

Letters to the editor:

Faculty member responds to Spanos' opinions on diversity

Where do I sign up to join the Spanos fan club?

Spanos' column is the best thing that's happened to the *Collegian* since Love Rob. I'm not implying Prindle and Spanos have anything in common except maybe species identification, but her column does introduce a lively exchange of opinions, and brings taboo issues out into the open. That can't be anything but good at a college.

Spanos refers repeatedly (in her last column) to the "extremity" of the university's position on cultural diversity. She says we're all being "beaten

over the head with it." I think perhaps hers is a mainstream position, shared by many faculty members as well as many students. Spanos articulates the convictions of a substantial number of faculty members at Behrend who can't possibly say what they think without finding themselves in a courtroom or under institutional censure.

Some, for instance, are tired of the emphasis on women and minorities in our prize-winning speaker series and in other college events, and are wondering about the ignored rights of the majority and the prevalence of what seems

to them to be the narrow causes of special interest groups. Are they right? Hasn't this cultural diversity and affirmative action business gone too far?

The answer is no. It hasn't gone nearly far enough.

Mainstream white America, and certainly this college isn't an exception yet despite its efforts, is still utterly immersed in ethnocentric emphasis on white middle class values, still deeply and enduringly biased against the interests of minorities, still resentful when those whose voices haven't been heard show a desire to speak, to be listened to.

Imagine it this way: someone who has been invisible and silent in a group of talkative people finally speaks up and says, "Hear me. I have something to say." The group sees this person for perhaps the first time, listens for a moment, and then says, in effect, "Okay, we heard you, now sit back down and shut up. You talk too much, you're hitting us over the head." The group goes right back to business as usual.

For those of you who believe this cultural diversity thing is silly, that affirmative action--for that's what program and emphases on cultural diversity are, the visibly affirmative part of the action--has gone too far, consider these facts about our own college community.

We have no women or minorities in policy-making positions of power. None. None of our senior level administrators or division heads are females or minorities. None. Until very recently we had no organized regular offerings in black studies and women's studies (with the notable exception of a few of Dr. Dan Frankforter's history courses over the years) and we still have only a few.

Until the university and the sensitivity of a few individuals in student services made it possible fairly recently, the speakers we had on campus seldom included minorities or women. Programming devoted to the interests of minorities is still relatively recent on this campus. We have one full-time black faculty member. One! We have one woman at the senior professional rank. One!

Ms. Spanos, did you know any of these things when you

wrote what you did?

Our highly visible black student services staff members are here because of the university's and college's new emphasis on cultural diversity, and that's a good thing. But it hasn't gone far enough until our programs, policies and curriculum make special courses, special positions, utterly unnecessary.

Ms. Spanos, when you say that we're being beaten over the head by it, I respond that we've got to be--or else we don't notice. It's simply true that we won't pay any attention to things that don't directly benefit us unless they're placed squarely in front of us where we can see them. But is having these things brought to your attention the same as beating you over the head? What harm does it do you to have someone suggest that there's an event you might want to attend, a speaker you can hear if you would like to, an argument aired in the newspaper that acquaints you fully with the facts, a movie you can see that might give you knowledge about people unlike yourself, or ironically more like yourself than you might know? How does what the college has done in the name of cultural diversity constitute an extreme, given the facts I've listed above?

I'd like specifically to address Ms. Spanos' comments on Chris Reber's article. You call his letter "just about the most ridiculous thing I ever heard." What was so ridiculous about it? How was the careful, well expressed, judiciously balanced account Dr. Reber provided to clarify the issues for the college community offensive to you?

How could it be offensive to anyone, given the clear evidence that the perspectives of both groups were taken into account? How much more restrainedly and carefully could the administration have responded to such a delicate, important human situation? You find it offensive and useless that the fraternity was asked to apologize and to attend a speaking event?

I have the impression, on the contrary, that the way Dr. Reber, Elvage Murphy and others have handled this has brought people closer together and resulted in both groups understanding each other to some degree. I know there's still some bitterness and misunderstanding in the wake of it all, but that's inevitable. How else would you suggest it should have been done, if these mild, balanced reprimands and an effort to increase understanding and knowledge constitute "beating them over the head?"

Ms. Spanos wants us to believe that she thinks diversity

should rank right up there at the top of the list of priorities, but then she objects to the few things the college is doing, belatedly and sincerely, to try to rectify a previous imbalance. Isn't that tantamount to saying "sit down and shut up" to minorities?

And you're going to be hearing from yet other new groups of people who have remained invisible at this college and want to be seen and heard. Do you know that we now have dozens of Asian students here? When they begin to put up posters and give us the opportunity to hear their problems and interests, is it just going to be more head-beating? Why not welcome the opportunity to learn more about perspectives outside of your own?

Finally, the most important point in Ms. Spanos' article is the one that dichotomizes cultural diversity and "academics" or education. The reason it's important is that the university is considering implementing further requirements in cultural diversity, and people are already protesting this direction. Ms. Spanos thinks she has a headache now? There might be a bigger one coming.

Ms. Spanos seems to think that academic education and cultural diversity emphases are separate. But what is education about?

Isn't it in part about enlarging your knowledge of new information and other perspectives? Isn't it about growing beyond what you already know? Isn't it about expanding your world, your mind, to accommodate the strange and the new? History courses should more fully include the perspectives and achievements of black people, Hispanics, women, Asians, Indians, Japanese and Chinese, Africans. American literature courses should incorporate the writing of the many culturally diverse peoples in America and women writers.

Some of our professors are trying to do this, but we're hampered by the fact that most courses and textbooks aren't designed for these purposes. One of our own faculty members, Dr. Frankforter, has written such a text. But until that minority studies, in cultural diversity, are needed.

I'd like nothing better than to have this full curricular integration take place. I don't like the fact that such courses are ghettoized into special "cultural diversity" offerings. But we're decades away from the goal, and in the meantime, if there are to be any requirements for a college

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Student disgusted with cigarette butts littering campus

Dear Editor:

People at Behrend can hardly help but notice the variety of cigarette butts littering the campus grounds. This letter is not going to discuss the well-known health risks of smoking. Instead, I'd like to discuss smoking's impact on the campus.

After I leave my car and begin to walk to class, I cannot help but notice the cigarette butts floating in tire ruts filled with mud water and stuck in the cracks of sidewalks. While passing a bench, I noticed hundreds of cigarettes butts all around it. The bench appeared to be a cigarette snuffer stuck in the middle of a large ashtray.

While entering Turnbull, you will see the dried leaves, pine needles, holly bushes, ground covering pachysandra, and cigarette butts. Not rain, nor sleet, nor even snow will stop faculty and students from huddling near a vestibule smoking a cigarette.

If the college administration could find even one well ventilated room, the smokers would probably use an ashtray rather than the grounds. The college may also want to consider starting a counselling group to help those who would like to break their strong addiction to nicotine.

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1st semester, Undeclared

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