

Removal of the paper should prompt some serious thought

An explanation is definitely in order.

The Pendulum does not make a practice of re-running an issue. However, due to circumstances beyond our control, the November 9 edition of the paper did not remain on the stands.

The "circumstances" to which I am referring have by this time been made quite public, I'm sure. The papers were pulled from the stands on the request of Nan Perkins, dean of admissions and financial planning. Her reasons are cited in the letter on this page.

I am livid. I am outraged. And, perhaps most importantly, I am disappointed. As far as I am concerned, the removal -- and eventual destruction -- of the newspaper is an action which needs to be examined closely.

When my staff and I decided to compile an issue devoted to the drug problem on campus, we realized that we were dealing with a very important -- and, yes, controversial -- topic. We knew we would raise some eyebrows, and we expected some sort of response. We did not, however, expect the papers to be removed.

We have known about the drug survey results for several weeks, but we did not publish a story sooner because we wanted to approach the subject in the best way we knew how.

By supplementing the cover story with articles about students who use drugs, an interview with a police officer and a letter from George Bush, we hoped to bring this important issue to the surface in as interesting and powerful a manner possible. It seems we succeeded.

In talking to Dean Perkins, I have expressed my contempt for the actions of the Admissions Office. She told me that she intended for the papers to simply be removed from sight during the visitation day. Unfortunately, she did not make plans for their replacement to the stands. Somewhere along the line, the papers were disposed of.

Just like that, all my staff's hard work . . . gone. I personally worked on that paper for between 40 and 50 hours. The edition wasn't even on the stands for that length of time. Nobody even bothered to contact me about the situation. I had to raise the

subject. Were we supposed to simply ignore this thing?

To me, it doesn't matter if Dean Perkins asked for the papers to be put out of sight for 15 seconds or 15 years. In my opinion, that request should never have been made. As I see it, this is a violation of freedom of the press.

In speaking with the dean, I have come to understand her concern over the misrepresented figure. Indeed, over 34 percent on the students do not use cocaine on a regular basis. That figure represents the number of students who use marijuana on a regular basis. The percentage of students who are regular cocaine users is 7.5.

At this point, I believe it is my obligation to state that I have an "OOPS" policy for The Pendulum. If we print a substantial error, I will correct it in a box on the editorial page. (I'm sure some careful observers have noted changes in a few of our stories this week. Errors have been pointed out and we have done our best to print the correct information in this edition.)

Dean Perkins also expressed to me her concern that Elon seemed to be singled out in our stories. We neglected to mention the other schools involved in the PICA survey. Once again, true. One of our stories did contain that information, but the paragraph was edited for layout reasons. The way I saw it, of course we would focus on Elon. That is, after all, the college for which the paper is published.

But this defense is not the important part. The important part concerns what happened to our papers. Those papers should never have been removed. Each edition is published for the Elon College community, and it is supposed to be displayed until the next edition arrives a week later.

For those papers to be removed for even a fraction of a second imposes on certain rights. For those papers to be removed for an extended amount of time -- and, worse yet, destroyed -- is absolutely reprehensible.

In a phone conversation, Dean Perkins told me that she did not think the prospective students and their parents were the audience I was trying to reach. I don't think it was her decision to make.

Using that logic, however,

suppose I wanted to reach my intended audience: the students, faculty, staff, and community of Elon College. They couldn't have found a copy of the paper on Visitation Day.

In fact, they couldn't find a copy on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday either. Readers could only find a copy the following Thursday -- at a substantial cost of time, effort, money and patience, I might add.

We intended to run a regular eight-page issue this week. Instead, I opted to run the "core" issue, with removal of outdated stories and addition of more current events. I made this decision in an effort to appease staff, advertisers and readers.

I feel that the newspaper was censored. And I don't see any reason for it.

I have spoken to many people about this issue, and I know that I am not the only person outraged by this entire situation. Some action must be taken, but little can be done now to help the November 9 edition.

But something must be done to prevent this from happening in the future. I think everyone on this campus -- from students to faculty to administration -- needs to understand the importance of this problem. I wonder whether the issue would have been pulled had it cited the proper percentage and addressed the issue at other schools.

I think the paper would have been removed regardless. An issue devoted to drugs would make the Admissions Office flinch whether one figure was misrepresented or not.

The actions of the Admissions Office have upset the balance of things at The Pendulum. How do we explain this to our printer, our advertisers, our readers and our staff? The paper was supposedly pulled to avoid giving people a negative impression of Elon. That action in itself reflects badly upon Elon.

I told Dean Perkins that if I were shopping for a college and discovered that there was a drug problem on campus, I would not be shocked. Drugs are a reality. They are a problem on college campuses everywhere and they are a reality throughout our country and the rest of the world.

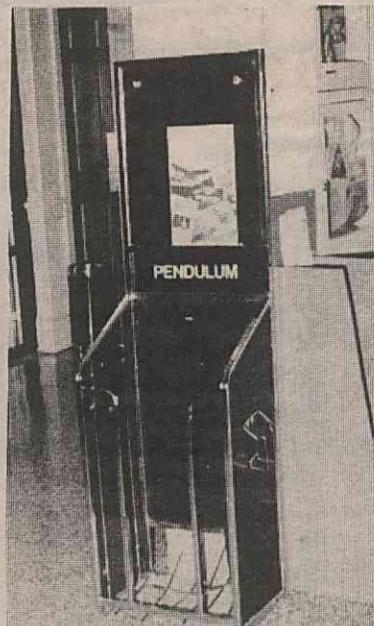


Photo by Pat Hobin

If, however, I were to find that the college at which I was looking had removed newspapers, I certainly would have second thoughts about signing my application. Any college which would even so much as consider infringing upon the rights of the student press does not deserve my respect or my tuition payment.

Drugs are a problem. We're taking steps on this campus to deal with that problem. Removing a newspaper from the stands is another problem. We need to take appropriate action to ensure that such an outrageous action never again takes place at Elon.

SGA President Ed Boswell is organizing an open forum to address this issue. As of now, the forum is scheduled for Wednesday, November 29 at 10 a.m. I am eager for the entire college to put this issue in perspective.

Already several people have expressed their support, and for that I am thankful. I think it is also fair to let readers know that the administration acted upon the situation and costs incurred by the Visitation Day actions will be handled by the school. Additionally, the administration suggested re-running a duplicate issue as soon as possible. However, because some stories and ads were outdated, we opted for the format presented in this issue.

But I don't think apologies and money are enough. We need to examine the ethics of the action and we need to determine a way to avoid future problems.

To me, it's frightening to realize that I can attend a mass media law and ethics class on the same campus that violates some of the most basic freedoms.

Reasons for the removal

To the Editor:

On Friday, November 10, I read with concern the articles in The Pendulum dealing with drug and alcohol use among students at Elon.

While I felt the issue was an appropriate one for The Pendulum to cover and that the articles were in general well-handled, I felt that certain portions were misleading.

The opening paragraph of one article stated that 34 percent of the student body was using cocaine on a regular basis. Also, I did not see it pointed out anywhere that the statistics used in the articles were obtained in a six-college survey which showed essentially the same level of drug and alcohol use at all campuses.

I was particularly concerned that the 800-1000 prospective students and their parents who were scheduled to visit the campus on Saturday, November 11 would receive from the articles an inaccurate picture of the level of drug and alcohol use at Elon, a misconception which we would be unable to dispel.

Therefore, on Saturday morning I asked two of my staff members to move The Pendulum displays out of sight for the day. When the day was over I failed to ensure that the papers were returned to their proper places. As a result it seems they were thrown away. That was never my intent.

I made a decision I felt was in the best interests of the college. I felt it would be irresponsible to allow such a large number of visitors to receive the erroneous information that one third of Elon's students use cocaine on a regular basis. In hindsight, I wish I had taken my concern to you, the editor, and your staff and asked for your advice. In short I made a mistake and I apologize. I sincerely regret the difficulty this has caused.

You are doing an excellent job with The Pendulum, and the admissions office wishes to support you. A strong student newspaper is an asset to the college.

Sincerely yours,
Nan Perkins

Dean of Admissions and
Financial Planning

Mindy Schneeberger
Pendulum Editor