

COMMENTARY

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Wednesday, May 29, 2002

Letters to the editor

University needs to fight racism in sports

I recently read in the online edition of the Emerald that my beloved alma mater was approached by the law school's Sports and Entertainment Law Forum to consider refusing to schedule games with teams using racist mascots.

Although I am not aware of any racist mascots in the Pacific-10 — a remarkable thing, indeed — I believe this resolution will send a strong message. It's the job of educators to encourage tolerance, to work to prevent the teaching of racism and to open students' minds to the possibilities of living with diverse cultures.

No other ethnic group is singled out, their heritage mocked, their facial features distorted like American Indians. When I see the mascot for the Portland Winter Hawks, I am physically sickened.

It isn't just an unappealing image painted on bleachers that bothers me. The U.S. Department of Justice found that American Indians suffer more violence than all Americans combined twice. More than 70 percent of crimes against Native Americans are committed by non-American Indians, compared to 25 percent among whites.

I can't prove that these statistics are because of racist mascots. But I'm disturbed to think that encouraging the crowd to do a "tomahawk chop" can somehow encourage brutality against American Indians.

I am proud of my education. I'm proud of the teams at the University. The University is a great school, a well-known school. Use this visibility to make a statement against the racism that has plagued sports for 200 years.

Abra Jaggard
Class of '96
Denver, Colo.

Judaic Studies delivers objectivity

George Beres recently criticized the Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies for co-sponsoring a talk by Israeli speaker David Harris, ("Middle East discussion in need of solid University curriculum," ODE May 22). In fact, the Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies was not a co-sponsor of this student-initiated event, although we were mistakenly mentioned in some publicity.

I am glad to clear up this misapprehension, and I would like to challenge several of Beres' other remarks, as well. Beres suggests that Judaic studies courses serve only a small minority of students. This is not the case. Like any other University department or program, Judaic Studies courses, and our major

and minor, attract students from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. We do not expect that any of our students have prior knowledge of any aspect of the Jewish experience. Rather the program is based on the assumption that acquiring such information in an academic context will be a positive and powerful educational event.

I am also surprised that Beres questions the credibility of Judaic Studies on the subject of the Middle East. We recently offered a course, "Israelis and Palestinians," taught by anthropologist Dr. Diane Baxter, that is a model of objectivity in its multidisciplinary and participatory approach to this most tortured and complex of international dilemmas.

Judith R. Baskin
professor of religious studies
director, Harold Schnitzer Family Program
in Judaic Studies

Ruthlessly crush terrorist states

Contrary to what FBI Director Robert Mueller says, we don't have to "live with terrorism."

That kind of mindset invites passive acceptance. Unless there is a huge public outcry about Mueller's statement, we've sealed our fate and encouraged terrorists to immolate us on an increasingly larger scale.

Instead we must ruthlessly crush terrorist states, by whatever means necessary. The public must demand that President George W. Bush live up to his stated principles post-Sept. 11. He must move decisively against Iran, the world's biggest sponsor of terrorism, stop treating the enabling Saudis with kid gloves and allow Israel to destroy Yasser Arafat and the PLO.

We're fighting for our lives.

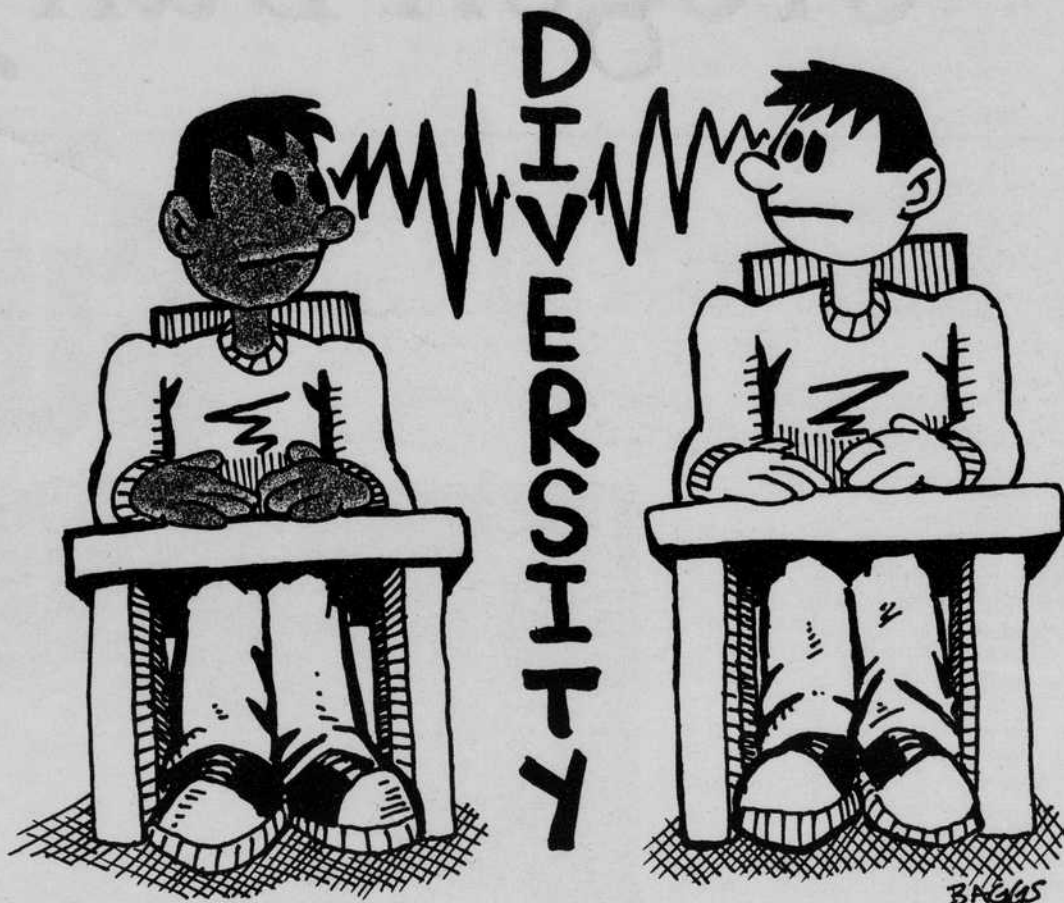
Tym Parsons
Seattle, Wash.

Incumbent politicians should be canned

Many states now have major problems with their budgets. None of the incumbent governors and legislators have taken responsibility for their failure to do their jobs. In many instances, they have spent and wasted money with no regard for the consequences. In the real world, you and I would be fired from our job for failure to perform. The American people can resolve this problem by voting these politicians out of office. Most have been in office for years and have forgotten why they were put there.

This would send a message to each and every politician on the local, state and national level that they have been elected by the people to work for the people — and that performance will be dealt with. They are not there for a lifetime career of looking out for themselves.

Vernon Hill
Atlantic Beach, N.C.



Judging people by the color of their skin

Two weeks ago, the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati upheld the University of Michigan law school's policy of considering race for admissions. In a swarm of support statements by University of Michigan leaders, the court was praised for recognizing the importance of diversity in a well-rounded education.

"I am pleased the court recognized that diversity brings educational benefits to all students — minority and majority alike," said University of Michigan interim President B. Joseph White in one such statement. "We must prepare our students to learn and to lead in the world's most diverse democracy."

White and the University of Michigan are absolutely correct, in that diversity does improve the quality of education, and of life in general. It is how the word "diversity" is defined that creates the controversy.

My Webster's dictionary defines "diversity" as "a point or respect in which things differ." Of course, if I'm in a classroom and I'm a white American sitting next to a native of Japan, then right there, according to the definition of the word, diversity has occurred. If we just sit there, though, having the color of our skin be the deciding difference, then that is not promoting the ideals of an education enhanced by diversity.

As the definition reads, diversity is all about differences, and it is those differences that strengthen our knowledge. But differences come from experiences. The guiding principle of a diverse campus stems from having individuals with a wide array of experiences.

Just because a student checks a different box

on their application form doesn't mean she has experiences any more valuable than anyone else's. What makes a diverse education is what students can individually contribute to the community, not what box they check.

The University also has difficulty defining this buzzword. The University prides itself on having one of the greatest international student populations in the country. This is wonderful, and what those students bring to the University falls right in line with the purpose of creating diversity among the population. The problem is that the University thinks the answer to creating diversity is to increase the number of students that check any box other than "white." Diversity is not something that can be measured through fact sheets or statistical profiles.

We assume that by clumping students of the same race into student groups like the Black Student Union, the Native American Student Union and the Asian-Pacific American Student Union, then somehow diversity occurs. If the University were truly diverse, then these groups wouldn't exist. We would all be seen as individuals with our individual merits, experiences and contributions.

To be honest, as a middle-class white student who grew up on a cul-de-sac in the Midwest, I can list just as many ways I bring diversity to a campus on the West Coast as anyone else. It is because of the color of my skin, though, that people assume I'm just like everyone else.

If you want to learn something based on my experiences, then you need to talk to me. Staring at my skin isn't going to get you too far. I know that the same is true for myself. When I leave the University and enter the "real world," I can't judge people based on the color of their skin and expect to succeed — unless, of course, I become an admissions officer at the University of Michigan.

E-mail columnist Jeff Oliver at jeffoliver@dailymerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the Emerald.

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Letters to the Editor and Guest Commentaries Policy

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.

CORRECTION

Thursday's photo centerpiece caption ("Studio Apartments," ODE, May 23) should have identified the sleeping man as Jonathan Ferrari.

The Emerald regrets the error.



Jeff Oliver
Columnist