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# OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

What did you think of this year's Homecoming? What should be different about next year's? Let us know.

## Two different worlds

Returning students must juggle familial and domestic responsibilities along with the usual classload

A little over two weeks ago, a friend asked me what I thought of that day's *Emerald* editorial. When I told him I hadn't read it he said, "You gotta read it! You're not going to believe what they wrote!" He was right.

Of all the possible topics the *Emerald* could have addressed, they decided to whine about types of students they found personally "annoying" ("The Usual Suspects," *ODE*, Oct. 21). They stereotyped half a dozen "offenders of

basic classroom etiquette," and concluded that "they need to be educated and alerted to their offenses."

Perhaps it's time the *Emerald* was "educated and alerted." That editorial was trivial and demonstrates the juvenile insensitivity of its editorial board to the difficult conditions

many of the students on this campus face.

One paragraph stands out as a classic example: "An infamous sub-group in this collective is made up of those few 'returning' students who feel the need to be very loud, obnoxious and utterly meaningless. They love to ask questions — endlessly. Perhaps they need to prove they belong in a classroom of younger, less attentive students."

"Returning students" is a name given to non-traditional students, students who have interrupted their education for a significant period of time — usually years, sometimes decades — because of career and/or family obligations. Approximately one third of the students on this campus are returning students, according to the Office of the Registrar.

They are not here because college is the place to be between high school and the "real" world. They have already been out in that real world, and have returned because they want to acquire more knowledge and skills. They are here because college is, or is supposed to be, a place to learn. And yes, they love to ask questions "endlessly" because that's an important part of the learning process. It's too bad the "younger, less attentive students" don't realize that. The *Emerald's* suggestion that asking questions be confined to office hours seems to indicate they don't realize that either.

The *Emerald* noted that "being in college has its problems. Besides the many tests, essays and projects required under impending deadlines, many of us have financial problems that often force us to juggle multiple jobs outside of our usual class load." Now consider what it is like for many, if not most, of the returning students who are not only students and wage earners, but also parents.

Returning students not only have all the burdens that traditional students have, but most of them must also support and nurture a family. When they



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/EMERALD

get home from school or work they have a whole load of family chores to do on top of homework. What makes it even harder is that families of returning students often don't consider how hard the school workload is. The spouse and children still expect to be cared for the way they were before Mom or Dad went back to school, and the returning students get torn between the desire to learn and the guilt of not taking care of the family the way they used to.

It's true that many returning students feel alienated from most of their classmates, and it is also true that many of them question almost daily if they made the right decision to return to college. But they don't "need to prove they belong in a classroom" to anyone, least of all the "younger, less attentive students." They have already paid, and are still paying, more dues than most of their classmates.

It is not surprising that the *Emerald* is oblivious to the problems and barriers faced by returning students. So is most

of this campus. I've only found two groups specifically designed to help older students regardless of race, gender or religious beliefs. The first is Academic Learning Services in Room 68 of PLC. They have numerous programs to help returning students succeed. The second group is the Returning Students Association in Suite 7 of the EMU. It's an ASUO-sponsored student group. Theo Burnette is the chairperson. He has a good heart and does everything he can to help returning students cope with many of the obstacles they face daily.

Now that they have been "alerted," perhaps the *Emerald* will eventually become "educated" to the fact that a newspaper's content is more important than its layout, and trivial editorials and reporting will cause people to joke about the *Emerald* rather than read it.

Larry Haftl, a returning graduate student in journalism, is a columnist for the *Emerald*. His views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.

### LETTERS

#### Party lines

In the *Emerald* article dealing with political parties on campus, University College Republicans Chairman Joel Thompson said, "It's easy to be a Democrat on campus, but it takes guts to be a Republican (*ODE*, Oct. 31)." This is probably the smartest thing I've ever heard a Republican say but not for the reasons Thompson might think.

Thompson has hit the nail on the head. Yes, it is easy to be a Democrat when higher education, the environment, a woman's right to choose and workers' rights are threatened by Republican legislators. And it is easy to be a Democrat when Republicans equate legal and illegal immigrants and try to kick children of illegal immigrants out of public schools or deny them the citizenship they deserve. The fundamental strategy behind the Republican party lies in finding a scapegoat for each of society's ills.

What bothers me about Thompson's opinion, however, is the obvious self-righteousness of his remarks. The holier-than-thou attitude that he displays is typical of Republican ideology. The theory is as follows: Students are not intelligently choosing their leaders based on the issues but instead upon the fact that "everyone else is doing it." Students at the University are smart enough to decide for themselves which party to affiliate with. Simply because they choose to side with Democrats more often than Republicans does not mean they are the peer pressure junkies Thompson makes them out to be.

Thompson is right — being narrow-minded takes guts. But is it worthy of a pat on the back?

Lindsay Soto  
Political Science

### LETTERS POLICY

The *Oregon Daily Emerald* will attempt to print all letters containing comments on topics of interest to the University community.

Letters to the editor must be limited to no more than 250 words, legible, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is submitted.

The *Emerald* reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style.

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