

Thursday, July 24, 2003

EDITORIAL

New housing should move south of Bean

The University is finally going to build a new residence hall and, as many who have lived in the housing can attest, it's about time.

The \$30 million venture will provide rooms for more than 400 students and, perhaps more importantly, they will be much, much bigger than current spaces.

Unfortunately, since the building will be paid for from students' rent money, it's likely only those with deep pockets will experience the luxuries of the "Living Learning Center."

With the complex's completion slated for fall 2006, it seems the glory days of Barnhart Hall — currently the priciest and roomiest of the residence halls — are numbered.

Barnhart is the newest of the residence halls and, given its somewhat odd placement from campus, one has to wonder whether it in any way weighs on the minds of planning committee members.

University administrators asked the planning committee to review a spot they fancied, a location currently home to outdoor basketball and tennis courts between Earl and Walton complexes.

Another option was briefly discussed, and a potential site near Bean Complex also received consideration. Ultimately, though, it looks like both will lose out to administrators' preferences.

In one sense, we understand the desire to build housing closer to the center of campus. The location would benefit students greatly in that they would be closer to their classes. The learning aspect of the facility could be utilized, too, because faculty would be much more receptive to a short walk to the building. East 15th Avenue would also become more prominent, as would the walkway toward "dormland."

But the problem with this location lies mostly in the land use restrictions the University has imposed on itself. To build the Living Learning Center between Earl and Walton, the zoning of the land would have to be revised. If the University is willing to amend its policies, then perhaps the land should also be considered for other buildings that would fall under these new guidelines.

Since there isn't a lot of land in the heart of campus, its availability should be preserved. The basketball and tennis courts are certainly nice, but they could be moved just about anywhere. It seems that it would be a wise idea to hold on to the land until a rainy day some decades away, when its value can truly be realized.

The same can be said for the other site location, which would place buildings on both sides of the path toward the residence halls, with a building adjacent to Carson and a building between Earl and Walton.

Administrators have said there is a desire to bring students closer to academics. Conversely, couldn't the University choose to bring academics closer to students? Using the Earl/Walton site for teaching facilities seems just as viable and, when considering the University has land available to the east, it seems all the more practical.

The University should build the Living Learning Center atop the pavement basketball courts across from Bean, despite likely objections from nearby residents. Taking this route preserves vital, centrally located campus land. It doesn't revise the long-range campus plan. It will add to the prominence of East 15th Avenue, although perhaps not in the same desired capacity.

Ultimately, the University should look to the future when building the Living Learning Center. The campus will only continue to grow, and what may look like a long distance today may not seem the same tomorrow.

A point was made at Monday's campus planning meeting that putting the residence hall at the Bean location would create a suburban-feel. This is most certainly true. And when thinking about suburbs, growth should be anticipated.

Perhaps one day academics might encompass Agate Street and University housing will extend to Villard Street. At some point, say 50 years, it's probable.

The University should allow for proper institutional growth and proper eastward expansion, and building the Living Learning Center across from Bean will do both. Hopefully administrators and planners will come to this realization.



Peter Utsey for the Emerald

AFRICA: NOT WHAT YOU THINK IT IS

There he was, President George W. Bush, patting some elephants. I was staring at a picture of the president's recent trip to Africa that had found its way into a local newspaper. I was hardly surprised that, out of all the pictures Bush must have posed in, this one made it to print. After all, it simply reinforces the popular concept we're all familiar with: Africa is a jungle with wild beasts in every corner. This and a variety of other stereotypes run rampant in the media and in the minds of many Americans. Well, as a proud Kenyan and Tanzanian child, I feel it is my duty to dispel some of these crazy misconceptions people have about Africa.

Africa: The jungle

While many parts of our continent are blessed with abundant wildlife, the idea that every household has a resident hippo in its backyard is absurd. Many of us do not have pet lions, hyenas or gorillas, nor are we likely to rub shoulders with them as we walk down the street. The wildlife safaris on the Travel Channel do not necessarily represent everyday life!

Africa: The country

"So is Nairobi the capital of Africa?"
 "Uh, no it's the capital of Kenya."
 "Kenya. Is that like a state in Africa?"

This conversation actually happened. I swear! It represents some of the highest levels of ignorance, and I must reiterate that people need to stop thinking that Africa is a big, homogenous place where everything and everyone are the same and Nelson Mandela is president. There are thousands of different cultural groups with different languages and customs.

This means you cannot ask me questions about the circumcision practices of the Ibo in Nigeria. I'm from Kenya, how would I know? I don't even know the customs of the Boran and they are from the same country! There is no such thing as the "African" experience.

And to the person who asked me whether I speak Kenyan: surely, what were

you thinking? There are no languages called Kenyan or Zambian or Gambian.

Africa: The tree-dweller's continent

Africans do not live in trees. We may not live in air-conditioned condos in glass skyscrapers, but we still do not share a branch each night with six other families and the community leopard. We do have houses, even if some of them are made from mud with grass-thatched roofs. They are still houses.

And yes we have seen electricity. Some of us even saw computers, telephones and microwaves way before we came to the United States. Why does it surprise you so much when I tell you I sent my mother an e-mail? The era of smoke signals is over in many parts of the continent. Unfortunately, the forces of globalization are bringing all forms of technology to even the most remote places.

And what is this: "My goodness, your English is so good!" Do you have any idea how many times I've heard that comment? As if the fact that I can speak English is some great anomaly. I'd just like to remind folks that we do speak English and French and other European languages because we are the products of years of colonization (I guess the two days spent on "Africa" in your high school history class were not enough to drum this fact into your heads).

Africa: The poor, diseased, corrupt, lazy, underdeveloped, the "you think of anything negative and that's what it is"

Yes, some parts of our continent are wracked by ethnic conflict.

Yes, we have the highest rates of AIDS in the world.

Yes, some of our people are extremely poor and some of our leaders are blatantly corrupt.

But do you really believe that there is absolutely nothing positive in Africa? We are not just the nations of beggars, pining for foreign



Ayisha Yahya
 Afro café

aid handouts as we wait to slit each other's throats because of our "tribal" hatred, which the international media seem quite content to push on people. We are not promiscuous hordes, either, who court disease because we're too "uncivilized" to use a condom.

Africa: The reality

There are diverse factors behind Africa's problems, and not all of them are our fault. As Africans, we do recognize the challenges we face as a continent. But that does not give people the right to judge or pity us. Many of us are proud to be Africans. We are proud of our languages and our customs. We are proud of our natural resources. We are proud of our resourcefulness in the face of scarcity and adversity.

I'm not going to pretend everyone carries negative stereotypes about Africa. I am happy to say I have met many people who have taken the effort to learn more about other cultures — not just depending on images of emaciated Ethiopians on CNN to make their conclusions. I'd encourage everyone to follow their example and learn something new about someone else. Even I make that attempt because I don't pretend to be knowledgeable about every culture on earth; I am fighting my own stereotypes.

One last comment: Africa is a beautiful place with beautiful people. This column is dedicated to the land of my birth.

Contact the reporter at ayishayahya@dailymerald.com. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Students should send opinions on DPS jurisdiction to city officials

On Monday, the Eugene City Council will vote on whether the Department of Public Safety may issue citations on cam-

pus, as discussed in recent Emerald articles ("Council mulls expanding DPS responsibilities," July 15; "City council helps defend student voice," July 15). ASUO urges students to e-mail the mayor and city councilors to express their opinions on the issue and to stress the impor-

tance of involving the campus community on issues that affect students and student safety. This can be done by sending an e-mail to mayorandcc@ci.eugene.or.us.

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EDITORIAL POLICY

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailymerald.com.