

Thursday, April 22, 2004

EDITORIAL

New Senate decisions contradict each other

Last week, the University Senate made renewed efforts to change how administrators will cooperate with government agencies that are seeking student records and was updated on the process of expanding disciplinary procedures for students.

These two issues, while unrelated, carry with them consequences and benefits that must be recognized.

In its first order of business, the Senate declared that requests for private student records must be cleared through the University General Counsel's Office before they are released.

"While privacy issues are governed by both state and federal law, the University's interest in privacy goes far beyond its commitment to comply with law," the Senate's policy statement declared. "... Students, faculty and staff should be aware that the University supports their freedom to inquire, discuss and experiment with ideas without fear of improper government intrusion or public exposure."

While bound to have little material impact in the long run — after all, the federal government could fight the efforts, most likely very successfully — the University administration's efforts symbolize faculty disapproval of Attorney General John Ashcroft's secretive and covert attacks on civil liberties. Further, the action shows that the Senate is looking out for the interests of University students before the questionable tactics of outside agencies.

In another action that could more drastically change the way students behave off-campus, the Senate heard an update from the Student Conduct Committee that widened the scope of criminal behaviors that the University can punish. Currently, only students who commit sexually motivated crimes off-campus can be disciplined with the Student Conduct Code; the proposed changes would add "any act of physical violence or threat of violence against another student that causes a reasonable person fear of physical harm" to that list.

The justification?

No law prohibits it, according to Director of Student Judicial Affairs Chris Loschiavo. And while the conduct code process is meant for educational purposes and won't take the place of criminal prosecution, Loschiavo pointed out, we question the need for double punishment.

One wonders, too, whether the University has a legitimate claim on punishing crimes that didn't happen on its property, and that only happens to involve people affiliated with it. For a body that stressed student privacy in the same meeting, there's at least some hypocrisy in standing by while the Student Conduct Committee expands the University's ability to meddle in events that happen off-campus.

That being said, if the new rule can curtail harassment and assault, then the outcome may outweigh the unintended consequences.

EDITORIAL POLICY

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A message from a black male to the white community

I like to think of myself as a fairly controversial student columnist, so I feel compelled to voice my outrage at the actions of the Daily Barometer, Oregon State University's campus newspaper.

Writer David Williams was fired after penning an April 9 column titled "A message from a white male to the African American community" (I encourage you all to read it at <http://barometer.orst.edu>). Williams writes, after several qualifying paragraphs, "There is a lack of morality in the black community because African American leaders ... choose to rally around minorities who seem to have little quality characteristics about them."

In an editorial on April 13, the Barometer described the column as "racially insensitive and inappropriate" and apologized to the black community "who was no doubt disappointed, hurt and outraged."

As a black man, I was far more disappointed in the editors of the Barometer who fired their columnist for writing a column that his editors signed off on for publication. To scapegoat the writer in the face of controversy is pure cowardice. It is absolutely shameful.

Let me be clear: The Barometer had many legitimate reasons to fire David Williams. For one, he is a terrible writer. To borrow a line from Grandpa on "Everybody Loves Raymond," I could have eaten the alphabet and crapped a better article.

That brings us to the second reason Williams should have been fired: He is a plagiarist. I just quoted a line from a television show, but I didn't pretend I invented the line. Williams, on the other hand, decided to take paragraphs from syndicated columnist Leonard Pitts, change some words using his thesaurus and then pass them off as his own.

Here is one example (the first is from Pitts and the second from Williams):

"We — blacks — ought to be more thoughtful about who we choose to rally around, ought to be less automatic in leaping to the defense. ... (W)e need to grow beyond the notion that someone deserves our support because he is black and in trouble."



David Jagernauth
 Critical mass

"I think blacks should be more careful in deciding whom they choose to support. They need to grow beyond the automatic reaction of defending someone because he or she shares the same skin color and is in a dilemma."

Unfortunately the Barometer didn't fire Williams because he was an untalented plagiarist. They fired him because, as they put it, "we have a policy never to print material that is discriminatory, racist or sexist."

Asking a "white male," as Williams self-identifies, to avoid racially insensitive remarks is the equivalent of telling him to stop writing about his true feelings about race. Racial insensitivity — or let's call it what it is, racial innocence — is so ingrained in white America that it is practically instinctual.

Oops. Did I just say something racially insensitive?

The conservative rhetoric about out-of-control political correctness is dead on (unfortunately conservatives are the worst perpetrators of PC ideology). It is dangerous to use the word racism as a muzzle for any columnist talking about race in a controversial way. Why are we afraid of confronting ignorance in print? The stupidity of Williams' column speaks for itself — it is a perfect illustration of the stupidity that the black community has to put up with from white America.

Williams isn't a racist. He is a young white male attempting to talk about something that he doesn't have the maturity to understand. Should he be punished for the attempt? I certainly don't think so.

David Williams gave his message to the black community. Well, here is my message to David Williams: Don't tell the black community what it needs to do. Maybe think more deeply about what the white community needs to do.

My message to the Barometer: Apologize to Williams, reinstate him and then immediately fire him again for being a plagiarist and a disgrace to student journalists everywhere. Then maybe a few editors should resign. You, too, are a disgrace.

And my message to the black community: Williams has a point. We should be "more careful in deciding whom (we) choose to support." Not blacks but whites. We should be more careful in deciding which whites we choose to support. Colin Powell, rethink your support of President Bush. Janet Jackson, rethink your support of Justin Timberlake. And black Democrats, rethink your support of John Kerry.

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