

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Pulling the plug on the Guilford College tree

To the Editor:

As a responsible local citizen, I feel that it is my duty to address an important issue which, I imagine, has hitherto been hushed up by your administration.

For years now, Guilford has used as its logo the image of a Black Oak tree in full flower. It is a beautiful image — it gracefully portrays the Quaker traditions and institutional power of your college. Its roots are firmly embedded in fertile ground while its leaves reach toward the highest ideals. However, this emblem is a strong contrast to the actual tree, which is slowly dying. Trees do that when they get old. Just like people.

Guilford realizes this discrepancy, and has of late been trying to "save" the tree by pumping huge amounts of water (and secret chemical growth hormones) into the ground where the roots are, and by selective "trimming" of its limbs.

This horror must stop. It is unnatural and, by God, immoral to haphazardly extend the death-throes of this once-magnificent tree. Moreover, it is butcherous hypocrisy to chop off its arms with the stated intention of helping the tree. We know their real reason. They just want to protect the building it's next to.

All of this goes completely against the natural inclinations of the tree, which is clearly ready to move into the next world. For one thing, it's cramped up next to that building, whose space it needs for its roots. It is also being choked to death by all the pollution from the nearby intersection. Perhaps most importantly — and most simply — it is too old to live any longer.

If the tree is capable of wanting anything, it wants to die. It is like a beloved great-grandmother lying comatose in a hospital bed with an IV stuck in her arm. She can no longer perform any useful life skills. She can't even eat her peas. But she's being kept alive by the doctors, sucking hospital fees out of her children's pockets.

As we swing by Earth Day 1990, the Guilford community should pay some attention to the rights and needs of its eldest member. Let the tree die! It will be grateful. You can plant another Guilford tree (maybe in a better place this time), and I bet the old one would be happy to be made into inexpensive tables for the new library.

Robert Dobbins  
coordinator, Environmental Self-Determination League

## 24-hour space, more terminals needed

To the Editor:

Though it would appear to be contrary to the idea of a college, the administration of our wonderful little Quaker school has decided that it is quite unnecessary for us to do any homework. While this may come as a welcome relief to many, some of us find it frustrating to discover that we are unable to complete our work due to the lack of 24-hour study space and the vast deficit of computer terminals.

It seems that the great leaders who command the future of this institution have decided that students really do not need to study on weekends. During the course of the weekend, the library is only open until 6 p.m. on Friday and 8 p.m. on Saturday. While our administrators may be enjoying their weekend off from the rigors of New Garden Hall, most students use King Hall as de facto 24-hour space, it is officially closed and locked for the weekend. Thus science majors must break school rules in order to complete their work, which often requires that they use equipment only available in the labs.

On the weekend, one is faced with the choice of limited hours of library time, breaking the rules and entering an academic building, or the often vain attempt to study in a noisy residence hall amidst the drunken revellers. All of

this, and no one will accept the excuse that there was no where to study...

Another serious problem in terms of the lack of available study space is the fact that Guilford College has only 32 computers for student use. Thirty-two computers and over 1300 students. Have you ever heard of a professor accepting "I couldn't get to a computer" as an excuse? I have not heard of that happening and it should not be necessary. To compound the problem, the only place one can use a computer after the library closes on weekends is in the security office — where there are only four computers and no printer.

As has been stated, our administration has decided that homework is unnecessary, while our faculty disagrees. It would seem that one side would have to rectify its position. As our purpose for being here is to get an education, it would seem that it would be more profitable to the student, who keeps this school financially running, to have more study space and computer terminals.

Aaron Banks

## Responses to National Association of Scholars and Burris

To the Editor:

In their advertisement (*The Gullfordian*, April 16), the National Association of Scholars argues that works by "minorities, women and Third World authors" should not be incorporated into the standard curriculum. They insist that the mainstream literary canon does not exclude those groups, and therefore seek to limit women's studies and ethnic studies programs to a position well-removed from traditional disciplines such as English and History.

In fact, works by women and non-Westerners have been consciously excluded from the canon as long as both have existed. The NAS, following the homogenous model of the canon itself, assumes that works by these so-called minority groups are "inferior works." When studying English 17th century literature, for example, students rarely encounter works by Anne Finch, Anne Killigrew or Aphra Behn, though all three were accomplished poets.

Non-Europeans, too, are denied access to the mainstream classroom. The NAS writes that "Western art and science have [long] drawn upon the achievements of non-Western societies." Examples such as Gauguin's idealized paintings of Tahitian women and the countless, patronizing "cowboys and indians" movies effectively demonstrate the anthropological value of such explorations.

The authors go on to suggest that "the truths of...the sciences [and] history... are not different for people of different races, sexes or cultures." This is completely false and unsupportable. Where is the history of women in Medieval Europe, or that of Central Africa, India or the American continents before they were recognized by European sensibilities?

The National Association of Scholars operates in a nation founded by Europeans, to serve the needs of Europeans. But it was founded at the expense of the (now decimated) native population which once inhabited the continent, and today's United States is the home of millions of Americans whose lineage traces not to Europe, but to Africa, the Middle East, Asia and South America...Why are the cultural values of European ancestry valued so singularly above all others'?

The given explanation is that Western values embody "universality." The authors boast that non-Western civilizations are "rapidly adapting Western practices to their own situations." But is this really because European thinkers have historically cornered the market on good ideas? A global map of Westernized cultures is first a map of European economic imperialism. The economic dependencies created by the central Western nations inevitably lead to cultural dependence. Western ideas were brought to the "Third World" by slave ships and gunboats, not by well-meaning academics.

The idea that there even should be a singular "universal" set of values reflects an active, destructive intolerance of non-European traditions. As Europeans developed a society based upon the ideas of Plato and Aristotle, so did Asians build upon

the ideas of Confucius and Mencius. Recent linguistic scholarship has found in the Hopi language a philosophical base fundamentally different from the European, and better suited to the study of physics (so much for the universality of the sciences).

The canon needs to be renovated; it is stacked in favor of a particularly paternalistic world view which fails to recognize the diversity of different cultures, or what Catherine Keller calls "a truly multiple integrity (From a *Broken Web* 181)." The way to connect with the rest of the world is not to expect them to adopt our views. As Keller writes, "the more diversity I take in, the more feelingly I connect (186)."

Jonathan Lawson

To the Editor:

I disagree with the statement made by the National Association of Scholars on the following grounds:

First, the underlying assumption of the N.A.S. is that the European tradition is of such diversity, and has been proven by time, that any new viewpoints offered by minority groups (ethnic, black, women, etc.,) would have already been dealt with more vigorously within the European framework. What this view fails to recognize is that the Western perspective in this framework is the only perspective handled. We know of "cultural diversity" through our Western perceptions only, and not through direct dialogue with and application of other cultures. Our Western mind-set frames other cultures that we receive through it in its own tradition rather than in that of the culture which it claims to comprehend. By so doing, the West stereotypes and claims authority over cultures without allowing them to speak for themselves.

The Western viewpoint is unexaminedly narrow. Behind their traditions lies a rigidity of dualistic orientation which emphasizes subject/object split rather than connectedness, mutuality, and universality. A true sense of the universal includes the particular, the exception, the minority (in the case of gender, 50 percent of the population). When a patriarchal, Eurocentric system says that it's universal, its universality stops at any idea or anyone which steps outside the system. So yes, the "banner of cultural diversity" is attacking "the West and its institutions" — simply because it must.

Second, it should be obvious from this narrowness of the liberal arts curriculum which the N.A.S. defends that it is, consciously or unconsciously, oppressive of minority groups. Perhaps it is that the Eurocentric tradition to which they adhere and devote their life's work is threatened by true cultural diversity. The reason that non-Western, non-patriarchal disciplines aren't studied is the very fact that they oppose "traditional" standards of thought which have led to imperialism, patriarchy and Western supremacy.

This ad evoked shock and resentment in me, for it threatens to eliminate the very dynamic elements which insure a rich and diverse campus, full of complexity and growth. An educational institution must embrace diverse studies, whether or not they follow the Western "generally applicable intellectual and aesthetic standards" or are completely unequatable; especially today, as so-called "minority studies" are no longer fueled by the fringe of society.

Ella Mavronikolas

To the Editor:

The National Association of Scholars asserts that all academic works should be "added, retained, or removed from the curriculum on the basis of its second conformance to generally applicable intellectual and aesthetic standards." I have a couple of initial questions:

- 1) Who sets these standards and what are they?
- 2) What is the criteria for being "intellectually or aesthetically sound?"

see LETTERS on page 4 >