

Thursday, July 17, 2003

EDITORIAL

Timing of policy changes more than coincidental?

Remember the girl from the residence halls freshman year, the one who had all the big ideas? She was the good girl in high school who did what her parents told her, but as soon as she got away from her family, all hell broke loose.

First it was the tongue ring. Then the tattoo. And who could forget when she moved in with her boyfriend?

By the time she finally told her parents of her actions come winter break, it was too late. The damage had already been done.

The new girl in the residence hall these days, it seems, is the University administration. While students are away for the summer, important changes oddly seem to go into effect.

First, the University decided to update its privacy code to comply with federal regulations that require institutions to hand over student information to law enforcement agencies upon request — without telling the student. By law, the University has had to follow the policy since 1996, but it chose to update the language of the privacy code in June. One meeting occurred June 3, during Dead Week. The other occurred June 20, after school ended.

Yes, the change needed to be made. But couldn't it have happened when students weren't busy studying or when students were actually on campus?

As biology professor Frank Stahl, a verbal opponent of the change, noted: "This should have been out where people know about it. I think the process doesn't smell good, although we don't have all the facts yet."

Good call, Frank. We wouldn't want to jump to any conclusions.

Second, the University realized it was going to be in the red for the 2003-04 academic year. Back in January, Oregon voters rejected Measure 28 — which would have prevented those pesky tuition surcharges and the resulting permanent charges — essentially setting the tone for things to come.

The Legislature hasn't even set a budget for the 2003-05 biennium — which, of course, started July 1 — so perhaps that's also part of the problem. Moreover, Oregon is in a recession, so state funding clearly isn't going to be what it was.

We understand all that. In fact, given all of the above, we knew tuition was going to increase in 2003-04.

So why, then, did the revelation come just weeks ago? Yes, the meeting that will ultimately determine whether the University gets to increase tuition is this month, but couldn't the administration have put out the word earlier?

Instead, as students are gone for the summer and effectively have no voice, the University and six other state schools are seeking drastic revisions to the plateau policy that determines tuition rates. To top it off, the University sought changes that would go into effect in the fall. What a nice surprise that would have been: Welcome back to campus; you owe us more money than what we said we'd charge you.

Thankfully, the University is no longer seeking the provision to increase tuition in the fall because of people like Amelie Welden. As the Oregon Student Association spokeswoman remarked, "Students are totally unaware and they'll get to school in the fall and find things changed."

Boy, imagine what would have happened if OSA was taking summer vacation too.

Finally, the University's administrators on Monday gleefully supported changes to city law that would allow Department of Public Safety officers to issue certain drug and alcohol citations on campus.

It should be noted that this change in law would give DPS officers power that seems somewhat reasonable given that state law allows the very same officers to detain and arrest individuals under certain circumstances. The Eugene Police Department, which currently issues the citations, could utilize their time better, too, without having to cite disorderly college students.

But the thing is, laws get broken all the time, often in front of police officers. In an ideal world, we suppose, no crime would go unpunished. But the way things are, that's not even remotely the case, and officers have to make decisions by considering time restraints and, more importantly, the severity of the crime.

If the University is given the power it seeks, and DPS officers start deciding whether or not to cite students, we'd bet that — with the plethora of parking tickets the office hands out — students will be ticketed more often, despite University comments to the contrary. As we said, maybe that's how it should be. This argument — we have others, as well — goes against enforcing the law and is quickly dismissible. But, hey, we figured we'd give it a shot. Students aren't around this summer to make their own arguments and, unlike the previous scenario, our student representatives aren't representing student interests.

"The timing is not only inappropriate, but irresponsible, to conduct this hearing on an ordinance that is very specifically targeting the University at a time when the University community is largely absent," preached Ward 3 City Councilor David Kelly, who represents the University area, at Monday's meeting.

In all three instances, the ideas behind the changes aren't new. The University could have updated the language in the student privacy policy at any time since 1996, yet it chose to do so at a time when students were unavailable.

The University could have let students know earlier that tuition was going to go up next year; administrators must have known months ago. Nonetheless, word didn't come out until this month, when students weren't on campus.

Lastly, the University could have — and still has — the chance to push back its attempt to expand DPS power. The University could realize that students aren't here for the summer, and even those who are and who should argue on the behalf of students can't because of the questionable scheduling. All it would take is a phone call to each city councilor. Otherwise the decision will likely come on July 28.

Perhaps the timing is just coincidence. The University certainly didn't wait for students to leave before making all these moves, right? University administrators surely have the integrity to make changes when students are around to put up a fight. The University administration isn't really that girl from the residence halls. Right?



Peter Utsey for the Emerald

TROUBLE in IRAN

I don't know about you, but I didn't know about the massive demonstrations happening in Iran until I ran across a few news reports on the Web. Apparently, not much news about Iran has appeared on television besides the conjoined Iranian twins story.



A. Sho Ikeda
 Dial-a-column

According to many news reports, thousands of students have taken to the streets to fight for democratic reform of Iran.

But what does this have to do with me? Iran is all the way on the other side of the world. Well, they're students just like us, except they're fighting for something that we have enjoyed for a long time.

Freedom.

Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the Iranian people have been living under a hard-line theocracy. After living under a brutal regime for all of these years and catching glimpses through the media of the freedoms enjoyed by the democratic world, these students seek to gain what we already possess.

And Iranian students still have a dangerous road ahead of them. The attempted reforms of the past few years have yielded few results, as Iran's ruling hard-line clerics routinely block reform changes of the moderate president, Mohammed Khatami. Due to deepening public discontent and the lack of progress toward reform, Khatami recently offered to resign if Iranians willed it.

"We are not masters of people, but servants of this nation. If this nation says, 'We don't want you, we will go,' Khatami was quoted as saying in the government-owned newspaper, the Iran Daily.

The problem is, most of Iran's leadership will not step down even if the majority of the nation desires reform. Since June 10, when the protests began, the regime has made 4,000 arrests, according to Abdolnabi Namazi, Iran's prosecutor general. Members of the Basij, a paramilitary youth militia loyal to the regime, and members of the Ansar-E Hezbollah, another organization loyal to the regime, have burst into student dormitories at the University of Tehran and attacked students in their beds. They even attacked drivers who honked their horns in support of the demonstrators.

Photos of the aftermath of these arrests and attacks displayed dorm rooms with broken

doors, shattered windows and floors splattered with blood. Another set of photos showed the nasty wounds some students suffered when they were attacked by the regime's goons.

The government, seeking to quell student unrest, arrested three student leaders on July 9, the four-

year anniversary of an attack on student groups that resulted in at least one death and twenty arrests. The government discouraged protesters to demonstrate last Wednesday, placing riot police on the streets and monitoring Tehran with government helicopters.

Iranian police arrested Zahra Kazemi, a 54-year-old Canadian-Iranian photojournalist, after she took photos of a Tehran prison. While in custody she was beaten into a coma. She died Friday. A government report said Kazemi suffered a fatal stroke when she was "subject to interrogation."

For atrocities like these to be committed against protesters in America would be unthinkable. However, that this is taking place in another country shouldn't allow us to ignore what is happening.

Changes must occur in the Middle East to stabilize the region and to eliminate terrorism across the globe. Establishing a democratic government in Iran would be invaluable for accomplishing this goal. Though it is also possible that Iran is attempting to develop nuclear weapons, I don't believe military intervention is the solution right now.

The key lies in helping the people of Iran. Currently, the majority of Iranians appear afraid to speak out against their government. The abuses inflicted upon students and the countless arrests seek to discourage action against the brutal regime. However, promoting causes, such as human rights groups in Iran and independent Iranian media, is crucial.

Revolution cannot happen in a day, a month or even a year. Governments with bureaucratic and military power are too strong to fight physically; however, spreading the message of democracy and reform and convincing others to work to reform the structure of government can achieve significant change.

For us in America, it's a matter of caring about what other students are fighting for.

Contact the reporter
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