



FÜRTWÄNGLER

BRET FURTWÄNGLER | GRAPHIC ARTIST

## ■ Editorial

# University's punishment of professor inadequate

In spring term 2005, psychology major Mary Thomson's professor Jim Weston made an inappropriate comment of a sexual nature to her in class. At the beginning of the next class, Thomson sat in the back of the room. Weston created an even more uncomfortable situation for Thomson by demanding that she sit in the front row. Thomson dropped the class later that day and filed a grievance with the University, stating that Weston had sexually harassed her.

Although the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity does not discuss its grievance proceedings, Thomson was told that Weston would be reprimanded; a warning note was placed in his file. However, because his actions were not found to be ongoing, no other punishment would be carried out against the professor.

According to the American Association of University Professors' suggested policy on sexual harassment, academic freedom is impossible to maintain on campuses if sexual harassment is present. The Association also states that in some instances, conducts of a sexual nature become sexual harassment when "such speech or conduct...persists despite the objection of the person targeted by the speech or conduct."

Thomson's decision to drop her class on account of the professor's improper comments surely shows that a violation of academic freedom did occur; likewise, Weston's continued and unwanted attention toward Thomson would surely construe persistent inappropriate conduct.

To punish Weston with only a note of warning was a move of bad form on the part of the University. Giving professors an easy way out of sexual harassment charges will only persuade victims to stay silent, because of the knowledge that perpetrators of harassment will only receive a slap on the wrist anyway.

The University cannot adequately address the issue of sexual harassment until every student and professor knows that the crime of harassment will be investigated, and dealt with in a serious manner. ASUO Women's Center interim director Erin O'Brien seems to be correct in her assertion that "the University has found someone culpable, but not accountable" ("Harassment grievance filed against professor," ODE July 7). If Weston received both a reprimand and note of incident on his personal file, then it is apparent that some sort of harassment did occur; for the University to end its investigation and punishment is unfair and potentially dangerous to Thomson as well as future victims of sexual harassment at this school.

Another aspect of this situation to consider is Thomson's position as a sexual trauma victim, which would understandably create a heightened sensitivity over the professors' comments. However, Thomson's sensitivity should make Weston more, not less culpable. It is not the job of a student to inform her teachers about what does or does not make her uncomfortable; it is the job of a professor to leave unsuitable sexual remarks out of the classroom.

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## ■ Guest commentary

# Support the troops with more than a yellow ribbon or sticker

Drive just about anywhere and it's easy to see there's a war on. No, not just the war in Iraq, but the one being fought on the back of our cars.

First there are the many cars, seemingly overwhelmingly SUVs, wearing magnetic yellow ribbons urging other drivers to "Support Our Troops." Then there are the growing number of cars sporting bumper stickers with anti-war slogans, such as "How many soldiers per gallon?" and "Are you driving the war?" Our passions for and against the war in Iraq are clearly spilling out onto our highways.

Everyone in America supports the troops. But what does that really mean? Does displaying a three-dollar magnetic ribbon made in China really support the troops? Does countering with anti-war bumper stickers really support the troops? Or do both actions simply make the drivers feel good about themselves as if they are "doing their part" to support or resist this war?

Is affixing yellow ribbons to the rears of cars really a form of protesting against anti-war protesters rather than a statement in support of troops? Or is it a proxy statement for "Support Our Commander-in-Chief," no matter where he might lead us? Similarly, is affixing anti-war bumper stickers really a form of retaliating against the yellow ribbons, an empty gesture more easily done than insistently writing letters and making phone calls to newspapers and politicians?

Of course, we must take great care not to think in absolutes. There are

certainly yellow ribbon drivers who question our presence in Iraq, but who nonetheless feel that it is important to remind others not to forget the troops. And there are certainly anti-war drivers who supported our nation's actions in Afghanistan, and who unflinchingly support our troops despite their vehement opposition to the president's war in Iraq.

Then there are drivers sporting yellow ribbons on their cars who've honored our country by serving in the military, and who are reminding us that our young men and women in combat need to know that they are supported back home. And there are drivers sporting anti-war bumper stickers who've also honored us by serving, and who, having known the horrors of war, are reminding us of the dangers of blindly supporting leaders in wartime.

Finally, there are drivers who've done something more than purchase a magnet. And there are drivers who've written plenty of letters and made plenty of phone calls. However, I suspect all these exceptions taken together still represent a minority of drivers on each side of the rear bumper war.

Which returns me to the question: What does it really mean to "support our troops"? When The Register-Guard prominently ran an article last winter offering information to readers interested in sending care packages to troops in Iraq with little family, I called the number provided to the Oregon National Guard headquarters in Salem. Despite it having been several days

since the article ran, I was told I was the first to call in response.

I took down the mailing instructions, offered my support, and was thanked for calling. My kids and I assembled several boxes filled with various items we thought a soldier far from home might need, and we mailed them from the post office in time for Christmas.

I was surprised to have been the first to find out how I might support the troops, especially given those thousands of drivers out there supporting the troops. There were probably others who called after me, but I suspect not many.

Today, there are more than 150,000 American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. While doubtless they appreciate the good will behind the yellow ribbons, what our soldiers really need is something more than symbolic support.

To find out how you can support the troops, contact the Oregon National Guard, at 1-800-452-7500. Donate your unused frequent flyer miles by checking out Operation Hero Miles, at [www.heromiles.org](http://www.heromiles.org), or by calling your airline. Participate in the American Red Cross "Treasures For Troops" program online at [www.trianglearc.org/afes/treasuresfortroops.htm](http://www.trianglearc.org/afes/treasuresfortroops.htm). Finally, contact the USO about its Operation USO Care Package program, at [www.usocares.org](http://www.usocares.org).

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