

Opinions

The Blue Banner Editorials

Evaluating safety

Finally, the Officer Rathburn issue is resolved. After months of silence from university officials, run-arounds by state and federal officials, we have some answers.

One of our former public safety officers was indeed found guilty on seven of eight accounts of assault. Comforting, isn't it? Not only was he found guilty of these federal charges, but all of the incidents happened in 1995-1996, before his stint at UNCA.

The state needs to take a very serious look at their methods of evaluating officers for campus positions. If someone like Rathburn, who, on top of these recent offenses, had a prior conviction for domestic violence, could slip through the cracks, who else could?

Please note, this is a flaw in the state's operating system, not necessarily in the university's system. The state supposedly has a thorough program of evaluation for every officer that applies for campus security jobs.

If their system is so thorough, whose brilliant idea was it to let Mr. Seven-felonies, one-domestic-violence-conviction watch after a bunch of college kids?

Had the students known ahead of time what Rathburn's record was, you'd better believe there would have been a stink about him being hired. How comfortable would you feel as a domestic violence victim calling public safety, knowing that the officer who comes to help you has been himself convicted of that crime?

This is all ancient history, but we hope that the state and the university has taken note: we are paying attention. As we look for a new director of public safety, the students will be aware of the proceedings. We want someone we can trust.

Protection, not censorship

A federal commission that is studying online child protection is planning to recommend a special kid-friendly Internet zone to Congress. The debate has been raging since the Internet became popular as parents noticed the availability and accessibility of pornography sites on the Internet.

Since then, many parents have wanted to censor those sites, but censorship violates our First Amendment right to free speech.

This commission may have found a way to maintain our constitutional rights while protecting children from potentially psychologically damaging pornographic material.

Parents should have a way to monitor their children's behavior on the Internet without censoring others, and this special zone might be the answer.

Creating a kid's zone on the Internet simply entails protection from pornography without stepping on anyone's toes. The Supreme Court has already made it clear that censorship on the Internet through legislative means is unacceptable, and we agree. But this is not censorship. It is a controlled space for children to actively participate in the information revolution while letting parents rest easy about the information their child is exposed to.

Acting globally

Women in the United States are still constantly fighting for equal pay, equal respect and equal treatment in today's society and workforce. Unfortunately, American women have it easy.

Stan Bernstein of the U.N. Population Fund recently said that worldwide discrimination of women still constitutes a "massive violation of human rights that takes various forms around the globe," according to a Sept. 20 CNN article.

Females in different cultures face such degrading and extremely harmful practices such as genital mutilation, governmentally-overlooked domestic violence, forced prostitution and unsafe abortions.

American women are in a position to take the access they have to education and jobs and use them to educate and influence these other cultures to cease these harmful practices.

Though studies show that some cultures are becoming more aware of human rights, massive problems still exist in the execution and enforcing of laws deemed to alleviate these issues.

Americans take human rights for granted. From day one we are told that we will always have the right to better ourselves and improve our lives, because our Constitution grants us that right.

We need to remember that, though our system is not perfect, we have far fewer problems to deal with on a daily basis than, say, a teenager who must accept that one day she will be genitally mutilated for her village's religious traditions.

America has the opportunity, as one of the wealthiest, most prominent countries in the world, to use our resources in positive ways to help these countries accelerate their journey toward the protection of all their citizens'.

Whatever happened to Sesame Street purity?



Andrew Thomasson
Columnist

The general deterioration of children's programming overall nowadays is one of my pet peeves.

I was a hardcore Sesame Street fan when I was younger. I would watch twice a day, usually the same episodes, at 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.

I watch the shows sometimes now, and every time, I catch references to things that I never got, things I never even knew were references outside of the show. Although the quality in the show has somewhat deteriorated with the death of Jim Henson and the advent of the 15 minute "Elmo's World" segment that now airs as the finale of each show, the intelligence of the Sesame Street presentation still awes me.

With all the choices kids have to choose from on TV today, there are not many I could stand to sit and watch with the younger generation. Digimon, Johnny Bravo, Rugrats and Ed, Edd and Eddie just don't do it for me,

unless I feel like being brain-dead.

Then again, I'm not too terribly fond of the superhero genre of shows, either. I do realize, of course, that superhero worship is one step below rock star worship, and is a critical part of childhood. I was a major He-Man fan, and I remember it being one of the harshest crises of my young life when they took Spiderman off the air when I was six.

I'm sorry, my loyal readership, but there's no way that the Powerpuff Girls are in the same league as Spiderman. Maybe I've romanticized them beyond recognition, but the superhero cartoons of yesterday have proven to be vastly superior to today's.

Face it — Sesame Street, though still the ultimate kids' show, has fallen off. Mr. Rogers is getting very old, Captain Kangaroo is gone, as is Schoolhouse Rock, and the end of Fraggle Rock came much too soon for my taste.

We are left with such pa-

tronizing fare as Barney, Blue's Clues and the Teletubbies to satiate our craving for "teaching TV." The major discrepancy between Sesame Street and the aforementioned slim pickings of today is that my parents watched Sesame Street with me.

I know a lot of parents who both watched and enjoyed Sesame Street with their kids. I know very few, if any, parents who actually would admit to watching Barney with their kids, much less admit to enjoying the Jovial Purple One.

Sesame Street kids, and you know who you are, do you remember how much you actually learned from that show? Or were you like me, enjoying it without realizing how much you were taking in? I more than likely learned my ABC's from the "letter of the day" segments, learned to count in English from The Count, and in Spanish from a dingy little song.

We were introduced to the classics, or at least spoofs thereof, on Monsterpiece Theatre. There was "The Postman Always Rings Twice," "The 39 Stairs," "The Old Man and the C," and "The Taming of the Shoe."

Though we didn't catch the references then, our parents did — that's what made it fun for the whole family. A band of bugs called the "Beetles" sang a song called "Letter B." There was the "Cereal Girl"

song, spoofing Madonna, and "Eight Balls of Fur," taking off on Jerry Lee Lewis.

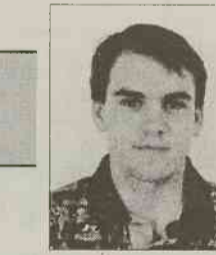
They were also in on pop culture, using a Faith No More riff to sing about picking up litter and bringing on R.E.M. to sing "Furry Happy Monsters," spoofing their own "Shiny Happy People." Somewhat tangentially, but as a testament to the greatness of the show, Michael Stipe and R.E.M. don't do live performances of that song, not wanting to have their long and illustrious musical careers defined by such a shiny, happy pop song. But they did it for Sesame Street, parodying themselves and creating a monster's anti-depression theme. This is stuff that I dig.

Although we can't demand that Jim Henson be exhumed and resuscitated, we can demand creativity in children's programming. If we don't, there seem to be three other options.

First, we risk raising kids with large friendly purple dinosaur fetishes. Two, we could actually take it into our own hands by writing and producing our own quality TV for our children. Third, we could do the tried and true thing that I grew up on. It involves a parent saying "go play outside."

So, for increasingly well-adjusted kids, I recommend a shovel, a large backyard, and Sesame Street reruns. The world would be a much happier place.

Bad reputation for Greek system: is it in students' heads?



Josh Day
Columnist

Like many incoming freshmen, I came to college with a lot of baggage, some of which had accumulated from high school, but mostly things I had picked up over the years from movies and popular culture.

I walked onto campus with several preconceptions about university life — heavy bass would be blasting through the walls of my dorm room every hour of the night, my classes would pose no more challenge than the warehouse sessions of public high school, and I would never have to do more than three hours of homework during any given week.

After a few days at UNCA, though, I realized I couldn't count on anything I had once thought was true, except for the bass wailing at 2 a.m. (just one of the many pleasures of living in Founders Hall). Nothing rocked me more, however, than when I accepted a bid from a fraternity.

Before I came to UNCA, I could spout off anti-fraternity rhetoric with the best of them. Like most people, and most UNCA students, unfortunately, I distrusted anyone who belonged to a fraternity, and I hated the very idea

of an exclusive group. Movies like "Animal House," as well as the general conception of fraternities in popular culture, had influenced my thinking so much that I thought every fraternity was about gratuitous drinking and overall harassment.

I went to a recruitment event simply because I had nothing better to do one evening. I had my misgivings, but I was curious about the organization, and I wanted to learn why people would want to join. Although I wasn't converted on the first night, I was interested enough to see rush through to the end, if for no other reason than for the free entertainment.

The turning point for me was when I realized everyone involved was sincere and truly believed in the virtues of the fraternity (and no, the virtues are not booze, sex and mayhem).

I discovered that fraternities aren't necessarily composed of guys in Izods and khakis, and can be as diverse as the UNCA community. Slowly, I began to rethink some of the stereotypes I had accepted as truth for so long.

When I started to tell friends I was considering joining a fraternity, I was met with a variety of negative responses, rang-

ing from concern to all-out animosity. Some told me I was being brainwashed. Others told me I was buying friends, and would blow my tuition on dues. I found when I even mentioned the word "fraternity," people's eyes would glaze over in suspicion and, sometimes, even contempt.

I knew if I joined a fraternity, I would alienate myself from more than half of the people on campus.

In spite of all this, I continued going to rush. The more I got involved and the more I got to know the people in the fraternity, I realized I would be foolish not to take the opportunity and pledge. I made my decision, and that decision has turned out to be the best I've made since coming to UNCA.

Although my personal experience has been positive, by no means am I advocating that all fraternities or sororities are good. On the contrary, Greek organizations have blemished the standings of many campuses nationwide, and few would argue that their overall bad reputation isn't somewhat earned. The Greek system can ruin the atmosphere of a campus with its elitist attitudes and snobbish behavior.

Fortunately, we don't have to put up with that at UNCA. We pride ourselves on having such a culturally diverse campus, and we claim we're tolerant of all groups and organizations. Is it fair to judge people by the artificial color in their hair, or by their belief system, or by the Greek letters on

their shirts?

Oh, I forgot, we're elitists, so it's okay to judge us. We're founded on excluding people and associating in a tight little group with secret handshakes and secret meetings. It's funny because the people who hold stock in this notion have usually never been to a rush or taken the time to look into the organization they're so quick to judge.

Talk to the faculty and see how many community service hours the sororities and fraternities do each semester, and how much they contribute to the university. Talk to a brother or a sister and ask them how much their fraternity or sorority means to them.

Making blanket statements like "All you guys do is drink beer, have sex and exclude" reveals a mind satisfied being enclosed in a box of prejudice.

UNCA defines itself upon its cultural diversity. Discrimination has no place in this university — we make that clear in everything we do. When people go around telling freshmen not to vote for a few SGA senate candidates because they're in a fraternity, we may as well just scrap our image. What if they had been saying not to vote for a candidate because she belonged to a particular religion, or because he was gay?

The fraternities and sororities of UNCA are not the ones of other universities. We remain true to our virtues of friendship, service, and achievement. Come see what we're about — all you've got to lose is a prejudice.