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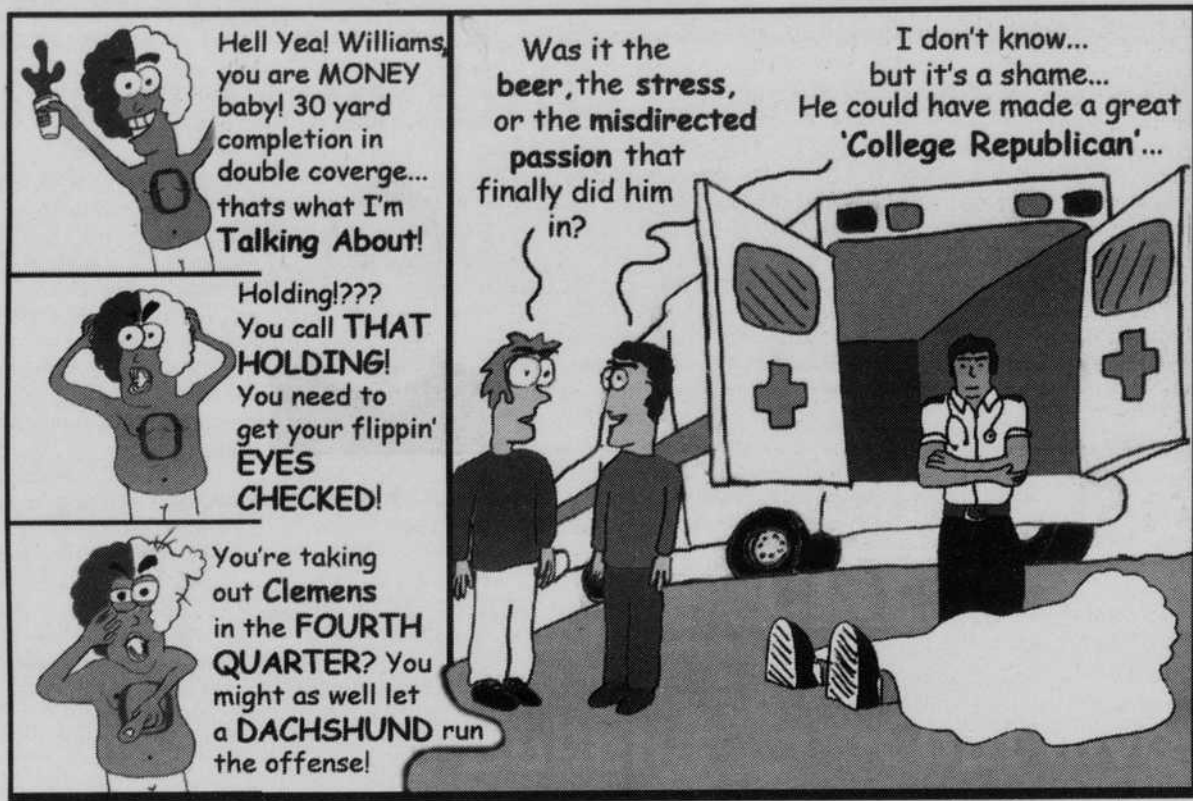
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AARON DUCHATEAU | ILLUSTRATOR

■ In my opinion

I know what it means to miss New Orleans

I'm never going to return to the city I left on Aug. 27.

That morning, all five of my roommates banged on my door, screaming that a hurricane was almost upon us and we had to leave. I immediately threw some clothes and a few toiletries into a tote. My packing philosophy was that since I'd be spending a few days in Jackson, Miss., it certainly didn't matter if my clothes matched or were even clean. Besides, this was the sixth hurricane I'd had to evacuate for, and in the past I had spent copious time obsessing over which of my belongings I absolutely could not live without, only to return to New Orleans and find just a single fallen branch. This time, I just assumed I was coming back, so I took almost nothing.

By the night of Aug. 28, we'd almost made it to Kentucky. After being told to evacuate Jackson, we figured we might as well see the southeastern United States in all its glory. We got stuck in a traffic jam in southwestern Kentucky and listened as AM radio reports became more and more dire. "No wooden structures will remain in New Orleans"; "The pressure is the lowest on record" — this, in a city that has been keeping records for 200 years. We called parents and friends every 20 minutes, desperate for information. The worst news came from my boyfriend, who noticed CNN.com spouting information on how to survive in the worst-case scenario.

"Well, first, you're supposed to have an ax, to chop through the roof if the waters rise. Then, it says if you're on your roof and the waters keep rising, your best bet is to grab onto a lamp-post. But the problem is that the fire ants will be swimming around, and eventually they'll climb the streetlight and they will win."

My roommates and I oscillated between crying and laughing hysterically. I knew the wind at that point picked up in New Orleans as the first rain bands moved through. An unstoppable monster was gliding toward my



KELLY BROWN
Y'ALL HEAR THAT 'NOLIA CLAP...

home, and there was nothing I nor anyone else could do about it. That night, we cried for almost everything. We cried for the abandoned pets and zoo animals that probably knew, as animals do, what was coming. We cried for our neighbors, so many of whom lacked the transportation or resources to get out of town. Mostly we cried for New Orleans itself.

New Orleans is a paradox, simultaneously wonderful and terrible. There aren't many cities in America with 300 years of history, but there aren't many cities that have witnessed as much poverty and fundamental ugliness as New Orleans. The impossibly ornate palaces of St. Charles quickly give way to projects where children with distended stomachs wander around without shoes.

The people there love to celebrate; working in a French Quarter bar, I was constantly asked what the parade outside was for. Nine times out of 10, I had no idea — could've been a jazz funeral, could've been an obscure Creole holiday, could've been that a bar owner decided to throw himself a parade, or it could've been that a group of street musicians got bored and recruited some tourists to throw beads. But they had to step carefully on the streets, which featured 7-foot potholes, concrete evidence of the corruption that enshrouds New Orleans' politics.

Sunday I'm going back to where New Orleans used to be. I'm going back to gather some belongings — I am one of the incredibly lucky few whose things survived intact — but

more than that, I'm going back to see what New Orleans is, because it certainly isn't what I left.

How do you mourn a city? So far, I've filled my time here in Eugene pretty well so I don't have to think about it. At first, it was uncomfortably surreal to see familiar places splashed across national television, but now it's easy to imagine that this happened somewhere else, that I'm just back in Oregon to catch up with old friends and work at the Emerald again. I can pretend that maybe things aren't as bad as they seem; after all, it's only water.

But all of my friends who are or have been back say the same thing: It's so much worse than it looks on television. The phrase "post-apocalyptic" has come up more than once.

My friend who works for FEMA, normally so enthusiastic and animated, sounds dead. Katrina switched his lively voice with a monotone. Another friend that lived in St. Bernard Parish has a house that's covered in oil from a nearby refinery. Her family brought a trailer, but left with nothing. The oil ruined even the photographs. If you've never talked to someone who has suddenly found out that they have nothing, not even a shred of their former life, I don't recommend it.

I have my doubts about what the new New Orleans will be like. Giuliani will probably be in charge, and I bet it will resemble the New Orleans exhibit at Disneyland more than anything else. Dirty parts of the city will be swept under the rug, alcohol regulations will be enforced and the French Quarter probably won't even smell.

But all I can think of right now was how beautiful it was when we left. The sky was free of clouds; my friends and I were excited for a week off of school, and the city looked as grungy and heartbreakingly beautiful as it always does. I hope I can always remember that last day of New Orleans.

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■ Editorial

Objectivity needed for RRC to help programs

Reflecting on last year's process of funding student groups through the Programs Finance Committee, one quality characterizes the ordeal: ineptitude.

The proceedings were delayed for several weeks after the committee overspent its budget and the PFC failed to keep proper meeting minutes. PFC members also generated intense controversy after they rejected the Oregon Commentator's mission and goals statement.

Throughout the process, the ASUO Executive, bound by the separation of powers dictated by the ASUO Constitution, played a background role. Following tradition, the Executive's power was limited to making budget recommendations for groups and vetoing the PFC's final budget.

This year, the Executive is taking on a more active role — a move we cautiously support.

In short, the Executive has found an end-run around the PFC process that will allow it to determine whether student groups get funding. With a goal of confirming that groups are "advantageous to the cultural or physical development of students" and that groups do not duplicate services, the Executive has created the Recognition Review Committee. The five-member board, headed by ASUO Programs Administrator David Goward, aims to review 30 groups before budget season.

The RRC initially garnered criticism, and rightly so. Goward announced the committee at a Programs Council meeting last week without warning. Because the Executive has the power to disband groups — not merely defund them — some group leaders expressed concerns that RRC members hold too much power.

The RRC indeed holds great power, and it must use that power responsibly. The very stability and success of student groups hinges on the virtue of this committee.

During his bid for ASUO vice president last year, Goward vowed to bring integrity to student government. The RRC should adopt this philosophy and work fairly with all student groups.

Some groups have historically duplicated services, such as when Night Ride and Project Saferide were ordered by the federal Office of Civil Rights to merge into the Assault Prevention Shuttle. If clear duplications exist, they should be addressed by the RRC.

However, the Commentator debacle of last year clearly demonstrates what can happen if committee members who hold grudges against another student organization use their power for personal retribution.

Based on these factors, here's one example to watch closely: What will happen to the Designated Driver Shuttle, which was recently placed on probation for an alcohol-related incident? How closely does its services mimic those of APS? Without a thorough study of both groups, we can't make that judgment. But the RRC could, if it so chooses.

The lack of a formal process to elect members to RRC was startling. Group leaders present at a recent Programs Council meeting were asked to elect two RRC members via e-mail. The other two RRC members are appointed by Goward.

Thankfully, students may appeal RRC decisions to the Constitution Court. We believe the court, which showed exemplary logic and objectivity last year, will be fit to review any grievances against the RRC.

As this new process unfolds, we will watch closely to discover whether it is a hindrance or a help to the budget process. To ensure it is the latter, we charge Goward and ASUO President Adam Walsh to keep promises to infuse this student government with viewpoint-neutrality and integrity.

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