

## Life, liberty, and the pursuit of illicit substances

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In 1975 Holland altered its policy on marijuana to decriminalize possession in amounts less than thirty grams. It has since been changed to five, but the principle remains intact. Holland changed its drug laws in order to avoid spending billions of dollars a year arresting and prosecuting marijuana users.

In contrast, the United States spends 31.7 billion dollars per year between state and federal government on drug arrests. Of 1.5 million drug arrests in 1996 forty-three percent were marijuana offenders. An article published by the University of Southern California in July of this year states, "...if all arrests were equally costly, America spent 13.7 billion on marijuana arrests, or 21,400 per arrest."

Marijuana, the world's most commonly used illicit drug, is often classified as a 'soft' drug, less problematic than the 'hard' drugs such as cocaine and heroin. This distinction came about for various reasons. Cocaine has caused increasing amounts of violence, whereas marijuana has never been known to cause aggressive behavior.

Many Americans ask a central question: What makes marijuana such a problem? Recent studies conducted by Mitch Earleywine, an associate professor of psychology at USC, show that less than one percent of marijuana users abuse heroin.

In Holland marijuana can be sold in shops, keeping Dutch marijuana users from coming into contact with criminal elements. On the other hand, many American users resort to procuring marijuana from individuals who also deal in heavier drugs and

crime.

Financially, support for legalization of marijuana comes from those who would prefer the United States make money off marijuana rather than spend money on arrests. Many states, such as North Carolina, have the perfect climate and environment for growing marijuana. According to supporters of marijuana legalization, doing so would create enormous revenues.

Other advocates view the financial side of marijuana differently. "The fact is, the mafia controls the drug game," said Kevin Cook, a pro-legalization junior at the Durham School of the Arts. "They pay all the right-wing conservatives in the Senate and House to keep the drugs illegal. In this way, they can be the only players and not have to share profits."

Many groups against legalization cite what they consider the dangers of marijuana. For example, several groups have touted statistics relating car accidents to marijuana usage and claiming there is a positive correlation. The main problem with these statistics is the fact that they do not include the blood alcohol level of the driver involved.

Also alluded to are the studies showing marijuana's impact on the brain. Marijuana has damaging effects which are acknowledged by parties on both sides of the issue. Ten percent of frequent marijuana users experience memory loss and paranoia.

However, advocates of marijuana legalization argue that tobacco and alcohol are both more damaging and more dangerous than marijuana.

In May of 2001 the United States Supreme Court

ruled against the medicinal use of marijuana saying that the Controlled Substances Act does not allow for a medical exception.

Despite this setback, activists still advocate marijuana's medicinal benefits. Sufferers of multiple sclerosis

many traditionally prescribed medications for the same problems.

Nonetheless, marijuana is not the best solution for all health related issues. In countless cases there are more legal alternatives for treatment. For this reason, groups

recent article in The American Prospect, "Poor urban minority communities, which have been devastated by drug violence and drug imprisonments, might benefit substantially."

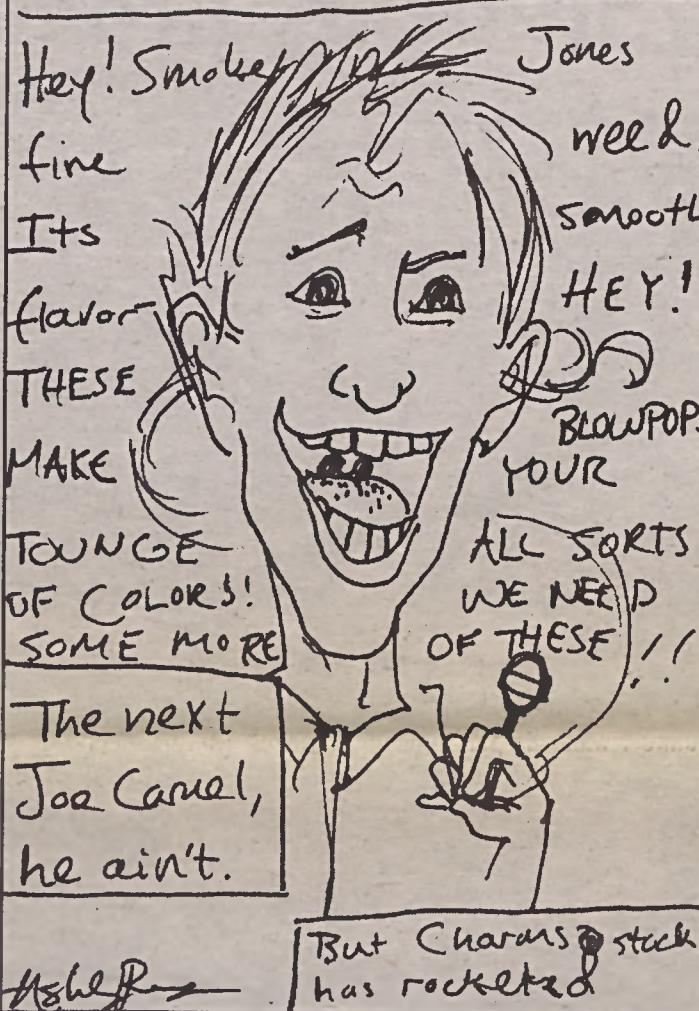
However, some are concerned that if communities legalize marijuana individually, they may attain undesirable reputations. In Lambeth, England, after penalties for possession were reduced, drug dealers and users were attracted to the area, bringing other types of crime with them.

Here at NCSSM, there are equally persuasive arguments for each side of the issue. Mani Maheshwari, a junior, said, "I don't think [marijuana] should be legalized. The fact that something else is controlling your mind is weird. You should have control of your own mind." She went on to say, "Legalizing marijuana would increase crime, [since] people would be irrational."

Junior Carla Clark is split on the issue: "I think that it would be a good idea to legalize [marijuana], because it would cut down on the court cases and save money. ...People should be able to do whatever they want to after age eighteen. [On the other hand], you don't want to legalize it because of the whole moral issue. ...Legalizing marijuana probably won't increase crime because it will be open, easy to get, and cheaper."

In spite of the compelling arguments of each side, it is unlikely that marijuana will be legalized anytime soon in the United States. Current foreign policy conflicts have taken the forefront to domestic drug issues, of which legalizing marijuana seems to be a low priority.

### A stupid legal thing IS STILL STUPID.



are much helped by the use of marijuana, which allows them to function better and helps diminish pain and muscle spasms. For cancer, AIDS, and MS, marijuana seems to help lend lucidity and relieve suffering. In addition to its effectiveness, the cost of marijuana is lower than that of

opposed to legalizing marijuana claim other medicines are as effective and less problematic.

Also ambiguous is the response of America's individual communities to legalization. Would marijuana legalization make towns more or less safe? According to a

## The Declaration of Character

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going to a conference in Florida, leading Student Life 101/201 discussions about ethical issues, and working with the whole school to develop a fair and effective way to promote ethical awareness at NCSSM.

Many policies and procedures at NCSSM are modeled after leading universities such as UNC-Chapel Hill and Duke. Honor codes are a staple at colleges and are now implemented at many residential boarding schools and even some public high schools. So, why does NCSSM have a "Declaration of Character"

instead?

No one is required to sign this declaration, yet it will hopefully promote ethical decision making and foster a trusting envi-

ronment by placing a statement of morality in the public eye. This may mean developing a more heavy-duty honor code by the end of the '02-'03 school year that would hold students accountable for all academic dishonesty, whether it is their own integrity or

another's in question.

Many students are against the idea of promoting "rating" on others by having an honor code, but conversely some are now concerned with

the ineffective and vague principles of the D.O.C. Senior Emily Marzbani believes that "it's

really about what you think cheating is. People will still do it no matter what." Similarly, Dr. Miller says that, with or without an honor code,

"honest people don't have to remember to be honest." The true problem is that "students are unwilling to stand up in this battle" against academic dishonesty.

Clearly, the D.O.C. is meant to do more than look pretty. The Ethical Awareness Group's goal for the D.O.C., found on the At-A-Glance webpage, is for it to "become a part of our school, something that will sustain the test of time, something that will give us pride, and that we will carry with us in our lives everyday - even after we leave NCSSM." According to EAG member Charlie Stone, the main purpose right now for

the D.O.C. is "just existing and drawing attention to the issue" of academic honesty.

The "Declaration of Character" is still in the process of review and revision. This school year, EAG is looking towards adding junior members to continue the quest for ethical awareness. Upcoming events and issues for the group are an honor code conference at the University of Virginia, sponsoring speakers on ethics and the recent issue of plagiarism software.

Regardless of statements, declarations, or codes, the goal to promote trust and honesty at NCSSM is shared