

Forum



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"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."

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

OUR VIEW

Place to share

AT ISSUE: Residence halls should strive to find policies that fulfill all students' needs

Clubs, organizations and regular meetings are a major part of many college students' lives. Sometimes a club works best when it meets in a large conference room in the Student Center; other organizations prefer the intimate but formal setting of a quiet library space. Still others prefer the couches and familiarity of the residence halls. Every group — like every student — has its own set of needs.

However, Housing and Residence Life employees have begun cracking down on use of the residence halls as meeting places for campus organizations. Students are allowed to congregate to watch television, play Monopoly, hold a Hall Council meeting and have hall-

sponsored ice cream socials, but church groups, campus organizations and other specified clubs that are not expressly organized or run by housing are not allowed to use the residence hall common areas for meetings.

The policy makes sense, in that housing officials do not want campus organizations using up spatial resources residents are paying for. Still, most of the organizations that meet in the halls are casual and run by at least one resident — most often, it's a group of friends who've decided to hold productive meetings with a focus and purpose, rather than spend their time hiding in their rooms. The university should award that ambition, not punish it.

Furthermore, residence hall staff will have a hard time determining the difference between an "organization" not allowed to hold meetings versus the weekly meeting of the halls' Desperate Housewives Club, or the Texas Hold'em Friday night game or 10 friends who happened to stop in to a study lounge all at the same time.

It comes down to the fact that the residence halls should be available to the residents — who pay for them — to use as they need and want, within reason. Certainly that means students should be able to find a quiet study lounge or comfortable place to watch television or play pool whenever they want it, but it

should also mean that students can hold organized meetings in a convenient location when they want that, too.

The residence halls are large and all have a number of available common areas — most of which are not full on a regular basis. If each hall could choose a lounge or room that would be available for meetings, then allow residents to sign up for times to hold their meetings, the hall would be providing a service to all the residents.

The residence halls have a financial — if not a personal — responsibility to find a way to please as many students as possible. Sometimes that means finding a way to offer everything residents need.

Michelle Long:
POSTCARDS FROM MORELIA

Mexican festival has deep significance

The stars were out, the night was chilly, and all was dark. Our bus pulled into Tzintzuntzan, Mexico, where we joined the hordes of other tourists visiting cemeteries. The smell of burning candles and fragrant flowers strengthened as we neared the entrance.

Tuesday was the first day of the Mexican holiday Día de los Muertos, Day of the Dead. On this night, Mexicans celebrate Noche de los Muertos, Night of the Dead. Each year on this night, families welcome the return of the souls of their deceased loved ones with intricate altars and abundant offerings. In the middle of the cemetery in Tzintzuntzan, I leaned down to talk to a woman sitting next to an altar. It is important to note this holiday is a time to celebrate the lives of loved ones, not a time to grieve for them.

The holiday coincides with the Catholic church's All Saints Day, celebrated on Nov. 1, and All Souls Day, celebrated on Nov. 2. The first day is reserved to celebrate children, so it's called Día de los Angelitos, and the second day is to celebrate all of the deceased. Traditions for celebrating the holiday vary, and some Mexicans don't celebrate at all; but for those who do, it's an important event.

The traditional celebration involves families returning to the grave sites of their loved ones to clean them up and create altars, which are decorated with candles and flowers called cempasúchiles, which are similar to marigolds. They also leave offerings for the loved ones' returns, such as fruit, bread, tamales, toys and alcohol—things their loved ones enjoyed in life. The families also share a picnic and talk by the grave sites, staying there all through the night.

Another tradition is the skeletons made of sugar, which Mexicans decorate and write the names of their loved ones across the skeleton foreheads.

I could say this seems odd—and even a little eerie—that people celebrate death with skeletons made of sugar and chocolate, as well as sugar-coated candy coffins and skeleton dolls. However, thanks to my previous Spanish courses, I was aware of this widely celebrated holiday in advance, and I have been excited to experience it firsthand.

My Mexican family lost a son last year from cancer. For this holiday, sitting on an enormous wall of shelves are photos of him, some of his toys, whiskey and pan de muerto — a special type of bread offered in celebrations during this holiday. Beautifully scattered around, she has flowers in vases, but they are not the traditional kind seen on the indigenous altars we saw in the cemeteries.

The altars in the cemeteries ranged from extravagant to almost nothing and it broke my heart to see the graves which appeared abandoned. But even more so, the disrespect of many tourists bothered me. One man leaned over an altar candle to light a cigarette as he chatted with his pals. Others seemed solely interested in photos or video, rather than appreciating the cultural dedication of this celebration.

As with the commercialization of many holidays, outside of the indigenous community, this celebration seems to have fallen in the trap. While I stepped cautiously between the graves so as not to disrupt the altars, a man waved his glow wands about for sale as if he were at a county fair.

However, within the faces of the people celebrating, in our friendly conversation and the delicacy with which they constructed their altars, I saw the true meaning of Día de los Muertos.

Write to Michelle at mllong2@bsu.edu

Online

To see photographs of Michelle's Día de los Muertos activities in Tzintzuntzan, Mexico, visit www.bsudailynews.com



Patrick Hogan is a syndicated cartoonist. His views do not necessarily agree with those of the Daily News.

Tim Sukits: OH, AND BY THE WAY ...

Iraq doesn't inspire students to protest

Oct. 26 brought us the news that we have finally hit the 2,000 mark for the number of American soldiers killed in Iraq.

Wow! Two thousand! Two grand! It's a bi-millennial celebration.

If soldiers only weighed a pound, we'd have literally lost a ton of soldiers. Actually, it's probably closer to 180 tons worth of dead soldiers, but that just doesn't have the same ring to it.

In September, Americans encountered what appeared to be the largest protest of the war thus far. It came in the form an estimated 100,000 people marching past the White House shouting, "Peace now!" and carrying "Bush lied, thousands died" signs.

Unfortunately, President George W. Bush wasn't home.

Strangely enough, those 100,000 people didn't make nearly as much of an impact on the American public as one 48-year-old woman did a month earlier. Cindy Sheehan, whose son was killed in Iraq, camped outside Bush's vacation home in Crawford, Texas, and refused to leave until she got an explanation from the president himself for why her son was dead.

Now, by ranting her conspiracy theories to numerous interviewers, Sheehan has managed to crush any credibility she might have had along with the notion that protesters aren't crazy people.

It's no wonder we don't see young people leading these protests like we did during the Vietnam War. The anti-war voices that are supposed to represent the people against this war are all one-minded radicals like Michael Moore and Sheehan. They have a bunch of demands but no solutions to any of the problems.

The first major protest of the Vietnam War came in December 1964. About 25,000 people showed up, and it was the largest anti-war protest that had taken place in America — and much of the crowd was composed of people our age.

At that point in the Vietnam War, there were 23,300 American soldiers who had been sent to fight and only 376 deaths. The American military had been in South Vietnam for 10 years.

We have now hit the 2.5-year mark since entering Iraq, and there are currently 139,500 American soldiers "over there" — more than 15,000 have been wounded, and more than 2,000 have been killed. It wasn't until 3.5 years into the Vietnam War that more than 100 lives were lost in a single month. We reached that point in Iraq after our first year. We almost reached it for the fourth time last month with 96.

It's no wonder we don't see young people leading these protests like we did during the Vietnam War.

The Vietnam and Iraq wars are similar in that they both started out with a small percentage of the American population vehemently opposed to them, both involved "Team America" acting as world police, and both were entered without an exit strategy. The difference between the two wars, in respect to American soldiers, is that soldiers in Vietnam were drafted into the army while the soldiers in Iraq went on their own accord.

This is why we don't see as many young faces at the anti-war protests these days. The crowds are all parents of dead soldiers and left-wingers who were there all along.

But could there be a deeper issue? Could the absence of young protesters be a testament to the apathy of our generation?

People our age, whether they signed up for it or not, are dying on a daily basis. They are dying faster and in greater numbers than they did in Vietnam — and for a more questionable cause. I don't think the mothers of the 2,000 dead American soldiers should have been the first people to protest this war.

Oh, and by the way ... make that 2,037 dead.

Write to Tim at sigep363s@yahoo.com

FORUM POLICY

The Daily News opinion page aims to stimulate discussion in the Ball State community. The Daily News welcomes reader viewpoints and offers four vehicles of expression for reader opinions: letters to the editor, guest columns, feedback on our Web site and phone responses. Letters must be signed and

appear as space permits each day. The limit for letter length is approximately 350 words. All letters must be typed. The editor reserves the right to edit and condense submissions for length as well as clarity.

The name of the author is usually published but may be withheld for compelling reasons, such as physical harm to the author. The editor

decides this on an individual basis and must consult the writer before withholding the name.

Lengthy letters that focus on an issue affecting students might be considered for "Your Turn" columns at the editor's discretion. Those interested in submitting responses can submit a typed copy to the Daily News office, located in AJ 278.

David Swindle:
SWIMMING IN BROKEN GLASS

Political opponents must agree on facts for reasonable debate

There are many culprits for the steady destruction of civil political discourse in America. One often overlooked is the battle over facts. Progressives and conservatives have slid into a thorny situation where all too often they cannot even agree on the most basic bits of information about an issue.

We cannot begin to build homes of warm, fulfilling debate when we have such radically different ideas about what the factual foundation should be. It leaves us out in the snowy blizzard screaming at each other while our country freezes to death.

The more complex and complicated political stories are those most likely to have multiple fact sets. A chief example is the Valerie Plame CIA leak case and the recent indictment of I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, former chief of staff to Vice President Dick Cheney.

To aid in healthier debate, let's nail down some of these disputed facts.

First, Plame was not responsible for her husband, Joe Wilson, being sent to Niger to investigate whether Saddam Hussein sought to purchase uranium.

CNN correspondent David Ensor said, "I have talked to very high intelligence officials who say that just isn't true. ... It was senior officers above her who had the idea of sending Ambassador Wilson."

Second, White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan made numerous false statements. On Sept. 29, 2003, he said, "I've made it very clear: [Karl Rove] was not involved, that there's no truth to the suggestion that he was."

On Oct. 7, 2003, he said, "I spoke with [Rove, Libby and Elliot Abrams] so that I could come back to you and say that they were not involved. I had no doubt of that in the beginning, but I like to check my information to make sure it's accurate before I report back to you, and that's exactly what I did."

Third, there seems to be some confusion as to whether Plame's CIA status was "covert" or widely-known, harmless information.

Larry Johnson, a former CIA analyst and colleague of Plame's set the record straight on PBS: "I worked with this woman. She started training with me. She has been undercover for three decades; she is not, as Bob Novak suggested, a CIA analyst."

Johnson also testified to a joint committee of congressional Democrats: "If she had been caught engaged in espionage activities while traveling overseas without the black passport, she could have been executed. We must put to bed the lie that she was not undercover. For starters, if she had not been undercover, then the CIA would not have referred the matter to the Justice Department."

Furthermore, a July 21 Washington Post article reveals a classified State Department memo that identifies a paragraph marked "secret" that included Plame's name.

There's one last matter that it would help for supporters of the administration to understand why we liberals are so angry and obsessed about this case.

Let's allow the president's father to answer that one in a speech he gave in 1999.

"I have nothing but contempt and anger for those who betray the trust by exposing the name of our sources," George H.W. Bush said. "They are, in my view, the most insidious of traitors."

Hopefully we can control that anger, agree on our facts and have some meaningful debate.

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The Daily News encourages its readers to voice their views on legislative issues. The following legislators represent the Ball State community:

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