

# Boring, pointless letters won't improve the 'Emerald'



LIA SALICCIA

Hello out there, are you awake? I want to know why things are the way they are.

How come, even though we have excellent tools for communication literally at our fingertips — the keyboard on which I'm typing, the newspaper you are holding — we are not really communicating? Why are the letters to the editor so vague, only sporadically making any sort of point? What is it that makes every mention of the *Emerald* an excuse to yawn?

Are you bored, or are we boring? It's time to fess up. Just what is the function of this rag?

The function of a campus newspaper should be to keep those within our University community in touch with each other. If there is a failure to communicate between the paper and the community, then both the paper and the students should be asking what is wrong.

Not to say that we don't get letters to the editor. The only problem is that for the most part, I can't understand what anyone is trying to say in them. Letters that clearly state a person's case and then proceed to make a point are few and far between. The bulk of the letters section has lately catered to a bizarre discussion of

Ayn Rand and whether or not her brand of capitalism is poisoning our country. (How did it start, when will it end?)

Then there are the many variations of letters that cry out at how horrible the *Emerald* is and how disgruntled people are, being neither specific about the mistake the newspaper has made this time nor about how the story could have been covered differently.

Then there is the other type of letter, always entertaining, sometimes scary, like the letter from John Wayne-Johnson in San Diego (why is he sending his letter to a university paper in Oregon, anyway?) that describes his "one-man crusade to exorcise demonized America" and his conviction that if all women stayed at home, we'd see full employment, no crime and "Jesus."

Oh boy, aren't we witnessing democracy in action. If you think these letters tend to be boring, whiny and just plain pointless, you should hear some of the comments they generate in the newsroom.

Not to say that our newspaper is such a stellar publication that it should escape criticism. But criticisms that somewhere involve a point might help us tailor this publication to better cater to you. Not to say that those types of letters never appear. But they don't appear often enough.

Here's a hint to letter writers hoping to make a point and have it heard. Be concise. Be specific. And try to include something that will capture the imagination

that might inspire thought for a change. When a newspaper receives responses from calm people who state their points in a way that informs both the short-falls of the coverage and what the reader wanted to read instead, then writers may stop producing content that the reader believes is limited, boring, sloppy or just plain stupid. Editors and the whole crew that puts a publication together can be more conscious of the way the readers want their paper to be.

I have a sneaking suspicion that there's only a few people out there who ever get fired up enough to write a letter to the editor. They are the types who get fired up repeatedly. The rest of the population, if they read a newspaper at all, just don't find anything in it that would ever make them care enough to bother to put their own voice in it.

The communication breakdown between a newspaper and its readers is by no means the fault of the readers alone. If the best friend of the newspaper is to line bird cages, the producers of that paper can't expect enough excitement from readers to warrant an interesting page of letters every day.

Wouldn't it be ideal if we all started caring about and getting involved with the process more than we do? Starting with reporters who think of their own story ideas instead of relying on the PR packs they get in the mail. Starting with editors who communicate with both reporters and the public. Starting with you, the informed readership who offers the information that the paper left

out, and offers feedback that goes deeper than "You suck," "Everyone reading this will go to hell," or "Thank you for kissing up to us, love the group you wrote the story about." We could all learn

more effective ways to communicate, don't you think?

I'm hoping to hear from you.

*Lia Saliccia is a columnist for the Emerald.*




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