

Free speech is for everyone

It's traditionally held that the point of a college education, in addition to earning a degree, is to broaden one's horizons. And part of the college experience is being exposed to different viewpoints and opinions and people who don't look, act or think the same.

Critics of the incidental fee have long argued that students should only have to pay fees to groups they personally support, if they have to pay incidental fees at all. But Alexis de Tocqueville warned us more than 150 years ago to beware the tyranny of the majority. Just because a group's opinions or views aren't shared by a majority of people on campus doesn't mean its perspective isn't as valid.

The Supreme Court agreed last year, ruling in *University of Wisconsin System v. Southworth* that student incidental fees help with "promoting extracurricular activities, stimulating advocacy and debate on diverse points of view and providing opportunities to develop social skills, all consistent with the university's broad educational mission."

Diversity has become something of a buzzword, but true diversity can only be achieved if everyone is allowed to speak. And yes, that includes groups that have caused controversy, such as The Insurgent and Justice For All. A liberal group to one person can be staunchly conservative to another. If we don't fund all groups, regardless of their viewpoints, we can't guarantee all perspectives will be heard.

There are plenty of groups on campus that I do not personally support — but that doesn't mean I would want to deny them funding. To exclude a group from re-

ceiving student incidental fees just because people don't like the views or actions of the group amounts to censorship.

Most people who were on campus last fall remember the controversy the Genocide Awareness Project caused when it was set up in the EMU Amphitheater. The graphic anti-abortion display sparked a heated debate and prompted protests and counter-protests.

It was my first term at a four-year university, and I remember being shocked at the graphic nature of the display and that it was allowed to be exhibited in such a high-traffic area. Everyone who witnessed the display had a strong reaction — and I was no different.

But despite my personal feelings about GAP, it definitely challenged my beliefs and truly made me think — not about abortion, but about free speech. I had always been a staunch defender of freedom of speech, but this made me re-examine my stance — did I really practice what I was preaching? Or was I only willing to listen to people who expressed views that aligned with my own?

Ultimately, the experience helped me realize that while there are many groups at the University that I do not agree with, they have the same right to express themselves as I do. We should be embracing and encouraging the diversity of opinions on campus, not stifling it. GAP may have pushed some people's buttons, but at least it got the campus talking about a sensitive issue.

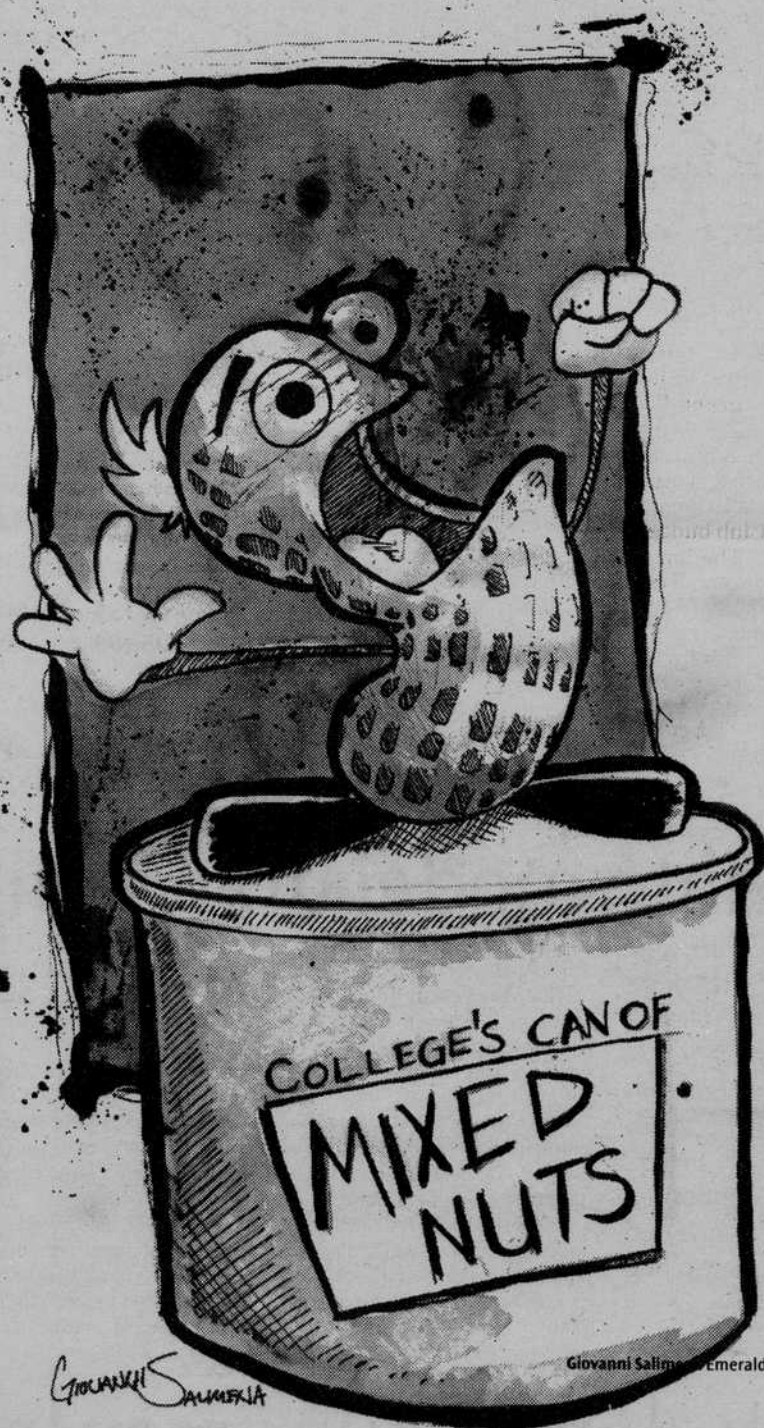
Many students, if given the choice between paying a fee and not, would opt not to pay at all. Apathy and self-interest are rampant on our campus, and a lot of

students don't realize that the incidental fee goes toward things many of us take for granted: the bus pass from Lane Transit District that allows students to ride free; tickets to Oregon sports events; and even EMU services, which help pay for the existence of services such as the Computing Center and the pool hall, The Break.

Everyone, whether they realize it or not, receives some benefit from the student incidental fee — so everyone should help pay it. If you don't like a group that receives fee funds, don't participate in events it sponsors. Don't help it raise funds. Don't sign its petitions or even talk to its members. Protest at its group meetings. Write letters to the editor or guest columns.

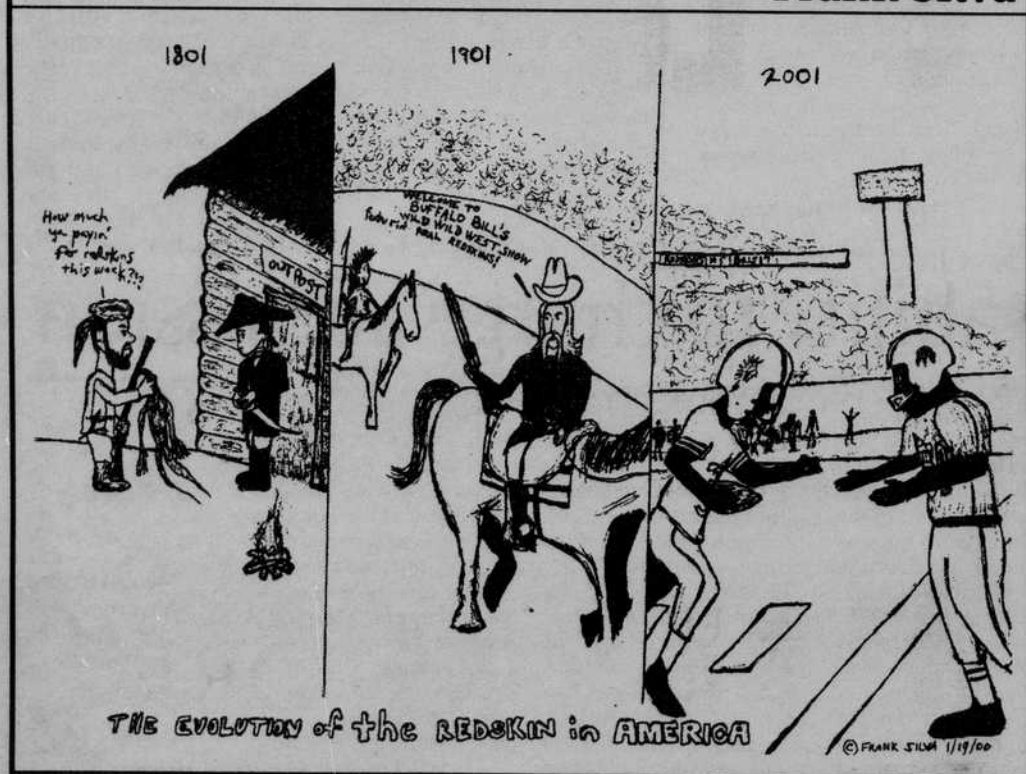
The bottom line is that groups are free to express their beliefs, just as you are free to agree or disagree with them. But don't take them out of the equation and not fund them because you don't like their beliefs — that scenario would leave us attending a bland vanilla university where open debate was discouraged, instead of one where people are exposed to the many different flavors of opinion.

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Leftfield

Frank Silva



Letters to the editor

Join the fight against anorexia

I was dismayed at seeing an overly thin woman under the caption "The Future of Fashion" on the Steamtunnels advertising insert found within the Feb. 7 issue

of the Oregon Daily Emerald. It's possible the model might naturally be that thin, but I doubt it. As a college newspaper, I hope you will get behind the promotion of a future absence of anorexia nervosa.

Brad Hachten
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