

Wednesday, November 27, 2002

Editorials

Administration deserves praise for logo decision

The University reversed its policy on student group use of the "O" logo, and we applaud the administration's willingness to listen to student concerns and respond.

Student groups — which are funded by student dollars and run by students — will not be forced to put the "O" logo on their printed materials. This makes sense, given that these groups are not run by the University and do not represent the University's opinions.

We can't help but wonder if incidents like The Insurgent's publication in the 1999-2000 school year of an Animal Liberation Front "primer" — a how-to guide to subversive tactics for protesters — gave administrators pause. Does the University really want its seal of approval on all of the free expression in which student groups engage? Might it be liable for expression found by a court to be illegal?

The next step, frightening in its implications, could have been the University demanding to "approve" all information put out by student groups, in order to avoid legal or image problems.

We are thankful those concerns are over. It's good that this issue has been put to rest, and again, the University deserves praise for letting student groups have their own voice. Congratulations.

Clarifying our stance on KUGN

In the past two weeks, the Emerald has received considerable feedback about our editorial concerning KUGN-AM calling itself "the voice of the Ducks," while broadcasting syndicated talk shows by hosts that engage in speech that is harmful to specific populations in the community. After reading much of the feedback, it seems that a clarification is in order.

Our editorial did not call for censorship, as we don't believe Savage's and Medved's shows should be forced off the air. This is not a case of a government agency withholding funds from an organization because it disagrees with the organization's politics. It's a different matter when a government agency accepts money from an organization and allows that organization to represent it in public — when the organization's behavior violates the agency's stated principles.

By disassociating with KUGN, the University would not be withholding money in an attempt to censor, it would be upholding its mission.

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.

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Don't put pot in the joint

Marijuana became illegal in the United States in 1937. The plant has been grown here since 1611, primarily for the hemp products made from the stalk of this hearty, naturally occurring weed.

George Washington, raising support in France for the American Revolution, gave this excuse for cutting his visit short: "I wouldn't miss the hemp harvest in Mount Vernon for all the tea in China." Pot plants weren't magically discovered in some hippie's dorm room during the '60s, as popular culture would have us believe.

Neither can growing marijuana plants be associated with criminals who tend to use the buds or leaves of the plant to get high any more than with farmers who plan to use the stalk to make rope, paper or clothing. Thomas Jefferson wrote the original draft of the Declaration of Independence on hemp paper. As to whether he used any other part of the marijuana plant during this process, your guess is as good as mine.

After graduating from high school, I moved out of my parents' house and worked for a roofing contractor for eight months before attending college. During this period, I experimented with much more serious substances than marijuana.

I am not proud of this, nor do I continue to use drugs, but I can tell you from personal experience that lumping marijuana in with harsher drugs is sending the wrong message to youth. Smoking marijuana acted as a gateway drug for me specifically because our society does not differentiate it from addictive, life-threatening drugs such as methamphetamines and cocaine.

When I did not keel over from trying one illegal substance, I began to think that other drugs were probably not overly dangerous either. Now, I know differently. I have had many traumatic experiences as a result of engaging in a lifestyle that included drug use, most of which only resulted in tempo-



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rary physical and emotional suffering for myself.

But I have been around people for whom drugs have been a way of life for years or even decades. Their addictions affect everyone they meet. I knew a mother who gave methamphetamines to her 12-year-old son. I know people who were born addicted to drugs.

One time I was riding in the back seat of a car with a 10-month-old baby on my lap when his mother, age 17, had her boyfriend hold the wheel so she could smoke methamphetamine while driving. I asked her to stop the car, but she refused. I tried to roll down the window so the baby would not have to breathe the smoke, but she locked the window from the driver's side console.

If you use methamphetamines or other drugs that are as harmful and addictive, you will eventually do things that affect not only yourself but also those around you.

We must do everything in our pow-

er to educate against drug use and decisively punish people that perpetuate the problem in our society. Focusing on truly harmful drugs will increase our chances of success.

If the young men and women of this nation are old enough to vote and old enough to be drafted for service in the armed forces at age 18, they are old enough to decide for themselves whether or not to use marijuana.

Legalization has decreased the rate of marijuana use in Holland by 40 percent. There is simply no reason to think that marijuana use would increase in the United States if it were legal, and at any rate, 83 million Americans have already tried it.

Efforts to suppress marijuana use are simply not working. Let's spend our time and money fighting the war on drugs, not a war on plants.

Contact the columnist at michaelcosgrove@dailyemerald.com. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Smoke harms others, unlike Twinkies

Guest commentary

I am writing in response to Michael Cosgrove's column (ODE, "Smoke-filled logic," Nov. 11). This is not the first time that personal freedom has been used as a reason not to curtail smokers' rights (privilege?) to indulge in their habit in public. As is often the case, they dredge up comparisons to other bad habits, such as eating junk food, that cause serious medical problems as well. What is often overlooked is the fact that an unhealthy diet mainly affects the individual, while numerous studies have shown that secondhand smoke has harmful effects on anyone in the vicinity of the smoker.

When a Twinkie-eater consumes a Twinkie, those around him or her do not involuntarily ingest the high fat and sugar that comprise the poorly

chosen snack. Not so with the smoker. Some smokers believe that the smoke from their cigarette dissipates harmlessly into the air. I have had numerous occasions when I, trailing in the wake of a smoker, have breathed in the residue they leave behind. This is not the case with "Junk Food Junkie." They leave no trail of fat, sugar and preservatives behind them for me to take into my body against my will. Cosgrove calls on us to defend the rights of smokers in the name of personal liberty.

If they, like the junk-food eater, could keep the harm from their choice confined to their own bodies (take a drag, but don't exhale until the harmful constituents have dissipated) I would be more inclined to do so. However, I don't believe that the freedom to make personal choices guaranteed to us by law and tradition extends to

those actions that cause harm to others. Freedom of expression does not protect you if you choose to express disapproval of someone by punching their lights out, no matter how annoying you think they are.

Private decisions carried out in public should not pose potentially harmful risks to those around you. What people do in private is their own business, so long as it doesn't affect me. What is done in public is another matter. By the way, one of the reasons that habits, like tobacco, are often taxed is that those who tax know that those who engage in the habits will continue to pay, no matter the cost. The fact that even some smokers who have had lungs and/or larynxes removed from cancer and yet still smoke tends to bear this out.

Blacita Telles is a senior majoring in planning, public policy and management.