

Ethics education? So, what's next?

Character education in the public school system? Scary.

Oregon's Board of Education will hold its first public reading today in Portland of a policy that could require the state's public schools to teach its students qualities like respect, empathy, responsibility and honesty.

The policy stems from a report submitted to the state Legislature by the board that lists character education in its definition of standard education, the required curriculum each school must provide.

The platform is also in response to an obscure, rarely enforced law, which states public schools are responsible for teaching ethics and morality. Education officials fear school districts that don't offer such lessons could risk losing state-funded support.

But whose morals will the schools teach? Whose ethical standards will be preached? Which value system will be enforced?

Those attempting to enforce the development of character need to consider the diversity of ethical stances present in this country before setting some ambivalent standard for the 'ideal' American.

It seems the Oregon Education Department, from where the policy originated, didn't account for the multitude of perspectives regarding character definition in this state.

Seeing as how this policy comes from an arm of our benevolent government, it seems probable the department would pick a norm that's no doubt best for us; that would serve to protect us from ourselves, as well as make its job of control a little easier.

The most predictable standard is the white, middle-class, patriotic, hard-working, basic "Leave-it-to-Beaver" norm. This grade of behavior exemplifies what America is "supposed" to be; the imaginary image of we, the masses, held in the minds of the few ruling elite.

Reality is a bit different, though. Americans come in a variety of shapes, colors, sizes — and value systems. Those attempting to enforce the development of character need to consider the diversity of ethical stances present in this country before setting some ambivalent standard for the "ideal" American.

And that leads to another point: There is no ideal moral standard by which to measure. Because we all have different life experiences, our individual personalities are inherently different.

No group, and especially not our "democratic, liberal" government, has the right to dictate what our ethics and morals should be. Granted, some qualities are more desirable than others and more conducive to our society, yet the "teaching" of character still treads on shaky ground.

And besides, consider the current condition of our school systems. The declining reading, writing and mathematical skill levels of our graduates show these areas need our fullest attention right now.

The policy is expected to be accepted by the board, which will hold another public reading/comment meeting during its Nov. 21-22 session in Salem before making its final decision.

It's in our best interest to further evaluate this proposed plan before its approval; should it pass, Oregon's children will be subject to a system of enforced character forming that may soon extend beyond the boundaries of "morality."



"MOM, on second thought, I think maybe I'd like to be in the Key Club instead"

LETTERS

Shortsighted

In response to Ryan Blacketter's attack of Laurie McMillen (ODE, Oct. 16).

McMillen states that she can do without people like Jon Wollander despite her support for a diverse society.

Blacketter's adolescent, shortsighted response accuses her of hypocritically providing a "disservice to those gays and lesbians tolerant of true diversity."

To express distaste does not contradict the concept of tolerance. McMillen's distaste for Wollander's views is not a rejection of his right to exist.

Just because she "could do without him," as I'm sure many of us could, doesn't imply that Wollander, or anyone else for that matter, doesn't have the right to express him or herself.

For example, besides agreeing wholeheartedly with McMillen about being able to do without the likes of Wollander, I could also do without people like Blacketter.

McMillen's so-called "radical" distaste for Wollander's views does not provide near the disservice to the gay and lesbian community as Wollander's militant intolerance, and Blacketter's petty argument over semantics, which tremendously undermine and jeopardize the struggle for true diversity within the community as a whole.

Kathleen Bender
Anthropology

Thelma & Anita

I wonder if *Thelma and Louise* had been made in the early eighties if Anita Hill would

have handled her sexual harassment differently.

For those of you who still have not seen the movie, or thought it ended poorly, or thought it was just the wrong message to give to America, what we witnessed in regard to Hill and how she was treated is the reason *Thelma and Louise* was made.

It's just like how Louise tells Thelma, "Who's going to believe that? We don't live in that kind of a world."

The treatment of Anita Hill proves Louise is right. For this woman, I was with *Thelma and Louise* to the end and I wonder if Anita Hill now wishes she had gone over the edge, too.

Rebekah Shelley
Theater Arts

Thank a cop

Until reading the "Reporter's Notebook" articles of Oct. 20 concerning police-student relations, I was unaware of any problems between the two groups. I finished reading the pieces and decided to make a police officer's day and tell him that I, for one, appreciated the thankless effort he and his fellow officers put in every day trying to make the campus a little safer for students like me.

During my conversation with Officer Scarborough, he suggested a way to ease tensions between students and police. He proposes that if students were more responsible for their own behavior, and behaved with common sense and respect for other people and the laws of our area, there would be less need for police officers to confront students, issue citations, or take other such ac-

tions.

Since every student is a self-professed adult, this simple doctrine of courtesy toward one another and our laws would not seem to be an outrageous idea, but obviously it is too much to ask of some people, and the result is the need for police officers to act as society's keepers. Perhaps those students that are resentful of the presence of officers should look at their own behavior and modify it to a more mature course of action.

Heatherle Himes
Journalism/History

Lies

Do you get the feeling that someone is lying in Washington? For example, during Robert Gates' confirmation hearing for CIA director, the testimony was contradictory.

Did Gates intentionally slant intelligence reports to over-exaggerate the Soviet threat? Did he lie to Congress about his involvement in illegal covert activities?

The witnesses strongly disagreed. If the senators are confused, where does that leave us?

We can start by learning all we can about government secrecy and the lies of government officials. You are invited to hear Rev. Bill Davis' presentation, "Government Secrecy: The Constitution in Crisis," on Oct. 28 at 7:30 p.m. in Room 150 Columbia.

It's time to set limits on what government officials do with the money and power we give them.

Scott Reeves
Portland State University

