

Hermiston HERALD OPINION & READER'S FORUM

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A4

OUR VIEW

Changes make schooling more democratic

Blue Mountain Community College is on the right track with its recent efforts to modernize the classroom. We congratulate the school on its work, and we look forward to future developments.

Hermiston Herald staff was present at Blue Mountain a couple of weeks ago to see how one class was being delivered. We liked what we saw — a biology class that included more than a traditional classroom experience.

There was a teacher lecturing from the front of a room and eager students hanging on her every word, but there also was technology that made remote learning possible.

From their homes, students are able to participate in a classroom lecture. They can see, listen and interact with their instructors. In addition, they can view presentation slides and their professor's whiteboard. Students can be part of their classes live, or they can watch lectures at a later time that is more convenient for them.

This is an exciting and revolutionary approach to education that makes schooling accessible to new demographics. With the ability to study remotely and asynchronously, new



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald
Students work on course material Jan. 14, 2022, during an anatomy and physiology lab at Blue Mountain Community College in Hermiston.

students are able to take classes and earn degrees. This includes people who are employed, disabled and rural.

We also think about one group of people who might otherwise be intimidated by in-person learning — namely, older people. Seniors, who might be apprehensive about sitting elbow-to-elbow with their grandchild-

ren, might feel better about remote education. With this, they now have privacy that may make them feel better about joining a class.

As we look at the opening up of education, we see schooling become more democratic. As long as the technology is made available and understandable to all, it brings education to the home of anyone who can

afford it.

In the future, we hope for more affordable or free college. For now, though, we are happy with the benefits we are witnessing.

Much of what we are now seeing in the classroom is because of the pandemic. Schools, wanting to reduce face-to-face contact, have instituted new changes in classrooms. They may not have anticipated the effect of opening education up to new customers.

That said, they probably do not mind it. College enrollment at many schools, including at BMCC, have been dropping. By making classes more accessible, colleges may boost their number of students. Meanwhile, the rest of us will benefit from having education available at our doorsteps.

Changes to our schools are among the positive things that have come out of this awful pandemic. COVID-19 has locked us indoors and has forced us to do things differently. It is our hope, however, that some educational changes stick around with us after the disease is gone.

Furthermore, we hope new changes occur to make education accessible to even more groups.

INSIDE MY SHOES

Who really has their head in the sand?

I'm afraid Pendleton Chamber of Commerce President Velda Arnaud is going to suffocate if she remains steadfast to her recent statement in a letter to chamber members.

"I will be sticking my head in the sand until some sense of sanity returns to the world," she wrote.

I joked with one of my friends that there goes her Supreme Court nomination, but it's no laughing matter. I am amazed in this day and age that Arnaud would think it's perfectly fine to refuse to use a person's preferred pro-

noun, saying she "worked too hard to learn English grammar to just willy-nilly make changes."

The English language is constantly changing. I still recall the first time I heard alternate usage of the word "sick." My husband and I were in a ski shop in Colorado and the clerk said John's shirt was sick.

Initially, I thought the dude didn't like it, but when he asked where I bought it, he went on about how awesome it was.

And just like "The Times They Are A-Changin'," written by Bob Dylan in

the early 1960s, the times continue to change. If my 82-year-old conservative Christian mom can have an open mind, I would think that 60-something Arnaud could retrain herself.

In her philosophy of education, available via a link from her instructor page on the Blue Mountain Community College website, Arnaud states, "It's the instructor's job to encourage and help students grow, not to put them down."

And she further states, "Another thing that is important to teach our students is that each one of them has value. While we cannot necessarily elim-

inate low self-esteem, I feel that we can increase self-confidence."

It seems Arnaud has made a connection with students, being recognized in the May 2021 Staff Spotlight by the BMCC Associated Student Government. Maybe it's time for Arnaud's students to become her teachers.

My parents, who live in Coos Bay, don't have internet access. However, they watch the news and when they don't understand something, they ask. I have explained such things as Uber and social media platforms, as well as nonbinary and pangender.

A few years ago when a former high school football player came out as a transgender woman a couple of months prior to my 40-year high school reunion, I talked about Marcia with my mom. We recently discussed having no real understanding of what it must have been like for Marcia growing up and living the majority of her adult life as a male.

We discussed that the least we can do is honor people's wishes by addressing them by their preferred pronouns. Somewhat surprised by my mom's response, I said, "Well, aren't you progressive?"

I'm proud of my mom.

While she may not understand, she's willing to accept people for who they are.

Marcia died due to complications from gallbladder surgery in November 2020. I'm glad she was able to live her last few years as her authentic self and felt love and acceptance from her family, friends and former classmates — including being addressed with her preferred pronouns.

Tammy Malgesini, the Hermiston Herald community writer, enjoys spending time with her husband and two German shepherds, as well as entertaining herself with random musings.



Tammy Malgesini



Sarah Haug

LIGHT OF UNITY

Aligning behaviors with physical, spiritual world

Istopped drinking alcohol 32 years ago last month, long before "Dry January" made it a thing. I did it because I was becoming a Baha'i, even if I hadn't yet declared myself to be one. The Baha'i Faith forbids the consumption of alcohol or non-medically prescribed drugs.

This law against substances is what we call a "social" law. It isn't as fundamental to the Baha'i Faith as the central tenets,

which include the oneness of God, the oneness of religion and the oneness of humanity, but rather is a commentary on the needs of the world today.

That's a crucial caveat: the needs of the world "today." While alcohol has been an important part of human society for at least 10,000 years, the needs and understandings of our ancestors are not necessarily the same as ours.

I felt the effects of alco-

hol long before I decided to quit drinking. When I drank, my behavior changed, and I was more open to suggestions — from men, from friends, from total strangers. Often these behaviors were ones I would never have considered when I wasn't under the influence. During my junior year abroad in England (where, ironically, I was only 20, so not yet a legal drinker in the U.S.), someone told me that it took 36 hours for alcohol to leave the body. I couldn't remember the last time it

had been 36 hours between drinks.

"It is inadmissible that man, who hath been endowed with reason, should consume that which stealth it away."

Few would argue that alcohol has potentially destructive effects on people's lives and that it puts up a barrier between an individual and their usual self—or even, one could say, their "true" self. From a Baha'i perspective, alcohol thus acts as a veil between an individual and God.

Baha'is are instructed not to condemn anyone or judge the behavior of others — ever. (We don't believe in hell, either.) But we are taught that there is a physical world and a spiritual world. Those worlds aren't actually separate or distinct from one another, but exist within a single whole. Our job is to align our behaviors with, and live within, the laws of both. In so doing, we become happier and healthier.

"Every created thing in the whole universe is but a door leading ... to His

straight Path." These last two years have been hard for our world as a whole, as well as for me personally. Given the dramatic increase in alcohol consumption in the United States as a result, I can only be grateful to my 21-year-old self for putting my feet on this path I've walked for 32 years.

Sarah Haug is a member of the Baha'i Faith and has called Pendleton home since 2002. You can find her most days walking on the riverwalk with her husband, Dan.

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