

Consumers should get to know their sources

Tell us this: Who qualifies as a "journalist"? And now, who qualifies as "media"? What's the difference? And who should get to film the activities of police on public property?

These questions were raised again in Eugene on the Saturday before Halloween, when Tim Lewis and Steven Heslin were removed from a University parking lot without a reason by the Department of Public Safety and the Eugene Police Department. The two men, working for Cascadia Alive!, were filming the DPS as they dealt with alcohol violations.

Over the past couple of years, these questions have been asked more loudly, as independent media find it harder to cover police activities and people question if they really qualify as journalists.

For the sake of journalism, and the right of the public to know what goes on in their community, all types of media must be allowed access. Neither law enforcement agencies nor local governments should be allowed to determine who is a journalist. That's the job of news consumers. By the same token, activists cannot use their credentials as "media" to get involved in confrontations between police and activists. Such behavior also threatens the free press, and such activists rightly run the risk of being arrested, as does any citizen.

Independent media outlets like CopWatch and Cascadia Alive! are often treated more as watchdog groups than as news operations. Their agenda is questioned and their

actions closely monitored. But the police don't seem to question the agenda of local news outlets, even though many studies have shown that the public does sense a bias in mainstream media.

Mainstream journalists do their utmost to appear fair and balanced, even if the term "objective" is used less and less these days. No one is completely objective; it's not possible to remove the filters of life experiences when reporting. Fair and balanced seems to be a happy medium between biased and objective, but even as journalists choose how to present a story and what "sides" of the issue to cover, they exercise their prejudices, if unwittingly.

Independent media outlets don't always use the same "fair and balanced" standard. They don't have to, as there is no licensing procedure for journalists and no formalized media industry standards to adhere to. Some independent media outlets are unabashedly biased.

At www.indymedia.org, anyone can file reports and submit videotape of activist events, like the WTO meeting in Seattle or the political conventions this summer. Protesters involved in the event are often doing the reporting, and they're not pretending to call police headquarters and get a quote to show they're unbiased.

So when do the police have the right to stop these media from filming or remove them from the scene? After all, these videographers may not be getting all sides of the story. We hope the police never have the

right to remove them, unless they are committing a crime. Then remove them like any other criminal. But the question of the media participating in the activities being covered makes the scenario a little more sticky.

In journalism classes, students are exhorted to "know your sources." Be immersed in the scene you are trying to cover; know the people and the community and you can more accurately portray the events. And of course journalists must be involved at the scene of the event, if they are to record what happened.

But what about when Tim Lewis walks in the street, in the middle of a throng of protesters on June 18, 1999, to record what the protesters are saying and doing? He was treated as a protester. During his trial, police said he was interfering and breaking the law.

And what happened to the mainstream media sources who were standing in the street on June 18, 1999, to film the standoff between police and protesters, after the police had announced that standing in the street was against the law? The protesters moved onto the sidewalk and the mainstream broadcast journalists stood in the street to film. Police didn't seem to have a problem with it.

Because Lewis was convicted of interfering with a police officer and attempted assault on a police officer for the incident of June 18, ostensibly he did something more than simply record the protesters. But who is more accurately representing the events of the day: a mainstream journalist filming

from behind the police lines, or the independent media filming inside the group?

Both views are important. All media professionals should try to get a glimpse of every aspect of the scenario. And no one in the media should interfere with police. When they do, they become a protester, not a journalist.

Most importantly, it isn't the job of police or the government to decide who has a right to be recording events in public. If Tim Lewis, once convicted, wants to cover a story in the future, he needs to be allowed to do so. Just because Cascadia Alive! represents the interests of one segment of the community doesn't mean they should be denied access to events.

If any media outlet, mainstream or not, is doing a poor job of representing reality or is operating with an agenda, it's up to consumers to determine if they'll trust that information. Students who follow news events should always be questioning the sources form which they get information. What "sides" of the story are being told? Whose viewpoint is being presented? What's being left out?

These are important questions for the public to ask, and they can only be asked if all types of media are allowed to be standing in the parking lot when authorities deal with alcohol violations.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.

Our duty is not done, but work has only just begun



DIARY OF A MALCONTENT

MICHAEL J. KLECKNER

All right, the duty's done. Students cast their ballots. Congratulations. Oregon voters should be especially congratulated. Turnout was estimated at 81 percent Tuesday evening. Fantastic job, y'all.

I don't think, however, that the mail-in nature of the election had much to do with it.

According to the secretary of state's Web site (www.state.or.us), Oregon's average turnout in general elections since 1960 is 75 percent. The trend in primary elections is lower, with an average turnout since 1960 of 56 percent, and the turnout for the all-mail-in primary election this May was about the same, with 51 percent. The all-mail-in voting didn't make much difference.

I still think, however, that mail-in elections are the wave of the future. We need to join the future and encourage voter participation like other countries do: Give people more time and opportunity to vote. More states should give their voters a three-week balloting peri-

od and the accessibility of letting the post office deliver the ballot. Congratulations to Bill Bradley, the secretary of state, for doing so much work to make this happen in Oregon.

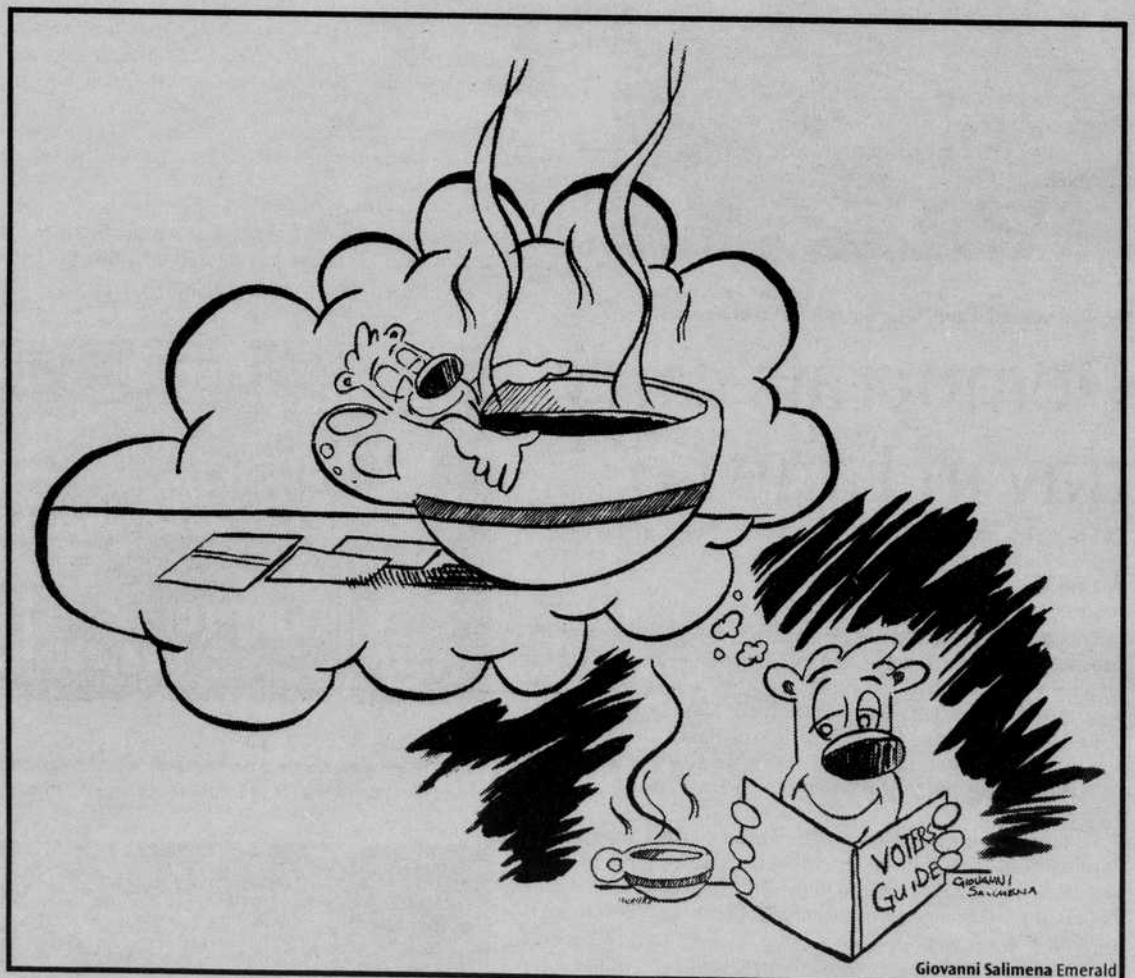
But the ballots have been mailed or dropped in the giant green box. Politicians have been elected and ballot measures have been decided. And so what now?

I guess y'all are off the hook. Participation is complete. Your voice has been heard and you can crawl back into the world of Fox programming, parties and sports for another four years. Like, sooo NOT.

Cajoling, conniving and convincing students to vote was just a ploy to get them actually involved in the political process. Your job is not done. If Ralph Nader hasn't been elected, the Republicans haven't retained control of the U.S. Congress and Measure 9 passed, what do you do?

Regardless of the outcome of any election, the real work to make our world look more like our secret ideal happens after the polls close. Representatives can only represent the people in the political process if they hear what the people think.

So when you pick up the newspaper and read that President Bush has just approved more drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, call



Giovanni Salimena Emerald

and tell him if you think it's wrong.

If President Gore decides to push for federal mandates of affirmative action at every university, write him a letter if you think it's wrong.

If there are issues not addressed by the elected representatives, send them e-mail and let them know.

This is the best part: Direct participation in the governing process can be achieved on an ongoing basis on your computer. You can find the e-mail addresses of politicians, write a message and send it, all in the time it takes to download the latest U2 single.

The duty's not done, and stu-

dents aren't off the hook. Congratulations for finally getting involved and making your voice heard. Now get to work.

Michael J. Kleckner is the editorial editor for the Oregon Daily Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald. He can be reached at opededitor@journalist.com.