

▶ SOUND OFF With dead week starting and finals just around the corner, is it still possible to get in the holiday spirit? Let us know.

OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

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BY PHONE: (541) 346-5511
BY E-MAIL: ode@oregon.uoregon.edu
IN PERSON: Suite 300, EMU

Drug education: 'Just say no' just won't work

Until anti-drug programs in schools get with reality, they won't get results

Whether it's MTV or *The Oregonian*, no one can resist pointing out that teenage drug use is on the rise. While the figures vary depending on where one hears them, it is generally accepted that more young people are doing drugs now than before. While it's debatable how high the increase in teen drug use really is, one thing seems certain. Despite over a decade of anti-drug education programs, the appeal of drugs

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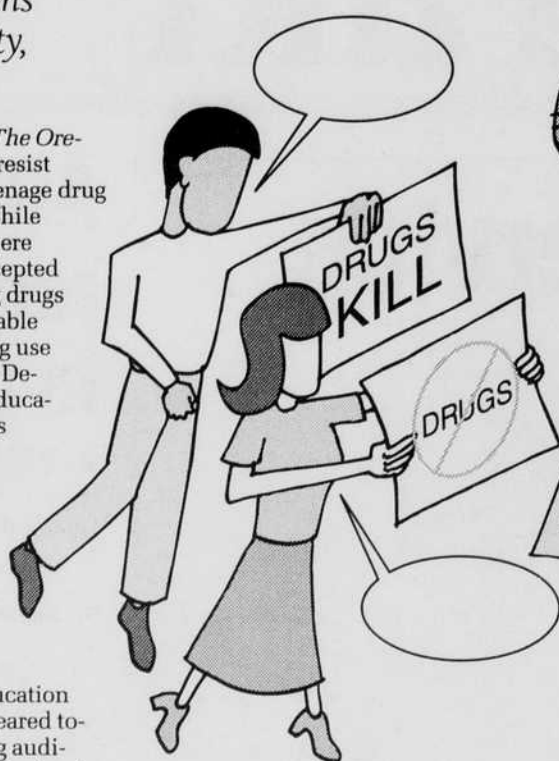
Brian Diamond

among young people is not going down. The question that begs answering is, why?

One reason is that drug education programs are geared toward the wrong audience. Drug education training begins in elementary school with the hope of getting the message out at an early age. Of course, one may wonder what good it really does to tell a fifth grader to just say no. Most elementary kids are thinking about their new Nintendo game, not shooting up. Even in middle school, when some people begin to experiment with drugs, the majority of students have little interest in getting high. So when you tell eighth graders to just say no, they think: "Sure, why not?" But the fact is most middle school students aren't thinking of saying yes in the first place. And those who do try drugs at such a young age will be the least likely to listen to the wise words of their drug education instructor.

Most people's first experience with drugs is in high school. Despite the fact that this is where most experimentation starts, there is hardly as much drug education at the high school level as there is in middle school. The idea is that after years of education, high school students have enough information to make smart decisions. So why don't high school students heed the advice of their earlier drug education classes? The problem isn't that they forgot what they learned; it's that they remember.

One of the flaws with drug education is that it's really



anti-drug propaganda, not education. This isn't to say we shouldn't teach people not to use drugs; we should. It's just saying in elementary and middle school, students aren't given the whole truth. They are given the portion of the truth that supports the message that drugs are bad. For instance, I doubt any anti-drug program is going to stress that marijuana is less physically addictive than alcohol and cigarettes. Even if the statement is true, the whole point of drug education is to show all drugs are bad. To say one isn't as bad as another weakens the argument. It is equally unlikely that any drug education program would describe how great cocaine feels when one uses it. Again, the idea is to discourage drug use. Therefore, any information that doesn't support the idea that drugs are bad is not given — even if it has some truth to it.

While it may seem like a good idea for an anti-drug program to provide only anti-drug information, doing so can

undermine the entire validity of the program. When people enter high school and first come in contact with the drugs they learned about earlier, they realize things aren't as simple as drug education programs portrayed them. First of all, almost all anti-drug programs focus on peer pressure. Kids are trained to just say no when they're offered drugs. What most participants of these programs grow up expecting is that people will try to stuff drugs down their throats as soon as they hit high school. The fact of the matter is it just doesn't happen that way.

What does happen is people look around them and see others experimenting with drugs. And what they see doesn't seem to reflect what they have learned. Not everyone who tries marijuana starts smoking crack. Not everyone who drinks becomes an alcoholic, and not everyone who tries drugs suffers from bad grades. There are even people out there who try cocaine (next to heroin, the ultimate no-no in the field of drug education) at a party and don't become hooked. As people see more and more contradictions in the real world with what they learned in school, they begin to reject all the information they got from drug education. Once this happens, all the good information about the dangers of drugs is filtered out.

Ultimately, the world of drugs is not as simple as "just say no." It is complicated and filled with people who become addicted and with those who don't. We learn from education, but we learn even more from reality. For drug education to start working, it must get in touch with this reality. Let's not pretend that people don't casually use drugs. Let's not forget that for every person who dies from a drug overdose, at least nine other people survive. If we want people to say no, give them the facts. Until drug education programs start telling it like it is, there is no reason to expect kids to listen.

Brian Diamond, is a columnist for the Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper. Brian can be reached at brin@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

Oregon Daily Emerald

P.O. BOX 3159, EUGENE, OREGON 97403

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year and Tuesday and Thursday during the summer by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co. Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon. A member of the Associated Press, the Emerald operates independently of the University with offices at Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union. The Emerald is private property. The unlawful removal or use of papers is prosecutable by law.

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Newsroom: (541) 346-5511

Display Advertising: (541) 346-3712

Business Office: (541) 346-5512

Classified Advertising: (541) 346-4343

LETTERS

Forgotten coverage

Your coverage of the men's and women's cross country teams' performances at the NCAA Championship meet was disheartening to say the least (*ODE*, Nov. 26). The men's basketball preview got more ink, and it was just a preview of one game — the opening game of the season, at that. Also receiving more ink was a whiny plea for help in getting to a bowl game for a football team that finished a mediocre 6-5 on the season in one of the least competitive conferences in college football.

The Duck men's cross country team, which was consistently ranked among the top five nationally all season, finished an exciting third place. This is the 13th time in the last 30 years they have accomplished this feat — an amazing story of success for the most successful athletic program in University history. In that same amount of time, the men's football and basketball programs have combined for zero finishes in the top ten nationally.

Furthermore, the men cross country team produced two All-Americans (Matthew Davis and Oliver Wirz), and the women produced one (Marie Davis). The Duck football team only managed to garner one player on the all-conference squad.

I understand the fact that both football and basketball produce hundreds of times

more revenue for the University than cross country. However, a daily student newspaper should recognize the accomplishments of the hardest-working group of student athletes at this university with more than a passing fancy. University athletics are about a lot more than money, and a third place finish in the nation is deserving of a lot more respect.

It is more important to cover what actually has happened than what will or could or should happen. The news of the day was the national championship cross country and you failed to recognize the fact. Shame on you.

Andrew Millbrooke
Undeclared

Ducks guilty too

Thank you once again for sending your sorry excuse for a Civil War edition to Oregon State University's campus (*ODE*, Nov. 22). I particularly enjoyed Chris Hansen's article concerning the 100th Civil War game. Rumor has it that Hansen is a journalist. You could have fooled me!

Where did the *Emerald* dig this guy up? His photograph looked like something out of "America's Most Wanted." The paragraph I truly enjoyed was his attempt to belittle OSU's mascot, the Beaver. Wake up, Mr. Hansen. Your school's mascot is a duck — not very intimidating! Your beloved ath-

letic department had to rip off Walt Disney when designing the school's mascot. Furthermore, you have no sense of history concerning the Civil War. Five years is not an indicator of the overall series.

As for OSU's football team, it is downright awful. However, Beaver fans do not have to turn on their television sets in January and watch their teams get crushed by a top notch program. Can you say "Cotton Bowl," Mr. Hansen? When will you Duck fans figure out that you can't compete with the big boys of college football? Maybe the Ducks will still get an invitation to the widely hailed Weed Eater Bowl! As far as I can tell, the Pac-10 is sending the better team to the Aloha Bowl. Go California!

Rob Andrews
Graduate Student
Oregon State University

CORRECTION

In the "Reader Voices" section of the Nov. 27 opinion page, four students and community members were incorrectly identified. Doug King, a Eugene resident, and students Jessica Bartlett, Dore Zarlons and Vienny Nguyen had erroneous photos attached to their names and comments. The *Emerald* regrets the error.