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ROSE POINT BLANK
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How to write a successful column

It's inevitable when a person achieves a certain level of fame, such as myself, that the clamor for passed-along wisdom will at some point become undeniable.

Well, little people, today is your lucky day. Today is the day I break down the fourth wall and dip into the mailbag to answer some of the questions from those of you so desperate for some tricks of the trade from the teacher. Like this letter, from Dave F., in Pomona, Calif.:

"Dear Jason, I'm an aspiring writer who reads your column every week. My dream is to someday have my own column and be as handsome as you. But, I am realistic, and I'd settle for just being able to have my own column. Could you write me a letter that says we're friends so I can show it to girls to help me score with them? Or, if not, could you maybe at least give me a few pointers about the column writing process that might help me get started?"

Sure thing, Dave. In fact, you're not alone, I get letters almost every week asking for tips about how I go about writing my columns, how I come up with new ideas every week and how I get over the inevitable cases of writer's block. So here, for one time only, I'm going to pull back the velvet curtain and let you and everyone else in on the method behind the mastermind.

Step one: Begin the process approximately one hour before your deadline. Go out and buy beer.

Step two: Open one beer, start drinking. Repeat as necessary.

Step three: Look at your computer, wonder half-heartedly what it was you were supposed to be doing.

Step four: Use the bathroom. Remember what it was you were supposed to be doing.

Step five: Try to think of something to write about.

Some weeks will be easy — an obvious news story, a holiday, an insider tip about cocaine laced scratch-n-sniff stickers being sold in preschools by leprechaun gang members in disguise. Some weeks it will be harder, and you'll have to rely on your own ingenuity. But there are some easy ways to jump-start an idea.

First, just think about some of those universal life questions that everyone wonders about, like: I wonder if anyone's ever been killed in a junkyard death-fight with something that I threw away? Or, I wonder if fish will ever evolve to have really, really hard hook-resistant jaws and we won't be able to fish anymore? You know what I mean, there's a million of them.

Secondly, decide if you can elaborate on any of those questions and if anyone would be interested to read about it.

Finally, decide that you don't care what anyone wants to read about and just start spewing some garbage from your fingertips.

Step six: Make a plateful of hot dogs with peanut butter on them. Wonder why you did that. Eat them all, wonder why you didn't try that before.

Step seven: Check your word count. Try to remember what it was supposed to be.

Step eight: Try to remember what you were trying to remember. Return to Step 2.

Step nine: Look at the clock, realize you still have 10 minutes before your column is due, relax.

Step 10: Finish your column.

Well, Dave, there you go. I may very well be excommunicated from the International Society of Awesome Columnists and Superhunks for telling you, but that's really all there is to it. Just follow this process every week and you'll never be stuck.

And in a desperate spot, if all else fails, you can always go to the mailbag. That's just the kind of jack move that'll always let you BS your way through another week when you've got nothing else. Good luck, kiddo.

EDITORIAL CARTOON By David Huyck, dh@unc.edu



It's not our fault

Students shouldn't have to pay for others' mistakes

While the student fee advisory subcommittee gathers Friday to consider a fee increase to cover the costs of a contract settlement, the University should consider the actions that warranted the debt in the first place.

The dispute began when the University became disgusted with what officials claimed to be shoddy work. UNC terminated contracts with four companies, settling with three of the companies and even getting some of their money back. That UNC and the J.M. Thompson Company were unable to reach an agreement without the State Construction Office intervening is suspicious at best.

If Thompson truly didn't uphold its end of the bargain, the University should not have been left vulnerable to a \$1.4 million settlement. The State Construction Office's decision to side with the Thompson

Company is likely the result of UNC's failure to adequately protect itself.

Carolina Union debt reserves will cover most of the claim, but due to the recreational nature of the Union, the University cannot pay the additional costs outright. The Union will have to accept a loan to be paid over a 10-year period instead.

It might be determined at Wednesday's meeting of student leaders and UNC officials that the most reasonable source for paying this loan is student fees.

However, awarding this additional money to Carolina Union's debt services sets a dangerous precedent for similar problems in projects to come. While fees already support other organizations' debt services, the Union's debt is unique in its ties to a specific incident.

High cost projects come with high risks for issues, and the University should be taking

every precaution available to protect itself from these risks. If student fees are used as a cushion once, there is no promise they won't be used again.

The University complaints that resulted in termination of the Thompson Company seem reasonable — students should appreciate that firing the company contributed to the sound construction of an important campus fixture. But this doesn't mean students should foot the bill. The student fee advisory subcommittee should remember students were not involved in the series of events that made this fee necessary.

Students cannot be a consistent default for the University's fiscal needs. Lack of responsibility for the fine should absolve students of financial responsibility, and every possible alternative for funding should be explored before students are forced to shoulder the costs.

A great deal we can't afford

UNC is a great value, but some students need more help

It's hard to put a price on a quality college education, but there are a lot of organizations willing to give it a shot — sometimes with very different results.

Kiplinger's Personal Finance magazine's "50 Best Values in Public Colleges," released last week, put UNC at the top of the list. On the other hand, a report released this summer by the National Center for Public Policy and Affordability gave North Carolina an "F" in college affordability.

So what's the truth? Well, it's a little bit of both. UNC is far cheaper than other schools of similar quality, but that doesn't necessarily mean it's affordable.

Most students, especially the in-state ones, must admit that Carolina is a great value compared to its peers. Undergraduate tuition and fees for 2005-06 totaled \$4,612 here, compared to the public university average of \$5,491.

Even the out-of-state total of \$18,411.02 is reasonable compared to private university average of \$21,235.

With greater numbers of college students nationally graduating with more than \$100,000 in debt, everyone at Carolina has something to be grateful for. In fact, with the greater earning power of college graduates, it might be the best value many students ever find.

The problem is that something can be a great value but still not be affordable to some students. The growing cost of college tuition has greatly outstripped inflation even here at UNC where tuition and fees have gone up by approximately 30 percent for both in-state and out-of-state students over the past four years.

During that same course of time the overall inflation rate has only been around 13 percent. But there are plenty of students who are on partial or no financial aid that still struggle to pay for college. And with interests rates always on the horizon taking on thousands of dollars in loan debt isn't the best solution.

The University has made great strides in the form of the Carolina Covenant, a wonder-

ful program that has made Carolina affordable for lower-income students.

But there is an undercurrent of resentment on the part of many lower-middle and middle-income students who don't quite qualify for the Covenant.

Often parents and students feel squeezed to cover the cost of tuition, and many of them don't appreciate that 35 percent of their tuition increases go to supplement others' student aid.

The continued expansion of the Carolina Covenant is in the best interests of all students. Hopefully, it will reach a point one day when all Carolina students are expected to pay only what they can afford.

Until then, though, administrators should do everything possible to keep UNC affordable for everyone. Let's not forget Article 9, Section 9 of the state constitution: "The General Assembly shall provide that the benefits of The University of North Carolina ... as far as practicable, be extended to the people of the State free of expense."

Don't dress up as a carrot

Mounted police on Franklin ensure a safe Halloween

Horses have long been known as some of the planet's noblest animals. They've also proven themselves very useful at making human beings taller and more mobile.

In keeping with this, Chapel Hill will be adding mounted officers to its policing repertoire this Halloween. We think the introduction of these equine officers is a welcome addition to Franklin Street.

In case just being awesome isn't enough, horses allow police officers to have an important height advantage over large crowds. Mounted police are proven very effective for crowd control — from their equestrian perches, officers are better able to maintain the safety for those

below. Better visibility equals a better ability to see and eliminate problems.

Given the violence of Apple Chill and the scrutiny it's placed on Franklin Street events, it's imperative that this year's celebration runs smoothly. Horses will help meet that aim.

They have a built-in intimidation factor and can often deter crime just by virtue of being several hundred pounds of lean muscle.

In crowds such as those seen here in Chapel Hill every Halloween, mounted police should be in their element — no longer will officers have to stand on the brick planters in front of Qdoba to see over the crowd.

Mounted police are used all over the world for crowd control

in areas with dense populations, including New York City.

Mounted Unit horses must meet certain qualifications, such as color, height, age and temperament. Horses with histories of biting, kicking or cribbing are disqualified. Horses are trained to deal with the myriad of distractions and excitements inherent to large crowds.

The horses and officers used here in Chapel Hill will be equally qualified. We welcome these noble animals to Franklin Street's Halloween festivities.

A word of caution, though: The horses are considered police officers. You can be charged with assaulting a police officer if you mess with them. So let them do their job, and don't make them bite you.

QUOTE OF THE DAY:

"The spirit of Carrboro, even more so than Chapel Hill, is much more open to students."

DANIEL WALLACE, UNC PROFESSOR

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Due to space constraints, letters are sometimes cut. Read the full-length versions or post your own response to a letter, editorial or story online. VISIT www.dailytarheel.com/feedback

Legalization of marijuana has catastrophic effects

TO THE EDITOR:
I am very disappointed in the DTH editorial board for supporting the legalization of marijuana without considering its Earth-shattering consequences.

Number one, Spongebob Squarepants would become the most highly rated show on TV (not good for anyone).

Number two, most of the lecture halls across campus would smell worse than they already do (and be filled with more mindless conversations than they already are).

Number three, an unnamed sports team might forget to show up for games on Saturdays (could be a good thing if we play Clemson again).

Number four, Willie Nelson would be free to make movies and music.

My point is that with war, social security, marriage rights, and education all on the hot seat, why should legalizing marijuana even be considered as a valid political topic?

It is the government's responsibility to fix these more serious problems first, way before worrying about the accommodation of potheads.

Matt Ellis
Junior
Chemistry

Time would be best spent helping troubled peers

TO THE EDITOR:
The DTH's recent "Monday Spotlight" look at underage drinking in Chapel Hill was headlined "A Risky Pastime," yet this title somewhat contradicts the, er, substance of the articles.

After all, the only risks identified by the DTH are structural: the risks of getting caught by the ALE and other authority figures, of having a black mark put onto one's permanent record, of having to pay fines and other costs.

Seeing these facts and figures all listed together do not highlight a drinking problem at UNC so much as they expose the entire circus to be a monumental waste of time and money for just about everybody involved.

We assume alcohol to be a recognized "pastime" and a part of UNC's culture, so why is there such effort to selectively punish a portion of the community for participating?

There is no denying that alcohol can cause terrible trouble, but nowhere in either of Monday's articles is there reference to alcohol-related health problems or drunk driving, and the only suggestion that alcohol leads to deviant behavior comes from Adrian Thorn's ridiculous assertion that "The first person to get out-of-control drunk really shows they're underage."

I rather attest that the first person to get out-of-control drunk really shows that he or she is immature, which is a trait independent of age.

Among our university's community, we should be looking for fewer ways to get peers into trouble and spend our energy instead helping those who are already there.

Ryan Millager
Junior
Dramatic Arts, Music

SPEAK OUT

WRITING GUIDELINES:

- ▶ Please type: Handwritten letters will not be accepted.
- ▶ Sign and date: No more than two people should sign letters.
- ▶ Students: Include your year, major and phone number.
- ▶ Faculty/staff: Include your department and phone number.
- ▶ Edit: The DTH edits for space, clarity, accuracy and vulgarity.

SUBMISSION:

- ▶ Drop-off: at our office at Suite 2409 in the Student Union.
- ▶ E-mail: to editdesk@unc.edu
- ▶ Send: to P.O. Box 3257, Chapel Hill, N.C., 27515.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Editorials are the opinions solely of The Daily Tar Heel editorial board. The board consists of five board members, the associate opinion editor, the opinion editor and the DTH editor. The 2006-07 DTH editor decided not to vote on the board.

If you give up on the team, then give up your tickets

TO THE EDITOR:
In response to Eugene Rossitch III's comments: Thanks for giving up on your coach, your school and on your seats.

If you receive UNC tickets to the N.C. State game may I please have them?

Joseph Ligon
Senior
Political Science

'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' is a discriminatory practice

TO THE EDITOR:
In response to Monday's letter regarding "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," I was appalled by the author's rationale in supporting the discriminatory practice.

Not only was it insensitive, but it seriously failed to capture why opponents are against "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

According to the writer, sexual minority soldiers are "selfish" because they want to discuss their sexual orientation.

Furthermore, because sexual minorities are sometimes fired in the civilian workforce for such discussion, the military's policy is justified. Consequently, gays should "quit whining" about "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

He can't be serious? But sadly, I think he is.

I'd like to point out, however, that discussion about sexual orientation is not limited to what takes place in a soldier's bedroom, as the reader seems to believe.

What about conversations regarding missed loved ones such as boyfriends and girlfriends, or partners?

These conversations are pervasive among heterosexual soldiers at war. Therefore, denying sexual minority soldiers from being open about their sexuality prevents them from living honest, fulfilling lives.

Moreover, the partners of sexual minority soldiers killed on the battlefield do not receive the same treatment or sympathy from the Army as the spouses of heterosexual soldiers.

And, when sexual minority soldiers are honest about their lives they lose all of their benefits, regardless of how honorably they serve their country. The logic in that just doesn't hold.

Lastly, it is a slap on the face to capable sexual minority soldiers when the Army reports having trouble recruiting people to fight in Iraq and across the globe.

If requirements are going to be loosened to increase numbers, shouldn't other policies like "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" be removed, as well?

So if fighting for the reversal of policy as discriminatory and offensive as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is grounds for whining, then we should all join in crying out against the practice.

Thomas Cluderay
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Lambda Magazine

The Daily Tar Heel

Established 1893,
113 years
of editorial freedom

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