some valid points about the need for greater student involvement inside and outside the University. But these points were overshadowed by his implications that such needs will generally go unchallenged and by his gloomy outlook for the future. In a Sept. 27 article, Kouns stated, "the underlying message of the whole thing is hope." I got no such impression from his speech nor did anyone else I talked to.

The intent of NSHP is to help new students feel comfortable at the University and to let them know people here care. The program is important because the start of the school year is a time when encouragement can be very meaningful to new students who might be confused, frightened or unsure. It is also a time when discouragement can be very detrimental to a person, and he or she drops out of school. Then their chances in Kouns' real world become even worse.

It is apparent Kouns failed to realize or even care about the consequences of his remarks, which raises some serious questions about his abilities as a student leader.

Christopher Gore
junior, journalism

Watt now?

James Watt has done it again. His most recent blunder denigrated women, blacks, Jews

Jan Flaherty
Jack Kapuscinski
Eugene

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Letters to the editor must be limited to 250 words, typed, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is turned in. The Emerald reserves the right to edit any letter for length, style or content.

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