

Survey provides revealing data

In the newspaper business it is always an advantage to know your reader. At the *Oregon Daily Emerald* we have had the chance to get to know some of our readers really well from letters and commentaries. But what we, in the newsroom, were interested in was finding out about our other readers — the silent majority.

Riley & Associates, Inc. conducted the survey in November. The firm surveyed 375 people who lived within a mile of the University.

Most of the information from surveys, in general, comes in the form of averages. So we'll get those out of the way first. The "average" *Emerald* reader is a male undergraduate who drives a car, drinks coffee on a daily basis 25 percent of the time, buys groceries once a week at the Safeway on East 18th Avenue and shops at Valley River Center.

On average people read the advertisements and the crossword puzzles more often than any other section of the paper. Of course we already knew that. Nothing generates more letters than leaving out the crossword puzzle.

The section that was widely read was the editorial page. We could take this information one of two ways: Either you think we do a pretty good job on editorials or you think the edits are pretty weak and just read them for entertainment value. Or, a third possibility is that you just love our columnists. We know that the third possibility is not true because we had one respondent who wanted to hang up Brian Womack by his toenails. (As a side note, he was thrilled with the comment.)

The comment about Womack was in one of the appendixes at the back of the survey, which brings us to the most interesting part of the survey. Each appendix listed some of the more unconventional responses to the questions asked. Some of these unconventional responses were mentioned by as many as 15 people while others were mentioned by only one person.

Among the most frequent responses was that we don't have enough national and international news and that we don't have enough campus news. Other people wanted more sports coverage, while still others wanted less sports coverage. One person wanted us to be more independent of the University administration, another said we should let professors write the articles and someone else said we should devote an entire page to the stock market.

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!!!!

We commissioned this survey for our ad staff. They wanted to be able to show potential advertisers what they would gain by advertising in the *Emerald*. It did much more than that though. This survey has given us a glimpse into the hearts and minds of our readers. Though we will not be able to implement all of these suggestions, we thank those of you who participated in the survey.

Oregon Daily Emerald

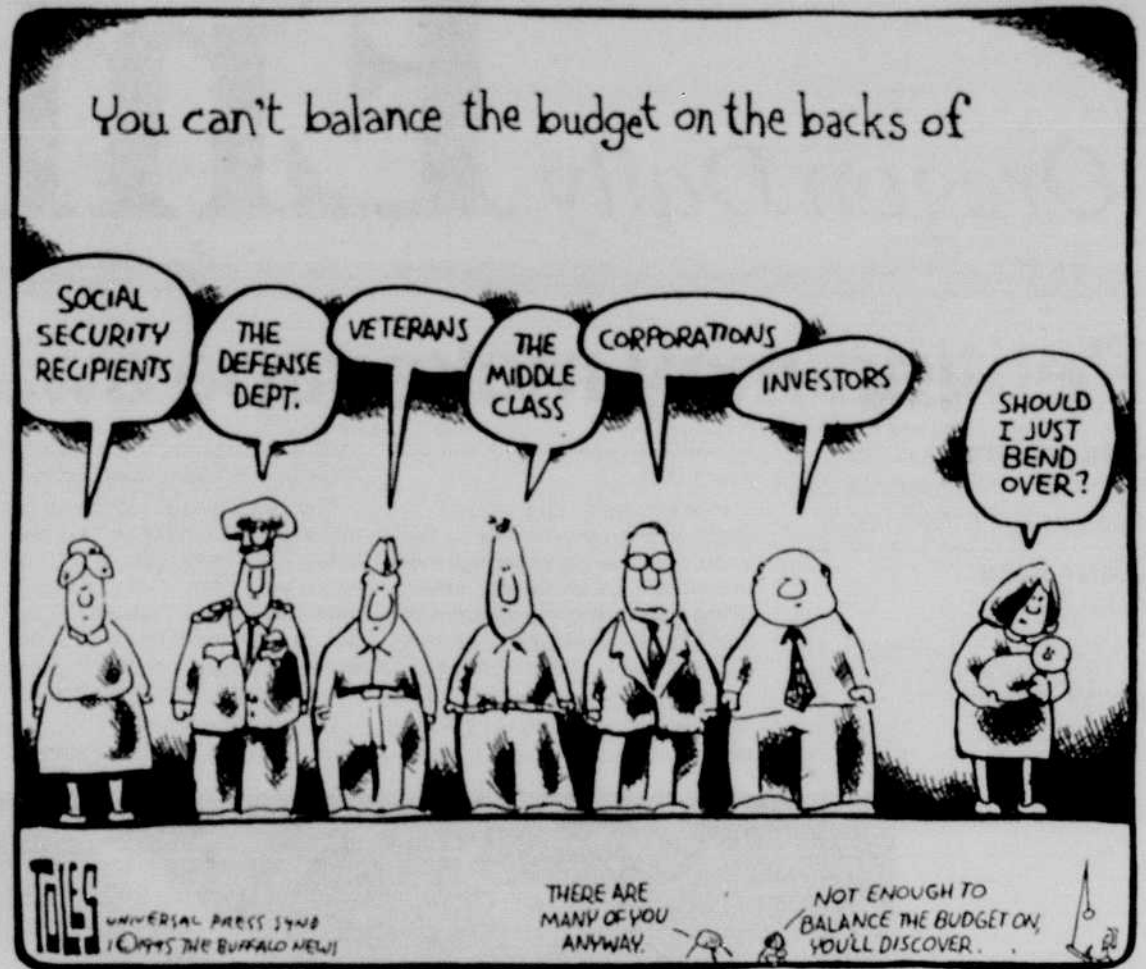
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■ OPINION

Media not to blame for problems



PAUL VAN SICKLE

Everywhere I turn, someone's blaming the media. If they're not being derided for their glorification of violence, they're being blamed because O.J. Simpson won't get a fair trial. Maybe it's because I'm training for a career in "the media," but I can't help thinking how this blaming of the media is a little out of hand.

I would like to address this issue of the word "media" before I go any further. An overly abused term, it generally refers to all kinds of publications designed for public consumption that includes *The New Republic*, *Weekly World News*, and *The New York Times*. It also includes *Hard Copy*. The word also tends to indicate films, broadcast news programs and even *The Limbaugh Letter*. When people use the term media, I don't think they often understand all the people they implicate when they say they're being unfair or impartial. Some of those mediums aren't obligated to be impartial. But let's move along under the assumption that when an average American uses the term media, he or she is referring to the newspaper and news magazine press.

For example, when someone says "The media are just trying to sell more newspapers," or "The media glorify violence so," I can't help but think of how this reflects on that person's ignorance. Yes, newspapers try to sell copies of its publication, and yes, broadcast news shows a lot of violence on television. It's not as if we have a peaceful society full of understanding and caring for others. The media are trying only to tell us about it. It's

their job.

That's right, I said. It's their job.

Newspapers put shocking stories on the front page because they want people to buy it. A newspaper is a business, like any other. It has to make enough money in order to cover its costs and continue publishing.

I know that doesn't necessarily make it OK, but let's also consider the difficulties in trying to sell a printed-on-paper-reading-intensive medium to the American of the '90s.

The vast majority of newspapers in this country, believe it or not, is dedicated to impartiality and a certain amount of social morality. Sure, there are these publications called "the tabloid press," but we assume a certain level of awareness on the part of the public to know that it is these publications' purpose to invent stories that will grab your attention.

That may be the newspaper's only fault: that it has to make money. And it does make money. That means, people buy those newspapers with lurid and shocking stories on the front pages. I think the American public doesn't want to admit that it actually likes reading about violence sex, violent crime and so forth. *A Current Affair* continues to prosper on network television with just such stories. It wouldn't prosper without reasonably high ratings, and it wouldn't have high ratings if people didn't watch it.

Magazines, on the other hand, are rarely obligated to the same level of impartiality. Many magazines pride themselves on their freedom to publish their opinion. That's OK; they make their money that way.

But for some people, that isn't good enough. For example, a certain right-wing talk show host loves to complain about the "liberal media." And he says it as if the media have only recently become leftist. The reality is that the newspaper has always attempted to be a catalyst for

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change. Even in the 1800s, when many newspapers were still partisan, and most politicians were Republican, one of the newspaper's main missions was to move towards political change and improvement.

So, if the media are liberal, it isn't a new thing. Limbaugh must have known that before he went into broadcasting. But that's OK. That's how he makes his money.

Americans love to blame someone else for their problems. The media are such an easy target because of the nebulous nature of the word. Nobody knows just at whom that blame is being aimed. Yet, we also fail to remember the freedoms we have granted the media in this country. "Our First Amendment rights" is so often cried in defense so often, it is strange that it is forgotten when it comes to a publication's opinion. Instead we scream, "You're supposed to be impartial!" because those opinions don't coincide with our own.

So don't blame the media. It's probably not their fault O.J. Simpson won't get a fair trial, and it's not the reason the American public likes violence so much, as much as Oliver Stone would like to have us believe. They just try their hardest to bring events to your doorstep and then provide a forum about those events. That should be the least we can expect of them. And if you are going to blame the media, at least try to use another word.

Paul Van Sickle is a columnist for the *Emerald*.