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COMMENTARY

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Editorial

The community should not be screwed anymore

Does the University have a set of community standards?

This question is important to explore, as the city of Eugene recently accused the University of complicity in the recent rioting and asked it to pay some of the costs incurred as a result. As we see it, the University is negligent in expressing its community standards, and it should, indeed, pony up some money to the larger community of which it is a part.

The University does have standards, and these are expressed in myriad ways on campus, from class syllabi to the ASUO Constitution. Perhaps the most important of these is the Student Conduct Code.

The code mentions inappropriate behaviors, such as academic fraud, destruction of University property and disorderly conduct, and provides consequences, but only if these activities hurt members of the University community or University property.

It seems odd to us that our community standards extend only so far as the edge of campus property. If it occurred off-campus, then, could we fail to turn in our homework and still get credit? Of course not — our community's standards do not end when a student leaves the property.

This extension exists for a reason. One is not a hapless member of this community. To join costs money and time, and expectations must be met in order to receive the prize of membership: a higher education. In turn, then, the standards of the community are higher, and students carry those standards no matter where they go.

To say otherwise would be foolishness; is it acceptable for a murderer or rapist to continue to be a student here? No — that would cheapen the membership and the prize for the rest of us who are not murderers or rapists.

The problem, then, in the current situation, is that University standards either are not stated explicitly enough or that consequences are not provided for. We think both are true.

Here is a quote from Boston College's conduct code: "Violation of the laws in the communities surrounding the campus injures the University, just as it does the other citizens who reside there, and the University offers no tolerance of any such conduct. ... Therefore, the University reserves the right to refer any student(s) identified as being involved in this type of behavior to the Boston College Student Judicial System for disciplinary action ... including loss of University Housing privileges or suspension or dismissal from the University."

How difficult is it to say that? By not doing so, the University has shown a disregard for the surrounding community. "Education" and "outreach" only go so far. Riots have occurred near campus five times in the past six years, and nothing has been done to further specify community standards and provide consequences.

We're tempted to update an old saying: Riot once, screw you. Riot twice, screw the University. Riot three times, deny the screw. But riot five times, and something is screwy at the University.

In the absence of clear standards and consequences, the University's refusal to help pay for the damage feels like the actions of bad party guests — as long as their house doesn't get trashed, who cares?

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. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submission must include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.



Peter Utsey Emerald

The black, white and green of media coverage

Americans need a good scandal to keep them preoccupied in the summer. So with a slew of rapes, abductions and brutal murders for America's little girls in the summer of 2002, we weren't disappointed.

The inebriated Bush twins sobered up, the Chandra Levy case was solved and "American Idol" seemed to be the only game in town for a while. Yawn. Instead of something juicy, we have been inundated with coverage on the crummy old war on terror for more than a year.

No wonder America became so romanced with stories of violent child abductions — of little, rich white girls. For months, the media jumped all over any story fitting this rigid racial profile faster than you could say "JonBenet."

Abduction stories of Elizabeth Smart, Danielle van Dam and Samantha Runnion were at the forefront of media concern for months. The drama in Oregon City involving Ashley Pond and Miranda Gaddis gained national attention and became water-cooler gossip nationwide.

But Gaddis and Pond didn't fit the mold for what is front page-worthy because they were relatively poor. But their real-life murder mystery was unique inasmuch as they were classmates, lived in the same apartment complex and were eventually buried in a shed and under a concrete slab in

their neighbor's yard.

But what about the stories of children like 13-year-old Laura Ayala, who disappeared in March when she left her Houston home to buy a newspaper at a gas station? Or 2-year-old Jahi Turner, who disappeared in April while playing at a park in San Diego — the same city where Danielle van Dam was abducted and killed? How about Alexis Patterson, 7, who vanished in May on her way to school in Milwaukee?

These children never made national headlines. Ayala is Hispanic and Turner and Patterson are both black. Is race the only reason why these children were ignored? Well, Erica Pratt, 7, a black girl from Philadelphia, made CNN. But then again, her story was unique because she fought off and escaped her attackers.

We splash images of white victims all over the 5 o'clock news but never extend the courtesy to minorities. Not only are the abducted boys and girls of America victims of horrible crimes, but also they have to contend from the get-go with an inherently racist media to get out their story.

To solve the problem, why don't we just stop featuring abduction stories altogether? The phenomenon is nothing new.

According to CNN, FBI statistics show child abduction rates have actually decreased in recent years. In 1998, when such statistics were first kept, 115 ab-

duction cases by someone outside the family were investigated. In 2001, the number of investigations dwindled to 93.

So much media coverage has desensitized at least me (and maybe potential criminals) to the severity and horror of the crimes. With all the attention, it seems kidnapping, raping and murdering little girls is actually kind of popular. And it's nothing I haven't watched on prime time television for years.

Even though blatantly biased victim-based media sensationalism is perpetuating the problem, it wouldn't have any dog to wag if there weren't predators acting out in the first place. But their stories — and punishments — don't make headlines either.

An exception may be made for sick old Ward Weaver III. He has been charged with the deaths of Pond and Gaddis. But will his near-inevitable death penalty serve as a deterrent to other criminals? Chances are, other predators won't bother following Weaver's fate. They'll be too busy stalking their next victim, and the cycle will continue.

You say an 8-year-old white girl was raped and murdered in her own bedroom and there are no suspects? After this summer, I wouldn't even blink an eye.

Contact the columnist at julielauderbaugh@dailyemerald.com. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Letters to the editor

Vote for better health care

Are you registered to vote? Your future health and dental care will be voted on this month. You have until Oct. 15 to register to vote. Health Care For All Oregon at the EMU and the Street Faire will have tables set up to register.

Health Care For All Oregon has Ballot Measure 23, which will provide affordable health care for every Oregon resident. You will have your choice of dentist or practitioner and be able to pay according to your ability to do so.

Schools will save millions because of an 11.5 percent cap on payroll, which would take the place of today's more expensive employer premiums. It will stabilize the spiraling health care costs.

Too many people in Oregon are without health care insurance.

A publicly accountable nonprofit, independent, health care finance board will administer the system. This will provide you a future with secure and affordable health care. Register to vote and support Health Care For All Oregon.

Ruth Duemler
 Eugene