

COMMENTARY

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Editorial

Students must stand up to Daddy 'O'-bucks on logo

Maybe paternalism is a nationwide movement. The GOP now has control of the Congress and the Oval Office, and pundits have been saying Americans want a strong father-figure to guide them and keep them safe.

Whether it's the national mood or not, ugly paternalism has landed at the University, threatening students' ability to speak out against the institution they're paying to attend.

The University, through Strategic Communications Associate Vice President Harry Battson, has announced that any materials a student group produces — like business cards, letterheads, posters or flyers — now have to be branded with the "O" logo. Compliance is required immediately, or else Daddy "O"-bucks won't let the group purchase any new materials.

What is going on here? Have we returned to the 1950s, when college administrators "knew better" and "guided" student expression so it would be "appropriate"? This policy — which was decided without broad student input or support — is the most corrupt move the University has made in years.

Student groups are student funded. Students pay an incidental fee to have groups formed and run by students. And many groups have concerns about the direction of the University, or about certain policy decisions made by Daddy "O"-bucks. And they have the right to express those ideas without an administrative seal of approval. How are students expected to think freely if they can't spend their own money to produce materials that reflect their ideas?

If you're not outraged yet, here's some more: Battson has said that if, say, the director of the Multicultural Center wants to have a business card, the "O" logo must be proudly

emblazoned across the top. The Multicultural Center logo, if it really must be put on the business card, can go on the back. On the back? Has the administration lost its mind?

It gets worse. Student groups were told Wednesday that their own logos now need to be approved by Battson. Logos that have been used for many years probably will be approved, groups were told. But... old logos probably need to be updated so they appeal to a "contemporary audience." Could the University please choose one side of its mouth to talk out of?

"No, no," Daddy "O"-bucks says. "This is about perception." Everything that comes out of the University, everything that everyone says, must be "on message" with the identity the University is trying to promote. After all, that's how you get to be a nationally recognized top-tier program.

This message-molding also has its hands on administrators and faculty. A draft document was recently circulated among administrators, listing the "themes" that were appropriate to use when promoting the University. So now no one on campus can express an idea about the college unless they have been vetted by Daddy "O"-bucks? Sounds like a scary private university. So much for public education, or freedom, or critical thinking.

Actually, here's the irony: In that draft document, one of the "themes" administrators are allowed to promote is, "Faculty care about teaching... and demand the development of critical thinking." Really? Well, faculty may demand critical thinking, but the University only seems to want to allow it when it is "appropriate."

In response, we wanted to encourage student groups to

refuse, to stand up for their rights, to demand free thought. But it's not like they have a choice; the University won't allow materials to be printed if they're not approved.

The issue made us so angry, in fact, that our imaginations envisioned a fantasy world: Student groups ordering boxes and boxes of the "O" letterhead and posters, piling them high and burning them to the ground.

In reality, however, students must find a rational way to let the University know this policy is not acceptable.



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Copyright controversies within the public domain

Some people may not know it, but there's a concept in this country called public domain. After a set period of time, copyright protections on a work (novel, recording, play, movie, video game, what-have-you) are supposed to be phased out. After that, the work becomes the joint property of everyone, and can be published freely by anyone. Even more important, authors then can reference those works in their own without fear of running into a pack of lawyers.

However, public domain is quickly becoming as fictional as

Sherlock Holmes. Most of the great detective's adventures have fallen into public domain, as have the works of Shakespeare and Homer. However, the last set of stories (The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes) was caught in a blanket renewal of all copyrights under the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act in 1998.

Thousands of works published in 1923 or after, including great movies like "Casablanca" and numerous scientific works, were unceremoniously yanked from the public domain. This is a disaster in many ways for culture. Think if Vergil had to hunt

down the copyright holders for Homer's Iliad and Odyssey (from which Vergil borrowed in his Aeneid)? For that matter, What would have happened with Nicholas Meyer's famed novel "The Seven-Percent Solution," which was a Holmes pastiche? What of a scientific or historical work that could be published on the Internet for all to see?

I'm not against the idea of a copyright that is meant to recompense, for a limited time, the authors of a work, but it rankles me that a few companies are now lobbying for permanent copyright. The problem with the copyright setup in this nation is that it has become driven by the entertainment industry.

In the 19th century and before, before the big media conglomerates came along, it was pretty much assured that a work would go into the public domain in the author's lifetime (unless, like Edgar Allan Poe or Emily Dickinson, the author died young). In the original copyright acts, the maximum length of a copyright was set at 28 years. After that, everyone could publish it. That all changed with the advent of the major movie studios and the rise of phonograph recordings.

Not too long ago, both industries realized that — hey, these copyrights are going to run out someday — their golden goose was about to expire of old age.

So, what to do? Congress has the power, under the Constitution, to set copyright limits. So, you lobby, lobby, lobby: Get friendly with a few legislators, and grease a few palms with — ahem — "campaign contributions." This they did, and 11 times since 1962, they were able to get the copyrights extended. Finally, in 1976, we joined the Berne Convention which set copyright at 50 years after the death of the author, or 75 years for works for hire.

Then, they got one of their own elected. Sonny Bono, of Sonny and Cher "fame," was a California congressman. Then, he hit a tree while skiing. His wife, Mary, and Sen. Orrin Hatch felt that the best tribute to Sonny would be to extend all copyrights another 20 years, and set the maximum for any work at 95 years.

The best that public-domain enthusiasts could ask for would be to strip the copyright extensions back to the life of the author plus 50 years (the Berne stipulation), as well as abolish the automatic renewal. This could happen, with any luck. Eldred v. Ashcroft may challenge the constitutionality of the Bono Act on the grounds that they cannot retroactively yank works in, or almost in, the public domain back into copyright protection. What is so amazing is that the court even heard the case at all. They have not been interested in the past in hearing copyright cases.

Of the intellectual property controversies arising now, copyrights will have the largest impact on our civilization.

Contact the editorial editor at patpayne@dailyemerald.com. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.



Peter Utsey Emerald



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 The return of
 Captain Sensible