

OPINION

This column represents the views of the Old Gold and Black Editorial Board.

Hate group's arrival stirs controversy

The Westboro Baptist Church, a militant anti-gay group from Topeka, Kan., has announced its plans to travel to the university Oct. 30 to protest the presence of gays on campus.

The group targets universities and establishments that it deems as "gay-friendly," an epithet that emerges as more of a compliment to an institution that strives to maintain equality for all. Despite the Westboro Baptist Church's flagrantly offensive platform and its tactics of hatred, the university has not yet decided if it will bar the group from protesting on campus, if it applies for a permit.

According to Harold Holmes, an assistant vice president and the dean of student services, every group that desires to protest on campus must apply for a permit.

If the Westboro Baptist Church fails to apply for a permit or fails to comply with the permit, the university can issue a warning for trespassing.

The decision the university has to make on whether to allow the group on campus is very important, involving freedom of speech, values and the welfare of students.

Because the university is private, it has no obligation to allow a militant group within its gated confines.

The fact that the group has warned the university of its arrival date makes it even easier for the university to bar it from the campus.

Guards could easily be placed on duty on the arrival day in order to prevent the group from even entering the campus.

In theory, the university should allow outside groups who will further the education and well-being of the student population to visit the campus.

It is apparent that the Westboro Baptist Church will bring few benefits to the university.

The only things that the group will bring to campus are hatred and narrow-minded beliefs.

The spectrum of ideas that the Westboro Baptist Church represents is not only obscene, but also groundless. Its litany of abuses and obscene slurs against Maya Angelou — one of the university's most admired professors — are unwarranted.

As testimony to the group's ridiculous accusations, it even labels Mother Teresa a lesbian because of the Catholic Church's adoration of the Virgin Mary.

The group's Web site address — www.godhatesfags.com — characterizes the group as a hate-inspired organization whose only platform is the practice of hatred itself.

Furthermore, the group can hardly label itself as religious. Love, not hatred, is the dogma of groups who are truly religious.

The university should consider that allowing the group on campus might

subject certain students to hatred in a place where they should feel most accepted.

Although the world is not always a place where all are treated equally, a liberal arts school has a particular obligation to emulate equality.

It is especially disheartening that, in a year when the Gay Student Alliance has made great strides, a group such as the Westboro Baptist Church should decide to make this campus part of its stomping grounds.

On the contrary, it can be argued that the university has valid reasons for not barring the arrival of the Westboro Baptist Church.

In ignoring the group rather than creating a commotion and ushering the group from campus, perhaps the university is denying the group the publicity that it desires.

Trying to remove the group from campus could create a larger scene than simply allowing them to protest and issuing them a trespassing warning if they fail to comply with university policy.

Members of the university community are making plans to counteract the group's demonstration with a vigil against hate on the steps of Wait Chapel.

It is hoped that not only homosexuals, but all members of the university community, will unite against such hatred.

Although the student population may not be the most liberal-minded in its acceptance of gay students, in comparison to students at other colleges, it can hardly be said that there is an atmosphere of hatred for gay students at this university.

There is undoubtedly a difference between finding it difficult to accept different life choices and responding to them with cruelty.

Hopefully the university can be brought together in a common demonstration of its intolerance for hatred and inequality.

The Westboro Baptist Church has exceeded the bounds of simply not understanding a portion of the population.

They have responded to this already over-harrassed group of people with tactics that are militant and unacceptable.

The only benefit that the university has to gain from the Westboro Baptist Church's arrival is that it will strengthen its affirmation of equality to all and its intolerance for hatred.

Additionally, perhaps the decision of the Westboro Baptist Church to visit the university signifies that the university's atmosphere of equality is gradually strengthening.

It must be the case if an organization would travel all of the way from Kansas to suppress it.

Athletes' primary goal is school

Student athletes are to be held to the same standards as others.

I recently read guest columnist Will Rikard's Sept. 17 editorial "Athletes receive bad name on campus," and I disagree with several of his points.

Let me start by saying that I totally respect the time and energy that athletes put into their sport. I find their work ethic and commitment admirable,

Sean Blue

ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

and I appreciate the recognition that athletes bring to this school.

However, in his column Rikard made it seem as if regular students don't have extracurricular activities that command a lot of their time and energy. Sports are an extracurricular activity just like student publications, volunteer service corps, Student Government and the debate team.

These are all activities that improve both the student and the university. The only difference is that many athletes use their respective sports to finance their education.

During high school, I was one of those students who was busy attending meetings and doing everything possible to pad my college application. I was also a four-year letterman and coach at my high school.

I used extracurricular activities much in the same way an athlete does, to finance my education. I worked hard and won scholarships to attend this school. I receive no financial assistance from my parents or anywhere else. I've also found that there are many students like me on this campus.

So, let's experience the typical day of a regular student paying his way through college.

Wake up at 7 a.m. and be in class by eight. Go to classes until 1 or 2 p.m. Return home, grab some lunch and be at work by 3 p.m. Work until 7 or 8 p.m., then do homework until 10 or 11

p.m. Be in bed by midnight so you can do it all over again the next day. On days when we don't have to work, we replace it with our extracurricular activities, which are important not only to ourselves, but also to our financial aid.

So, as you can see, athletes aren't the only ones who have it tough.

My main problem with Rikard's column, however, was his assertion that athletes should be held to different standards when it came to the educational standards of the university.

I agree that because their sports take them away from their classes for competitions at certain times they should receive some extra help.

However, the main reason for them being here is to receive an education. They should be held accountable just as every other student is. I know many athletes on campus and they are by no means dumb. Last year, 105 athletes earned All-Academic honors for this university.

Only about three percent of all college athletes ever make it to the pros. They are here for an education first and to play sports second. If we begin allowing athletes to pass by without actually fulfilling the course requirements, we are hurting them because they will be grossly underprepared when they begin applying for jobs.

This university is known mainly for its academics, not its athletic program. If we begin giving out undeserved diplomas, this will reflect on the university. Graduates that aren't prepared to perform the duties they are hired for could seriously hinder the academic reputation of this university.

Over the last few years, the academic reputation of this university has steadily declined, while the average workload and academic requirements have remained the same. Perhaps it is time we began looking for other reasons for this decline.

Everyone with a college degree is affected when a university begins giving away diplomas to students that have not earned them.

This decreases the importance of a hard-earned degree, because employers can't tell the difference between the two.

Therefore, they have to act as if all were not as hard-earned as they may

have been.

I'm not saying that all athletes don't work hard for their degrees. Many do. Nevertheless, if we give them the option to slide by, it is human nature for a few to take that option. Athletes already receive special benefits that regular students do not receive such as free tutors, structured study halls and an academic monitoring system to make sure they keep up their academic requirements.

If an athlete decides they don't feel like going to class that day because they're tired or just got out of practice or for whatever reason, they shouldn't automatically have access to the notes they missed in class that day.

If they missed class because they were representing the university in some athletic function, then that is a different story. But the anonymous source in the Sept. 10 article, "Student paid to take notes," stated that she was paid to take notes on a weekly basis. Most athletes do not miss classes due to official athletic events on a weekly basis. Their schedules are designed to take them away from class as seldom as possible.

If an athlete misses class for some other reason, he or she should have to get the notes on their own and decipher the notes on their own as well, just as a regular student would.

Most students take notes in different ways and find different information important. Athletes are provided the notes, then a tutor to guide them through the missed class. Regular students are not afforded this same opportunity.

There are days when I'm tired from everything I had to do the day before, but I still have to drag myself out of bed and get to class because there is no one else waiting to help me with what I miss that day.

I respect what athletes do for this university and the amount of time it demands. However, other students do just as much for the university and to finance their education.

Athletes should not be held to different academic standards than regular students.

We all have obligations we must fulfill to get into this university, but no one is more important than another. We are all here for the same reason: to receive an education.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

University needs to reprimand students

It is with continuing interest that I read in the *Old Gold and Black* about the problems confronting the university, the students and the surrounding neighborhood citizens. Especially interesting was the staff editorial in the Sept. 17 issue titled "Neighborhood should not confront school." The question which ultimately remains is, whom *should* the neighborhood confront if not the school?

Students have been confronted year after year and have not taken responsibility for their behavior. Absentee landlords who rent to students in order to make money at the expense of the neighborhood have shown little interest in helping to solve the problem. The university has refrained in the past from even determining who the students were and what their specific addresses were.

Consequently, in order to have any semblance of protection from abuse of various ordinances, some members of the surrounding neighborhood have resorted to assistance from the city and campus police. This has been distasteful to both students and citizens.

That is why the citizens have decided to organize and to be in a position (both in numbers and in finances) to take whatever action becomes necessary to recapture their neighborhood.

With further reference to the editorial's comments about the homeowner's association being "peevish and frustrated," I submit that the only peevish and frustrated ones are the students, and perhaps some of the administrators who have supposedly been responsible for the behavior of students and find themselves lacking in appropriate means by which this problem can be resolved.

I am personally sympathetic with the administrators of the university and other schools and universities throughout the nation, for this thoughtless intrusion on the rights of others by binge-drinking students is a

nationwide problem.

It is a disgraceful dilemma, and many parents should become more actively involved in the lives of their children who are away from home and are engaged in despicable behavior which, I feel sure, they certainly would not tolerate in their own communities. Furthermore, they should visit the communities in which their children live and help pick up some of the trash and debris left by their offspring.

I say this with some degree of authority on the subject because I am both a graduate of the university and the parent of a graduate who was a member of the Greek system.

I do not like the idea of a university *in loco parentis*, but I understand the need for *someone* to accept responsibility for maintaining a civil community when immature students will not do so. After all, getting an education surely means learning to respect the rights of others if it means anything.

Again I refer to the Sept. 17 editorial which stated, "But honestly, what were they thinking when they moved into a neighborhood less than a mile from a university?" Please, students, give me a break! Most of us in the neighborhood have lived here over 40 years! We were here before the university was!

Therefore, may I ask you a question: But honestly, what were you thinking of when you didn't like the idea that the university is becoming firmer in its enforcement of the rules both on and off campus, and you decided to move into our neighborhood where, you hoped, you shouldn't have to be accountable to anyone?

I fully realize that the problem confronting us applies to a small percentage of the students at the university who seem determined to change its image for the worse.

Most of the students are decent, hard-working individuals who are truly seeking to take advantage of the many opportunities for learning and for becoming responsible members of society. Let us hope that their influence will spread to some of their classmates off-campus.

Ginny Sams
Class of 1963

Winston-Salem neglects environment

Well, ozone levels got bad enough recently for the Forsyth County Environmental Affairs Department to issue its first Code Red air-quality alert.

We thought things like that only happened in places like Los Angeles. We should have known better. The population grew, commercial enterprises increased, traffic got worse and so did air pollution.

We probably should have seen it coming, but now the most important thing is for us to respond to this impending crisis. The city and county governments should probably start thinking about things such as mass transit between cities.

The most important thing, of course, is individual responsibility. A recent unscientific survey on Reynolda Road showed that nine out of 10 cars had only one person in the car during rush hour. What about carpooling? And university students are worse than anybody. I have known many a student to drive across campus instead of walk or drive all the way to K-Mart to pick up one or two non-essentials.

Do we want our town to become like L.A., where it takes hours to drive just a few miles on the freeway and mothers are scared to let their children play outside because of the pollution? If your answer is no, you should consider how you can help. Carpool? Walk? Bike? Do you really need to go to the store at all? Think about it next time you decide to hop in the car to go pick up a pack of gum at the store.

Greg Frey
Junior

Our letters policy

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