

The Behrend Beacon

published weekly by the students of Penn State Erie, The Behrend College

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THE BEHREND
Beacon

"A newspaper by the students for the students"

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Forty-five important words

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances. —First Amendment to the Constitution.

Every time I hear those 45 simple words, my eyes fill with tears and my heart swells with pride. The forefathers of America truly outdid themselves with the Bill of Rights. I wish I could go back to that glorious day of December 15, 1791, and shake the hand of every man or woman that helped shape such an awesome amendment.

The First Amendment is the foundation of our personal freedoms and is the mark of our wonderful democratic society.

Without the First Amendment, the government would be free to establish a national religion, totally going against one of the reasons people fled to America—to escape religious persecution.

The government could also silence protestors. Journalists would not be allowed to question or investigate the government.

Without the basic freedoms of expression, we would no longer live in a free society. Once the government has the power to censor, they could do it again and again. The government could censor anyone!

If you're not outraged by now, there might be something seriously wrong. In a free society, every individual should have the right to decide what art, entertainment, speech, you name it, he or she wants to receive or create.

As an aspiring journalist, those 45 words couldn't be any sweeter. But moreover,

as a human being it overwhelms me when I think of all the amazing rights this amendment affords, especially the freedom of speech.

When people do not exercise their right to freedom of speech, it is outrageous. Free speech provides a check and balance system between people and the government. The right to free speech keeps a free society on its

toes and helps guide the society away from the majority view crushing the minority view.

In order for one person to have the rights for his or her thoughts, feelings, or works to be published, another person must have the same rights to voice agreement or disagreement.

Freedom of speech addresses both popular and unpopular viewpoints. Conflict and controversy are everyday proof of our nation's commitment to our fundamental rights guaranteed by the First Amendment.

We, as college students, are at a time in our lives where we should be voicing our opinions. I am woman, hear me roar. But

not just women; men, children, minorities, EVERYONE should be heard. Freedom of speech opens a world of light and brings so many viewpoints into discussion. Through freedom of speech, we, as a society, can be more knowledgeable and tolerable.

The greatness of the freedom of speech and the First Amendment is ineffable. It truly cannot be put into words. Forty-five words together make up an incalculable amount of freedoms.

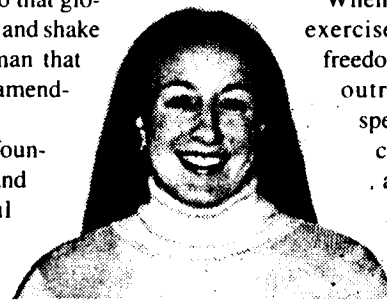
In a 2002 analysis of the State of the First Amendment, conducted by Center for Survey Research for and Analysis at the University of Connecticut, a whopping 94 percent said people should be allowed to express unpopular opinions with 67 percent strongly supporting that right. Of those with a college degree, 78 percent said they strongly support the right to express unpopular decisions.

Everyone needs to be heard; I can't stress that enough. In order for our society to stay free, we must be heard.

If one disagrees, let it be known who you disagree with, why you disagree. We have to know what the opposition is thinking.

As a society, we cannot afford to have one track minds. Moreover, as college students with malleable minds, we must question everything and believe nothing.

We have got to be heard.



Lauren Packer

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The Beacon encourages letters to the editor. Letters should include the address, phone number, semester standing, and major of the writer. Writers can mail letters to behrcoll2@aol.com. Letters must be received no later than 5 p.m. Monday for inclusion in that week's issue.

Letters to the Editor

Dr. Miller's response to Reschenthaler

Dear Editor,

I would like to offer a few remarks about Guy Reschenthaler's editorial column which appeared in the September 12, 2003 edition of *The Beacon*. While there is much to comment upon in his article, I would like to focus on his comments related to the Multi-Cultural Council. Reschenthaler views MCC with a political lens, one that I do not believe reveals the true value of MCC and all of its member organizations.

Many students who attend Penn State Behrend live, work, and study in the majority. That is, 87% of our student population is Caucasian and 65% is male. If you happen to be in one or both of those majorities, in general your transition will be somewhat easier to the college than if you were not. It's not too difficult to find others with similar experiences, perhaps from the same area of the state, etc. You tend to feel more comfortable in your new surroundings because you become connected to other students. Not that you won't experience difficulties, nearly all students do,

but they won't be compounded by not being part of a majority.

The opposite, of course, is also true. The smaller the minority the greater the possibility that you might feel isolated on campus because others may have difficulty relating to your experiences or worse, don't value the diversity you bring to campus. It's not about politics, it's about human nature. If you don't feel somewhat comfortable in your new environment it will be difficult to do your best.

It is human nature for most of us that when we enter a new environment we tend to gravitate to those who are similar to us. Students join clubs and organizations because they have the same interest in accounting or outdoor activities or other interests represented by the multitude of organizations on campus. We have a need to belong.

But MCC is different. Many of the students who participate in MCC-related clubs do so because it is a part of their identity: who they are not just what they do. MCC helps students find an initial com-

fort zone on campus, one from which many students frequently branch out from into other roles on campus including Resident Assistants, SGA, etc. MCC helps international students adjust to a new campus and country. The Asian students (who, by the way, come from many distinctive cultural backgrounds) feel more welcome on campus. I could go on but you get the point.

I challenge Reschenthaler and other students who share his view of the world to try and step out of the majority for once and attempt to view Behrend from a different perspective.

MCC and its member organizations play a very important role in the lives of hundreds of students on this campus. Students should work to further learn about the variety of perspectives held on our campus, and not tear down that for which they don't have an appreciation.

Dr. Ken Miller
Director of Student Affairs

Gumbo and heritage

Dear Editor,

I am outraged by the publication, "Look, here's how it is," that was placed in the editorial page on September 12, 2003. I say this because of certain statements that were uttered which not only disrespected individuals from other nationalities but the Multi-Cultural Council. Now, even though I understand that this article was written in an attempt to unify, it ended up doing just the opposite.

First and foremost, American is the equivalent to a southern dish called gumbo. For all those who do not know what this dish is, it consists of a diverse array of seasonings and ingredients that make it delicious. Like gumbo, American consists of all types of people from all over the world- or as Guy Reschenthaler stated, it is a "melting pot."

Now, if one of the seasonings or ingredients is missing, gumbo is not gumbo- and therefore if one of the elements, such as the celebration of diversity which completes America is missing, then the melting pot is no longer a melting pot.

Furthermore, if one was trying to promote unity, I would think that they would steer clear of belittling other nations with remarks such as, "America is better than foreign lands, and that the "old countries were unstable, miserable, poverty ridden hellholes with little chance for upward mobility." Or my favorite, "But lets face it, who would want to live in Africa? Every time Africa is on the news people are either shooting at each other or are in some bloody civil war or starving to death in some fly and dung infested village. For the Native Americans: all they were doing before the Europeans came were killing each other. Their culture had not even invented the wheel." Does this make sense to you? Correct me if I'm wrong, but no, especially because my ancestry is of direct African decent. And, just to set the record clear, yet there may be some poverty and war going on in Africa bit to assume this stereotype about the whole continent when it is something that is going on in some of its countries is wrong. Additionally, if you want to get technical, the main reasons for lands such as Africa being "poor and war ridden" are due to exploitation (which America is very GOOD at) and corruption or internal leaders.

Now, when I was a little girl, my grandmother always told me, "Pam, you really have to know where you came from, before you can know where you are going." I never really understood the magnitude of this statement until I grew older. Basically she was telling me to be proud of my heritage, a heritage that consists of values which, to this day, have guided me on my journey to wherever it is I am supposed to be. So, with this in mind, if I want to learn more about my heritage by joining organizations that promote positive reinforcement within my heritage, why is it a crime? Charity starts at home. Before I can go out and promote diversity, respect, and awareness to others, I must be able to do so within my own race. And, that is exactly what the Multi-Cultural Council does, in addition to merging these different backgrounds together and celebrating them.

So yes, the Association of Black Collegeians, Organization of Latin American Students, National Society of Black Engineers, Organization of African Students, Irish

American Society, International Student Organization, Trigon, and the Asian Student Organization do have purposes on our campus as well DIVERSITY-knowing and acknowledging where you come from does in America.

Finally, I would like to say that if we do not study history, we are prone to make the same mistakes. Did you not learn from the Holocaust? Or the enslavement of not just Africans Americans, but Hispanic, Asian, and Native Americans? This all resulted because one culture or race looked down upon another as lesser. Now, this may be a little extreme, but hey, it has happened before and all begins with one statement: Diversity is not just an ideal, it should be a way of life.

Pamela Sumah,
Intl Business and Marketing, 03

Humor section

Dear Editor,

I enjoyed the humor section in last week's paper. It was at the end of Guy Reschenthaler's article.

Mark Reynolds
COMBA, 06

A spicy Thai dish

Dear Editor,

I find it amusing how so many Behrend students are criticizing Guy Reschenthaler for his latest editorial. I, for one, do not necessarily agree with all of Reschenthaler's points, but I do acknowledge his right to state his opinions. Reschenthaler writes in a witty, in-your-face style that captures his personality and raises pertinent and controversial issues. Compared to the rest of the Beacon writing staff, Reschenthaler offers a distinctive break from the mundane and monotonous pieces of other writers.

When I read Reschenthaler's column, "Look, here's how it is," I feel like I'm reading a spicy Thai dish, amidst the bland saline crackers that constitute the rest of the Beacon. Reschenthaler injects personality and charisma that is usually missing from the Beacon Editorial page. We may all disagree with his points, but we can all admire his bravado in stating his mind.

I eagerly look forward to Reschenthaler's next column. We all might find disagreement with what he writes, but he does that to entertain us and gives us a written rollercoaster every three weeks.

Ryan Mathew Ohl
MIS, 08

In response to Reschenthaler

Dear Editor:

In September 12th issue of *The Behrend Beacon*, Guy Reschenthaler declared that he was the first editorialist to address the hypocrisy of diversity at Behrend. We would like to congratulate Guy for initiating this discourse and have also decided to share our stance on the discussed issues.

"China sucked pretty badly; India does too, Mexico and Cuba, horrible nations, France, don't even get me started."

Whatever the intentions of the above statement were - either getting attention, expressing an opinion, or just being humorous - this and other comments concerning the history of the United States and the reason why Europeans and other foreigners have settled in a "stable, affluent country," are rather obscure; if these were intended to be humorous, the comments were ill-timed and poorly used. The United States itself is built on the concept of diversity. People immigrated to this country and are still immigrating mainly because the United States values diversity. Integrating the talents from all over the world under one roof has made the United States the hegemonic power it is today. Making remarks similar to Reschenthaler's undermines the confidence of a significant population of the United States (20%); they came here for a better life and adopted this country as their second homeland, but also have respect for their own roots. And, Sir Reschenthaler - whether you like it or not - by 2055, the immigrants will be the majority in the United States; therefore, you have no choice but to appreciate the different cul-

tures and values they bring, which, in fact, enrich our existing ones. The statistics below speak for themselves:

USA Population Projections, millions (rounded off)

	1997	2000	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050
Total	267	275	298	323	347	370	394
White	195	197	202	207	210	210	208
White % of total	72.8	71.8	68	64.3	60.5	57	52.8

(Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P25-1130, "Population Projections of the United States by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1995 to 2050")

"The next time you walk past the MCC office, think about their hypocrisy, think about how their presence divides our campus."

In reference to Reschenthaler's criticism towards the MCC, we would like to clarify one matter: the Multi Cultural Center (MCC) is not a bunch of racially-and-culturally-diverse students who came to college and all of a sudden decided to exclude themselves from the rest of the student body. The purpose of the MCC is not to "divide other groups;" it is to serve as a support mechanism first and foremost. When Reschenthaler walks by the MCC, perhaps he is offended. To him, a group of ethnically-and-culturally-diverse students have purposefully alienated themselves and are sending a racist message. We believe the students in the MCC are merely following the same group dynamics as oth-

ers; they form a group of people with similar experiences and common understandings - this is something they may not have been able to form with other Behrend students. It is not about animosity; it is about a human need for support. That is precisely one of the purposes of the organization. As

a matter of fact, membership of the MCC organization is open to the rest of the student body (talking of unity). We would argue that the MCC and other Umbrella organizations are essential for a successful and fulfilling college experience for some of the students representing different ethnic, cultural, and sexual orientation backgrounds. [We would imagine that the purpose of joining a fraternity would be more about uniting in a pursuit of friends and parties as opposed to alienating oneself from the rest of the student body.]

In conclusion, the responsibility of uniting the races and cultures does not lie entirely in the hands of minorities. These matters should be addressed by both parties. Dialogue will be able to occur when persons like Reschenthaler address racial and cultural issues with more sensitivity and respect

Olga Vaniev,
President of International Student Organization
Marketing and Psychology, 07

Mohammed E Hoque
Computer Engineering, 07