

COMMENTARY

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Yesterday's Editorial

Halloween 1959

Halloween has come and gone with hardly a passing notice from University students. It seems true there were a number of parties based loosely upon the occasion, the most laudable in our minds being the Sigma Alpha Mu celebration for the children of Pearl Buck School.

One of the most enterprising fraternities added a new twist to the trick or treat routine. Going

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around to different women's living organizations, the group would demand a hearty buss from the girl who answered the door as fulfillment of the treat. It is reported they met with outstanding success.

Downtown the pace was a little swifter. Three gorgeously dyed chickens squawked discordantly with one frightened hen taking time out to lay an egg on the sidewalk as she fled down the street. It was a pathetic sight however, no matter what you think of chickens.

The movie houses were crammed. Two sports cars raced up Willamette Street, weaving through crowded traffic. The only thing they proved was how ignorant drivers of flashy sports cars can be.

The final episode occurred late that night. A couple, strolling about the fountain, in Eugene's city center, pointed laughingly at the foam created from a box of laundry soap dumped into the pool. The young lady, fascinated by the bubbles, began kicking at them. One particularly vigorous thrust with her foot sent her shoe flying through the air. It landed neatly in the center where it bobbed far out of reach. The maiden's distress was relieved however when her gallant escort, shoes and stockings in hand, waded out and retrieved it.

We hope the girl thanked her hero properly afterward. She was laughing too hard when we last saw her being hurried away by the fellow.

Editorial Policy

Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words. Please include contact information. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.

GUEST COMMENTARY

Kay S.
Byler

"Man, I wanna be a math GTF!"
— Actual quote from a student, when told I "only" teach one class per term

Not that I want to discourage anyone from going to grad school or anything, but I think there might be just a wee bit of misunderstanding among undergraduates as to just what is involved in being an "overpaid GTF," as the Oregon Commentator referred to us last week. So I thought I'd give a bit of a rundown on the real scoop.

I am a student and a teacher at the same time. On the student end, I take classes, do research and study for huge exams — to the tune of about 20-40 hours a week. I also teach a class each term. This means I give lectures, hold office hours, write and grade exams, compute and agonize over final grades, and organize a course Web site, for another 16-20 hours a week.

GTF as teacher

Pop quiz: Which takes longest?

- (a) Writing, proofreading and copying a 50-minute midterm
- (b) Grading the midterm (for about 35 students)
- (c) Writing make-up exams for two students who overslept

Actually they all take about the same amount of time, seven to 10 hours each. This in the middle of having my own midterms to take! This is why, heartless as it seems, I never give make-up exams. I also grade over several days, to avoid insanity.

GTF as student

"Why would you want to study math?" I am often asked with a sneer. "What's it good for, anyway?"

I am sure that many well-meaning students truly don't mean to insult me when they say this. Maybe it's some sort of weird way of conveying admiration. Anyway, aside from its myriad applications in biology, chemistry, physics, economics, statistics and every other science, math is good for expanding your brain to understand abstract concepts. Think of it as weightlifting for your mind.

And, despite popular opinion, even theoretical math is beautiful. Algebraic topology, for example, has no practical use at all that I know of,

but I study it because it fascinates me to consider worlds that are totally unlike our own.

Believe it or not, I learn a lot by teaching. GTFs unfortunately don't get to decide what should be taught. We're handed a syllabus and told, "You have 10 weeks. Good luck." So part of becoming a good teacher is figuring out what to emphasize and what to let the students figure out on their own. For example, in order to demonstrate a new concept clearly, should I avoid examples with a lot of messy algebra? Or should I give harder examples that might prepare students better for the homework? Both my teacher and student experiences affect my decisions on these and similar issues.

Despite these challenges, I find teaching immensely rewarding. After straining my own brain to learn the material required for my graduate work, it is often a relief to consider ideas I have mastered. But the most satisfying aspect of teaching is to see the light of understanding in students' faces. It is an honor and a joy to bring a great concept to your attention, and to see 35 simultaneous flashes of epiphany.

Have a great year, and I'll see you in class!

Kay S. Byler is a graduate teaching fellow in mathematics.

Letters to the editor

U.S. government trains terrorists

Every American knows by now that Osama bin Laden is the current devil of American foreign policy. He is the one who seems to be behind the attacks of Sept. 11. We are informed that he is a Saudi Arabian from a wealthy family who holds to an extreme fundamentalist version of the Islamic faith. Hardly a likable fellow.

The only problem is, like all devils, he is partly myth. Not that he doesn't exist, or for that matter, play a leading role within certain terrorist networks. He is such a power, but the various states now lining up to volunteer in the "war against terrorism" know quite well that he is not the lynchpin in worldwide terrorism. He is simply a major player specifically within the terrorist networks that have associations with Islamic fundamentalism.

But another fact that has been mentioned, but not explained is that bin Laden was once a CIA operative. He learned what he knows from this intelligence agency of the U.S. government. What was he trained for? To carry out terrorist activities for the CIA, or so one would have to assume. Like so many of America's enemies of the past several years, bin Laden is also a former ally who has gone renegade. This is the sort of company that all states seek, the sort of allies every ruling class courts. Why, then, trust our leaders when they call us to fight these terrorists they trained?

Brenton Gicker

student

Lane Community College

Patriotism means respecting dissent

I agree with graduate student Sean Walston's description of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks as "an atrocity" ("Peace activists are hypocrites," ODE, 10/22). I'm less comfortable with his description of peace activists as guilty of "ideological arrogance" and of being "hypocritical and intellectually dishonest."

Walston argues that "others have paid the ultimate price ... in defense of the principles we as a nation hold dear." Freedom of speech is, of course, one of those important principles; yet, in my opinion, Walston and others who label dissenters as unpatriotic dishonor those

who died by wanting to deny the freedom they died for to citizens who question the infallibility of our governmental leaders or who examine the wisdom of their frequently self-serving policies.

The current revival of this sort of divisive and illogical nastiness posing as patriotism is merely an updating of the McCarthyism of the 1950s and the "Love It or Leave It" nonsense of the '60s and '70s. True patriotism to me means sup-

porting what's supportable and questioning what isn't.

I prefer this approach to blind lockstep obedience. As an ex-Marine, a teacher for 39 years, a father of three University of Oregon graduates and a grandfather, I fly the flag proudly, but that doesn't mean I want to hide behind it or wear it as a blindfold.

Jerome Garger
Eugene

