

Campus area an edgy locale for regulars, police

Frequenters of campus claim police harassment, brutality

By Gerrit Koepping
Emerald Reporter

The people who hang around the campus area have stories to tell. A lot of these stories are about the Eugene Police Department, which has an image problem, to put it mildly.

Reporter's Notebook

I spent Friday and Saturday night talking with the young people who hang out on the edges of campus. I heard many stories, a lot of them involving harassment, intimidation, racial discrimination, police brutality and false arrest.

Out of these stories arose one universal theme: If you look different you are going to be targeted for special attention from Eugene's finest.

For instance, take a group of skinheads and punks that I talked to — two men and four women — who hung out at 13th Avenue and Kincaid Street, across from Taylor's College Side Inn. Their average age was around 17, their clothes were not the latest fashions but were clean and well-kept, and they horsed around like any group of teenagers.

They had nowhere else to go, so they were forced to hang out near the campus, but because they look different from students they are singled out for attention, they said.

"If we were wearing Keds and Spirit shirts they wouldn't bother us," said Emily, a member of the group.

They complained bitterly of constant surveillance and occasional harassment. To

illustrate their point: 20 minutes into the interview, a police officer pulled up to the group, for no apparent reason, and asked if the group planned to be violent that evening. They said they didn't plan to be.

Moreover, during the half-hour I interviewed them, they were constantly watched by at least one parked squad car.

Some of them also complained of police brutality. One young man, who asked to be identified as Skunk, said he was arrested for curfew violation while he was

'There's a lot of cops that come off with this attitude that we're all shit, something that needs to be scraped off the boot of society.'

— Cody Yarbrough

on LSD.

After the police determined he was on LSD he was taken to Sacred Heart General Hospital and handcuffed to a gurney, he said. "I started giggling for no real reason and this cop gets pissed off and grabs me by the hair and slams the back of my head against the wall and then he punches me in the chest."

In addition to general harassment, some spoke of harassment of a racial nature.

Kane Allah-Muhhammad,

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Looking at college from behind the badge

By Colleen Pohlig
Emerald Reporter

I was convinced that every last cop was a racist, fascist, power-hungry idiot who preyed on the poor and the weak — and, of course, on college kids. Then, last Friday night found me riding

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around campus in the front seat of one of those shiny, brand new "Robo-Cop" police cars, and what I saw in the course of the nine-hour ride was no movie.

I began the adventure in Eugene Police Sgt. Gene Costanza's car and didn't see much action on campus until after 9 p.m.

While driving, Costanza explained to me why, since the weekend of the USC game (the first weekend after the start of school), Eugene police had doubled the amount of officers patrolling the campus area. As most people know, that weekend was full of violent crimes that kept the officers on their toes.

"We started noticing an attitude right when the students hit town," Costanza said as he drove around the campus area in an unmarked car. "They seemed very insolent. There seems to be a changing rapport and a large number of students seem to be looking for a confrontation."

"I don't know what they are mad at — the world, the University — but the police tend to receive the negative guff from people when they are frustrated by the government," Costanza said. "When something happens from police improprieties, such as the Rodney King incident in L.A., we are the ones people can see and get their hands on, so we tend to receive that kind of treatment."

Being a student, I had my own answers about why it was so much "fun" to hate cops. For one, it is the norm. Secondly, cops are the ultimate sign of authority — and who likes authority? And finally, it's so much easier to blame someone else for your mistake than to actually admit that you screwed up.

Costanza agreed all those were probably factors.

One thing is for sure — I have never heard as many "fucking pigs" comments in my life. Costanza had to meet another police officer at The Mission Mexican Restaurant, and as we were merely walking to the table, this comment, coming from several different students' mouths, was definitely meant to be heard by more people than their friends.

Once at the table, Costanza asked if I had heard the comments and proceeded to tell me that it was not unusual — they hear it all the time.

What a pleasant job.

Around 9 p.m. I switched cars and rode the rest of Officer Linda Fischer's shift until 4 a.m., which made getting up at 7 a.m. for my geology field trip out of the question.

Anyway, Fischer, otherwise known as "Officer Friendly" on campus, is one of 12 female officers on the force. Any question about her success or failure as a female police officer should stop right here — she could kick just about every guy's behind I know.

From the minute I got into the racy police car, the action started.

Three fraternity guys walking down the sidewalk, one holding a cup, spotted the cop car. The guy with the cup threw it and kept walking.

Fischer slammed on the brakes and cited the guy for a minor in possession of alcohol. Fischer, getting back in the car, was surprised to find him cooperative and polite.

"That's very rare," she said as she drove away. "Most of the time, you get a student lying to you, saying that no, you did not see me throwing that cup. Ninety-seven percent of the things we hear are not true, so when the other 3 percent are telling the truth, they don't get the benefit of the doubt."

Our next call led us to arresting a homeless woman who was sleeping in the hall of an apartment complex. She was arrested because she had gotten a ticket earlier that day for sleeping in the same building and the student who called the police wanted her arrested.

My former misconceptions of all cops treating the homeless like dirt, were just that: misconceptions. The officers were nothing but polite and it turned out that although jail is definitely not the Hilton, the woman had a warm place to stay for the night.

Next Fischer arrested a former Oregon State University football player because there was a warrant out for his arrest. We took him to jail all the while listening to, "You fucking ruined my weekend, bitch — that's the last time I say hi to you on the street."

I admit I never used to say, "Hey, how's it going?" to any cop before, but it was a real eye opener to see only glares and hear "fucking pig" comments all night.

Our next mission led us to responding to a noise pollution call at the Sigma Chi fraternity. Fischer talked to the president and issued him a citation for loud music, the second given in a week.

"He was pleasant," she said as we were walking back to the car. "A lot of the frats aren't. People think we're here to break up their party. I have so many better things to do than crash your party."

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