

COMMENTARY

Editor in Chief:
 Michael J. Kleckner
 Managing Editor:
 Jessica Richelderfer
 Editorial Editors:
 Salena De La Cruz, Pat Payne

Wednesday, October 2, 2002

Offensive imagery, blurry photographs and a simple error

Rather than explain what a newspaper "ombudsman" generally is and how this space will differ from that in the months to come, why don't I just get started, and we'll find out together.

During the last few weeks of summer publishing, the Emerald ran an advertisement for Divas, a local adult club featuring erotic dancers. The ad featured a nearly naked woman wearing football pads and boxer shorts.

Some members of the community felt the ad was in bad taste, and they let us know about it. Here's the instructive part: Becky Merchant, our advertising director, was responsive. She heard the complaints and let the advertiser know the concerns.

We are a community newspaper, and we do take into account the community's standards as they are expressed to us. In this case, Merchant and the advertiser got together and decided to change the ad. It will no longer feature the image that some readers found offensive.

Now, on to the riots. First, I just want to re-clarify an error that caused some confusion. And I guess I should preface it with a little explanation of the Emerald.

While the Emerald is an independent newspaper, the newsroom is staffed entirely by students. Monday was our first issue with a whole new staff, and we are learning as we go.

Long story short, mistakes will happen as we learn our craft. We have a swift and certain correction policy, so let us know when we get something wrong.

Now, back to the confusion. During the layout process, a few paragraphs were accidentally cut out of our first article about the riots ("Partygoers turn violent near campus," Sept. 30), and the result made it look like a Subway employee said something he didn't. For the record, Brett Michel did not express any enthusiasm for the riots. He simply explained what he saw. The missing paragraphs had set up quotes obtained from a videotape of the event. The corrected story is on our Web site.

Ordinarily, the copy staff only cuts stories for space. The copy editors read all the stories and know what can be cut without causing confusion. In this case, the cut was just a mistake, and we ran a clarification in Tuesday's paper explaining the situation.

Finally, I want to begin a discussion I expect will cause some disagreement. Our riot story on the Web featured extra photos of the event, and we included an editor's note explaining that in all of the photos, the identifiable faces had been blurred.

Since then, I've heard from people who wondered why we blurred the faces. I've heard that it was censorship — although I disagree with using the word that way — or that we were hypocritical given our editorial stance against the rioters. The decision to blur was mine, although some staff members expressed their support.

My reasoning was this: I believe the Emerald represents the students. In the craziness of after-the-riot Saturday morning reporting, I didn't want us to publish anything that could be used by the authorities to implicate students (or others) in actions that weren't entirely clear or that those people may not really have been involved in.

On the other hand, I thought the photographs by Norman Mesman (who worked at the Emerald in 1994) were compelling and illustrative for people who weren't at the scene Friday night. I don't believe blurring the faces reduced that understanding significantly.

My judgment call, then, was that we should run the photos but blur the faces and say that we did so. Many newspapers in these situations choose instead to run photos where people are not identifiable, or (like The Register-Guard, who used the same photos we did) to run them without alteration.

I am positive that people in the community, and probably some journalism professors, will disagree with my decision. But I wanted to err on the side of student interests.

We are not an arm of law enforcement, and we don't want to be seen that way — however tangentially — by students, who we hope will continue to talk to us candidly about large-scale events of this sort. We also withheld some identifying details from our story for the same reason. It is not yet clear who is responsible for what, and we didn't think our job was to provide investigative assistance to the police.

The police took their own video and photographs of the event, and the editorial board and I both hope that they use those resources to identify and prosecute the people involved in the riots.

Michael J. Kleckner is the editor in chief of the Emerald. Send your concerns about Emerald coverage or content to editor@dailyemerald.com.



Michael J. Kleckner
The editor's office

Statement from the president's office

The events near campus this weekend leave me appalled and dismayed. These actions disrupted and endangered the lives of students and residents of the West University neighborhood. Such behaviors are absolutely unacceptable.

Of the 35 people arrested, 15 are currently enrolled at the University. I am saddened that the actions of a few reflect so badly upon the vast majority of our 20,000 students who are first-rate scholars and exemplary citizens and most likely as appalled as I am about this incident. To begin an academic year in this fashion hurts and saddens us all.

The University student Code of Conduct currently does not cover incidents such as these when they occur off campus. We are currently reviewing the code, including the jurisdictional issues, in light of this event. I have asked senior officials from the University to meet with city officials and the Eugene Police Department to review the events of this past weekend and to explore all options open to us to prevent this type of disruption in the future.

Dave Frohnmayer
University president

Letters to the editor

Why do students riot?

Why does this happen? Is it that you have excessive disposable income, or lack of dignity and self-worth? Are there no other outlets for your creativity, angst and rage? Or was it simply poor judgment for admitting you into the University in the first place?

As a University alumna, current employee and community member, I am saddened, disappointed and frustrated with even the idea that this kind of destructive behavior exists, let alone seems to be some new fad or trend.

Unfortunately, the current Student Conduct Code does not allow the University to take disciplinary action that would fit this kind of crime due to its location off campus. This needs a revision.

As a community, we cannot tolerate anything less than immediate expulsion and a permanent criminal record.

Joann ZumBrunnen
Class of '96
Admissions

Rioters damage reputation

A sad note for those of you who think Friday night was just another Eugene riot: This story led the local news in Philadelphia. Yes, Philadelphia... one continent away. Previous-

ly, when I told my friends here about the University, they'd make some comment about how good our football team is. Now, they ask me if that's where all the riots happen. Great. I used to be proud of my school. Now I'm embarrassed.

Oh, and to add insult to injury... my 18-year-old cousin from Boston was considering going to my alma mater. Key word here — "was."

Good work, everyone.

Brian Goodell
Philadelphia

Send rioters back to high school

Brainless rioters are an embarrassment to the University of Oregon. Pointless rioting has happened for a number of years, with little repercussions for the idiots who have no respect for the community and even less respect for the University.

It is time to boot rioting participants off campus and send them back to high school where they can learn to grow up. I've witnessed all of the riots in the years past except for this one, and I think the police have acted with extreme leniency and patience each time.

Seeing the University logo on CNN wrapped in handcuffs belittles the education that so many of us have strived to achieve. How dare these kids think so little of themselves and everyone in the community.

Rioting students made the "O" logo look like a giant zero.

Autumn DePoe
Class of '02

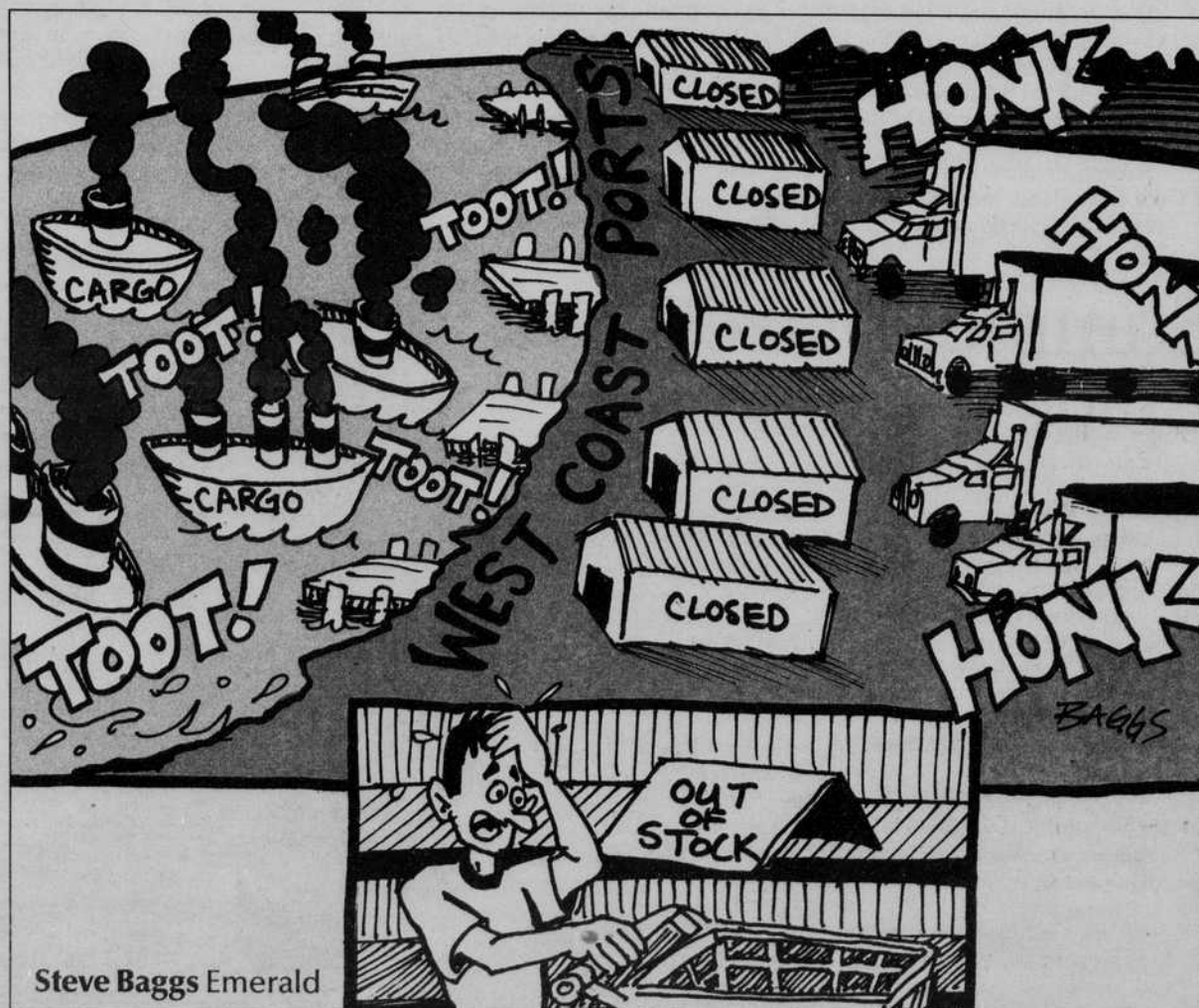
Cartoon sends negative image

I am writing in response to the editorial cartoon by Steve Baggs in the Sept. 23 issue of the Emerald. The cartoon depicts a University student who thinks of school supplies as beer, illegal drug paraphernalia and condoms, instead of the more traditional pencils and notebooks.

I realize that we have freedom of the press in this country and that Baggs was probably just trying to be humorous. However, keep in mind that prospective University students and their parents may be reading the Emerald. It's a common practice for people to read newspapers from colleges they may be interested in attending. Do you want them to think that your school is full of druggie slackers?

I am a senior at North Eugene High School. As I search for colleges, I am looking for a place where I will be able to develop my intellect and become a competent citizen of the 21st century, not a place where I will learn to get drunk and act like a moron. Perhaps I will reconsider my plan to apply to the University of Oregon.

Eva Sylwester
Eugene



Steve Baggs Emerald