

OPINION

The Behrend Beacon

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THE BEHREND
Beacon
"Professionalism
with a personality"

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In the Diversity Corner

By Fariha Andaleeb
editorial columnist

For a campus of its size, Penn State Behrend seems to have a lot more cultural diversity than I had expected to see. The international scene is both dynamic and active.

Clubs at Behrend include the Asian Students Organization, International Students Organization, the Association of Black Collegians, the Irish American Society, the Organization of African Students, and the Organization of Latin American Students. These are only to name a few of the clubs that promote diversity on campus and cultural awareness.

Understanding other cultures is particularly important now, considering the current state of the world. After Sept. 11, there seemed to be a spiked increase in the public's interest of international issues and understanding of how the 'other side' thinks. But in a time when lines are being blurred and boundaries being obscured, how do we define 'the other side?' Who are these people and what do they represent?

Defining this group of people remains the complicated task. After all, 8 million

of the world's Muslims are located in North America, many of whom are American.

The Muslim community is internationally on the rise. In 1900, it comprised approximately 12.4 percent of the global population. By 1980, this figure grew to about 16.5 percent. The year 2000 brought the population to 19.2 percent, with a projected figure of 30 percent by the year 2025. As the second largest religion in the world, Islam is internationally growing at a rate of 2.9 percent annually, which is greater than the rate at which the world population is growing (2.3 percent) in total.

According to similar recent demographics, the Muslim population is growing at a rate of 6 percent in the United States alone, compared to the total population growth rate of the US which is currently at .9 percent. It is no wonder that people are taking a heightened interest in this particular group of people.

Behrend offers an introductory course about Islam, which is being taken by a diverse group of students. In my class we have a Pakistani, Bangladeshi, African American, Bosnian, Caucasians, etc. The religious range is equally varied. These people are far from religious

studies majors. The student base includes psychology, biology, business, education, and engineering majors.

Why then, I asked, are you taking this course? "I feel that during these times it is important to understand Islam and those who follow it," said one student.

"I just want to learn about Islam...I was curious," said another. Students are opening their minds to new ideas, and exposing themselves to concepts they wish to understand, even if they don't necessarily promote them.

There is a general misconception of Islam that is slowly beginning to break as more people inform themselves. Being Muslim and being American are not mutually exclusive, as people are beginning to understand.

To understand 'the other side,' one must begin by distinguishing between religion and politics, Islam and culture, theology and nationalism. We have to recognize that the enemy is not a group of people as much as it is a set of ideas that separate us into sides in the first place. The fact that so many clubs, organizations, and individual students are taking an initiative to learn more about these issues and form opinions is a step in the right direction.

Our View

Park somewhere else

It's 2:30 a.m. and you're driving back to your on-campus apartment from work. You're tired, it's cold, and of course there is no place to park. You zip around the banana lot hoping to see one open space; no such luck. You continue to the apartment lot where you swear the same cars sit day after day and week after week. As you speed through the maintenance lot you feel your blood pressure start to rise. You resent the school for charging \$230.00 for a parking permit that has you parking somewhere over the rainbow. On to the Ohio lot, just to realize that one car passed you and took the very last spot. Impossible? Not at all; it happens.

Where do you park now? You contemplate parking in the grass or just creating your own spot. Then you think about the towing charge and with that proceed to the Jordan Road parking lot, better known as no man's land. Your car slides into an open spot and you bitterly turn off the engine. It's now 2:45, you're at the very bottom of campus and have a long, lonely, irritating hike up to your apartment.

Irritated? More like irate! Parking for resident students has gotten out of control. Why would we park in the Jordan Road parking lot when we live in Ohio, Almy, the apartments or even the suites? Why should freshmen, who apparently have impeccable timing, be comfortably parked in the banana lot? This has to stop!

The best part of this whole parking situation is that Penn State Behrend doesn't guarantee you a parking spot after you buy your permit. Obviously students aren't going to take time to read all of the parking regulations before buying one. The parking regulations clearly state that Penn State Behrend doesn't guarantee the registrant a parking space, but all attempts are made to meet the parking demands. Currently there are 850 parking spaces for on campus residents and approximately 850 resident parking permits were sold for the semester. Parking permits can still be purchased.

Can we use some logic here? If you live in Senat Hall don't park in the Ohio lot, park in the closer and spacious Jordan Road lot. In fact, let's just say seniority rules. Meaning, if you're an underclassman, park in the Jordan lot and if you're an upper classman, park wherever your 1985 Buick Park Avenue fits.

Edinboro University has a lot designated for freshmen only. When they buy their parking permit they get a decal that signifies the lot where they can park. Each university has different parking policies fit to meet the campus parking needs. We just think it's about time for Behrend to revamp the parking policy and set some new ground rules.

Your alarm is going off

By Kristen Comstock
editorial columnist

The latest Gallup poll taken last Friday shows President Bush with 55 percent of the vote and Kerry with 42 percent. So my question is, hasn't anyone been paying attention to what has been going on around them and throughout the world for the past four years? If you are still voting for Bush, it is time for you to wake up!

I know you may not want to be lectured to by another "zealous liberal". If this is true, you can stop reading right now... LUCKILY, this is still a free country. Or is it?

Bush has racked up the highest deficit in American history. Which means that each American has approximately 4,500 dollars that we are going to have to pay back in future taxes and reduced services.

As young Americans, this hurts us the most. The Republican tax and education policy forced our tuition to record highs while completely abandoning any promise to raise Pell grants and work-study.

Unemployment for college graduates has doubled in the last four years, and over thirty percent of us have no health insurance, which, by the way, is the worst

rate of any segment of the population. The war in Iraq has cost over 1000 young American lives, overstretched our military, and pushed us all towards a national draft. Has anyone woken up yet?

Here are some more caffeine-filled facts! Since Bush took office 3.3 million jobs have been lost, more than the last 11 presidents combined. Bush is likely to be the first president since Herbert Hoover to show a net loss of jobs at the end of his first term. I know I can't wait to start the job search knowing that!

The Bush Administration's regressive environmental policies have lowered cleanliness standards for our air and water, while allowing utility companies to profit off of the weakened regulations. And here I thought I was being healthy when I went for a run outside.

Don't forget, Bush is under funding education. Bush cut 200 million dollars from his own No Child Left Behind Act, eliminating crucial educational programs for lower income children and cutting professional training for more than 20,000 teachers.

More American children than ever are pouring into already overcrowded schools. America now faces the largest wave of teacher retirements in our his-

tory, while young teachers leave the classroom at alarming rates. Fourteen million children are home alone after school, but after-school programs are the first to be cut in the current budget crunch. It sounds like a great time to start a family!

And if that is not enough, good old Bush and his Administration established the Patriot Act, which threatens our constitutional rights and civil liberties. The Patriot Act expands the ability of law enforcement to conduct secret searches and engage in various forms of surveillance.

The FBI now has access to American citizens' medical, financial, mental health and student records without notification or permission. It allows them to investigate individuals without probable cause of crime. And that's not all! It allows non-citizens to be jailed based on mere suspicion and held indefinitely without meaningful judicial review. I don't know about you, but I know I can sleep soundly now!

So if you are still asleep, here is a recap! Bush is bad for the economy, bad for the environment, bad for education and bad for civil liberties! But go ahead and hit that snooze for the next four years. Who knows what you will wake up to!

Campus bookstore: Mission possible

By Aimee Pogson
editorial columnist

I really shouldn't say this in a school publication that everyone is going to read, but over the summer I thought a lot about breaking into the bookstore. I thought about it in intricate detail, imagining the doorways, the windows, the pipes that run along the ceiling. I thought about all of those expensive books locked inside, unguarded, lonely and looking for a friend to come in and just read them. I even started writing a fictional story about a student who makes plans to rob his school bookstore. It is amazing how that student resembles me.

I don't know if my preoccupation is good, bad, right or wrong. Many people would say that my thoughts about robbing the bookstore are wrong and probably even border on being illegal, but I'm not sure. If I think about robbing a bookstore, but actually have no intention of committing the crime, is it still wrong? Is it immoral to have bad thoughts about a bookstore? That seems like the kind of question that I would seriously ponder if I only got about three hours of sleep. As it stands now, I slept about four and a half hours last night.

While I'm not sure about the philosophy behind bookstore robberies: the question of what is worse, the thought or the intention of robbing the bookstore, I do know that thinking about robbing the bookstore entertains me.

I think about it when I am driving in my car. I think about it when I am eating breakfast in the morning. There is

something about the challenge of breaking into a building that intrigues me. When I was younger and still a Girl Scout, I told my Girl Scout leader that I wanted to break into buildings someday. "I don't want to steal anything," I told her. "I just want to know that I am smart enough to find a way in."

She informed me that there are people in the world who get paid to figure out ways to break into buildings. People are hired at prisons to try to think of possible ways to escape from the building, which is very similar to breaking into a building, only backwards. This is a way for prisons to improve their security. When I heard that there were jobs like this in the world, I was amazed.

When I was in high school and I got bored in class, sometimes I would think of ways to escape from the building. I imagined hosting a TV show or writing a book entitled Daring Escapes from Northwestern Senior High. It would be a fun, up-beat TV show or book, one that teenagers would find "cool" and "hip". They too would want to escape from school, if they didn't want to escape already.

And like my breaking out of school dreams, maybe my breaking into the bookstore dream is simply an escape, a little detour from reality that makes me feel like I am capable of doing daring, exciting, and illegal things. All of my life I have followed the rules, yet every once in a while I feel a resounding urge to break them. I get bored and I start to think to myself, "Well, if there are pipes on the ceiling, they must be connected

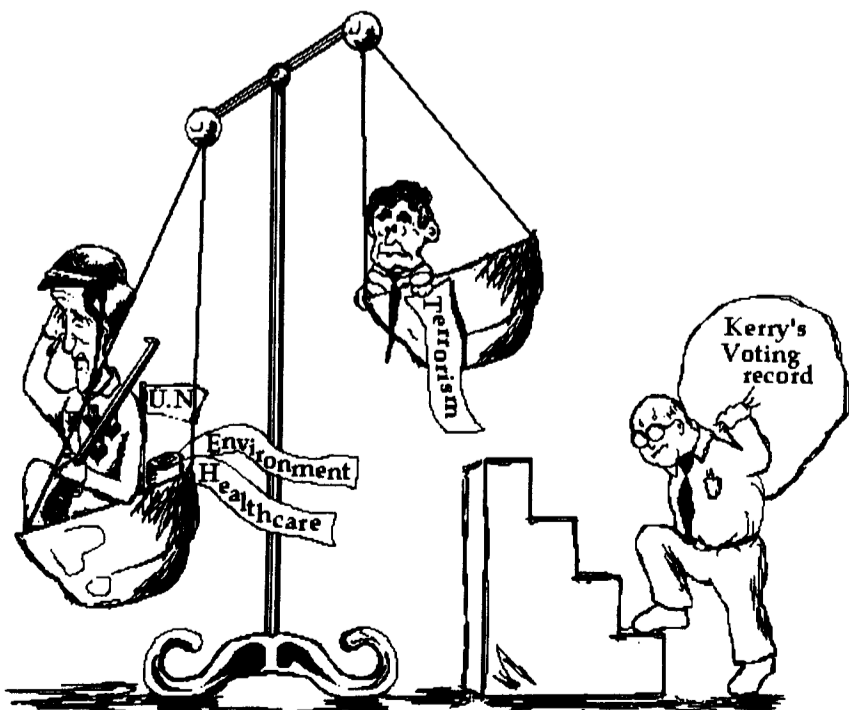
to something else in the building. They may even lead outside." And so on.

Although I am currently the only person that I know of who is voicing her desire to break into and out of buildings, I have a sneaking suspicion that I am not the only one who thinks about these things. While I am busy contemplating the tranquility of the bookstore, other people are probably scoping out the layout of Bruno's or the school post office, imagining all of those nice goodies that parents are sending to their kids. And that's okay.

Just don't act on these fantasies. It can be relaxing and fun to imagine yourself doing illegal things. I am a firm believer in the idea that expressing your desires, however bad or illegal they may be, in your imagination is a healthy alternative to actually carrying out your desires. It's never a good idea to bottle up emotions. Look at Martha Stewart, always calm, cool, collected, the perfect hostess. She wasn't in touch with her true emotions and now she is going to jail (Okay, so this is an exaggeration and probably even a bad example, but somehow she just doesn't seem emotional enough to be human. I definitely see a connection between her missing emotions and her terrible criminal activities).

So go ahead, imagine yourself being crazy, daring, and criminal. Besides being good for your emotional well being, it's also fun. Just don't get carried away and act on any of your ideas. And remember, I'll be thinking of you when the police and safety officials begin questioning me.

Disagree? Agree?
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by Zach Mentz/BEHREND BEACON