

PERSPECTIVES

Monday

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Why we do what we do

The pungent odor from a 79-cent can of tuna fish wafts through the Oregon Daily Emerald office, chomping at the collective sense of smell like an angry barracuda.

One of the reporters must be hungry again. And broke, hence the cheap sandwiches for lunch.

Trust me, the life of a student-journalist has its perks — sleeping on the Emerald couch anytime we want and having access to cable on the newsroom TV is pretty sweet — but putting up with the unpleasant aroma of your colleague's money-saving eating habits ain't one of them.

COMMENTARY

Jack Clifford

There are other drawbacks, of course. Unless you enjoy receiving early morning phone calls from bill collectors because the monthly pay here at the Emerald registers about 2.0 on the Richter scale of income. Who knows, maybe you'd enjoy leaving school with less than a sterling GPA because covering yet another student protest — was it animal rights or human rights this time? — took precedent over that Info Hell project.

So, beyond all of this self-pity, what does it mean to be a student-journalist?

It means we wake up with a sense of purpose. We walk to class with our radar set on "feature story," wondering if this person or that one would make for a good profile article. We sit and listen to our professors for a minute or so, then zone out and rework in our head the lead to that day's front page story.

We also willingly put in about 40-50 hours a week — if we're lucky and it's not more — trying to satisfy our creativity jones. We stagger into the office by 10 a.m., stay until 7 p.m., 8 p.m., maybe midnight if some major news breaks, such as a major donor pulls \$30 million from the school.

But, we're not complaining. What other job pays money to go around and ask people questions, sometimes of a fairly personal nature? Well, excluding those jobs that involve discussing whether or not the medication dosages are working.

Don't be fooled, however. We get in our goof-off time and one look at the Emerald newsroom around 1 p.m. any day of the week could verify this. Until the clock creeps toward 2 p.m. or so, then as the time begins to accelerate toward 3 p.m. Finally, when the 4 p.m. deadline is a mere hour

away, the newsroom takes on a certain chaotic calm, with computer stations filled and sentences getting ferociously, and sometimes incorrectly, typed.

This is when the student-journalist works the hardest and, most often, taps out his or her best work. The adrenaline rush of pushing that deadline, while irking the editors in the process, is hard to resist.

But the journalist isn't always a writer. The Emerald newsroom is made up of a diverse cast of characters, which includes copy editors, photographers, graphic designers and illustrators. Then there's the business side of the operations: the managers, the sales reps, the ad designers, the classified advertising personnel and even the newspaper delivery staff.

Sure, maybe a photographer doesn't know a nut graph from a bar graph, and maybe a designer isn't up to speed on issues of libel. That doesn't matter.

We're all journalists up here on the EMU third floor, churning out a daily product with one goal in mind: To be a source of information for you, the student, the University staff member, the professor, the city councilor or the homemaker. Who knows, maybe even for the guy who walks along the streets of Eugene mumbling to himself.

We can't provide that information without input from you, however. We don't always know what's happening on campus or outside the boundaries of the University. We depend, for the most part, on readers and the public to help us generate stories.

If you think something fishy is happening in the food services department, we want to hear about it. If you think some athlete is getting a heavy dose of favoritism, call us up. If your professor

makes a pass at you, or makes you think that your grade depends on some quid pro quo arrangement, come talk to us. These and others are the news stories we want to research and write about.

But we also want to cover the triumphs in the community. We want to hear about the single mother of two, working two jobs, going to school full time and bringing home a 3.0 GPA. We want to know if your band just signed a recording contract with some hot-shot label. We want to be informed if your student group raised \$5,000 to help disadvantaged youth in the community.

Will we write about everything that you think is important? Unfortunately, no. Our normal paper size is anywhere from 16 to 24 pages. In an environment such as the University that is burgeoning with ideas and innovations, it is difficult to squeeze in the gamut. Throw in a wacky city culture, where any day can bring on a newsworthy event, and the space gets tighter and tighter.

There will always be groups and individuals who feel slighted or targeted by the Emerald. We can't do much to change that, except to express that we are just carrying out this job to the best of our abilities.

Just do us one favor. No matter what your opinion of the Emerald has been throughout the years — good, bad or indifferent — shelve it for now. I know for a fact because I regularly read our archives, that each and every newsroom staff, from the first Emerald issue approximately 100 years ago, has taken on this responsibility with dedication and professionalism. Pleasing all of our readers is impossible, however. So take this coming school year for what it is, a new start.

We also don't claim to be the end-all

source of information on campus; pick up the Oregon Commentator, the Oregon Voice, the Student Insurgent or one of the other student-produced papers lying around. Listen to KWVA, the campus radio station, if that's how you like to receive your news.

Just remember, though, we're all students, trying to make sense of this, the Information Age. I can't speak for those other news sources, but if you have a problem with the Emerald, a complaint about our coverage or, hey, maybe even a compliment about something we wrote, come on upstairs and let us know.

There might even be a tuna fish sandwich in it for you.

We didn't forget about everyone else

What does it mean to play any significant role on this campus, perhaps as a student involved in athletics or one jazzed about acting? What does it mean to be a professor or administrator at the University? What about a member of the campus or local arts community, what does that mean? In general, what does it mean to be a member of the Eugene community?

We certainly don't expect you to answer those questions all by yourself, so we're using this Back to the Books issue as a mini-guide to dissect that very theme: What does it mean?

In each of the five sections — Campus Life, Community, Pulse, Sports and this one, University — we have posed that question to eight people in each category. You can read each set of blurbs and determine where you fit into the mix.

Jack Clifford is the Emerald's editor in chief.



Illustration by Giovanni Salimena Emerald

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