

Internal strife hurts credibility

Last week, controversy surrounded University Park Undergraduate Association (UPUA) positions — one because of offensive posts on a chairman's Twitter page and the other because of infighting.

The issues underscore another more fundamental question concerning student government at Penn State: How can UPUA recruit and promote effective leaders throughout the entire organization?

One concrete measure

UPUA could take that may help avoid the infighting that characterized the chair of the assembly's position selection is developing a more substantial application process.

Right now, candidates for chairs are nominated and voted on by the assembly. Having interested students apply for positions rather than simply being nominated would give assembly members a better idea of who they're voting for.

UPUA should also have

more stringent requirements for those who are named chairs.

Instead of bringing in outside students, experience in student government should be a top priority.

The most effective way for UPUA to avoid these situations and to grow as an organization may be for all of its members to be more mature about the application process.

UPUA needs to focus on making the best appointments for the student population as a whole.

Don't be afraid to ask "why," seek guidance

By Meagan Kanagy

WHY? It's a question we're all familiar with. One that we've heard children ask over and

over again, one that invokes a tired response from a parent. It's a question that can dignify an answer as simple as, "Because I said so," or one as complicated as "I don't know." This is a question that is prominent in a research university. We want to know the "why" behind everything.



MY OPINION

I wonder how many of us have questioned the reason behind our existence at some point in our lives and how many of us haven't really thought about it. I think it's fascinating how our bodies work, how the earth turns, how we need relationships, how we have emotions and feelings ... but don't you ever wonder why? What's the point?

Why does the universe exist? Why do we live in this world? Why does it matter that we are an intelligent species, that we have a currency system, that we speak different languages? Why do we have brains? If you believe in the Big Bang Theory, where did that tiny speck of energy come from, and why was it there?

Is the only reason we live that we come into this world to be educated, get jobs, make money, get married, have families and die? Why do we have hope? Why do we trust?

Why do we find comfort in the fact that tomorrow is a new day and that we can hope in the future? Why do we have the capacity to question, "Why?"

Sorry if you were expecting to read something a little less intense today. If I didn't think bringing this up was important, I wouldn't have wasted my time writing this column. But here I am.

Comedian, musician and self-professed atheist Penn Jillette said this: "How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate someone to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?" Penn State, I'm here because I don't hate you. I love the family that you have been to me these past four years, and I want you to hear the reason why I believe what I believe.

I believe the Gospel is the true story of God's love for us — his creation — and how he loved us enough to win us back even though we have a history of turning our backs on him. God has kept his promises to send his perfect son — his only son — Jesus Christ, to live the life that we could not live and pay the penalty for our mistakes that we were unable to pay on our own.

This is our hope: a restored relationship with our Creator now and a promise of an eternity with him in the future.

I believe in the Gospel because it tells me why I am here and why my life has meaning. Sometimes I still can't wrap my head around the fact that, although I'm far from perfect and even farther from knowing all the answers, God still loves me and accepts me as I am. But then, I remember that Jesus paid for my life — not with money — with his life, because that was what it cost.

Without the Gospel, I would be lost. I'd have no direction or support. I would always wonder why and never find an answer. I see the Gospel, the Bible, as my map to eternity with the one who loves me enough to die in my place. Let me tell you, it is not an easy guide to follow for an imperfect person like me. However, it's a lot easier than trying to control my life by myself.

So, my fellow Penn Staters, I'm asking you to question. Ask why. Ask yourself, your friends, your parents, your professors, a pastor — ask me if you want. My picture and my contact information are printed with this column. Stop me on the sidewalk or e-mail me. We'll talk. I'll do my best to help you find the answers to your questions, and if I can't, I'll find someone who can help more than I can. That is my promise to you, and this is my plea: Ask the tough questions and seek the answers. Read the Bible. Ask God. That's right — pray.

Ask him like you would ask anyone else. Why? Why not?

Meagan Kanagy is a senior majoring in photography and journalism and is a Collegian photographer. Her e-mail address is mak5146@psu.edu.

blog lines

Above the Net

After 15 games in 45 days, the Penn State men's volleyball team finally has a break.

In this week's Pavcast, Nittany Lion coach Mark Pavlik discusses why this week off is important to his team. Then, he looks back at the regular season, including comments on libero Dennis Del Valle recently becoming the program's all-time leader in digs and reflections on the best moments of the past four months.

Read more from the men's volleyball blog **Above the Net** and the rest of The Daily Collegian's blogs at psucollegian.com/blogs.

THE DAILY Collegian

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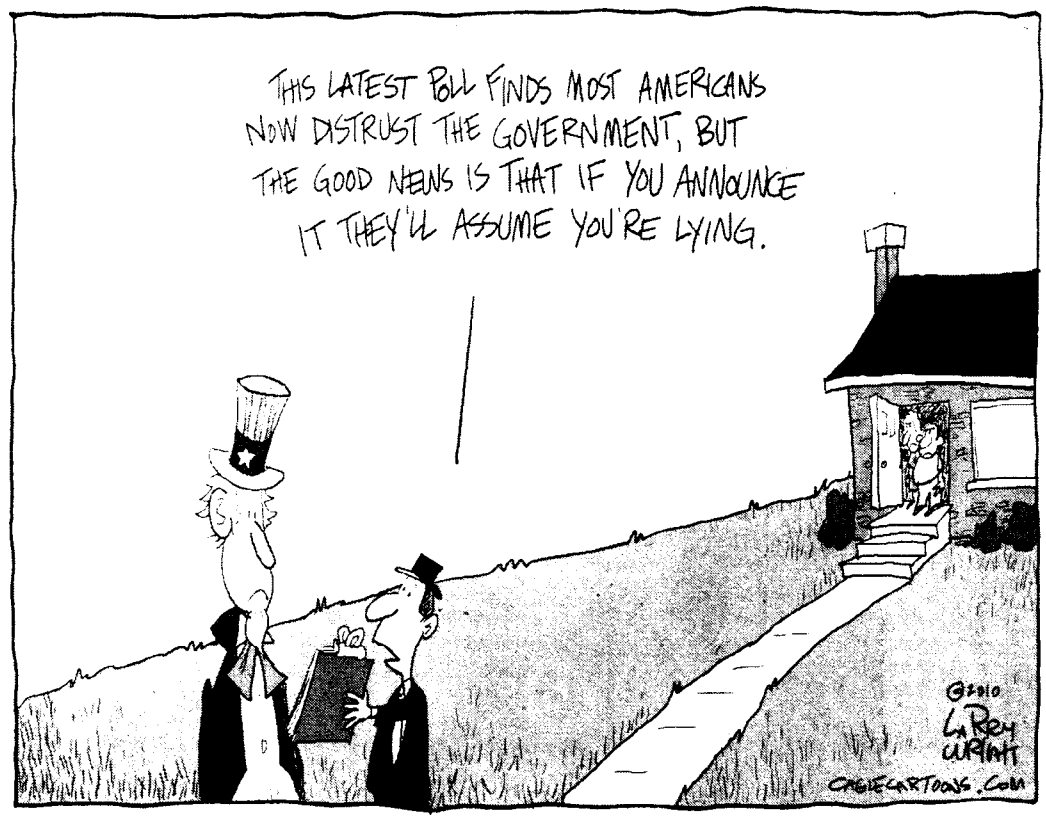
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Make the effort to toss your butts

By Caitlin Cullerot

I am not a smoker. With a father who volunteered for the American Lung Association for the better part of a decade, becoming a smoker was never even an option. That being said, I like to think I don't pass judgment when I see someone light up. I even try to bite my tongue if the person accidentally blows smoke in my face. But toss a cigarette butt on the ground, and we're going to have a problem.

I don't want to generalize — I realize there are plenty of considerate smokers that don't litter (and yes, this counts as littering). But those who do are causing more harm than they probably realize.

According to a 2009 New York Times article, some people see cigarette butts as "a natural kind of trash" compared to other items, like plastic bottles. But according to the organization Keeping America Beautiful, butts make up 28 to 33 percent of litter nationwide — and they're the No. 1 item littered on beaches. Last time I checked, the mere presence of sand does not make the beach a giant ash-tray.

Even worse, many smokers

wrongly believe cigarette butts are biodegradable. But all filters contain plastics, and some even contain acetate, which never fully breaks down — nevermind all the toxins that can seep out of the butt, such as nicotine, mercury and arsenic.

A San Diego State University professor of global health, who was cited in the New York Times article, said experiments have shown that one butt releases enough toxins in 96 hours to kill half the minnows in a liter of water. So while tossing a butt into a sewer might seem harmless, there's a good chance it's going to end up in a water source and threaten the wildlife living there. Cigarette butts have been found in the stomachs of animals such as birds and whales, which mistake butts for food.

Even Penn State animals are suffering the effects. I've seen squirrels curiously sniffing at cigarette butts, and on Monday, I watched, heartbroken, as one of the ducks at the pond behind the Hintz Family Alumni Center pecked at one.

But maybe it won't be a fish or a turtle that suffers the consequences of cigarette litter. Maybe it's the curious toddler who finds a butt on the ground and ingests it. The Center for Disease Control studied 146 Rhode Island children who had consumed butts in 1996 and found that one-third of the 146 children showed symptoms of nicotine poisoning.

You really want your future children chowing down on cigarette butts because mommy couldn't find an ashtray?

Another problem with butts is the time and money that goes into cleaning up this litter — and it's hitting home. Penn State was referenced on the website cigwaste.org for spending nearly two weeks and \$150,000 to get rid of all the butts around campus one year. Is that where smokers want their tuition money going when their wallets are already taking a beating from the rising cost of cigarette taxes?

I don't think it's my place to preach about the health issues associated with smoking and how it's a disgusting habit. Hell, I'm not even comfortable admonishing smokers for the toll second hand smoke can have on others. But when it comes to polluting my campus, it becomes my business. Nothing is a bigger buzzkill than seeing butts mixed into freshly spread mulch or watching birds line their nests with these carcinogens.

It doesn't take much effort to hold onto a cigarette butt until a trashcan is available, and I'd like to think, as well-educated Penn State students, we can all acknowledge that tossing a butt is as bad as littering a bottle.

Caitlin Cullerot is a senior majoring in journalism and is the Collegian's Wednesday columnist. Her e-mail address is cmc5217@psu.edu.



MY OPINION