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■ In my opinion

Thank you, Emerald, and goodbye

I went to a movie the other night with a group of friends. It's a new release, "Jarhead." A good ol' war movie. A few good explosions. Some nudity. All in all a decent flick.

In a scene where soldiers are in the midst of burning oil wells, one asks who else in the world gets to experience what they're experiencing right then.

It was an obvious attempt to highlight the weight of such a once-in-a-rare-life-time moment, but I had an answer to that seemingly rhetorical question.

Journalists. Journalists are the only people, other than soldiers, who get to experience situations like a desert full of fires. Because we are charged with reporting on the world, we are charged with experiencing the world.

Sounds good to me. This is the column where I'm supposed to tell you, the reader, that I'm off to that world. No more college for me. I'm finished. I've earned my credits. My work here is complete. I'm off to intern at The Spokesman-Review, first in Spokane for general assignments then in Boise for the Idaho Legislature.

I've been trying to think of something incredibly profound to say, but all I can think about is how I wouldn't even have a chance to say goodbye if it weren't for the Emerald. The Emerald was by far the best thing that happened to me in college. Fifteen months after working here, I know this university inside and out. (I still haven't decided whether that's a good thing.) I have favorite people, and now seems like an appropriate time to mention them.

Mike Eyster and Dan Williams are



MEGHANN CUNIFF
ALL UP IN YOUR BUSINESS

the only administrators worth mentioning. The best people I know at the University are, of course, my co-workers. Spending 12 to 16 hours a day with people will definitely help forge long-lasting friendships, but I think the fact that they're the best and most fun journalists I've worked with makes our friendships all the more solid.

Though I'll miss reporting on the actions of the administration, I'll miss working late into the night in the newsroom with my best friend and fellow news editor Jared Paben more. He's the one who got me in at the Emerald, and he's the one I turn to the most for advice. Not to mention the fact that he loves deluxe nachos from Chapala's Mexican restaurant just as much as I do.

I often wonder how the stories I write impact the community. Much of the time it's difficult to say, but every once in awhile something happens that serves as a reminder that our work does matter — people do pay attention. I received such a reminder the other day in the form of a three-page typed letter that detailed one Eugene woman's reasons for opposing the University administration's push to sell Westmoreland Apartments.

Much of what she cited came from

the articles I've written concerning University Housing and the financial policies that some past and present housing officials say have hindered the department and prevented needed renovation and additions. Those stories were a highlight of my Emerald career, not because they were the best but because they involved an extensive amount of work and made me realize how much I love being a reporter.

I still have the big stack of documents — ranging from minutes from the state board of higher education meetings to memos between administrators — that I used to write the stories. Looking through it makes me happy.

Though thinking about how difficult obtaining documents from the University is makes me quite angry, no matter how frustrated I get with the administration, I'm always thankful for Johnson Hall and the adjacent parking lot. Parking on this campus is such a mess, and that lot has provided me with a parking spot every day this term.

So I guess I can't really say the administrations never did anything for me. I've gotten free parking all term, and I got to watch the first quarter of the Civil War game in the president's skybox. But now that I think about it, the Emerald's more responsible for those experiences than the administration. If I didn't work at the Emerald I wouldn't even know the parking lot existed, and I certainly wouldn't have had the opportunity to write a story that brought me to the skybox.

So thanks, Emerald. I'll certainly never forget our good times.

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■ Editorial

UO records accessibility needs to be improved

As students, you pay thousands of dollars a year in tuition and taxes that benefit the University. But do you know how that money is spent?

As a public institution, the University is bound by Oregon Public Records Law to release many records that can show us how the University uses our money. Further, we believe open government, including this University, is vital to our ability in making informed decisions in this democracy.

We are fortunate that Oregon laws require government institutions to release most records to anyone who asks for them. Unless University lawyers can prove that a record is specifically exempt from the law, they must release all of the record or the portions that are not exempt. University President Dave Frohnmayer helped craft this law in the 1970s.

Public records theoretically available at the University include faculty salaries, University contracts, bills, budget documents, most meeting minutes and even correspondence via e-mail between some University employees. These records help us keep leaders accountable.

Yet a recent Emerald investigation of how the University releases public records and our experiences over the last several years, reveal that administrators sometimes do not understand the law or are reluctant to release records.

Most records requests are filed through the office of General Counsel to the University Melinda Grier. As she recently told the Emerald in an e-mail, workload in her office has been "extremely heavy," and she regrets she has not been able to provide information "as quickly as we would like." This statement understates the problem.

For example, in a written response to the Emerald's request for the travel records of three administrators, Grier stated it would cost \$275 to "collect the information and provide the documents." She stated that it would cost \$125 for labor to gather employment contracts for five top University administrators.

These costs are puzzling and disturbing. As a newspaper, we have a small budget to request key records. But how can the average student who is curious about this information afford these costs? Moreover, why are these costs so high?

In another case, the Emerald filed a request to Grier on Oct. 16, 2005, asking for all documents the University sent to the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights in its investigation into an Office of Multicultural Academic Support's policy that reserved slots in some math and English classes for minority students. We hoped to shed some light on the University's decision on a controversial issue. We sent two more requests before we received word back on Nov. 7, after we had already received the documents from the Department of Education.

We do not dispute the fact that Grier's office is busy. Yet what really matters is that the University is not releasing records in a reasonable time or at a reasonable cost. This defeats students' ability to obtain information that is their legal right to know. This situation is not acceptable, and it is President Frohnmayer's ultimate responsibility to ensure that these records are released at a price students can afford.

We know budgets are tight. We suggest that the University hire one or more legal assistants to help Grier and her co-workers with locating, redacting and duplicating records. This would reduce costs because Grier's pay-rate is far higher than that of a legal clerk. We can look to other universities as examples of this solution.

It's time to stop accepting excuses and demand faster and cheaper access to records.

■ Guest commentary

Recent immigration column was misinformed and irresponsible

I have read many poorly written articles in the Emerald over the 10 years that I have been a graduate student at the University, and some that were also downright offensive, but this is the first time I feel compelled to write a response. "Immigration reform doesn't cut it" (ODE, Dec. 1) by Ms. Brock is a very troubling, misinformed, and irresponsible piece of "journalism" that contains more than just a tinge of racism.

More than once, Brock makes very direct connections between undocumented "Mexicans" and terrorists like those responsible for 9/11. Making a comparison between undocumented workers who come here to be able to feed their families and 9/11 terrorists is simply outrageous. Are all people of color potential terrorists?

By the way, not all undocumented workers, or illegal aliens as you call them, are "Mexican." There are other countries in Latin America from which people migrate to the U.S. for a variety of reasons, and indeed, other countries in the world from which people "illegally immigrate."

I understand that Ms. Brock has written an opinion piece, but I was taught that effective persuasion pieces should still be well researched and based on examining many sides of an issue. Ms. Brock, however, seems to be simply using her column

as a platform to spit out the same anti-immigration propaganda in mainstream U.S. society, without looking into any carefully researched works on the matter.

In regards to history, it is an acknowledged fact that the U.S. illegally took a large part of Mexico's territory in The Treaty of Guadalupe. The U.S. government is not above acting illegally.

Second, if you know anything about U.S. immigration policy, you know that we have changed our policies over the years for our own convenience, depending on labor needs. We let people in our borders when we need them (for example during the Bracero program), and then kick them out when we don't.

Third, part of the reason "Mexico's lack of infrastructure" exists is not its own problem, but rather a result of how the U.S. has exploited this less powerful country over time.

Fourth, as you yourself point out, the U.S. economy survives, at least in part, because of the cheap labor that undocumented workers provide. Don't tell me that American citizens would take these jobs for the same crappy pay and no benefits and hazardous working conditions. Why do you think the U.S. rarely prosecutes people who hire undocumented workers?

Given all this, ask yourself why immigrants leave everything that is

familiar to them, risk their lives to come to this country, live in constant fear of being deported, and work for low wages. I think I might act "illegally" and cross the border rather than watch my thirteen year old daughter starve to death because there were no jobs in my country that would allow us to eat. Or, I might act "illegally" and come to the U.S. if my own country was torturing and murdering its citizens.

Instead of making any attempt to see people who come here as what they are — human beings — who for the most part come here out of sheer desperation, Ms. Brock turns them into faceless "criminals" and "terrorists." I guess I would hope that more of us would make some attempt to educate ourselves, especially those of who are in a position to challenge biases.

Tami Hill is a University graduate student in Anthropology and Education

CORRECTION

In the Dec. 1 Emerald article "UO Senate passes three motions Wednesday," it was reported that it costs between \$6,000 and \$8,000 to close campus for a University Assembly meeting. It actually costs that much to hold a University Assembly meeting, regardless of whether campus is closed.