

Friday, January 9, 2004

'Good news' groups can relieve urban area's problematic 'culture of violence'

In recent months, the Washington Post has published many articles focusing on the "culture of violence" that exists in the Washington, D.C., area. From Oct. 31 to Nov. 8, I noticed the following articles: "Neighbors Hold a Vigil for Mother, 2 Daughters" (Oct. 31), "At-Risk Children of SE Won't Be So Easy to Save" (Nov. 5) and "Gun 'n' Run — D.C.'s game" (Nov. 8).

In the above-mentioned articles, and in all public discussion I have read or heard regarding the "culture of violence" in Washington, D.C., there does not appear to be any sign of a consensus among community leaders as to what can be done to restore, support and sustain a "culture of peace" in the capital of the United States. (And a similar lack of consensus seems to be prevailing in other urban centers in the United States with the same chronic problem...)

I have a question: Have the community leaders — of Washington, D.C. and of other urban centers in the United States with the "Culture of Violence" problem — considered organizing "Community Visioning Initiatives" (i.e. encouraging 100 percent citizen participation in brainstorming ideas, organizing the ideas into goals, prioritizing the goals, identifying doable steps, etc.) for the specific purpose of cultivating "cultures of peace"?

Another question: Have any of the above-mentioned community leaders considered developing "Community Good News Networks"?

"Community Good News Networks" is a name for participation by local community residents in an ongoing process of actively discovering, sharing, encouraging and creating "good news." As more and more "good news" is discovered, shared and created, participants can give special attention to identifying the "good news" makers who live near their specific meeting place. A local "Community Faith Mentoring Network" could then be established to facilitate matching young people's preferences for faith mentors with elders and "good news" makers in their local community. (A faith mentor is a person who, by word, action and presence, models a meaningful lifestyle, clarifies important life issues and provides guidance for deepening spirituality in a caring and accepting environment.)

Taken together, annual "Community Visioning Initiatives for Peace," and ongoing "Community Good News Networks" and "Community Faith Mentoring Networks" can (1) "Bring to the fore what is often hidden: how many good people there are, how many ways there are to do good and how much happiness comes to those who extend help as well as to those who receive it." (2) Increase our collective capacity to inspire and encourage individual spiritual formation — with all the beneficial consequences that follow for individuals, communities and regions.

Urban centers in the United States can be — and should be — successful examples of an interfaith approach to cultivating "cultures of peace." And Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States, can provide — and should provide — a model for other urban centers to follow.

In the best of times, even the most profound difficulties can be overcome; for in the best of times, growth of the faith, discipline and perseverance required by the process of individual spiritual formation is carefully nurtured, supported and sustained by family, friends, teachers, mentors, elders and the everyday influences of community life and cultural traditions.

Our particular moment in time on this planet Earth could be the best of times.

"Where a rose is tended, a thistle cannot grow."

Stefan Pasti lives in Chantilly, Va.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Fellow Eugeneans should heed traffic rules, signals for safety's sake

In such times of strong national and international issues, it's sometimes hard to remember those which are closest to home. I don't mean state or even local politics, but something much more important to everyday living: traffic safety.

Since moving to Eugene three years ago, I have become more and more appalled at my fellow citizens' difficulty following the most basic of traffic laws. I dread four-way stops, for I never know who will think it is their right-of-way; I'm afraid for children when I see stop signs run near daycare centers. But by far, the most common violation I see is the running of traffic lights. I regularly see yellow and even red lights run with total disregard for the safety of pedestrians and fellow drivers. Yes, it is frustrating to wait for a light at times, but that is no reason for endangering yourself and others.

In closing, I'd like to encourage everyone to have another look at the Oregon driver's manual. Remember, traffic laws aren't created to hinder us, but instead to keep us safe.

Murray Sampson
 Eugene



Steve Baggs Illustrator

Refunds, not sports tickets, aid students

In September 2000 — a politically and fiscally simpler era that I now recall with some fondness — one year's tuition at the University was \$3,819 (\$13,839 for nonresidents). Since then, a shrinking higher education budget, vanishing tuition plateaus, slashed class sections, ex post facto "tuition surcharges" and the like have inflated the 16-credit student's tuition bill to an estimated \$5,079 for 2003-2004, an astronomical 33 percent increase over just three years.

But, the reasons for the convergence of these monetary troubles on Joe and Jolene Student like, say, so many sharks converging on a cloud of blood shed by a hapless swimmer, is largely beyond the scope of this column.

Rather, I'd like to take a look at the other end of the fiduciary pipe — student fee allocations — and explore what could (or at least should) be changed about the existing system to help alleviate the burgeoning budgetary burden students must face, even if only in a small way.

The Programs Finance Committee is meeting in these first weeks of this term and — if last year's committee was any indication — will labor for long hours to mete out millions of dollars to student groups and programs vying for a slice of student fees.

Some of these programs are essential and benefit all students materially: Campus Recycling (to which the PFC allotted \$113,126 for 2002-03) keeps our campus clean and green; the Designated Driver Shuttle (\$90,128) offers students safe transport and keeps intoxicated students from behind the wheel, protecting students and no doubt sparing the University community needless tragedy in the process; the Student Senate (\$20,778) approves funding for student groups outside the PFC process.

Other groups, such as the Black Student Union (\$19,514), the International Resource Center (\$51,848), the Muslim Students Association (\$4,032) and the Women's Center (\$125,190), though aimed at focusing on and representing specific segments of the campus community, offer social or cultural events at least open to, and therefore benefiting, all students.

However, some programs fail the common sense litmus test of universal student



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accessibility (which shouldn't be confused with universal student interest or universal student applicability). To wit, during summer 2003, the Office of Civil Rights notified the University's long-running (and evidently illegal) Project Saferide (\$61,320) that it would need to restructure itself to satisfy Title IX mandates or close up shop. The program served only women and had no male equivalent, forcing male students to shell out some \$2.31 for a service they couldn't use. The costly child care subsidy (\$220,801) poses a similar budgetary problem, although the specifics (which, too, are beyond this column's scope) are clearly much different.

The single largest item in last year's PFC allocations was the Athletic Department Finance Committee Ballot Measure, which provides the funds that the ASUO pays the Athletic Department in exchange for discounted tickets thereon available to students for "free," tipping the scales at \$1.17 million, or \$70.03 per student. Many students have little or no interest in attending sporting events and even less interest in paying \$70 for tickets for events they won't attend. But, from the perspective of the above accessibility criterion, this isn't the point. The issue is that, often, students trade an exchange like:

"Hey, did you get tickets to the Washington game?"

"No, the line was long, and I had to go to class."

"Yeah, at least a few of my friends wanted tickets, but the ticket offices ran out."

The root of the issue is that demand significantly exceeds supply: Too often — particularly for big games — students can't get tickets for which they've already paid. Couple this with the fact that the ticket

subsidy is, well, a big-ticket line item, and you have a situation that's fiscally unfair to already cash-strapped students.

(As an important side note, sharp-minded readers might recall that the Emerald's (\$118,963) daily distribution is about 9,000, far short of the 20,033 students that were here during fall term. However, there is no indication that there are students who want a copy of the Emerald and cannot find one at a distribution box, and unlike sporting tickets, several students can, and do, share single copies. Moreover, distribution varies throughout the year to accommodate anticipated demand. Like most other program subsidies, like that for the Lane Transit District (\$457,158), demand for the Emerald's student-oriented services rarely exceeds supply.)

The traditional benefit of the subsidy, however, is that the Athletic Department generously offers tickets to University students through the ASUO at 50 percent of the tickets' fair market value, as stated in section three of the 2002-2003 University of Oregon Student Ticket Agreement. As an alternative that retains this benefit, I suggest that the PFC nix this million-dollar expenditure this year and that the Athletic Department offer half-price tickets through the EMU and Autzen Stadium ticket outlets directly to University students, skipping the ASUO middleman.

This way, in the future, students who want to attend sporting events can pick which games they want to attend at the discounted prices. Students who aren't interested can apply their savings to their hiked tuition instead.

During the upcoming weeks' PFC meetings, the committee should zero-fund the student ticket program, instead dropping the money in a rainy day fund or, better yet, work with ASUO and Johnson Hall to refund the difference to the students.

The ASUO should furthermore work with the Athletic Department to arrange for the continuation of its generous 50 percent discount to University students, returning control of at least a little of their money to them at the time when they need it most.

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