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COMMENTARY

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Monday, January 5, 2004

EDITORIAL

News doesn't stop during winter break

Welcome back, snow-drenched readers. The Emerald Editorial Board hopes your holidays were happy and healthy, and relaxing if not rocking. For those of you who left the news programs off and the newspapers on the porch, here's a primer on the events of recent weeks, coupled with pithy but insightful opinions.

Dec. 14 After extensive questioning of people with family or other ties to Saddam Hussein, soldiers found the 'haggard' former Iraqi leader hiding in a so-called spider hole near Tikrit, Iraq. President Bush, in a televised address, said "the former dictator of Iraq will face the justice he denied to millions." While the news is definitely good for Iraqis and represents an important moral victory for coalition soldiers, Americans (military and civilian alike) shouldn't forget that the work in Iraq is far from over and that the nation remains a dangerous place.

Dec. 19 VIPs gathered around a muddy runway in Kill Devil Hills, N.C., to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Wright Brothers' first flight. Despite the replica plane's failure to fly, the centennial still reminds us of the fantastic capacities of human ingenuity.

Dec. 19 Libyan leader Col. Moammar Gadhafi announced that his country would end its weapons of mass destruction programs and admit weapons inspectors to oversee the programs' elimination.

Dec. 21 The United States cranked up the terror threat level from elevated (yellow) to high (orange), whose recommended measures for government agencies include "preparing to execute contingency procedures, such as moving to an alternate site or dispersing their workforce." While the "Homeland Security Advisory System" is a convenient way of packaging the current state of security affairs for sound byte digestion, more information that the department has been doling out in recent months would be a psychological and academic boon, whenever security concerns allow for it.

Dec. 23 The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced the discovery of the first apparent case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy — mad cow disease — in Mabton, Wash. Several nations, including Japan, immediately halted beef imports from the United States. This is cause for concern, but not gross overreaction: There's still only one apparent contraction of the disease in this country, and moreover, scientific studies have shown that the BSE infectious agent has never been found in beef muscle meat or milk, according to the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

Jan. 4 Pop princess Britney Spears eschewed the tradition of large Southern weddings and married a childhood friend in a small, 5:30 a.m. ceremony (wherein she was escorted by a limo driver and walked down the aisle in torn jeans and a baseball cap) in Las Vegas. She plans to annul the mockery, er ... marriage.

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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Starting over

As you wander from class to class, meeting new people and saying hello to old friends, take just a moment and realize that you are currently in the midst of a time you will look back to in about six weeks with sincere regret. Because, my dear friends, not only is this wintertime, start-of-term time and "Does-it-always-rain-in-Oregon?" time, it is also I-shoulda time.

A month or so from now, when you are feeling hassled and harried, you will look back to these halcyon days and think things like "I shoulda started this paper when it was assigned," "I shoulda organized from the start" and "I shoulda kept up with the reading instead of participating in that all-you-can-belch beer and soda pop social."

I speak from experience. Generally, I start out with the best of intentions. I buy planners and lovingly thumb through their empty pages all set up to organize my life. I eagerly await the first day of classes and vow that as soon as I receive a syllabus, I will faithfully begin to plan my studies with loving care. Somehow, it never quite turns out that way.

I usually wait until *after* the first day of classes to purchase my books. That presents a bit of a problem. In law school, they not only expect you to ferret out the first day's assignments before the term starts, they actually expect you to have read the required materials and be prepared to discuss them.

To disguise my lack of preparation, I find that staring intently at my laptop and typing furiously as if taking notes usually dissuades anyone from calling on me. That leaves me the entire class period to figure out what to do with my planner.

Should I put in the assignment that I haven't done? If so, where? According to the

planner, it belongs on the page designated for the first day of class. But, if I put it there will I ever see it again? I mean, the point of a planner is that you should be able to look at a day and see what your tasks are for that day,



Jessica Cole-Hodgkinson
 Huh? What? Really.

not thumb through all previous days looking for tasks that you failed to accomplish.

I could combine the first day's assignment with the second day's assignment and write them both in as one single task for the second day of class. But, if I do that, my beautiful new planner will silently testify that I started out the term badly. Every time I open it, the first writing I see will present a slight blow to my self-esteem. I usually conclude that it would be purpose-defeating for a planner designed to help keep me on top of my game to pettily dwell on my minor failures.

Usually, I dismiss both these options and decide that I will put nothing down in the planner about the first day's assignment. After all, I'm in law school. How hard can it be to read a few dozen pages?

Well, harder than you might think.

The problem arises with the assignments for the second day. If I write them into my still-virgin planner, then the evening before the second day, I will sit down with my

books to read the assigned material. At that point, I will discover that the assigned material is referencing material that was in the first reading assignment and I will be terribly confused. After all, I haven't actually read the first reading assignments. "And why not?" you may ask. Why, because I bought a planner to rely on, and I assure you it says nothing about any assignments for the first day.

Rather than continue on in confusion, I usually put away the books and see if I can find an episode of Buffy the Vampire Slayer to watch. It is, after all, only the first week, and no one flunks out in the first week.

Unfortunately, left unattended, none of my planner problems sort themselves out before the start of the second week. Still, I sail blithely on into the third week. By the fourth week, the still-blank pages of my planner — once so lovingly admired — have begun to haunt me. I try to leave it behind, only to find it has snuck into my book bag to taunt me with its emptiness.

By the fifth or sixth week, I begin to realize that my planner is an agent of (insert your preferred evil force here) and not to be trusted. After all, it still says that we've yet to be given any assignments, even though my professor — who has now caught on to the intent gaze/rapid typing gig and calls on me regularly to bolster the egos of my fellow classmates — assures me otherwise.

About this time, I start to look back in time to the early days of the term with fondness and regret. I think to myself, "I shoulda bought a different planner," and vow that I will try again next term.

Contact the columnist at jessicacolehodgkinson@dailyemerald.com. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

ONLINE POLL

Each week, the Emerald publishes the results of the previous poll and the coming week's poll question.

Visit <http://www.dailyemerald.com> to vote.

Last question: What was the biggest story of fall term?

Results: 81 votes

- Oregon shocks No. 3 Michigan: 33.3 percent or 27 votes
- Five-part series on cheating: 16.1 percent or 13 votes
- DPS: Officer committed misconduct: 14.8 percent or 12 votes
- Howe Field selected as location for new arena: 14.8 percent or 12 votes
- ASUO VP pleads innocent to assault

charge: 9.9 percent or eight votes

- Business school enters new era with Lillis: 7.4 percent or six votes
- Other: 3.7 percent or three votes

This week: Snow?

Choices: I love it and want more; That was fine and I've had enough; That was awful and I hate snow; Don't care.