

Save yelling matches for rainy day



Ah, springtime. There I was, strolling across campus, basking in that sense of serenity that only a sunny day in Eugene can produce. I approached the EMU, sharing that particular jocularly with other students who, temporarily lost in euphoria, were ignoring the fact that the end of the term is near.

This is not to be confused with "The End is near," which was the message I encountered next. Lo and behold, those pastoral hills surrounding the EMU were not as peaceful as I had imagined. My vision of sipping iced tea from my refillable mug and reading *Cultural Survival Quarterly* on those sunny slopes evaporated as quickly as snow on Flag Day.

I believe in free speech. I believe in tolerance. But it will take some convincing before I'll say I appreciate the yelling match I heard at the EMU Courtyard.

Actually, I saw the sign first: "BABY KILLING (ABORTION) AND SEXUAL IMMORALITY (FORNICATION, ADULTERY, LESBIANISM, HOMOSEXUALITY ...) BRING JUDGMENT UPON THE LAND. REPENT OR PERISH."

Gee, and all of this time I naively thought it was the corrupt multinationals who were responsible.

I digress.

So there I was, just walking to the EMU when I became acutely aware of a major theological conflict. A group of Christians were touting signs and crosses and verbally assaulting the crowd. I was rather surprised to see a large group of students, in various stages of repose, taking the news of their impending stay in hell so calmly.

However, not everyone took the news laying down. In fact,

some students were quite incensed to be told that gays and lesbians should be punished and that people who have AIDS will die alone.

I stayed for a while. I listened to people call each other bigots, graphically describe sources of sin, kick scripture and history around like footbags, and generally make generalizations.

I watched one woman practically lose her voice refuting a speaker. She obviously had a lot at stake personally. But people around me were commenting on the verbal sparring like they were watching the Olympics. "Good one," the guy to my left said. Was this spectator taking her viewpoint seriously, or just enjoying the game?

A man came up to me and said, "I'll give you a dollar to yell, 'Burn all the Christians!'" I hesitated, and he pulled out his wallet. "Save your money," I said, and someone chimed in, "Yeah, yell it yourself."

This is not my idea of free speech. I found this to be a deplorable level of discourse. What have we come to as a campus community if we can commodify our opinions, turn a blind eye to the ideas and pain of others, and essentially make a mockery of intellectual interchange?

I am glad the courtyard is open for public debate. But the message "repent or perish" does not allow much room for dialogue. In the words of the aforementioned woman, "Damnation is not OK. I felt threatened. As a lesbian and a Jew, I felt unsafe."

The courtyard should be a safe, comfortable place for people to exchange views, not for painful yelling matches. Free speech is important. But name-calling and

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arguments won by volume, not reason, do not belong on this campus.

Students should not have to be subjected to loud discord over lengthy periods of time, especially when it's springtime and we're all feeling generous. (After all, where is that urge to convert others when it's rainy and gray? Are we not all destined for hell unless it's at least 65 degrees out?)

Let's be fair. On a rare sunny day in Eugene, don't we have more important things to do than yell at each other in the courtyard? Couldn't we be reading, playing Frisbee, making music, falling in love, or even finishing our papers? Couldn't we be showing some respect for our campus community and the sanctity of discourse?

Beth Hege is a student activities reporter for the Emerald.

LETTERS POLICY

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- The language program has shifted to "competency based" instruction with emphasis on contemporary speaking, listening, reading and writing
- Special language tutorial sections supplement regular classes
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- Ludmila Zagorskaia, a celebrated teacher of Russian from Moscow, will join the language program next year.
- Department faculty maintain close contact with Russia, frequently on extended scholarly residence there, for example Fruim Yurevich, senior Instructor of Russian, has been selected to spend the summer in Moscow as a participant in the International Researches and Exchanges Board program.
- Faculty members in the Russian Department have been recipients of the prestigious Ersted and graduate teaching awards.
- The Russian Department collaborates with faculty of the Russian and East European Studies Center to provide interdisciplinary undergraduate and graduate programs in Russian Area Studies.
- The Marjorie Lindholm Endowed Professorship in the Russian Department brings teachers of world renown to the UO, for example, this Spring, Ruth Zernova and Ilya Serman jointly hold the Professorship. Zernova teaches Russian Women's literature; Serman teaches Lermontov.

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