

A View From The Lighthouse

Erie: Silencing the students

This will go down as one of the closest elections in American history. Every last vote will have to be counted and recounted before a President can be chosen. With the margin being so close, every last vote will count, except for at least 16 Behrend students who were turned away at the polls.

Is it any wonder that college students don't vote after the way that local officials treat us when we try to? While many of us were able to go to the polls and cast our ballot, a number of students were turned away after being told that they were not registered, even though they had properly registered to vote. These students were then told there was nothing that could be done about it. Now if it was your first time voting and this happened to you, would you bother voting again? I doubt it.

According to state law, if you have a problem with voting on Election Day, it is your right to see a judge to try and resolve the problem so that you can cast your ballot. But Erie County refuses to comply with this law. And what reason was given? None. The judges were just too lazy to do what they were supposed to under the law.

Now maybe some of you are wondering if they even knew about this law? I mean there are a lot of elections laws; maybe they just missed this one. Well, Dr. Robert Speel, Associate Professor of Political Science here at Behrend, spent hours on the phone talking to various local officials to find a solution to this problem. And what do you think these officials said? Nothing. They just continued to make up excuses that were constantly proved by Speel to be wrong. They just did not feel like following this law.

So students at Behrend took the next logical step. They went to the local media with this story, hoping that some attention in the press would help to change things for the next elections. And what did the local media do? They dropped the ball. The only media outlet that picked up on this story was channel 24 news.

Now maybe some of you saw the report on channel 24 about this whole problem. They interviewed the affected students and Dr. Speel to find out the entire story. They then spoke to the head of the Erie elections board, Flo Fabrizio, and Fabrizio explained why students were



turned away on Election Day. According to Fabrizio, students are stupid. He gave a variety of very inventive excuses that boiled down to that we are just too dumb to know how to fill out a voter registration card. And what about the state law about having a judge sitting to hear election disputes? That ended up on the cutting room floor. All the report told the public was that some stupid college students could not fill out a registration form correctly and could not vote. Oh well, better luck next time.

Contrary to popular opinion, college students, for the most part, are intelligent people—that is why we are in college. And the voter registration form is so simple that a trained monkey could fill it out, but Fabrizio insists that we just couldn't figure it out. Apparently we are smart enough to get into college and earn a degree, but filling out a voter registration form is just too hard for us.

Why do local officials not want us to vote? You would think that they would be encouraging us to vote, and would be going out of their way to get us to vote. But it seems that this is all just talk. We constantly hear people complaining that college students have the lowest voter turnout, but when we try to register we get the runaround. We at the *Beacon* are extremely disappointed in our local election officials. Students should be encouraged to vote, not be turned away on Election Day because no one wants to be bothered with us.

According to President Clinton in a comment he made after the election, "No one will be able to say that their vote doesn't count after this election." Well, we know of at least 16 Behrend students whose votes didn't count. And all anyone can tell them is better luck next time.



Another brick in the wall

And the wall I am currently speaking of is the towering, ten-foot high cinderblock creation that is my bitter disgust with the whole educational system in college. I am not really picking on Behrend in particular, because I am pretty sure that these problems exist everywhere. Granted, a large part of my problem is due to the fact that the workload is piling up right before the end of the semester, and I am completely unprepared to deal with it. An even larger part of my current whininess is directly related to the fact that I am soon to be a "super senior," and I really want out of here. And for those underclassmen who have not yet heard of the super senior phenomenon, never fear – you will be confronted with it soon enough. All I can say is that there is nothing "super" about it.

But, all the baggage aside, I think I would still have a foundation for the following gripes. They are common enough problems, and I have heard a lot of students complaining about similar issues. In fact, one of my editorial comrades addressed some of these issues earlier this semester, but I want to rehash some of them and state them my way. After all, I am apparently a genius and I have to come up with 900 words to fill this space, so I will write what I please! But, hopefully, I will be a little less cryptic than she was!

First of all, I am legally an adult. I can drink myself into a stupor whenever I want (as long as I don't drive a car, operate heavy farm machinery, or walk around campus with an open bottle of Cuervo). I can legally drive a car, vote for the leader of my country (I won't even touch that one), and hold a real job. I am even considered mature enough to marry the next guy I see and have five kids that I can't support (and not necessarily in that order). So why am I not mature enough to decide whether or not I should go to class?

Several of the professors I've had like to resort to the excuse that when I am in the workforce, I can't arbitrarily decide to miss work. Well, when I start getting paid to go to class, I will start buying that philosophy. And when I have ten papers, seven projects, five tests, three speeches, two jobs, and a partridge in a pear tree to prepare for in one week, maybe that will be an accept-

Beyond the Cheap Colored Lights

Liz Hayes

news editor

able analogy. Yes, I realize I will have to do a lot of work in the real world, too. But I sincerely hope that it will not require me to stay up until three in the morning EVERY day of the week and still get up in time for that 8:00 a.m. class or job or whatever.

Also, it seems to me that some (granted, not all) of the classes I have had that require attendance do so because the professor realizes that no one would show up if they didn't do so. I'm sorry, but is it my fault that the class is boring and not really worth my time? I think this could be a good yardstick for professors. Don't take attendance for a semester and see how many people come to your class. If no one shows up by the end of the term, maybe a change is in order. And yes, if the class is interesting, people will come. Really! I have several classes that don't require attendance and I still go!

And here's a hint – if you want students to actually follow your attendance policy, maybe you should take attendance once in a while! I really love the classes when the professor arbitrarily takes attendance. That really shows professionalism. Or when the professor announces halfway through the semester that he or she will "screw you" over attendance – when he or she hasn't taken attendance once that whole year. I've missed five classes? Prove it!

Another comment: why expect students to follow a syllabus if the professor can't? I think professors should be graded on their ability to follow a schedule – a schedule that they set up! Those who only stray by a day or two get an A or B; if off by a week, looks like a C; if you find yourself off the schedule so much that you actually have to move tests back by more than a month, I think that deserves a big fat F. I really love the English classes when actual books must be cut from the reading list. Not just readings, but

whole books. That's really impressive.

Which is a whole other can of worms. For the five hundredth time, can we PLEASE use the books we are forced to buy? Not only is it a waste when I buy a book that is later cut from the class, but how about those books that are never mentioned again? The ones that we are never tested on? The ones that are used to balance out the wobbly table or take up trunk space in the car? The ones

that I pointlessly carry around in my sac that will cause me serious back problems in another five years? Those books? And does putting a wimpy little essay question on the first test really qualify as using the book? I think not, especially if the answer can be gathered by reading the title of the book (which may be an accurate question for the use those books get).

Finally, gen ed professors, please don't take yourself so seriously. When I have to read more in my freshman lit class than I do in my 400-level English class, there is something wrong. When my intro psych class requires more work than my honors history class, you know there is a problem. I am not saying that it should be easy. But surely there is a way to adequately teach the material, interest the students, and accurately test students' knowledge without causing nervous breakdowns. I am not disingenuous general education – if you don't believe me, read my editorial from last year that defended it. But I don't think that my first two years should be as difficult as my last two (two – who am I kidding?).

I apologize if I offend any of my current or future professors. Actually, no I don't. Because I have some really great professors right now, and except maybe for the existence of attendance policies, those classes aren't a part of the preceding complaints. But if you are offended, maybe it is time to take an objective look at the way things are running in your class. No one obviously reads the end of the year evaluations, and even if they were read, the critiques won't help me now. So consider this a midterm evaluation. Good thing that book wasn't really needed, huh?

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