

Thursday, November 13, 2003

EDITORIAL

More drinking at UO, or are officers simply citation-happy?

The recent revelation that student alcohol violations increased 171 percent between 2001 and 2002 raised many eyebrows on campus and likely shocked the small minority of deluded people who still think students aren't drinking.

Yep, they're still drinking. A whole lot. No big mystery there.

Campus authorities suggested many possible factors for the steep increase — more Department of Public Safety officers throughout campus with better training, less tolerance of drinking by fellow students and a greater residence hall population for the 2002-03 school year. DPS Interim Director Tom Hicks even told the Emerald last week that "My sense is the University of Oregon is going to get spotted pretty quickly about having one of the biggest jumps in alcohol violations across the country."

But the trend didn't end on campus, where hundreds of residence hall dwellers discover the joys of drunken debauchery each year. The Eugene Police Department reported that the West University neighborhood has seen a 19 percent increase in alcohol violations from 2001 to 2002. In the South University neighborhood, a 59 percent increase was recorded in the same period.

Given the increase in these different areas, a vitally important question arises: Are students actually drinking more, or are law enforcement officials simply seeking to write more citations?

Housing Director Mike Eyster told The Register-Guard that he questioned whether the increase in alcohol violations is attributed to a sudden increase in drinking, citing the lack of any noticeable change in the residence hall atmosphere.

"As the director of housing, it didn't feel different to me last year," he said in a Nov. 12 Register-Guard article. "I didn't have a sense that the staff was overwhelmed or there was a huge difference, so it's difficult to explain."

University President Dave Frohnmayer's edict in fall 2002 that required all fraternities and sororities go dry could provide another explanation for the increase. Members of the greek system who live in chapter houses may choose to drink in surrounding neighborhoods instead. Likewise, new members may choose to drink in the residence halls instead of putting a fraternity or sorority at risk by drinking in the chapter house. But less than 7 percent of the campus has greek affiliation, so it's unlikely the increase could be wholly attributed to substance-free housing.

Most likely, the increases do not indicate a rise in students who are actually drinking; instead, patrols in those particular areas are probably increasing. Of course, more concrete research would have to be conducted to find any real trend.

It's not proper to justify underage drinking — some would say it's unhealthy for people younger than 21 to consume alcohol but, more than anything else, it's against the law. Choosing to break the law is, of course, an individual's choice, and it doesn't seem fair for any individual or group to pass moral judgment on an individual who chooses to get a little sloshed before the all-important, incredibly subjective age of 21.

College students, whether it's the right choice or not, choose to drink. Do University students drink more than those at Oregon State University, the University of Washington or Arizona State University? Probably not. The real question is why students at this University are cited more frequently. What are the priorities of most law enforcement agencies, and why are the local agendas seemingly so different? That's the real question that needs to be answered.

EDITORIAL POLICY

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



Steve Baggs Illustration

Who's American?

I'll never forget the first day of high school history, senior year. Mr. Smith (I've changed his name for the sake of anonymity) entered the classroom, removed an American flag from the wall and hurled it to the ground.

"How does this make you feel?" he asked, stomping on the flag after every single word. The class was slack-jawed.

"Remember this feeling," he said. "This is what 20th century history is all about." Patriotism.

It's one of those words — like art, terrorism, evil, love and God — that I cannot define, except to say, "I know it when I feel it."

And I felt a patriotic rage that morning watching Mr. Smith step on the Stars and Stripes, especially since he was a well-known socialist and draft-dodger. The feeling surprised me. I didn't think I was the patriotic type.

After the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, many Americans who never thought of themselves as patriotic were suddenly overcome by a similar rage. Rhetoric changed overnight. The Mr. Smiths of the world — the self-identifying proud anti-patriots — joined the dinosaurs as an extinct species. The question, "Can one be unpatriotic and a good citizen?" fell away into thin air.

Now, the guy burning the American flag at an anti-war rally claims to be a patriot; that dissent is patriotic. The most unpatriotic legislation in my lifetime appropriates the word, along with a tortured, Orwellian title. And CEOs trip over themselves to market their product as the most patriotic brand of toothpaste or fabric softener.

The natural momentum of big words is to grow ever bigger and more inclusive, so



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 Critical mass

inclusive that they become meaningless: Everyone is patriotic, everything is art, any act of violence is terrorism, everyone bad is evil, every good feeling is love, God is everywhere and everything.

I usually denounce these definitions as philosophically lazy, but, in the case of patriotism, I think it is a good thing.

We no longer need to ask, "Which is patriotic: Stomping on the flag or refusing to; questioning or listening; being skeptical or having faith; focusing on progress or tradition?" We should toss this question away because to ask it is really to ask, "Who counts as an American?"

We have yet to reach a consensus on that question. Arab-Americans have been made to feel more and more Arab and less and less American over the last few years. Even those who originate from other parts of the Islamic world — whatever that is — have felt this pressure on their identity.

In North Portland, for example, a group of South Asian immigrants began hanging American flags in the windows of their hotels along Interstate Avenue, not because of a sudden burst of patriotism, but rather

as a statement of identity: It says to their community, "We consider ourselves American, too."

In response, a few of the other hotel owners began hanging a new sign next to their flags: "American-owned." It was an attempt to cut that word down to size, to keep it in line and in check, to keep the big word from getting too big.

For some, the A-word is near microscopic. Once, when Fox News commentator Bill O'Reilly disagreed with an African-American guest, he said, "You can go back to Africa if you want to. I mean, you could go and repatriate back."

Repatriate? And remember the oft-used response to anti-war protesters and liberals in general: "Go live in Iraq if you hate America!" I guess the logic is: Shut up and enjoy your freedom of speech.

It seems to me, as I reflect on patriotism and the enormous debt we owe our veterans — debt being the perfect word since it has gone unpaid for decades — the word American can never be too inclusive. It seems to me that the word American was originally created to be all-inclusive: but it grew too big and became meaningless. For that meaninglessness could speak volumes about America's most cherished ideals.

Who knows? Maybe one day the word will grow so large that it can include Mr. Smith as well.

Contact the columnist at davidjagernauth@dailymerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Help University employees by being clean, responsible

There is nothing quite like walking into a recycling station and coming within inches of stepping in a big pile of crap. I don't mean Toto left a present for Dorothy, but right beneath my partner's feet is a big pile of nasty human excrement. What follows does not apply to most of the students here, but for

those who act like this — grow up!

Last I checked, we're all college students and shouldn't have to deal with this. I have a work-study job, attend classes and have a family, so the last thing I need is to not be able to do my job because some fool decides it'll be funny to lay a load at our feet. If this was isolated, I wouldn't be writing this, but in the last week we've had people puking in the recycling barrels and throwing trash on the ground while being kind enough to leave a note asking us to clean up the mess.

Maybe you're here spending Mommy and Daddy's money on classes in under-water basket-weaving, but you don't need to make life hell for the work-study students who are trying to live on minimum wage and complete college. It took some brains to be accepted to this school, so use 'em and give the employees on this campus a break.

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