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COMMENTARY

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Monday, May 20, 2002

Editorial

University's family events need serious improvements

Family Weekend at the University comes twice a year, in the fall and spring. But at both events, the University fails to offer any real opportunities for parents and students to spend time together with University-sponsored activities. The Office of Student Life needs to take a cue from Oregon State University, where Mom's and Dad's Weekends are cherished and promoted to no end.

OSU's Mom's Weekend earlier this month featured brunch, dinner and tea, a wine-tasting, a poetry and essay contest, a "Mom & I Look Alike Contest," a gardening presentation, free carriage rides, and the real zinger — the Wayne Brady Comedy Show. Granted, Wayne Brady did not do his show at OSU solely to cater to Beaver moms, but OSU scheduled the gig to coincide with Mom's Weekend.

OSU has a history of scheduling big-name entertainers for its parents. Bill Cosby and Jeff Foxworthy have done shows for Dad's Weekend. Next fall, OSU dads will get even better treatment with a Dad's Weekend football game scheduled for Oct. 26. Beaver dads get to purchase tickets for \$28 and watch the Beavs rumble with California.

So how does the University's Family Weekend compare to OSU's special treatment?

It doesn't. Parents visiting last weekend had the option of attending a Eugene Symphony performance, taking a tour of Autzen Stadium or participating in a golf tournament at Laurelwood Golf Course — all off-campus events.

Duck moms and dads had the option of making dinner reservations through the Office of Student Life — a nice courtesy, but the University isn't exactly dedicating a sporting event to the cause.

And the one event scheduled to coincide with our parents' weekend this year? An awards luncheon where family and friends had to pay \$15 a head to see their student win a University award.

Family Weekend at the University needs to be improved, and the Office of Student Life should take more interest in finding creative ways to promote the event. Scheduling a big-name entertainment act to coincide with the weekend could invite more parents to participate.

Although teas and fashion shows may seem old-fashioned, at least these events give parents and their kids an opportunity to spend time together. And renewing that child-parent relationship is what family weekends should be about in the first place.

Editorial Policy

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. 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.



Jacquelyn Lewis
 Assistant editorial editor

Besides being tragic, the event also adds more fuel to the age-old video game controversy. Since video games were invented, consumers and producers have been debating whether game manufacturers should be allowed to produce violent images, whether this type of violence has a significant effect on children's behavior and whether the gaming industry's self-imposed rating system works.

Though the industry should be commended for its current rating system, it's true that game producers could do more

to educate parents on which games might not be suitable for children. Vendors should also monitor the ages of buyers more closely. Right now, participation in the rating system is voluntary for both stores and manufacturers. According to a Federal Trade Commission study released in December, 78 percent of stores sold unaccompanied minors games rated for mature audiences only.

The Protect Children from Video Game Sex and Violence Act of 2002, introduced by Rep. Joe Baca, D-Calif., earlier this month, would officially ban certain violent games from being sold to unaccompanied minors, imposing penalties of up to \$5,000 and 90 days in jail for vendors' noncompliance. The blacklisted games would include those depicting sex and violence, such as Grand Theft Auto 3, which includes prostitution, murder and car-jacking.

Changes like these might be a step in the right direction, but in most cases the real culprit isn't video games — instead, the blame should be laid on a myriad other circumstances, including lack of parental supervision. Rating systems and other regulations aren't effective unless parents take an active role in monitoring what their children watch and play.

Parents should also make sure guns and other weapons are inaccessible to their kids. Hogan's family filed a civil suit against the Texas suspect's mother

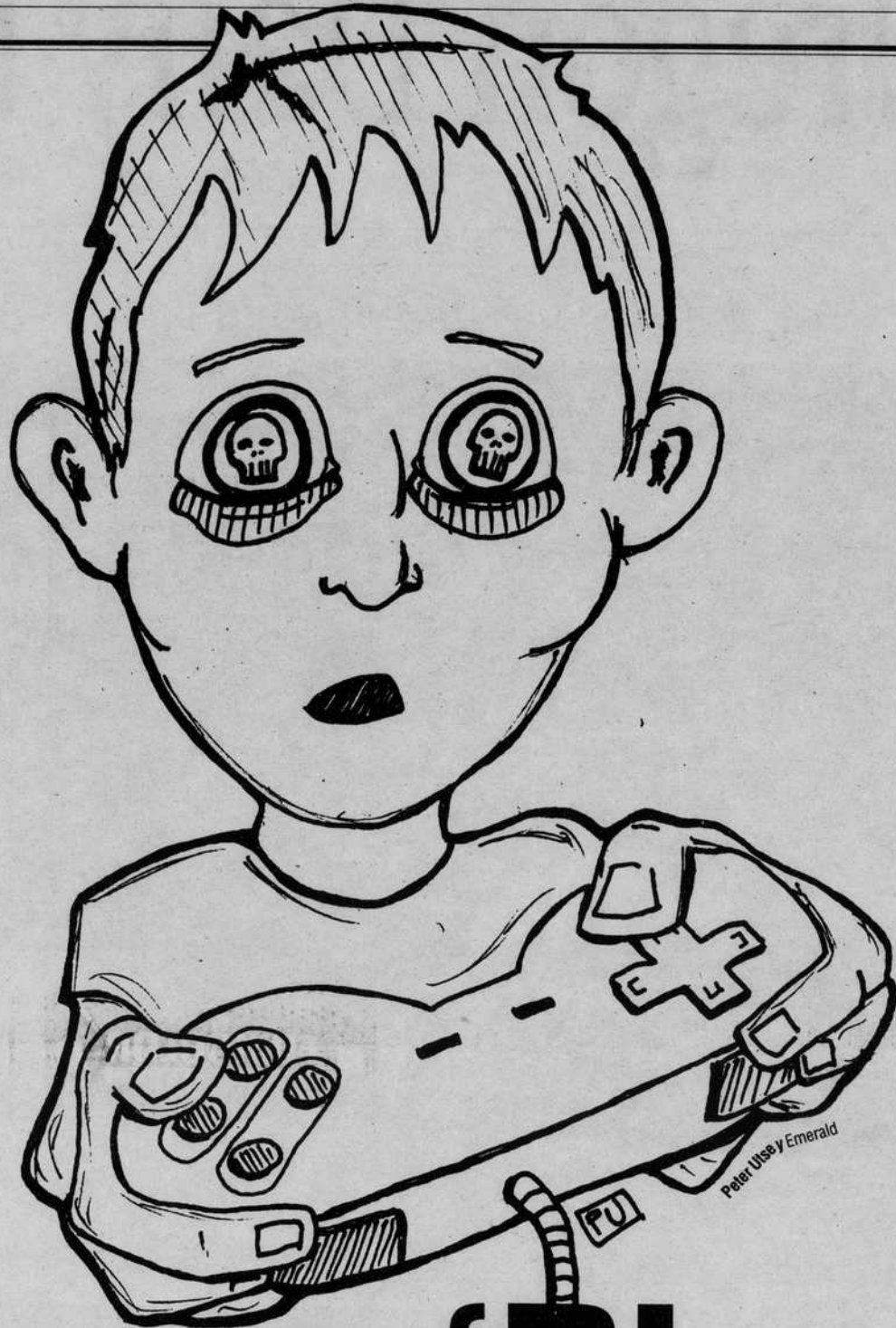
for negligence, since she allegedly kept a loaded gun within reach of her child — the gun that killed Hogan.

In a world where we're constantly searching for answers, it's also important to remember that a video game can't "make" anyone do anything. I'm not in the minority when I say my brothers, sister and I spent entire summers playing video games — some of them violent — and never felt the urge to shoot anyone. A normal child knows the difference between annihilating a video game character and actual murder. It's likely Hogan's shooter — or any child who commits violence — has mental problems extending far beyond the realm of video game overdose.

The FTC is preparing a report on both media violence and minors' access to this content, but before we assign blame to the media, we should look a little closer to home. Parents can't be with their children every second of the day, but they should be involved enough to determine whether their kids are mentally stable and mature enough to play certain games.

More stringent regulations on video game sales may help curb a small amount of youth violence, but we shouldn't use games as an excuse for violent behavior or expect regulations to be a cure-all.

E-mail assistant editorial editor Jacquelyn Lewis at jacquelynlewis@dailyemerald.com. Her opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the Emerald.



This game is rated 'B' for blame

Video games made him do it. At least that's what the lawyer of a Texas boy is claiming.

Jury selection started last Monday for the trial of the boy who killed his friend, 13-year-old Jonathan Hogan, shooting him in the head and chest after a day of playing violent video games. The name of the child, also 13, is being kept confidential, and his lawyer said he merely acted out what he saw in the games. However, law enforcement authorities contend the boy knew the difference between video games and reality, and he is being charged with juvenile murder.

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CORRECTION

The photo captions and credits under the pictures of Kyle Johnson and Jason Hartmann were switched in Friday's paper ("Oregon track aims for Pac-10 supremacy," ODE, May 17).