

Editorial

The Pendulum seeks to inspire, entertain and inform the Elon community by providing a voice for students and faculty as well as a forum for the meaningful exchange of ideas.

Student press freedoms should not be taken for granted

Elon University's many student media organizations exercise the right to print, broadcast and stream all stories they deem newsworthy without administration approval. We do not see this ability as a privilege granted on the whim of administrators, but an inherent right that is not questioned.

Unfortunately, there are other colleges that believe freedom of the student press is optional and not innate.

Quinnipiac University, a private school in Connecticut, states on its Web site: "Quinnipiac fosters partnerships among students and with faculty; we are a spirited, welcoming campus."

Quinnipiac, in addition to its friendly and jubilant atmosphere, fiercely battled the school's weekly newspaper, *The Chronicle*, after the paper began putting stories online before they were printed in the paper, a faux pas at Quinnipiac.

This rule was justified by university president John Lahey in 2007 when he stated: "The electronic version [of *The Chronicle*] would come out at the same time as the hard-copy version so at least dinosaurs like me who read the hard copy version get an opportunity to read it before the external world hears about it."

This rule, besides the absurd reasoning behind its establishment, is in conflict with the real world demand for instantaneous news coverage and society's exaltation of technological progress.

As a result, several frustrated student journalists broke from *The Chronicle* at the end of last year and created *Quad News*, a strictly online newspaper that was independent of the university. Quinnipiac's chapter of Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), which is a school-recognized organization, allowed the *Quad News* staff to share on-campus space after

SPJ meetings. When administration found out that SPJ was harboring such a dangerous enemy as the *Quad News*, they sent a letter to the group that stated their status as an organization was in jeopardy.

This audacious movement elicited a response from the national SPJ chapter and was the subject of a *New York Times* editorial, chiding the school's unjustified actions.

While this rule has rightly been recalled in recent months, Quinnipiac still has other regulatory practices that inhibit the free flow of information. Media organizations must go through the university's public relations office before talking to any school administrator. When *Quad News* was first established, the university not only barred them from campus but from contacting administration members as well.

"Until about a month ago, the university wouldn't deal with the *Quad News* at all," said Jason Braff, editor-in-chief of *Quad News*. "They wouldn't talk to us about anything."

The heated battle has cooled — Quinnipiac has relaxed its disturbingly strict regulations on contacting staff and is no longer threatening the status of the SPJ chapter. The editors at *Quad News* have no intention of becoming part of the university.

"We're not trying to be recognized as an organization, we are completely independent and want to stay that way," Braff said. "All we were asking is that we could be treated like any other outside newspaper."

Student journalists struggling with an outdated and almost tyrannical administration is a foreign concept to many of the recognized media outlets on Elon's campus.

"Our newscast is entirely student run, and that's

something *Phoenix14News* takes great pride in," said Leigh Lesniak, senior executive producer of *Phoenix14News*. "Ethical journalism is expected and demanded by the university, which makes for a staff of thorough journalists."

Elon is a private university and is not obligated by any of the laws that govern public universities to allow free speech to reign. The administration could demand to review every script of a *Phoenix14* and *ESTV* show before its broadcast, and require appraisal of every edition of *The Pendulum* before it hits the press. Instead, student media broadcasts and prints with only the restraints imposed by its own student executives.

"Elon may be a private university, but 20 percent of the students are communication students," said George Padgett, associate professor of communications. "Free speech is at the center of what we teach."

Quinnipiac is not the only university that has subjected its student media organizations to censorship, and the capability of that administration to yank funding and disorganize student groups is very real. It is important to recognize that Elon's administration's belief in the professionalism and responsibility of its student organizations when others obviously disregard the importance of student contribution.

College campuses are testing grounds for real world ventures in journalism, government, business, education and an abundance of other professions. Universities, whether public or private, should allow students to venture and boldly experiment with their chosen fields of interests, encouraging them to succeed and develop even if student goals do not match administration agenda.

Letter to the Editor

Homecoming theme misunderstood

I wanted to take this opportunity to address some concerns raised about the Homecoming theme in last week's *Pendulum* Editorial. Let me begin by explicitly stating that SGA never intended to offend any member of the campus or surrounding community. It was never our intent to insult students, faculty, staff, or others, and we sincerely apologize if that was the case.

SGA took the necessary steps and procedures in selecting the Homecoming theme. The Homecoming Committee itself is the most diverse committee of representation within SGA. It is comprised of a member of each grade level, and a member of all three councils on the SGA Senate. This diverse representation of students is mandated within the By Laws of our organization. The committee spent many hours developing the schedule and theme: *Phoenix Phiesta*.

The committee chose the "Phiesta" theme as it represents a celebration, not because it represented a specific culture. The committee consulted and presented the Homecoming 2008 packet to El Centro de Espanol, who helped identify a charity/philanthropy group for the Penny Wars Event. Through consultation with El Centro de Espanol, SGA selected Centro La Comunidad, a non-profit organization which works to benefit the well-being of the Latino population within Alamance County. El Centro de Espanol and other programs on campus were properly informed of the theme and helped to offer advice, support and

critique to produce the Homecoming theme and events.

Additionally, there was an opportunity for all students, faculty, and staff to come to the SGA Meeting on September 11, 2008 to speak on the contents of the packet before it was voted upon by the entire SGA Senate. We continually encourage students to speak on issues that arise before SGA, and welcomed comment on this issue as well.

This can be a teachable moment for our community. As an SGA, the issues raised in the editorial last week provides an opportunity for all students and organizations on campus to look at our thematic programming, and to ensure that we are not overtly offensive of any culture. While it will often be hard to please every single member of this campus, there are certainly ways to ensure that future programmatic themes minimize any cultural insensitivity issues.

I want to assure the student body that SGA did not mean to offend any members of our community and that we followed proper procedure in creating the Homecoming theme. I also want to extend our apologies again if any part of the theme did indeed offend anyone. I encourage those who are still concerned to visit our Senate Meeting on Thursday, November 20th at 7:30 p.m. in Moseley 215 to address the entire Senate.

Chase Rumley
SGA Executive President

Have an idea or opinion you'd like to share with *The Pendulum*? Contact us at pendulum@elon.edu and we'll print what you have to say. Lengthy letters or columns may be cut to fit. All submissions become the property of *The Pendulum* and will not be returned.

Christmas season comes too soon for some consumers

As Wal-Mart customers shopped on Nov. 1, picking through half-priced Halloween candy and costumes that only 24 hours ago had been hot items, faint music from the overhead speakers started putting them in a different mood. That is because, a little less than two months early, the store was playing "Silver Bells."

Most people hadn't brought their pumpkins in from the porch, and they definitely hadn't started to plan Thanksgiving dinner. Yet in most large stores, center displays were all about Dec. 25.

Decking the halls early is no new practice for retailers. After all, the Christmas spending season marks billions of dollars in reliable income for retailers. And with stock market woes and employment worries, Americans are likely to hold on to their dollars a little tighter, making advertisers' jobs a little harder.

Even in times of prosperity, stores displayed merchandise months early. Before reliable and fast transportation, Americans would purchase winter coats and presents by catalog months before the leaves had begun to turn. That allowed enough time for the order to reach a factory by mail, be filled, and for the product to be sent to a customer.

That tradition remained even after trucks, airplanes and phone and Internet orders were added to the mix. Consumers are not surprised to see seasonal products on the shelves before the holiday begins.

Officially, the Christmas spending season begins the day after Thanksgiving, but one would

never know that by the candy canes and mini Christmas trees that stocked Wal-Mart's shelves the day after Halloween.

The start date for Christmas displays seems to have been pushed farther and farther forward, swallowing important holidays in its path.

The day after children run around the neighborhood as superheroes and princesses, they can go over their wish list with Santa at almost every major mall in America.

Thanksgiving has become an afterthought. And it seems that if retailers could find a way, Halloween's costumes and candy would be combined with the behemoth that corporate Christmas has become.

It is understandable that corporations want to get a head start on getting customers in the Christmas spirit, but they must remember that it is very easy to go overboard.

Our country has just spent an outrageous two years gearing up for a presidential election, and by the end, nearly every citizen — politically involved or not — was sick of the commercials and constant bombardment of political views.

If it is possible to estrange voters from the political process by starting too early, isn't it logical to think that it would be even easier to do the same thing for Christmas consumers?

These are hard times for retailers and consumers alike and stores should be careful not to push Christmas too hard.

THE PENDULUM

Established 1974

The Pendulum is published each Wednesday of the academic year. The advertising and editorial copy deadline is 5 p.m. the Friday before publication. Letters to the editor and guest columns are welcome and should be typed and e-mailed with a telephone number for verification. Submissions are accepted as Word documents. The Pendulum reserves the right to edit obscene and potentially libelous material. Lengthy letters or columns may be trimmed to fit. All submissions become the property of *The Pendulum* and will not be returned. You can reach *The Pendulum* by e-mail at pendulum@elon.edu. If you have questions or concerns about an article contact a section editor. Please do not respond to reporters directly.

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