

Opinions

Home Brewing 100: Solution for University's problems

A lot has been said lately about multiculturalism and diversity at this University.

Some say it segments our society through highlighting division. Some say it brings us together through understanding.

I say maybe they're all missing the point. What I'm wondering is: what about beer?

Now I know that alcohol is often cited as one of the University's biggest problems. But I'm not talking about abuser-friendly light lagers sold at everything-must-go prices Thursday nights downtown. I'm talking about wholesome beer, pilsner you can be proud of, something you won't just chug away.

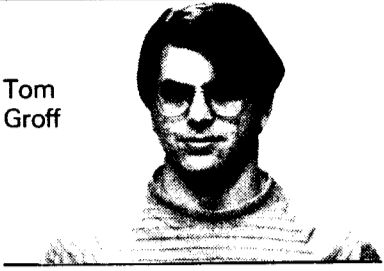
I'm talking, beer buffs, about home brew. There's lots of diverse people out there who like beer.

So why can't it bring us together?

On the pilsner planet, the rise of home brewing and microbrewing has restored the diverse collection of literally thousands of varieties of beer. Recent discoveries reveal that cultures as diverse as the Eskimos, the Mongols and the Sumerians all used to do some

My opinion

Tom Groff



home brewing. Plus, we all get along better with a good beer buzz.

My contribution to the diversity debate and the USG unconventional campaign ideas is to unite this campus, with glasses raised, in a Home Brewing 100 class. I figure there should be no harm in one more general education requirement — this can fall under alcohol awareness — especially one where you make beer.

It's educational, as well. I never thought much before about the origins of the beer I drank. Did you know that there is fermentation involved? I used to think that

smelly microorganisms and food only go together when we're talking about cheese.

I had a lot to learn. I mean, I've driven by the Stroh's plant on Interstate 78 near Allentown, lapsing into daydreams about the huge metal tanks and a yard piled with thousands of kegs, presumably filled with beer. But this was only imagination, not knowledge.

Then I got The Best Christmas Gift Ever, a complete home brewing kit.

Sorry to disappoint, however, home brewing is on a much smaller scale than giant commercial vats.

My guess is you won't be making enough beer to swim in, although perhaps enough for a shallow bath. My very first batch of home brew, an Old English bitter ale made from a kit called Munton's Gold, produced 1½ cases of 16 ounce bottles. It's not a lake o' lager, but it's a start.

So to anybody out there who wrote letters to the editor suggesting I had no coolness potential: I made beer, and this is an automatic coolness qualification.

"I figure there should be no harm in one more general education requirement — this can fall under alcohol awareness — especially one where you make beer."

My first batch didn't exactly prove that home brewing could unite the University. But I did share mine with all my housemates and even some of my friends, which is more than I do with, say, a package of hot dog rolls.

And my first foray into fermentation is only a microcosm of the caring, sharing, unified, tipsy community that could exist among Home Brewing 100 students.

The class would include a diversity section about beers of the world, but would be focused on groups working together to brew batches of beer.

My dream is so beautiful I could cry. But I won't cry in my beer — it tastes much better uncontaminated. In fact, one of the most tedious, but necessary parts of the home brew-

ing process is sanitizing every piece of equipment before you use it.

But the rest is easier and more fun. Ultra-simplified, it goes like this (all of the necessary materials are available at The Granary, 2766 W. College Ave.): You take some malted barley and hops, and mix it with some water and yeast in a big glass tank.

That mixture is called wort, which sounds bad, but it will be beer. Then you let the mystical beer spirits take over — also known as fermentation — for a while and then bottle it. After three to six weeks, you have beer.

Thanks to added educational benefits, the process really is a little more complicated. *The New Complete Joy of Home Brewing*, a how-to of home brewing by guru Char-

lie Papazian, has you doing all kinds of scientific stuff that should fill some requirement. You measure specific gravity (chemistry); you arrange siphons (physics) to get the beer into bottles; you trigger fermentation (biology) with yeast and priming sugar. Then you drink it (therapy).

In Papazian's words, "Relax. Don't worry. Have a home brew."

Except on my first try, I had no home-brew around, so I had to buy some beer.

There's really only one problem left with Home Brewing 100. You have to be 21 to brew and drink. Other than that, home brewing is far more legal than, for example, running moonshine in Hazzard County. So thankfully, I see a simple solution: make it a senior year requirement.

But make it a stress-free pass/fail credit, so we can all unite, relax, not worry and have a home brew.

Tom Groff is a senior majoring in journalism and a Collegian columnist.

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