

Compounding Folly

Journalism deans twist in the wind.

Nothing gives my views on journalism greater credibility than to have the University of Oregon dean of journalism and his retired predecessor twist in the wind as they take issue with them. Both Dean Tim Gleason and former Dean Arnold Ismach have earned deserved respect in education. That's why their comments about public relations can be so dangerous. It all started when *Eugene Weekly* stated (Slant, 7/14) what I had been writing for several years: It is folly for schools of journalism to teach public relations as if it were part of journalism.

Long personal experience taught me the distinction between them. Though I had a degree in journalism, I squandered that training by spending much of my professional life as a PR man on behalf of college athletics. So I have a frame of reference that may give credence to what I say.

My occasional PR lies about sports were petty. It's not petty when your government hires a public relations firm to confuse us about its image, as corporations and politicians long have done. That hit close to home with word the UO School of Journalism was starting what it described as a journalism program at the university's Portland Center. Trouble is, it is a class in public relations, not journalism.

Suggesting PR has anything to do with journalism is like the government line that Saddam Hussein collaborated with Osama bin Laden in the 9/11 attacks. It is disturbing when those entrusted with developing journalists make synonymous two disciplines whose goals are antithetical.

Gleason defends the indefensible in his letter (7/28), claiming PR in a journalism school is part of "a clear statement of our commitment to journalism." He further misleads by calling PR "communication management," then claiming PR in Portland sets the stage for a "much broader vision" of journalism.

The hypocrisy is not his alone. It is shared with most journalism deans nationally. They spread the misconception because of funding problems that are eased by enrolling many students more interested in PR's higher pay than journalism's ethics.

Ismach told me some time ago, as he wrote in his published letter, that mixing PR and journalism students gives the former a greater appreciation for ethics. Hardly. Journalism students instead see where corners can be cut in ethics, a tactic pursued by their educators.

Most journalists define their profession as getting facts on matters of public concern and presenting them with honesty. Public relations by contrast operates on behalf of a client, mixing facts and fiction selectively to paint as attractive an image as possible.

The very name of the educational program reflects an identity crisis. Most schools now are listed as School of Journalism & Communications. How very sly. Just add a word to the name, and you justify being able to lump public relations, advertising, promotions, et al with journalism.

Significant journalists have reinforced my contention. The late Fred Friendly, who was a valued assistant to Edward R. Murrow decades ago, told me "It is a tragedy journalism education has any connection with public relations." NPR's Daniel Schorr told me the same thing. Ken Bode, a recent dean at my alma mater, Northwestern, said: "I agree with you. But I'm too new here to begin rocking the boat in such a fundamental way."

The identity problem will persist so long as our public funding for education falls short, and journalism educators choose to use naming solutions for larger problems. That choice keeps journalism headed down a slope to meaningless identity.

The UO could start a corrective effort by choosing to teach journalism, not public relations, at its Portland Center. All schools could help by following one of their basic guidelines, conciseness: Drop that unnecessary word, communications.

George Beres of Eugene, a 1955 graduate of Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism, hosts "In the Public Interest" on Community TV.



TOO MUCH COFFEE MAN BY SHANNON WHEELER

A Birthday Thought from Your Pal
SHANNON WHEELER



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

APPETITE FOR WAR

This war stuff is getting mighty costly. The fee for the U.S. war in Iraq is over \$1 billion per week, but the hidden cost of battle casualties is largely invisible. As a country, we tend not to want to think about it. It doesn't fit the heroic bombast and bravado.

There are eight soldiers injured for each one killed. That's double the rate in Vietnam. The amputation rate is also double. Many of them are multiple amputees, needing two or three prostheses. Those prostheses cost between \$5,000 and \$100,00 each and will need ongoing readjustments.

Twenty-five percent of those wounded have traumatic head injuries. No one knows how much that will cost in the future or how those injuries will affect people in the decades to come. Army neurologists also believe that many brain injuries are going undiagnosed due to concussive trauma.

Then there are the veterans who will suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and other forms of mental illness. Already, one quarter of deactivated veterans from the Iraq war seeking help from the VA have been diagnosed with mental disorders.

The sad truth is that too many Americans have an appetite for war. It makes them feel very, very American. But it has to be a war that ends fast, with few American casualties and without seeing or counting the dead on the other side. Values indeed.

This war for oil and empire is not going according to that script — and then Johnny comes marching home.

*Roscoe Caron
Eugene*

KEY VALUES AT STAKE

In the recent controversy over establishing an enterprise zone (EZ) in west Eugene, Mayor Piercy has worked hard to make the best of a difficult situation. After agreeing verbally to the near-unanimous City Council proposal for an EZ with tax-break caps back in April, the Lane County

Commissioners (after the state approved the zone) suddenly changed course and demanded that caps be "optional" and — get this — that tax breaks would be based not just on creation of new jobs, but on "retention" of existing jobs. The latter would have opened the door to a vast tax-break giveaway, with no links to social objectives such as creating new, well-paying jobs.

Piercy and the City Council rightly said no to the county's tax-break candy store idea. Yet Eugene still faced a newly approved EZ in place with no caps and no local standards. The council's threat to take legal action to nix the EZ, while potentially costly and with an uncertain outcome, nevertheless gave Piercy additional negotiating leverage. The county agreed to her compromise proposal which required dropping the double-dipping "existing jobs" idea from the tax break formula.

If the city passes the compromise proposal, there will still be much work ahead, including discussions with the county about establishing community standards such as high wages and worker health insurance tied to the last 25 percent of tax breaks. Many thanks to Piercy and council progressives for keeping our focus on the key values at stake here.

*Greg McLaughlan
Eugene*

PEEPSHOW GETTING OLD

That was a nice story (8/4) about the young ladies on 11th Avenue who have figured out that shaking your rear end at passing cars while holding a hose will undoubtedly make you a few bucks. I live near the ladies and what went from a maybe once a month carwash has turned into an almost daily extravaganza.

I can't of course speak for the neighborhood, but as for myself, I am getting a little tired of the whole peepshow circus. It isn't just cuties prancing in their yard waving at people, it's gyrating in the flow of traffic with rap music blasting filthy lyrics

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