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PERSPECTIVES

The trouble with being greek

One way or another, young pledges may not be getting what they bargained for

I had a vision the other day. It was of uncompromised youth, high hopes and clothes that don't come from Abercrombie & Fitch.

I was riding my bike through the EMU Amphitheater when I noticed a group of young, fresh male faces gathered around the steps. They looked excited to be there, didn't have hats on and looked entirely different from one another.

I was confused, to say the least, because this was a system-wide fraternity function. I breathed a sigh of relief, and then a silent scream, when I realized these individuals were potential "pledges," and they may be part of the greek system in just a few short days.

In case you haven't noticed, scenes like this one have been playing out on and around campus for the last few weeks. Fraternity houses are

aggressively recruiting new students to join up at almost a frantic pace. It all culminates today with Bid Day, when many of the chapters will make formal offers to the best and brightest.

If this doesn't scare you, it probably should. Besides the high school-like judgments being laid on the freshmen (Am I good enough for this house? Do you want me?), there's the even scarier prospect of these promising new students being thrown into a culture that, at least publicly, seems to be in disarray.

The issue of individuality

is important, but there's an even bigger problem. The fraternity system is confused. The leadership on the Interfraternity Council talks about staying true to the original ideals of the houses, such as leadership, scholarship and fellowship, but many of the members don't feel the same way.

The prime example of this division is alcohol. greek leaders talk about shifting the focus off drinking and onto virtues such as brotherhood and community service. The boldest move in this direction, at least in principle, has been this substance-free housing concept now making the rounds both locally and nationally.

But many of the fraternity brothers don't seem to be warming to the idea that alcohol won't be the center of all social activity and, at least in the public eye, what fraternities stand for. As usual, several complaints of members having women or alcohol at their houses during Rush Week, a major no-no, have already been compiled by rush officials. And Steve Sutton, IFC president, acknowledges

edges the concept of alcohol-as-God will be "slow to die."

So where does this leave all these new recruits, eager for some hot sorority girls or maybe just some old-fashioned brotherhood? It definitely doesn't serve them well. A fraternity system in transition or at odds with itself is worse

than either extreme. Now, pledges with parrying on their mind may find it more difficult to satisfy their most primal urges.

And most discouraging of all, recruits who don't want to drink could enter the system,

spurred on by "substance-free" housing.

And then, on a Friday night, they'll find themselves sipping a Big Gulp in front of the tube while the rest of the boys are out having some real greek fun.

Of course, even if some common ground can be established, the pledges have a few more challenges ahead of them. First, they better be

ready

to be vilified, no matter how unfairly. The public image of fraternities is not nearly what it used to be, say, 30 years ago.

The long-standing tradition of hazing has been outlawed, perceived as cruel and unusual punishment. Locally, incidents such as the trashing of the Sigma Phi house in 1996 have presented a picture of brothers as brutes. And with recent deaths of students nationally on chapter-sponsored beer binges, fraternities are even seen as deadly.

And on a lighter note, the recruits need to be ready to be laughed at. The common wardrobe (fleece, North Face jackets, khakis and baseball caps with horrendously curved brims) is a running joke to non-greeks. Chapter GPAs are a literal pitfall, and local membership is down 25 percent in the last three years.

All in all, it doesn't paint a pretty picture, especially for the young ones I saw the other day. I'll understand if the idea of Nicole or Brandi or a crate of Corona defeats even your best intentions, but it doesn't mean that I won't stop hoping for you.

Ashley Bach is a columnist for the Emerald. His work appears on alternate Fridays. His views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.

Opinion



Ashley Bach



Chris Hutchinson Emerald

Letters to the Editor

Controversy continues

There were a number of points that I didn't see brought up during the Emerald's examination of the religious discrimination case being brought against the Computing Center (ODE, Sept. 30) regarding their elimination of alternative-religion newsgroups (alt.pagan, alt.satanism, alt.magick, and the alt.magick.hierarchy).

For starters, contrary to the claim made by Joanne Hugi (Computing Center director), these newsgroups are not adequately available from any of the University's USENET news servers. Furthermore, in response to her statement that "We [the Computing Center] don't carry things that are against regulations or are illegal," neither paganism nor Satanism are against University regulations or illegal. They are, in fact, religious expressions protected under the First Amendment and the 1964 Civil Rights Act, not to mention ORS code and the University's own anti-discrimination policy.

This University and its Comput-

ing Center are public institutions, collecting taxpayer dollars, and are thus required to abide by our nation's laws against discrimination. We all have reason to be concerned when the employees of the Computing Center (or any other public institution, for that matter) use those resources given to them by our citizens to discriminate against a certain class of people, no matter how unusual or unpopular that class of people may be. Such maneuvers often mark the beginning of a larger campaign to disenfranchise even larger groups of people.

If the Computing Center should prevail in this case, it would set a dangerous precedent. Such a finding would demonstrate that the Computing Center's employees need not consider themselves bound by guidelines restricting them from censorship and discrimination; it would show that those "public employees" are free (as they have claimed all along) to limit Internet access in any way they choose. This time it is newsgroups involving paganism that

are in question. What are the next controversial topics on the chopping block? Pro/con abortion discussions? Flag burning? Gun control? Race relations? These don't even have the advantage of protection against religious discrimination. This censorship needs to be stopped while we still have the means available.

Craig Hunt
Anthropology

OSPIRG fine without funds

I was delighted to see in the Emerald that OSPIRG was working to warn students about the dangers of credit cards (ODE Oct. 1). This was a giant leap in the direction of proving the point that the Honesty Campaign made during last spring's elections: OSPIRG will continue to exist at UO without student funding (\$147,000/year; \$8.65/student/year; \$2.88/student/term). I was heartened to see that OSPIRG is as vital and active as they have ever been.

I was, however, a little dismayed to learn that there is a group calling themselves the "Committee to Reestablish OSPIRG" here on campus. Clearly, OSPIRG is already established here on campus and has been for some 20-plus years. There is no need for a committee to re-establish OSPIRG, although maybe the committee could simply be the first volunteers for the Streamwalk and Hunger and Homelessness campaigns.

Maybe what the committee is really trying to do is re-establish student funding of OSPIRG. Maybe, in an attempt to justify all the PIRG employees that came here last spring to campaign full time, the committee really just wants our money back and is trying to validate themselves and OSPIRG in the students' eyes by telling students to be careful when they get and/or use credit cards.

OSPIRG's campaigns never needed to be validated on the grounds of its programs, just its overall cost. We just ask for a little accountability when it comes to

spending our money. Obviously, OSPIRG is doing just fine without it, and as long as they continue to get as much space in the ODE as they have and get support from the likes of Bobby Lee, they will prosper and flourish for a long time without any help from the students' pocketbooks.

Robert L. Wasson III
English, Ethnic Studies

Corrections

The Oct. 5 story "Congress OKs lower interest rate on loans" should have said students who want to consolidate their loans should call the Loan Consolidation Network at 1-800-557-7392 for an application.

The graphic for the Oct. 8 story "Transfer adds depth, character to UO" should have identified Steve Fein's 5,000-meters personal record as 13 minutes, 40 seconds. The Emerald regrets the errors.