

Wednesday, January 14, 2004

EDITORIAL

Professors should put ethics before book profits

The beginning of a new term is always rife with a twofold sense of anticipation and loss — anticipation for new classes and experiences and loss as students shell out hundreds for overpriced and often uninteresting textbooks.

The only thing worse, it seems, is shelling out hundreds for sleep-inducing walls of text written by the same professors who teach the class. This often gives the student not only a sense, however justified, that the professor can't relate to budgetary difficulties of many students, but also that the professor is out to make a quick buck on the backs of poor college kids.

However, that's not to say that all professors at the University are incapable of writing decent, well-researched textbooks or that all professors are out to rip off the student body. We're fully aware that the University employs a large number of impeccable educators who, at one time or another, have put together textbooks that don't require a DayQuil to read.

But the idea that professors would create a product that they could potentially profit from and force their own students to buy it seems wholly unethical. After all, if a professor is going to lecture on everything he or she wrote in the book anyway, then the necessity of buying, much less reading, the text is drastically reduced. Furthermore, class readings should give a breadth of views and angles to the subject in question, something that is distinctly lacking when you read a chapter one night and hear the same material the next day.

Some teachers who require their own books, such as journalism Professor Janet Wasko, remedy this problem by assigning other books to provide different perspectives, which is a partial solution to the ethical dilemma.

"If someone is only using a book that they've written, that could be perhaps problematic," Wasko told the Emerald. "I don't know what other professors do, but I use a book that I've written. I always use a lot of other readings because I think that's an important point that there should be a lot of perspectives presented. I never just use my own book."

Professors who don't keep royalties from their books also seem a bit more fair, although the problem of diversity in reading still exists. It's reasonable to assume that these professors, with their expertise in the field, require their own textbooks simply to contribute to the understanding of the subject. But perhaps professors could accomplish this greater understanding just as easily by making class notes available online or putting together a course packet, which is quite a bit lighter on the wallet than a textbook.

We urge professors who do assign their own books to forfeit their royalties earned from University students, perhaps giving them instead to a charity or educational organization, or make the purchase optional. At the very least, these professors should always explain to the class the reasoning behind assigning the book.

As journalism Professor Kyu Youm told the Emerald: "I think it's professionally unethical, and that kind of thing should not be condoned, unless his textbook is the best in the whole world," he said. "Some professors are using their textbooks because they are ego-inflated."

EDITORIAL POLICY

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Eric Layton Illustration

All wired up

Walking from the Lillis Business Complex to the EMU last week, I counted 12 people on cell phones. There they were, just walking down the street, chatting it up, and there I was with my hands stuffed in my coat pockets, counting the people who were talking on cell phones. I wonder if I'm missing something.

My roommates think I'm an oddity because I don't want a cute little phone. My boss asked me if I would consider buying one. My dad thinks, "It would probably be a good idea for you to have one in case something happens." I asked him, "Dad, what's going to happen?"

Everyone who knows me tells me I'm hard to get a hold of, almost impossible to track down, MIA. They tell me they worry about where I am and if I'm safe. I wonder how they think a phone is going to keep me from harm. I guess if worse came to worse I could throw it at someone. Chuck it at their head, then run like the dickens. I can see it now.

As a society, it seems we are becoming more and more dependent on technology. We are obsessed with being in touch, instantly. We carry laptops, cell phones, pagers and PDAs because we don't want to miss anything.

With this influx of technology we are seeing a loss of personal privacy. My best friend answers her phone while she's on the toilet.



Aimee Rudin
 Five feet of fury

She's had whole conversations with her pants around her ankles. Nothing is going to stop her from staying connected.

But is all this connection good for us? If the way the U.S. government is currently working is any indicator, by the time I'm ready to have children they won't need to worry about telling people where they are. Instead of carrying phones, they will be implanted with a homing chip at birth, and anyone who is looking for them could locate their personal little blip on a Global Positioning System screen.

I feel like I need time to myself; time when people can't get in touch with me and don't know where I am. I don't feel bad when someone calls my house and I'm not there. I think there are very few times in life when a message is so urgent that it can't

be returned later in the day with only minor consequences for lateness.

When I was a teenager, growing up in my parents' house, the rule was, "Call by midnight and let us know you're safe." That was it.

At 16, I drove to Colorado with a friend for two weeks; we didn't know the name of the lodge we were going to be staying at, the phone number or exactly when we'd be back. My mom stood on the porch the morning we left, waving and telling us simply to be safe.

When I was 17, Mom followed in my footsteps and headed out the door to travel across the country in a Volkswagen van for six months. I didn't ask for her itinerary or a phone number where she could be reached. I just stood on the porch the morning she left and told her to be safe and to call if she got lonely.

I believe we need time in our lives to be alone with our thoughts and our environment, and I fear our movement toward a completely technological society will ultimately destroy any chance we have of achieving solitude.

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

Focus on the crime, not the motive

The editorial "Society must address issue of hate-based violent crime" (ODE; Dec. 4, 2003) presents an obvious thesis: Violent crime is wrong and should be stopped. As

GUEST COMMENTARY

stated, the fact that we need days of remembrance clearly demonstrates an embedded problem with our cultural paradigm.

However, what I find problematic may not be what the editorial staff intended. Our focus should be on violent crimes, not just hate-based violent crimes. Violence should be abhorred universally, because it is not about sexual orientation or race or national origin. Whether violence is motivated by hate or by another means is not most relevant. What is the most relevant is the fact that violent crimes occur. Is it less wrong that

somebody was violently killed because of a bank robbery than because of a hate issue? I would venture to say no. Cultural and political differences cannot and should not be limited, whether that means loving everybody or hating everybody. What can and should be limited is criminal activity as a mode of political expression.

We must separate the political or cultural agenda from the crime. Are all Palestinians who advocate a sovereign state also advocates of suicide bombings? Of course not. Whether we agree with a particular political or cultural agenda does not advocate nor imply advocacy of violence as a means to our political or cultural ends. Hating, disliking, or disagreeing with someone is not a crime, violent crime as an expression of that belief is the crime.

The reason to establish this discourse is to combat the fallacious implication that those

who oppose same-sex civil unions promote violence as a means to their goals. The editorial staff has used violent crimes as a red herring to promote a narrow political agenda. It is not requisite that people agree with a group politically or culturally in order to not want to kill them.

I do not believe that same-sex civil unions should be legalized. However, this belief does not make me empathetic to those who use violence as a mode of expression.

Praise should be given to the editorial staff for raising the issue that violent crimes are wrong and should be stopped. However, the staff and anyone else who couples differing political and cultural agendas with crime should be rebuked.

David Carr is a junior majoring in political science.