

Debate still smoldering on the ODE op-ed pages

■ OUR OPINION: Many students apparently don't care about bigger issues

Whew. What a wacky term this one turned out to be.

Most of us survived the wind storms, ice-storms, the big flood of 1996 and winter's parting shot with the late snow fall in February.

Often, the issues and topics covered by our editorial staff and columnists over the last three months were as varied and as unpredictable as Mother Nature herself.

Despite our journalistic commitment to cover a wide range of concerns, the *Emerald* has had to routinely bat down its hatches to weather accusations of not only being mediocre and boring, but of failing to comment on serious issues. And when we do cover the serious issues, which is often, then something strange happens.

Nothing.

That's right. Throughout this past term, our editorial desk and columnists wrote about everything from national politics to assisted suicide. Usually, feedback was light to non-existent.

In trying to decipher the reason for this apathy, the editorial board recently came up with two conclusions; either people agree with our slant on any given topic, or they flat-out don't care one way or the other.

Don't get us wrong. We sincerely welcome the feedback we do get. Without it, there would be no healthy dialogue or debate. It's just that sometimes we are perplexed by the issues that do press the campus community's hot buttons.

Last week, when we proposed that creationism (as well as evolution) be taught to school children as another theory that attempts to explain the origins of life, the gloves came off, and we were buried alive with responses.

When we suggested late last term that it might be a good idea for people to wear personal locator devices when hiking or climbing (after two University students disappeared in the Sisters), people went nuts and aggressively opposed the idea. We even got saluted in one letter-to-the-editor with the angry letter writer's middle finger.

Immature and petty, yes, but feedback nonetheless.

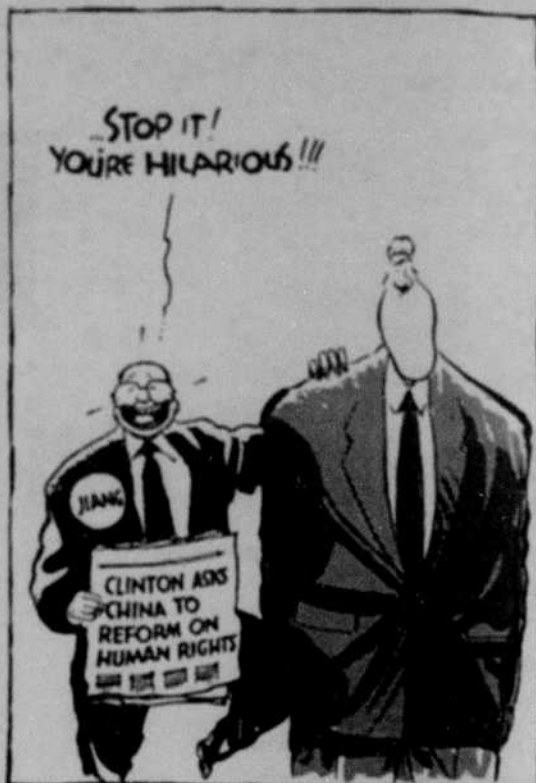
But when our op-ed writers delved into issues like the peace process in Israel and genocide in Bosnia, the silence was deafening.

One of our columnists, Sonja Sherwood, wrote about Israel, Ireland and China, as well as many academic-related issues, but the campus had no response.

She got responses to only two of her columns: her sarcastic unveiling of Ian Fleming's Bond Girls netted one letter, and her tongue-in-cheek look at the struggles between car drivers and bicyclists (she drives a Buick) harvested a letter so vicious and mean that we decided not to print it.

When we editorialized about racism on campus, we only received four letters. Legalizing prostitution brought in about the same number of responses.

Despite the unpredictable reactions, we will continue to try and bring up issues we feel have an impact on the lives of students at this university.



Friendship brings foreign violence home

When international conflicts threaten the life of someone we know, those conflicts suddenly become personal.

Last Friday, Taiwanese students staged a demonstration in the EMU Courtyard, calling attention to mainland China's war games in the waters around Taiwan.

Those "games" are so threatening, so deliberate, that many of those students are talking about returning to Taiwan to help defend it against an invasion by China. If there is an invasion, many will probably be killed.

The students were asking people to sign a petition begging the U.S. government to persuade China to stop its aggression. They were not asking for military intervention because they know that if a war does start, there will be no winners, only survivors, and not many of them.

They were asking the United States to help prevent a war, to help prevent Taiwan from being swallowed up by China, and to help prevent a genocide similar to the one that took place in Tibet.

Three aspects of the demonstration are especially noteworthy.

The first was the earnestness and intensity of the demonstrators. They were asking for help in defending their country, their homes from destruction. They were asking for help in keeping Taiwan "safe and free."

The second aspect was their consideration for the students and people of mainland China. In America, we usually demonize real and potential enemies, but the demonstrators emphasized that their enemy is not the people of China; it is the Communist government of China. "The people of China are like brothers and sisters to us. We do not want to fight them; we just want to live in peace and freedom."

The last aspect was the reaction of people passing by the demonstration. Many of them took the time to stop and listen. Many took the time to read and sign the petition.

Others seemed to pass by without even glancing toward the demonstrators.

I suppose that this is fairly normal, and I know that getting to classes, the EMU computer lab, or wherever can seem to be the most important thing at the moment. But it bothered me that so many ignored the pleas of the Taiwanese students.

I must admit that I am biased on this subject. You see, one of the demonstrators is a friend. He is one of the most positive, cheerful, intelligent and talented people I have met at the University, and the thought that he will probably be killed if a peaceful solution is not found makes this conflict personal for me.

Like most people, I feel a sympathy and a sadness for the victims of the many wars that plague our planet.

When I hear of the death tolls and atrocities in Bosnia, Rwanda, Mexico, El Salvador and East Timor (to name just a few), it adds to the depressing weight that comes from seeing

repeated examples of mankind's ability to damage and destroy almost everything and everyone. But these examples remain almost abstractions, and they bring a dull pain, like fatigue or exhaustion.

A good friend may die because of this conflict, and that makes it more than an abstraction.

The thought of so many more people dying brings the pain of fatigue. The thought of him being killed because China's leaders need to shore up their sagging prestige and power brings a pain as sharp as a hard blow to the chest. Perhaps that is what it takes to motivate people to take action against injustice.

China's aggression against Taiwan is as unjust as its invasion of Tibet. Taiwan declared its independence from China in 1949, and for the last 47 years it has operated as a self-governing, sovereign state.

How long does a country have to be self-governing before the world recognizes it as a sovereign nation?

If Taiwan sat on an ocean of oil like Kuwait, the United States, Europe and Japan would be lining up to ensure its independence from China. Unfortunately, access to China's enormous consumer market is a much more powerful lure than supporting the moral right of Taiwan to govern itself.

To their credit, House Republicans passed a non-binding resolution that says, "U.S. military forces should defend Taiwan in the event of invasion, missile attack or blockade by the People's Republic of China." One U.S. carrier is already in the area and another is on its way.

Like the Taiwanese students, I would rather see a non-military solution to this situation. To that end I offer the following suggestion: Stop buying products made in China. Get on the Internet and organize a world-wide, popular boycott.

I know this sounds simplistic, and I can already hear the objections: "It won't work." "It only hurts the workers." "American business is a positive influence in China."

But consider this: One way to get someone's attention is to slap him in the face — the military "solution." It doesn't take much to imagine what happens if China decides to "slap" back.

An alternative is to say, "Look, no one is going to buy your goods until you stop threatening your neighbors." If such a boycott is only partially successful, China may decide that the conquest of Taiwan is not worth the costs.

It may be a long-shot, but it's a lot better than the face-to-face confrontation between two military super-powers that is building right now. And maybe my friend won't be killed.

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