

Harassment policy needs careful reform

The University is proposing changes in the way it deals with sexual harassment on campus, and it's about time. Even though people are quick to recognize and condemn racial discrimination, they are less aware of and more tolerant of sexual harassment.

What the University is proposing will place sexual harassment in the same category as other forms of discrimination, thereby giving it a recognized status as an unacceptable behavior.

The proposal targets "inappropriate behavior" in the work or educational environment. Such behavior is defined as "creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive" environment through offensive words or pictures.

There is nothing to distinguish between a one-time stupid comment and a pattern of deliberate harassment. Presumably each report will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

The plan attempts to remove some of the burden of reporting harassment from the victim and places it on the shoulders of co-workers. The proposal requires University employees to report any violations they become aware of, or any allegations of violations they become aware of.

Sexual harassment, much like rape, is often not reported by the victim out of an undeserved feeling of shame, guilt or embarrassment. Any step to remove that stigma and increase the likelihood of the incident being reported is to be encouraged.

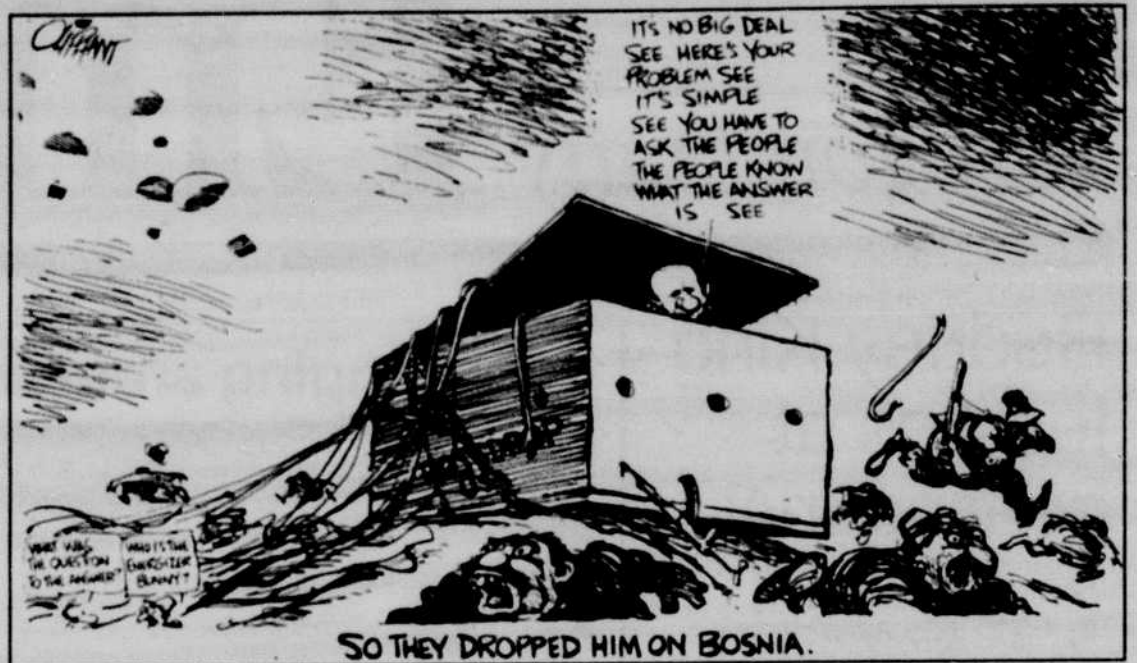
It is in that spirit that the plan would permit victims to make anonymous accusations, but the University will not act unless two such reports are filed against the same person.

Anonymous complaints are fine, so long as they are not used against a person in any way. The accused should be made aware of the complaint, thereby giving him or her the opportunity to recognize the offending behavior and correct it.

But any action beyond that should not be allowed to occur with no more than anonymous accusations. Marlene Drescher, director of student advocacy, said students may not file complaints if they fear being brought into an investigation.

The only solution, and not a very good one, is to make it more difficult for a case to be investigated. It is entirely unethical, and illegal, to take action against a person who has been anonymously accused. The Sixth Amendment guarantees the right of the accused "to be confronted with the witnesses against him," and the University should be careful it doesn't cross that line.

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COMMENTARY

Minority students not retreating

By Jack Orozco

Members of the group Students of Color Building Bridges were offended by the unsigned staff editorial regarding our efforts (ODE, March 3). We found the piece to be grossly ignorant of our campaign and the attitude of the authors to be overly condescending. We believe the editorial's vocabulary, such as the words "alleging," "complaining" and "threatening" were a misrepresentation, and they misconstrued the readers' opinions.

SCBB is a coalition of students of color from the four underrepresented student unions and the ASUO. It formed in the summer of 1992 to improve the communication and trust level between administrators and students of color at the University.

Recently, we let it be known that the University, despite its wonderful rhetoric, has largely neglected to make diversity a priority. Despite President Myles Brand's and other University leaders' ceremonial lip service, they have made virtually no progress on people of color's concerns. They fail to take people of color seriously, instead entertaining us with flowery dialogue of the University being a meeting ground for all.

As a result, after much thought and discussion, SCBB has instigated a comprehensive campaign to pressure the University into making diversity a credible and sincere objective. We have presented the University with a petition of our grievances and a list of demands. We have asked that the University soon begin making sufficient progress in the areas of multicultural curriculum, faculty of color and support services.

Otherwise, we will initiate a sequence of consequences, ranging from the encouragement of alumni and high school students of color to discontinue their affiliations with the University, to the withdrawing en masse from the University as an expression of our extreme dissatisfaction.

Our campaign has received an overwhelming amount of support from community organizations and leaders. This senti-

ment is expressed by the executive director of Centro Latino Americano, Antonio Sardinia: "What the students of color advocate is precisely the step we need to take" (ODE, March 5).

People nationally have made available a variety of resources for SCBB. In fact, Brand personally thanked us and said he appreciates our "very constructive, well thought out approach." Brand also assured us that administrators will offer no resistance to our campaign.

Some of our requests do require monetary support, and in the past, 1990's Ballot Measure 5 has often been used to justify not funding these types of reforms, as was repeatedly mentioned in the staff editorial.

But the measure isn't at fault; even before it was approved in 1990, the University claimed it had difficulty in locating funding. SCBB asks the University to look at the projects it is funding over diversity.

The staff editorial also discussed sensitivity seminars. It said "the goal could be attained by fixing the multicultural curriculum, not by requiring 're-education' seminars. Sensitivity cannot be taught but is acquired as a result of exposure to other cultures and environments."

First, how can the Emerald advocate multiculturalism when it has so historically opposed it? Second, sensitivity seminars aren't imposed "re-education," but rather awareness training. And we have concerns over whether these should be mandated — if not, then what incentives would assure attendance? Finally, of course sensitivity can be taught — racism certainly is.

One of SCBB's most imperative requests is the diversification of the entire curriculum, not just for students of color but particularly for European-Americans. It's vital they are provided with an understanding of racial issues in the context of the United States. And our current curriculum is recognized as seriously deficient by noted national authorities.

But the most offensive sentiment expressed by the staff editorial is that our campaign is a retreat, an attempt to run away. "Its members would rather give up, pack their bags and move on

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to more diverse pastures."

If it were truly a retreat, then why would we initiate a campaign? Why would we continue our involvement as committee members, as officers, directors and as representatives in the community? Why would we be receiving the extraordinary praise that we are?

The staff editorial's authors believe that "if these students are interested in building, rather than burning, bridges, they will stay and carry on the struggle." But why is this burden put on us as students of color?

The University has employed staff to do the exact forms of advocacy we are performing. As people of color, we are the recipients of racism, and yet we do almost everything to combat it. Because of the systematic oppression of white racism, European-Americans have an obligation to fight it. Some would say it's simply a white problem; because whites continue to initiate, maintain and condone it, people of color simply suffer from racism, as activist Eric Ward said.

People should remember that our struggles have existed, unlike our campaign, for quite some time. And we are tired of being used by the administration to create the appearance that reforms are being made. We therefore feel compelled to take our education — our activism — to an institution that sincerely struggles for diversity.

March 12, University leaders will present an update of their progress on our list of demands to SCBB. It's crucial that the University and people of color continue their support over the next several months regarding our campaign.

Jack Orozco is a member of Students of Color Building Bridges and a pre-journalism major.

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