

PERSPECTIVES

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Stay vigilant against the threat of hate crimes

The past two weeks have been frightening and yet productive for students at Penn State University, located in the appropriately named Centre County in central Pennsylvania. Ordinarily, the Emerald editorial board focuses on issues directly concerning the University of Oregon. However, the events at Penn State are instructive for all of us, and they are scary enough to demand everyone's attention.

On April 20, a black student reporter for Penn State's student newspaper, The Collegian, received a typed death threat that also threatened the leader of Penn State's Black Caucus. It wasn't a simple "You're going to die" message. It said, in part, that "this is a white academy in a white town—in a white country and by god it's going to stay that way." The letter said to look for the body of a young black man in the woods of Centre County. Handwritten on the letter were the words "Grad Day = bombs-PSU."

The next day, the Black Caucus organized a protest. Twenty-six students were arrested after running onto the football field before the start of a game and refusing to leave. The protest was designed to make the community aware of the threatening atmosphere on campus, which the Black Caucus said the administration wasn't doing.

But wait, there's more. Three days later, on April 24, the body of a black man was found in Camptown, Pa., more than 100 miles from Penn State. Police said the killing wasn't related, but the discovery upped the stakes for students. An administration-planned "unity march" that afternoon was overtaken by Black Caucus members, who used the rally to demand an active response from the administration.

That evening, students camped out in the student union. Then on April 27, the body of a black man was found in the woods in Centre County, some 20 miles from the campus. Student fears and demands escalated.

The sit-in lasted until Thursday when an agreement was reached between students and the administration on a proactive diversity plan, including expansion of the African and African American Studies department and a \$900,000 commitment to create an Africana Studies Research Center.

Obviously we're horrified by the hatred and violence of the threat. We're dumbfounded that the administration barely responded. We're also outraged that no national news covered this story in detail—our information is from The Collegian and the Penn State Web site. Students received death threats last October. The FBI has been investigating for months. Police even visited Black Caucus offices in early April to warn students about death threats. The administration simply dragged its feet until students reacted, and it should be ashamed.

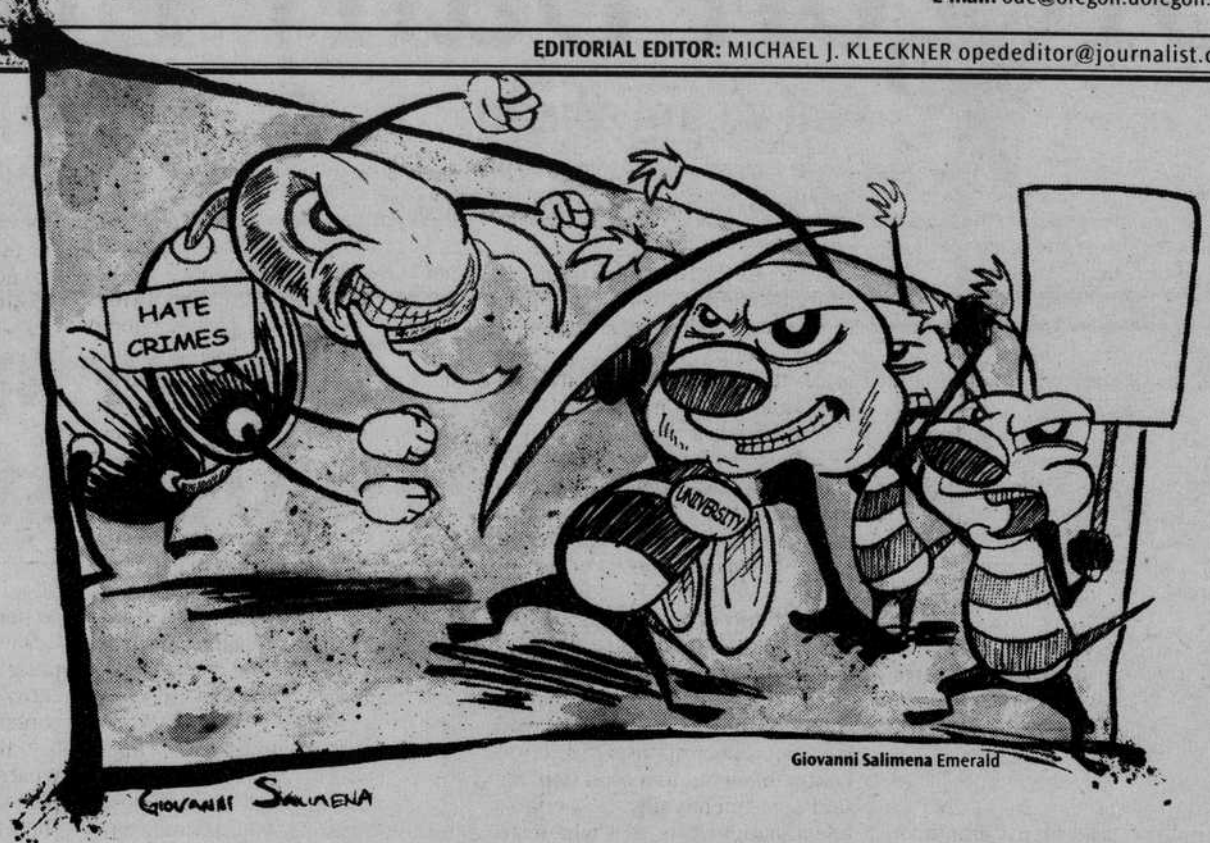
However, we also have a message for students at this University: Be vigilant. Don't assume our campus is clean of irrational, bigoted hatred. America is not a "white country," and it never was. Whites immigrated to this land along with people of color. The 2000 Census shows the diversity in America. But that doesn't stop some people from desperately wishing it were a "white country."

In 2000, there were 22 hate-crime complaints filed with the Eugene Police Department. Those are just the officially reported incidents; the actual number may be higher. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, Aryan Pride and Volksfront have a presence in Eugene, and organizations such as Communities Against Hate are working to stop them. Two years ago (almost to the day), a racist comment in a class right here at the University and further racist and sexist comments e-mailed to students in the class sparked a protest and sit-in at Johnson Hall.

While the University may not be a perfectly safe, racism-free and completely responsive environment, we would like to take a moment to thank all the people in the administration who have reacted immediately with concern for students this past school year. While we haven't always agreed with them (nor they with us), people such as Erica Fuller, Carla Gary, Anne Leavitt, Chicora Martin and Mark Tracy have been alert and responsive to students' concerns.

The University community should be proud of the strides it has made toward understanding and diversity, and it should feel relatively confident that, were an incident similar to the death threat at Penn State to happen here, our administration would handle the situation better. More importantly, though, we should all continue working together to build a community where those types of threats would never occur.

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



Resigning chief offers final words of wisdom

GUEST COMMENTARY

Robert S. Raschio

To ASUO President Jay Breslow: I want to submit my formal resignation as chief justice of the ASUO Constitution Court. The experience has most certainly been educational and interesting. My tenure at the University of Oregon Law School comes to an end on May 13, when I graduate and so must my tenure on the court.

If I may be presumptuous, I'd like to make three suggestions about the future of the court at the University.

First, the role of the court needs better definition. The ASUO Executive and the ASUO Student Senate can assist that by using the court in the means laid out in the Green Tape Notebook. The court is, by design, a body that should be available to answer questions, to avoid mistakes and to make student government run effectively. The genius of three branches of government is that it ensures all branches check each other's work and distribute power so no one branch gains total advantage.

Unfortunately, that is not the way things have run at the University. The court has been forced into the role of elections referee. The other two branches have ignored many responsibilities of the court, such as review of rules and deadlines, which are specifically laid out in the Green Tape Notebook. As a result, the court has not been able to assist in the smooth governance of the ASUO. It is a shame, but it can be changed with respect to the court's role in student government.

Second, the court should not be the elections referee. The executive is in charge of the administration of the ASUO. Lately, that difficult role has been thrust upon the court. The Elections Board must change their rules and set up a means of formal adjudication to ensure that elections run smoother. The current process is not efficient, not fair and leads to the transfer of power from the executive to the court. I believe it has done fundamental harm to the court and the ASUO.

Finally, there must be special care given to the choice of whom to put on the court. This court can and should be a place that students can turn to in the future for assistance. However, if the justices are unfriendly to student

needs, consider themselves smarter than everyone else or take advantage of the system by pushing their own personal agendas, the court is irrevocably injured. I have seen that this year, and it is unacceptable. These are important nominations, because the ASUO structure of government depends on an independent court. Those who would be justices must use sound discretion in the exercise of power. Please take the time to ensure that the new justices will use that discretion fairly.

Again, I want to thank all that I have worked with and come to know in the past year and a half. It has been quite the ride. I wish all of you well. The ASUO Constitution Court is a good institution worth protecting and empowering. Good luck on the continuing experiment of student government.

Robert S. Raschio was chief justice of the ASUO Constitution Court for the 2000-01 school year.

Letters to the editor

Three reasons why the Emerald stinks

1. An editorial board who wants to find the "middle ground" between racial equality and race-baiting advertising income.

2. An editorial board who wants to find the "middle ground" between a sexism-free campus and strip-club advertising income.

3. An editorial board who wants to find the "middle ground" between a woman's right to choice and Christian-right, pro-life advertising income.

My mother once told me, "You are what you do, not what you say."

Gary Malcolm
senior
computer and information science

Editor's note: The Emerald's editorial board is separate from the advertising department and has no control of the advertising policy of the newspaper.

Poll Results

Every week, the Emerald prints the results of our online poll and the poll question for next week. The poll can be accessed from the main page of our Web site, www.dailyemerald.com. We encourage you to send us feedback about the poll questions and results.

Last week's poll question

What should happen on the final episode of "Survivor"?

Results: 129 total votes

Colby is the final survivor. — 8 votes, or 6.2 percent

Colby finally loses immunity. — 18 votes, or 14 percent

Host Jeff Probst gets attacked by wild dingos. — 27 votes, or 20.9 percent

The jury drinks too much and is hung. — 33 votes, or 25.6 percent

CBS cans the stupid show. — 43 votes, or 33.3 percent

It is very pleasing that our poll respondents understand the insane lameness of this show. Only 26 people voted for the "real" answers. With luck, those 26 will soon get a "real" clue and watch something that matters.

This week's poll question

Should the Oregon Legislature forbid cities and counties from passing laws that ban smoking in bars, restaurants and bingo parlors?

The choices:

Yes

No

Don't know

CORRECTION

The phone number for University Housing is 346-4277. An incorrect number was given in a story about places to live ("Eugene offers variety in residential choices," ODE, May 4). The Emerald regrets the error.