

Viewpoint

Newspapers might offend

Last spring during the changing of the guard at *The Pendulum*, retiring editor Kelly Potter gave some much needed advice to her nervous successor.

I was worried about offending people with an article that would appear in the final issue of the paper. Potter's response to me was, "*The Pendulum* IS a newspaper."

She put everything into perspective with that simple statement. *The Pendulum* is a newspaper. We probably will offend some people over the course of the year.

The Pendulum is also a learning tool for journalism, communication and English majors. It is run by students for students - period.

We will make some mistakes. We will write some good articles. We will write some bad ones. But, we are a newspaper.

We gather news, information you have a right to know. We practice gatekeeping, making decisions as to what to print and not to print. It is a great responsibility, one which is not taken lightly.

We write the copy and someone with sleepy eyes reads it for accuracy. Then we lay out the pages in the wee hours and pray the columns are straight.

Our target audience is you, the student. The editorial and op-ed pages are places you can air your views. The administration, faculty and students can respond. Your opinions and rebuttals are welcome.

Open communication is a necessary part of any good relationship. Even the best of families have disagreements, discussions, fights.

The Pendulum is a newspaper, and we can throw some light on a problem and serve as a catalyst for change. We are a necessary member of the Elon family.

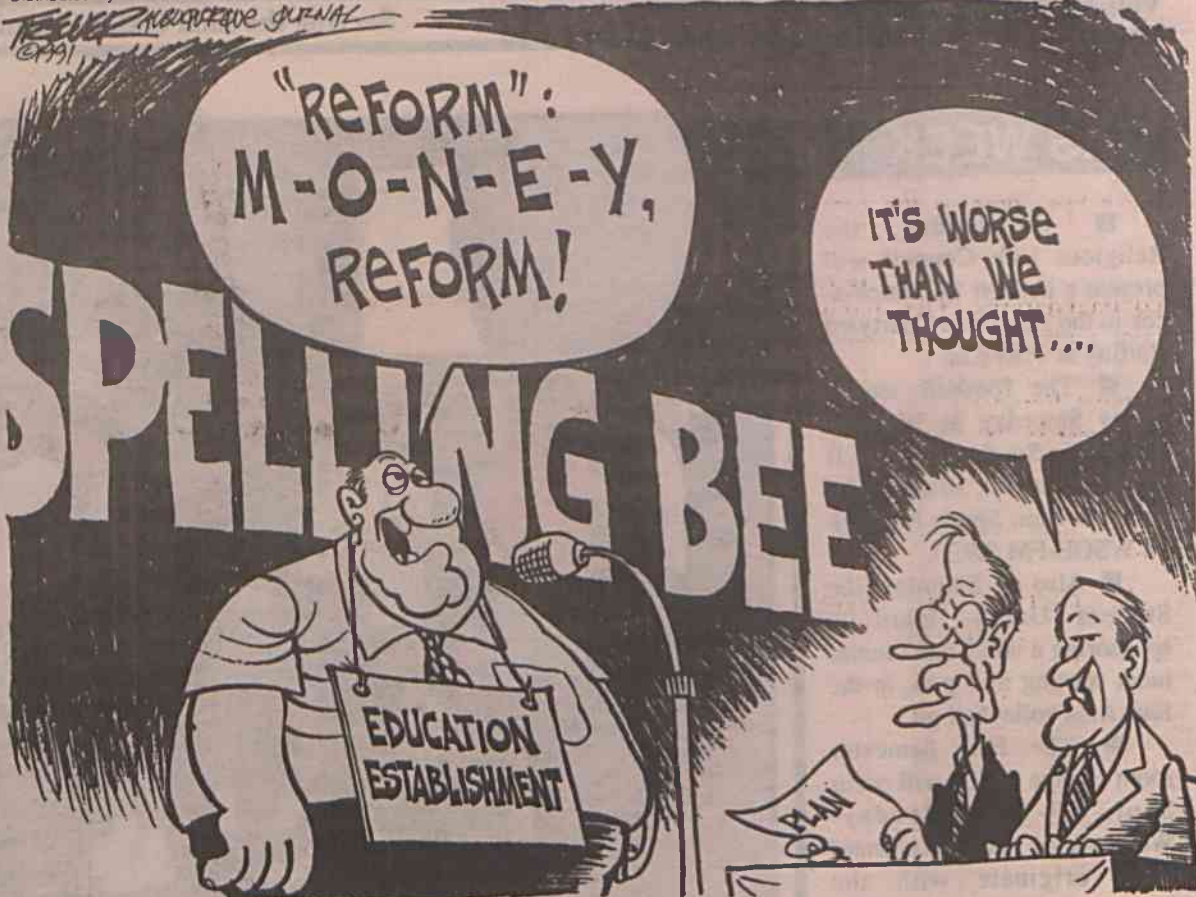
The Pendulum

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The Pendulum, founded in 1974, is published by Elon College students each Thursday during regular school terms. *The Pendulum* welcomes your opinions, with letters limited to about 250 words, if possible. Letters must be signed and a phone number given for verification. Deadline for submissions is 5 p.m. Monday.

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SAT's - same old song

The SAT scores for 1991 came out on August 26, and what do you know: The verbal scores of high school seniors hit an all-time low. Scores on the mathematics part of the exam declined for the first time since 1980. The response from the educational establishment was predictable: same song, umpteenth verse.

The Scholastic Aptitude Test is not intended to measure achievement as such; neither is it regarded as a test of basic intelligence. The SAT is supposed to measure a high school senior's ability to read, write and reason at the college level. This past spring 1,032,685 students took the test, an increase of 7,162 over 1990. The findings were dismal.

How dismal? Fifteen years ago, young men averaged a score of 433 on the verbal part of the SAT. Young women averaged 430. In 1991 the men slumped to 426, the women to 418.

On the other half of the test, involving mathematical skills, the score for men was exactly where it was in 1976, at 497. Between 1976 and 1991 young women improved in math from 446 to 453, but 1991 was two points down from 1990. The maximum possible score on each part of the



James Kilpatrick

exam is 800.

Looking at these miserable results, some educators were honest enough to lay the blame squarely where it belongs -- upon teachers, principals and administrators of the public school system, and also upon the permissive parents of a generation gone morally and intellectually soft.

The predominant response, to judge from *The New York Times*, was to fuzz the picture by minimizing the statistics. The universe of test takers, it appears, has become "more democratic." A wider variety of students are taking the test. Moreover, each state measures a different sample. Thus, Iowa, which came in first, tests only 5 percent of its high school graduates; South Carolina, which

finished last, tests 58 percent.

The downward trend, said one comfortable fellow, is not really a downward trend. When more students are taking the test, including more students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, a drop in scores should be expected. Properly analyzed, the test results are "a great victory."

Another educator, this one an associate professor of psychology at Columbia Teachers College, was not alarmed. The composite scores on both the verbal and the math exams for 1991 were two points below the composites for 1990. "That two-point drop is not a drop in my eyes," said the professor. "It's such an infinitesimal amount as not to be worth commenting on."

The larger point is that there is no trend whatever toward improvement. Teachers, parents and society as a whole are failing in the most important task before the nation. We are failing to rear a generation intellectually equipped to compete in the coming century. The schools are doing a fair to good job with the bright and gifted youngsters. On tests of specific achievement, students are doing better. But when we look at the

See Kilpatrick, Page 3