

ORBIS

Amplifying Vanderbilt's Progressive Voices

Vol. 8/No.8/April/2009

HOGWARTS,

A progressive history

...page 5

Vanderbilt's greatest mysteries, SOLVED...page 6

a note from the editor

This month, I am graduating with only the vaguest notion of what comes next. I'm not alone in having no set plans for next year, and but I'm happy with that. Whatever happens, a wise person once told me, one should stay open to new experiences. (Of course, in the meantime it helps to fill out as many job applications as possible.) So this is my last issue of Orbis - and while it is with some relief that I leave the paper in the hands of my capable successor, Erika Hyde, it is also with a certain amount of sadness. I'm really going to miss working with my staff, having an excuse to go out and investigate things that I might otherwise ignore, and even production weekends, as hectic as they are. Importantly, Orbis has forced me to go out and seek new experiences. Writing about political and social issues has also led me to examine my assumptions and re-affirm my deepest beliefs. Putting one's convictions down on paper really forces one to take a side. It hasn't always been fun, but it's been worthwhile. And I've had the freedom to write about whatever I want.

Writing for a school paper has certain challenges, though. For one thing, I wonder, who are our readers, and what are you looking for when you pick up the paper? What is our obligation to be fair and unbiased while, at the same time, reporting on progressive politics, in which we all have a stake? These are not insignificant questions, and I have worked to try to address them. I wanted to make the paper informative and entertaining, and something that would truly be useful to progressives on campus. We may not have achieved all of our goals, but I'm proud of what we've done.

I've been lucky enough to have the freedom to work on this paper with funding we receive from VSC and Campus Progress. With so many print media outlets facing financial distress these days, it is truly a luxury to be able to write as a student paper without worrying about fund raising or ad sales. Things may get harder in the years to come, but I truly hope that Orbis staff will continue to find the experience of working on the paper as rewarding as I have.

-Robyn Hyden

Published with support from the
Center for American Progress/Campus Progress
 Online at <http://www.campusprogress.org>

ORBIS

Amplifying Vanderbilt's Progressive Voices

April 2009

Volume 8, Number 8

Robyn Hyden
 Editor-in-chief

Sam Abney
 Associate Editor

Erika Hyde
 Associate Editor

Haley Swenson
 Editor Emeritus

Claire Costantino
 Commentary Editor

Evan Didier
 Web Editor

Jon Christian
 Issues Editor

Thomas Shattuck
 Distribution Director

Questions, comments, concerns? E-mail us at vanderbiltorbis@gmail.com.

E-mail submissions to the address listed above, or send to Box 1669, Station B, Nashville, TN, 37235. Letters must be received one week prior to publication and must include the writer's name, year, school and telephone number. All submissions will be verified. Unsigned letters will not be published. Orbis reserves the right to edit letters for length and clarity. All submissions become property of Orbis and must conform to the legal standards of Vanderbilt Student Communications, Inc., of which Orbis is a division.

Editorials represent the policy of Orbis as determined by the editorial board. Letters and columns represent the opinions of the writers.

Please recycle.

- S** 03. No Cuts campaign meets with Zeppos
By Benjamin Eagles
- t** **Progressive checklist: the year in review**
By Robyn Hyden
- r** 04. Gay marriage in Iowa and Vermont
By Claire Costantino
- e** 05. Harry Potter Progressivism
By Claire Costantino
- t** 06. Vanderbilt's unsolved mysteries
By Robyn Hyden
- r** 08. Evaluating charter schools
By Josh Rogen
- O** 09. "Sicko" panel and healthcare discussion
By Erika Hyde
- O** 10. Obama's visit to Europe
By Nakul Shekhawat
- C** 11. The return of social spending
By Matthew Farina
- C** 12. Issues: what's the best way to procrastinate during finals?
By Sam Abney and Jon Christian

2.6 million Estimated number of jobs that would be created under a U.S. single-payer healthcare system*

1:1 Ratio of jobs lost last year to the jobs potentially created by a universal single-payer healthcare system*

4270 number of American military deaths in Iraq since March 2003

Orbis aspires to change the atmosphere on Vanderbilt's campus and provides a voice for liberal, multi-cultural and minority viewpoints. This publication strives to inform the public about issues that these groups face as well as to promote diversity and unity within our community. It is a forum for discussion of social, political and religious commentary relevant to Vanderbilt, the nation and the world. Orbis was founded by a coalition of students seeking to raise consciousness about diverse ideas, cultures and backgrounds in our society. We hope to challenge the existing social atmosphere at Vanderbilt and promote a rebirth of acceptance.

* source: *Harper's Index*, April 2009

LIVE meets with Chancellor Zeppos

Despite the administration's refusal to commit to requests from the No Cuts campaign, LIVE remains optimistic



No Cuts logo (www.vandydrive.com)

On Wednesday, April 8th, four representatives of Living Income for Vanderbilt Employees sat down with Chancellor Zeppos to discuss the job security of Vanderbilt's workforce and our "No Cuts" movement. Our request for the presence of a worker was denied by the administration, but we did not let this stand in the way of civil and sustained discourse.

Going into the meeting, we wanted to clarify our requests and encourage the Chancellor to strengthen his public stance regarding cuts to our lowest-paid workers. We commended him for his voluntary pay cut, but stressed to him that our campaign was not a witch hunt of the highest paid administrators in the country. Our goal was, and still is, to protect the livelihood of our lowest-paid workers. Chancellor Zeppos expressed that he shared this goal and that every member of the Vanderbilt community is vital. He described himself as "old school" in that to him "a university consists of three parts: students, workers, and faculty." In email correspondence since the meeting, he again emphasized that "there is no Vanderbilt without the devoted staff, faculty, and students." It was good to hear that Chancellor Zeppos is truly committed not only to the institution of Vanderbilt, but to the people of Vanderbilt.

An ethic of shared sacrifice will be necessary to steward the Vanderbilt community through these tough economic times. Our lowest-paid workers were already made to sacrifice when Vanderbilt did away with overtime hours. Those workers must not be made to sacrifice their jobs and homes so that our University's endowment will be a little healthier when times of prosperity return. As evidenced by his pay cut which goes into effect July 1, Chancellor Zeppos values shared sacrifice. It was vital that Chancellor Zeppos went public with his decision to take a voluntary pay cut because in doing so he put forth a valuable example of shared sacrifice for the sustainability of our community. We trust that he will continue to lead from the top by encouraging other administrators to take similar pay cuts. He assured us that he has already initiated such discussions.

Our message was clear: students and faculty – and we hope, administrators – on this campus are ready to give back to ensure the livelihood of our workers. We expressed our willingness, and indeed eagerness, to collaborate with the administration to develop creative, cost-cutting initiatives that will protect staff positions in the context of the University's greater good. In turn, Chancellor Zeppos expressed that "There are so many things we do well, but when it comes to resource conservation and devoting resources to our mission, we all know this is a time to work together and do better." We left the meeting with a sense that the administration is committed to protecting and strengthening Vanderbilt's sense of community. It was explained to us that were it not for this sense of community, cuts would perhaps already have been made.

Despite the Chancellor's strong rhetoric about community and shared sacrifice, Zeppos stopped short of guaranteeing that there would be no cuts to our lowest-paid workers. While this is disappointing, LIVE understands the difficulty of making a hard and fast guarantee. What did come out of the meeting is an understanding that the administration intends on doing what it takes to protect everyone in our community. In the coming weeks, Chancellor Zeppos will be working on his "next message to our community and emphasizing the core values of shared sacrifice and caring for all in our community." Likewise, LIVE will continue to spread its values and put pressure on the administration to live up to theirs. If you are interested in getting involved, visit www.vandydrive.com or email live.vanderbilt@gmail.com for more information. *-Benjamin Eagles, LIVE*

Clarifications and Corrections:

In the March issue of Orbis, an article about the student organization Youth for Western Civilization misidentified Marcus Epstein as one of the founders of the national YWC. Marcus Epstein is a vice president of the national YWC, not a founder. The article also misattributed a quote from the Southern Poverty Law Center, stating that, according to the SPLC, other founders of YWC participated in several events organized by the Michigan State University- Young Americans for Freedom. Actually, the SPLC claimed DeAnna posted on the MSU-YAF website, and that the MSU-YAF chapter was classified as a hate group after it organized these events, but the SPLC article did not specifically identify YWC founders as participants of these events. Over the phone on March 24, Kevin DeAnna stated that he did not write for the MSU-YAF's blog, the Spartan Spectator.

According to the YWC's 2008 Annual Report filed with the

Commonwealth of Virginia's State Corporation Commission, Kevin DeAnna incorporated the YWC with Craig Burgers and Luke Pelican. Both Craig Burgers and Luke Pelican were identified as former chairmen of the MSU-YAF by Kyle Bristow, then-outgoing-chairman of MSU-YAF, in a post on the Spartan Spectator. While the original Spartan Spectator blog is now defunct, a number of other websites have archival copies of the post, including the New Century Foundation's American Renaissance website. Orbis did not find definitive evidence to suggest that Burgers or Pelican directly participated in the activities attributed to the MSU-YAF by the SPLC or definitive evidence that they were still members of the group when the SPLC classified MSU-YAF as a hate group in 2007. According to DeAnna, neither Burger nor Pelican are heavily involved with YWC currently.

We apologize for our error. View the article online vanderbiltorbis.com.

Progressive Checklist: The year in review

At the beginning of this year, we published a progressive wish list. It included several changes we wanted to see on campus, including divestment from Sudan, a revived living wage movement, and increased recycling facilities. While we didn't get many of the things we wanted, we saw many indications that Vanderbilt is continually moving in the right direction.



Expanded financial aid

Zeppos announced the newly expanded financial aid initiative called "Shape the Future," which aims to eliminate unsubsidized student loans, right before the bottom fell out of the economy. Despite budget cuts, the administration seems committed to raising money for the financial aid fund, having already raised \$1.6 billion towards the \$1.75 billion dollar goal.



Revived Living Wage

While the Living Wage movement seems to have lost a lot of the momentum it had going into the union negotiations of 2007, they have become substantially more organized with their latest campaign against wage cuts. A press conference to kick off the campaign was fairly savvy, embracing the language used by the administration itself to communicate the importance of community solidarity in hard economic times. The group's willingness to engage the administration politely, has been a more effective strategy when trying to bargain from a position of little power. Finally, the administration's willingness to work with the group represents a substantial shift from past experiences, when LIVE was unable to work with the administration.



Increased student political engagement

The biggest progressive victory of the year was, naturally, the election of Barack Obama to the presidency. Polls showed that a majority of Vanderbilt students actually supported Obama's campaign – which is fairly surprising, on a campus as right-leaning as ours supposedly is. Furthermore, we saw many students mobilized and excited about the election on all sides of the political spectrum, which can only be a good thing on a campus that is generally politically apathetic.



Revised sexual misconduct policy

At the beginning of the year, a special panel released a revised student conduct policy relating to sexual misconduct. These changes clarified many of the issues surrounding sexual assault and consent. We hope that this policy will make it easier for students to obtain justice through student conduct.

Things we're still waiting on:

Holiday for MLK day of service
Divestment from Sudan
Glass recycling drop-off point

News Briefs

Colbert lemmings mobilize again

NEW YORK CITY - Comedian and faux pundit Stephen Colbert made headlines recently when he hijacked a NASA contest to name a module of the International Space Station. Legions of fans in the Colbert Nation helped make the contest winner "Colbert," much to NASA's chagrin. The funny man's already persuaded his legion of fans to vandalize Wikipedia articles, take over a Hungarian bridge-naming contest, and even write him in as a presidential candidate. When will the U.S. government wise up and start using this man's powers for good? Start a contest to fix global warming, the economy, or the health care system and put him in charge. Two weeks later, voila, problem solved, thanks to the Colbert Nation.

Obama's gift a diplomatic dud?

LONDON- Britain's love affair with President Obama hit a sour note last month as the new Commander in Chief's gifts to both Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Queen Elizabeth fell flat. Obama received a lot of flak from the media for his gaffe gifts, including American DVDs for Brown (which don't even play in Britain) and an iPod for the Queen (which would have been nice, if she didn't already have one). Although the gifts could be considered a hip, nontraditional sign of Obama's new diplomatic style, they ended up looking rather crass in contrast to the Brits' thoughtful trinkets. So much for improving America's reputation abroad. All of this negative attention must have Obama worried; he's risking losing his invitation to NATO's annual Secret Santa gift exchange.

Twitter disseminates deep celeb thoughts

SAN FRANCISCO- The newest online sensation to hit the celebrity world is Twitter, that microblogging service that everyone talks about and which seems completely useless. (Tweeting about you and your friends' lives is about as exciting as watching paint dry.) But now, eager fans and stalkers alike have access to their favorite celebs' deepest thoughts. All the big stars have their own Twitter streams, which may or may not be updated by personal assistants. Out of all of them though, our favorite Twitterer is probably the great philosopher Shaquille O'Neal, who unleashes gems like "Its freezn n portland, schwlbbbbb schlwbbb dats da lip shiver sound" and "Should I go see elvis, I'm in memphis, you aint nuttin but a hound dog, ridin around town Dun nun daa" to his 600,000 followers on an almost hourly basis.

Iowa and Vermont approve gay marriage

America's heartland is leading the way for equality

By Claire Costantino
COMMENTARY EDITOR

It has long been believed that the battle for equal rights for gay Americans would be most successfully waged along the Blue State coasts, where progressives provide a more sympathetic audience to the movement's advocates. In early April, however, that assumption was challenged by significant victories for gay rights advocates in Iowa and Vermont. Starting April 27, 2009, the state of Iowa will allow gay marriages, and Vermont, which currently recognizes civil unions, will recognize gay marriages by Sept. 1, 2009.

Iowa and Vermont, both archetypal 'heartland' states, are hopefully the first in a charge of victories for the movement.

Polk County, Iowa, and the state's Supreme Court may not seem like vanguards of liberalism, but the Lambda Legal team has achieved an unusual success there. Many pundits and observers have asked what made the environment in Iowa different from before, yet it appears that the victory for gay rights in the Varnum v. Brien decision can simply be traced to good lawyers, a strongly constructed case, and excellent judges. In a court-issued summary of the landmark decision, the judges "reaffirmed that a statute inconsistent with the Iowa constitution must be declared void even though it may be supported by strong and deep-seated traditional beliefs and popular opinion." In this case, no credible charges of judicial activism can be lodged. Finally, the Equal Protection Clause is being justly applied to protect homosexual Americans' rights.

Civil unions have been recognized in Vermont since 2000, after a contentious state Supreme Court trial and legislative battle. Certainly the civil unions were a step in the right direction for gay rights, but many of the movement's most fervent activists likened civil unions to a "separate but equal" circumstance that made it difficult to argue for full equality through marriage rights. Luckily, a bill passed on April 7, 2009, that implemented full marriage rights for all citizens. Vermont Governor

Jim Douglas vetoed the bill, but the state Senate and Legislature had a strong enough will to override it. The Vermont Congress has not successfully overridden a governor's veto since 1990.

Gay rights activists across the country have heralded these two victories as proof that respect for their cause has gone mainstream. Massachusetts, one of the most

liberal states in the country, has recognized gay Americans' right to marry since 2004, but this development was unable to spur further reform until now. Iowa and Vermont, consid-

ered by many the archetypal 'heartland' states, are hopefully the first in a charge of victories for the movement. The issue of recognition for gay rights is in flux in many states, but most gay advocacy groups intend to ride these recent victories to positive resolutions in other states. Perhaps most prominently, California's refusal to respect the human and Constitutional rights of its citizens by defeating Prop. 8 is an embarrassment to both the state and the movement. California, Connecticut and Washington, D.C., seem like the most likely followers of Iowa and Vermont. Civil unions are either permitted or recognized in those states, and D.C. recently announced that they would recognize unions contracted in other states.

Hopefully the results in Iowa and Vermont are not a fluke. The time has come for gay rights to be fully recognized across



Photos from the PFLAG rally following Iowa's decision. via Flickr user Rua.A.

the country. The hard work of national groups, local activists, and individuals should be rewarded with Constitutional protection.

Is your roommate tired of listening to your political rants?

**We'll listen! Write for Orbis next year.
Email erika.m.hyde@vanderbilt.edu**

Harry Potter

AND THE RADICAL MULTICULTURALIST AGENDA

By Claire Costantino
COMMENTARY EDITOR

Sometimes when I'm toiling away in the library, searching for insightful things to say about Mexican politics or trying to make sense of a seemingly illogical assignment for my logic class, I just want to slip away into a magical world where school is a little more exciting.

Unfortunately, I don't live on Commons, so the novels in the Harry Potter series are my only adequate outlets. Yes, I am willing to admit that I love the Harry Potter books. A lot of people may judge me, but those haters are about as much fun as Dementors anyway! (Ha! See what I did there?)

I was twelve when the first book appeared, and I have been hooked ever since. To this day, reading them takes me back to that simpler time where I could lose myself in Rowling's fantastical world, a time before I had to worry about making time for meetings, homework and sleeping. Now that I look back on the books, I think I can also credit them with reinforcing some of my progressive political beliefs.

Among the thrilling plotlines, fascinating alternate reality and intriguing characters, J.K. Rowling found the time to insert an explicitly progressive agenda into all of the

Harry Potter books. Rowling tackles racism, gender issues and individual activism. I would not go so far as to say that Rowling is trying to indoctrinate the preteens (and, let's face it, everyone else with any sense of fun and whimsy) that are her audience, but she certainly has a political agenda.

Rowling also frequently goes head-to-head with the crazies of the Religious Right who criticize the "pagan" elements of her book, claiming that they are the surest ticket to eternal damnation in bookstores today, and not a way to foster a healthy interest in reading or encourage creativity in young readers. I will gladly give props to anyone who must ever face the borderline-insane wrath of those ignorant book burners, especially someone who must face this kind of criticism as frequently and intensely as Rowling.

It doesn't take a genius, however, to recognize one of the most blatant allegorical plot lines in the Harry Potter series involves the evils of racism. Throughout the book, Harry and friends face off against the evil characters' obsession with racial purity, which leads to systemic discrimination against Muggles or wizards of mixed descent. Certainly this allegory bears a striking similarity to racial prejudice in the real world. Rowling's liberal, or really even just rational, values are made clear when her



Yeah, we're cool and magical and progressive. Got a problem with that? Photo: Warner Brothers Studios

most sympathetic characters, Harry, Ron, and Hermione, fall soundly on the progressive side of this divisive issue in the wizarding community. The characters themselves are symbols of the benefits of multiculturalism because Harry, the hero, has both wizard and Muggle ancestry, and brilliant Hermione comes from two Muggle parents. Further, Rowling is quick to link the racism of characters like the Malfoys or Professor Snape with other blatantly evil factions and the Dark Arts. The evil lord Voldemort is motivated by a desire to achieve ethnic "purity" in the magical realm.

Fairy tales, and the Harry Potter series certainly falls under this genre, have not always been known as bastions of progressivism in literature, but Rowling manipulates the form to fit a progressive mold. One of Rowling's largest departures from the typical fairy tale canon is her treatment of women. Throughout the series, strong female characters play a significant role. Hermione, for example, is brilliant, competent, and hardworking, and never tries to hide these admirable traits to gain social acceptance. In fact, without her help and advice, Harry would never have been able to win the Triwizard Tournament or find the Sorcerer's Stone. Characters like Mrs. Weasley may seem to fit traditional definitions of women in fairy tales as domestic figures, but she too has her moments of glory. Few feminists would be offended at Harry relying upon the sensible and loving Mrs. Weasley as a surrogate mother figure to keep Harry in line and fully stocked with stylish Christmas sweaters. But my favorite female character in

the Harry Potter books is, without a doubt, Professor McGonagall. She holds her own very well in the boys' club that is Hogwarts' faculty and is, in a word, a badass.

In this era of grassroots activism, progressives should take comfort in knowing Rowling also supports political action. Some would say it is an intellectual leap to attribute part of the unprecedented political interest and efficacy among young voters in this past election to Harry Potter's message of youth empowerment, but I say it's no coincidence that many of us first-time voters came of age with Harry Potter instead of Baby-sitters Club. I do not doubt that Harry Potter's ability to have such an amazing impact on his entire community made me more confident that my small donation to Obama's campaign would make a difference. Similarly, it would come as no surprise to learn that Hermione's crusade against house-elf slavery as the founder of S.P.E.W. (Society for the Promotion of Elvish Welfare) informed my own attitude towards active citizenship and social justice.

These seem like troubled days at Vanderbilt. We have lost much of our endowment, tornado warnings are practically a daily occurrence, T.I. may bring automatic assault weapons to campus during Rites, and a group opposed to "radical multiculturalism" (whatever that even means) has gained frightening prominence on campus. In the face of these challenges, perhaps it is time for us, a generation raised on the magical optimism of Harry Potter's world, to return to Rowling's books and look for guidance.

PROGRESSIVE THEMES IN HARRY POTTER

BOOK ONE: introduction to a multiethnic, gender equal wizarding world; Harry is a friend and champion of the poor, marginalized kids.

BOOK TWO: elaborates on the threat of racial purist ideologies in the wizarding world

BOOK THREE: criticizes discrimination against werewolves

BOOK FOUR: the multiculturalism of the European wizarding world faces the threat of ethnic cleansing; Hermione becomes an activist to protest the enslavement of House Elves

BOOK FIVE: Harry speaks out against the slaughter of innocents and government inaction; "No Child Left Behind"-style education reform is ridiculed

BOOK SIX: free speech and criticism of the government are championed; parallels are drawn between the Patriot Act and government surveillance.

BOOK SEVEN: cross-species relationship; love defeats hate

POST SERIES REVELATION: turns out, Dumbledore was gay

Vanderbilt's greatest mysteries - solved

By Robyn Hyden
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I'm graduating in three weeks, sadly, which means leaving the campus that I have come to know and love. Vanderbilt is such a complex place, and one that I may not have fully explored when I had the chance. It occurred to me that, while there are some things that I will never fully comprehend about this University, there are some small mysteries that are within my power to investigate.

Vanderbilt, it turns out, does not have many rumors or mysteries relative to other campuses. Yes, I once heard that you get full tuition paid if you get run over by a Vandy Van - but nobody really believes that, and certainly no one has ever tried it. But other than that, we don't have any really good ghost stories, or strange rumors to perpetuate. This really is a shame.

There are, however, some curious features of campus that have led to a certain amount of speculation, and it is these that I hope to address in this article.

I. The curious case of the tunnels

The mythic history of the Vanderbilt tunnels surely goes back for several decades. The rumor I heard upon coming to campus was that the tunnels were closed-off passageways that had previously connected all of the dorms on main campus to Sarratt, Wilson, Stevenson, and the medical center. Nobody knew quite why the tunnels had been blocked, though I envisioned them as something like the tunnel linking Towers East to Towers West. I even heard a rumor (undoubtedly influenced by the memory of the Hogwarts secret passage leading to Hogsmeade) that one tunnel leads out to Hillsboro Village, the land of the Villager, the Belcourt, and of course pancakes. Of



Above: a photo from Angelfire user tn/subterra shows a possible entrance to the tunnels.

course, this was a fanciful idea - but many ideas about the tunnels are.

I found one 1995 Hustler article about the tunnels that repeated several tunnel myths in vogue at the time, many of which seem to have disappeared from circulation. One was the idea that the tunnels housed Vanderbilt's large art collection, and that "students have been caught down there because they've tripped infrared beams that the University set up as a security measure to keep people from stealing the art." Another student repeated the myth that the Chancellor had "some sort of underground monorail bunker system to protect him in the event of a nuclear attack...He rides from Kirkland Hall in his silver chariot all the way to 400 feet underneath Stevenson... but I'm not sure if that's true." Several other rumors seemed to have envisioned the tunnels as an escape hatch leading from the Chancellor's mansion.

Then, as now, students believed that being caught in the tunnels might lead to automatic expulsion, although the administration has debunked this myth, claiming that one would only be charged with "unauthorized trespassing" as long as it was only a first offense.

I was never driven to explore Vanderbilt's tunnels further until I unearthed some interesting information about them, quite by accident. An anonymous source who claimed to know about "tunneling" pointed me to an ancient Angelfire website, dated 2001, with evidence of student explorations of the tunnels. The site contained explicit information about entering the tunnels, and photos of what one might find inside. Until very recently, it seems, students were exploring the tunnels with little fear of getting caught.

As the website explained, there are several entrances to the tunnels on main campus - one in the medical center, one through a hidden manhole cover, and many others through doors in dorms and academic buildings (which are often locked). My source warned me that the information contained on this website was "deliberately misleading"; apparently, people who use the tunnels are extremely secretive about them.

What I have learned (from my top secret investigation) is this: the tunnels are extremely cramped, hot, and unpleasant - certainly not a good backdrop for laser tag, or storing an art collection. Photos taken of the inside show spaces that are barely six feet high and three feet wide; some spaces seem much smaller. There do, however,



seem to be offshoots of the tunnels with small storage rooms or old equipment, and there are weird treasures inside, for those who are interested in the detritus of decades gone by. One photo I have obtained shows a strange piece of equipment with a switchboard and an old intercom system, seeming to date from the 50s. Another room, looking for all the world like an interrogation room or torture chamber with its lone chair and exposed light bulb, seems to have contained

Another offshoot of the tunnel leads right into the basement of Stevenson. This confirms the impression that I have often formed while wandering around lost in the Stevenson Center complex - that if you wander down the wrong hallway, you might find yourself in an entirely different part of campus.

a massive circuitboard computer at some time in the past. Photos also reveal chalk drawings left by tunnel explorers, which leads me to wonder if they have some sort of secret code, like hoboos.

In reality, the tunnels are not quite as mysterious as they once seemed to me; they primarily serve to bring power from plant

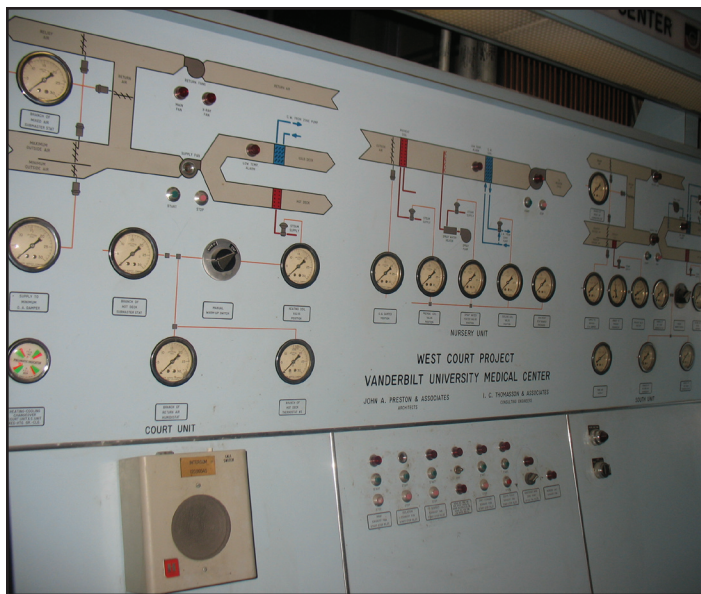
operations to the rest of campus. They do indeed extend under much of main campus and the medical center. With the construction of the Commons, new tunnels have been added under Peabody.

Unbeknownst to myself, I had actually entered the tunnels before, as a volunteer at the Medical Center. The ground floor of the hospital is used for the storage of dirty linens, dead bodies, and many other things, but if you walk far enough, you will enter the utility shaft. One wing of the tunnel is the janitorial entrance, with a timeclock where employees can punch in. Another offshoot of the tunnel leads right into the basement of Stevenson. This confirms the impression that I have often formed while wandering around lost in the Stevenson Center complex - that if you wander down the wrong hallway, you might find yourself in an entirely different part of campus.

Certainly, I can't advocate exploring the tunnels yourself. Aside from the fact that you have to break some major rules to find them, they seem like they could be quite hard to navigate and, for the most part, not as glamorous as the one would hope. However, it does seem that we need to start some new rumors about Vanderbilt's tunnels. Because, let's face it, the ones we have are kind of boring.

Researching tunneling myths at other universities, I found a few common threads. Perhaps we can use them as inspiration for our own tunnel mythology.

Most rumors concern tunnels being used



A mysterious switchboard in the tunnels has intriguing labels, such as one switch which apparently controlled a "toilet ventilator fan."

sageways. Campus grounds employees twenty years later still claimed to fear encountering the wild monkey in the depths. (I could envision a story like that here...Wilson lab, anyone?) In a related theme, I've heard the rumor that a horror movie was filmed in Vanderbilt's tunnels in 2004 featuring a second-rate rapper whose name nobody can seem to remember, although I have yet to find any evidence of this. True or not, this is clearly a story that needs to become a more widely

known aspect of Vanderbilt lore.

What is it about tunnels that inspire such fervent interest among students? Perhaps tunnels are inherently mysterious. They are inaccessible to students, and underground; of course we want to know what's hidden there. A study that appeared in the New York Folklore Society's magazine claimed that tunnel myths function to form student identity. It pointed out that, although tunnel myths are meant to be unique to each university, they are ironically very similar to the urban legends found at other schools. However, since each myth is tailored to the unique history of its school, and is tied into the school's own unique landscape, they nonetheless reinforce a collective student identity.

Another thesis tentatively proposed by the authors is that students use tunneling myths to subvert the university power structure. Students are often powerless in relation to the bureaucracy of the school, and don't have access to the privileged information of school administrations. Much like other conspiracy theories, tunneling folklore claims to know some secret truth that is not widely acknowledged. Students who use the tunnels are able to break rules and learn secret information - in this way, they are subversive.

It seems that tunnels function as a rich ground for creative tales and campus legends. I myself am a bit disappointed that there isn't more discussion about our own tunnels. Part of that is because the University has been active in disenchanting students about tunnel rumors; at least two articles have appeared in the last ten years (one in the Hustler, one in the Vanderbilt Magazine) which gave reporters access to the tunnels, in order to kill some of the mystery and speculation surrounding them. "I wondered what I had gotten myself into," wrote one reporter; "The tunnels were hot and dirty,

and I was standing in a shallow puddle of an unidentifiable liquid. I was starting to sweat. This was not my idea of fun." Well, nothing kills the mystery more than being awkwardly sweaty - that, and pictures of trashy, grimy, dank places that accompanied the article.

With any luck, however, the generations of Vanderbilt students to come won't forget about the possibilities inherent in Vanderbilt's mysterious underworld.

II. The case of the mysterious hiking trail

Returning to campus this year, you may have noticed a curious addition to our campus sidewalks: tiny green signs with arrows pointing in random directions along Vanderbilt's footpaths. This mystery is perhaps not as exciting as the secret tunnels, although I have to admit that it intrigues me almost as much.

For one thing, the signs don't seem to be organized in any coherent way. They don't follow one single trail across campus. In fact, if you start at one and try to follow it anywhere, you are bound to get confused. At various junctures there are three or more arrows pointing down all available paths; at other junctures, there is no arrow telling you which way to go; and, at one point on the path from Peabody to main campus, there are two arrows that point back at each other. Is one supposed to bounce back and forth indefinitely?

For another thing, the signs are often accompanied by an icon of a little hiking man with a backpack. One location is even designated as the trail head. Are people seriously meant to hike the trails of Vanderbilt? And if so, why do they need arrows to tell them that, yes, you can walk this way, or this way, or, eally any way.

I could find seemingly no explanation for these signs. Friends offered various interpretations of what the arrows meant. Many thought they were supposed to help blind people - until they realized that would be impossible, as the signs lay perfectly flat.

Finally fed up with wondering what these arrows could mean, I telephoned plant operations. They directed me to the rec center, where I reached an enthusiastic student worker named Arielle who seemed just as interested in solving the mystery as I was. I emailed several employees in the departments of health and recreation (there's quite a few of them). Someone suggested that I email the guy who designed the National Arboretum park trail.

In response to my queries, I



Strange signs point to a trail that leads, well, everywhere.

received three emails at about the same time. "Robyn....mystery continues...call marilyn holmes...she will give you final clues" wrote the director of the Rec. center. Arielle emailed me to say that she had conducted an investigation and had discovered the answer.

The answer, as it turns out, is not nearly as exciting as I had hoped. Apparently, Health Plus, the faculty and staff wellness program, designed the trails as an incentive for staff to walk more. There is even a website where you can go to download maps of the walking routes.

No word yet on why all of the arrows are green (even though there are at least five separate trails designated, which often overlap) or why staff and faculty would even need a map to figure out how to walk on Vandy sidewalks.

III. The case of the alarming statistics

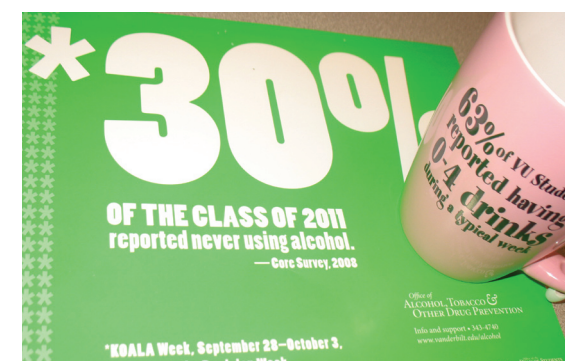
This is not really a mystery with any meaningful answer, although it is a feature of campus life that seems to have inspired some consternation and confusion. I am referring to the Office of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Prevention's campaign - a flurry of posters, flyers, and even coffee mugs that are emblazoned with bold statistics about the Vanderbilt student body

Continued on **Mysteries**, page 10



Chalk drawings in the tunnels mark prior visitors.

concern creatures who wander the tunnels. In the 1970s, the University of Arizona's school paper published a rumor that a monkey had escaped from the research lab into underground pas-



Mystery: OATOD has printed up signs, flyers and even coffee mugs with its tobacco and alcohol statistics.

Schools for sale: privatizing education in America

Charter schools are not the answer to public school woes

By Josh Rogen
STAFF WRITER

America's primary and secondary education systems need fundamental reform. Unfortunately, it seems inevitable that this much-needed change will come in the form of charter schools and universal voucher systems, given the political momentum of the privatized education movement. However, many of the arguments put forth by proponents of this movement are simply inaccurate.

One impetus for these trends lies in the frustrations of parents and students living in underserved areas, attending under-funded and under-performing schools. The public education system has failed these people, and they are right to demand improvements.

With no other promising reform proposals in sight, however, the efficacy of the deregulated school model has risen in the public's eyes to a point of fact. For example, on April 5th the *Hustler* ran an opinion piece titled "Charter schools work." In this thesis, the author suggested expanded funding for charter schools without actually proving that charter schools work; their merit is simply assumed.

However, data backing this assumption is lacking. One

2005 study conducted at Columbia University found no significant differences in charter schools' performance against public schools performance in 49 out of 50 states. For impoverished Asian-Americans and Hispanic-Americans, charter schools actually scored four to five percent lower than public schools. Another study conducted in California showed that charter schools in that state reach their Adequate Yearly Progress less often than public schools. A policy brief released by the Education Policy Research Unit at Arizona State University went so far as to call charter schools "a failed reform."

Furthermore, much of the research that supporting efficacy of charter schools has been released by policy centers that have much to gain by privatizing America's public schools. Thus, the notion that privatizing public education will save the system is at best a muddled and unproven belief; yet, it is a belief that seems to be gaining momentum.

Each year, the United States invests over \$800 billion on education and, unsurprisingly, the private sector wants a piece of it. But don't just take my word for it, listen to a major market analysis by the Montgomery Securities group presented to corporations across the country, which claims that "the education industry represents the largest market opportunity" since health-care services were privatized during the 1970's... "the K-12 market is the Big Enchilada." But for every American that does not see their education system as a large, albeit tasty Mexican dinner, the intrusion of Big Business needs to set off panic alarms. Companies that run on a profit motive with strong incentives to cut per-pupil-spending cannot be allowed to control our public schools. The results would not only be disastrous for our students, but also for the dedicated teachers running their classrooms.

Running parallel to that popular assumption that charter schools work is the belief that teacher unions stand in the way of progress. Much of the media surrounding education privatization focuses on the National Education Association's opposition to charter schools. However, liberals must segregate perception from reality. The prevailing perception is that charter schools work better than public schools; the reality is that they don't. The perception is that the NEA is fighting educational progress; the reality is that the NEA is saving the public education system from deregulation and from filtering public funds into private pockets.

It's no secret that the most qualified individuals will migrate towards the highest paying jobs. In order to get great teachers, our schools need to offer competitive wages. In many cases, higher wages are a result of collective bargaining through unionization. For example, before the modern teacher union movement formed in the 1950s, teachers earned less than car washers in New York City. Union action is necessary because power only concedes to power. Thus, the fact that deregulated schools do not hire union employees and do not allow

What is a charter school?

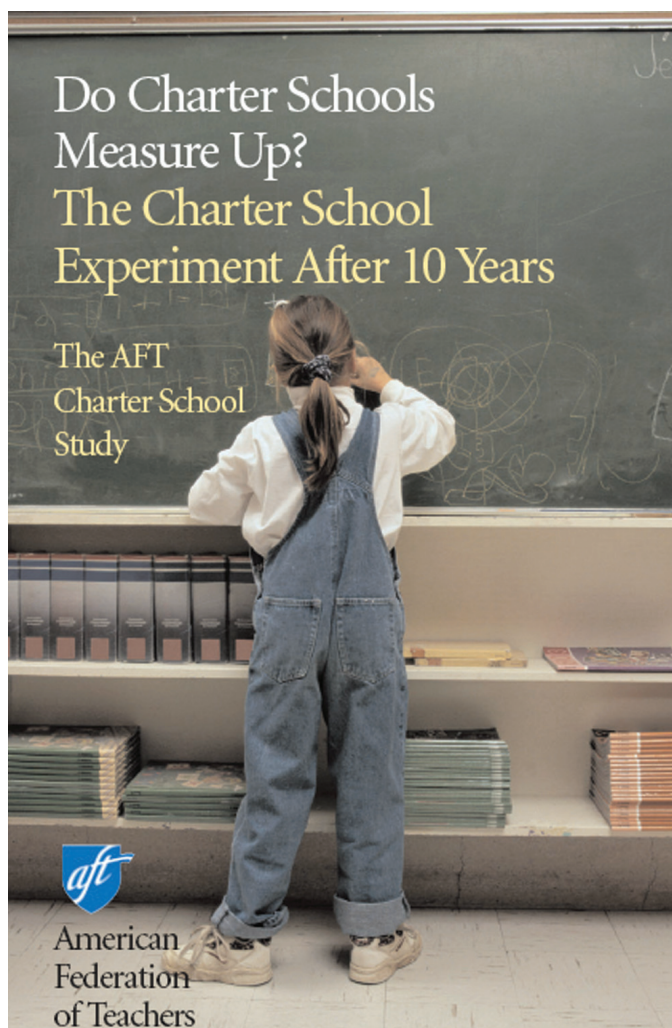
A charter school is a school funded by the public but overseen by outside institutions. A charter school can be run by a group of individuals, a university, or a company. After the founding party writes its charter, its school can run independently of the school board, deciding who can go to the school, what to teach, and how to spend the allotted money. For-profit operators (or EMOs) run over one-quarter of all charter schools in the United States with extremely little regulation. That means the public is pumping money allotted for education into private pockets without demanding much in the way of oversight.

Excerpts from the AFT Charter School Report:

- Charter school teachers are less experienced and lower paid than teachers in other public schools.
- Charter schools generally obtain funding for the type of students they educate that is comparable to other public schools. Because charter schools operate on a small level, they do not reap the benefits of economy of scale that school districts do. As a result, the charters spend more on administration than other public schools.
- Charter school students generally score no better (and often do worse) on student achievement tests than other comparable public school students.
- Charter schools have not been held to the "bargain" they made—trading freedom from rules for increased accountability.
- Charter schools were supposed to experiment with new curricula and classroom practices, but they have proven no more innovative than other public schools.
- The justification for charter schools has moved from one that is based on education and innovation to one that is based on choice and competition. Yet charter schools provide a narrower range of services to a more homogeneous student body, and "competition" from charter schools has not brought about significant educational change in other public schools.

their current employees to unionize represents a great threat, not only to the education unions but also to the students that both groups serve. If teachers can't stand up for themselves, who will stand up for them? If schools can't hire quality teachers, how will students achieve highly? Educators should not be underpaid altruists, they should be highly respected and well-compensated professionals.

I do not mean to suggest the infallibility of the NEA. Certainly, many of the union's positions have faults and many of the union's members are incompetent. However, that the NEA continues to fight for higher wages and continues to battle deregulation in the education sector is not a mistake. It is only by working with the NEA and by incentivizing education over profit that our education system will take the long jump back to respectability.



Moving beyond 'Sicko'

A campus screening and discussion of the film raised many questions, but provided few answers

By Erika Hyde
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

On April 7th, several student groups co-sponsored a showing of the Michael Moore documentary piece "Sicko" followed by a panel discussion on the deteriorating state of the American health care system. While the movie's message about the dangers of our for-profit health care model tugged at the viewer's heart strings, Moore spent very little time discussing how to implement systematic reform nor the practical implications of such reform on our economy and existing health infrastructure.

The 2007 documentary followed Moore on his journey through the heartland of America, meeting with downtrodden citizens who faced bankruptcy, escalating medical bills, and failing health despite owning an insurance plan. While there are nearly 50 million Americans without health care coverage, "Sicko" focused on those people who had insurance but were nonetheless denied coverage when a sudden or traumatic incident occurred. Listening to a wife tearfully tell the story of her husband's death after their insurance company denied payment for his cancer medication, the viewers may feel a surge of populist anger at the insurance giants who pride themselves on high denial rates and "profit loss prevention." In stark contrast to the high medical bills and insufficient care of the American patients in the film, Moore also invited the audience on a tour of Canada, the U.K., France, and even Cuba, making the argument that all of these countries offer free, fast and accessible care that the U.S. system can't, or won't, provide.

Moore highlights the most heartbreaking HMO stories of Americans and juxtaposes them with free hospital visits in the U.K., government paid vacation time in France, and prisoners receiving universal health care at Guantanamo Bay. However, in crafting his message, Moore fails to delve into hard analysis of the universal care system, as he never seriously addresses criticisms about the foreign systems, including supposedly long wait times or "rationing" of care. By handpicking the most heartbreaking stories about American patients, like an 80 year old who can't afford to retire because of his medical bills, "Sicko" tells a story with maximum emotional impact in a way that leaves little room for open discussion about how to actually change the U.S. system.

It's undeniable that U.S. health care is badly in need of reform. Despite spending more money on health care than any other country, the U.S. lags behind many of its Western counterparts in average life expectancy, infant mortality

rates, and quality of life rankings. Yet, it's impractical to call for a sudden shift towards the NHS in England or the mixed system in France, without taking into consideration what will happen to today's health care industry workers, doctor compensation, and a method of paying for the system in a country that's already experiencing economic distress.

Following the documentary showing, which was hosted by Vanderbilt Students for Nonviolence, American Red Cross, Are You M.A.D., Unite for Sight, and the American Medical Student Association, Professor Larry Churchill and Dr. Robert Miller of the Medical School led a short discussion about the state of our health care system, moderated by History Professor Arleen Tuchman. The questioners and panelists all agreed about the urgent need for reform, but much like the film, the necessary conversation to follow- how to actually achieve that reform- did not fully transpire.

Churchill explained that the film's "portrayal of the health care system as a racket is a fair assessment. Fundamentally, the system's not designed to deliver care. The heavy regulation that's needed to achieve that end doesn't exist." On a similar note, Dr. Miller said, "We can't afford to look toward any other standard than universal health care. If you can't start there, you're probably not in the right conversation."

The panel's suggestions for reform revolved around small steps toward progress and a caution against immediate, sweeping change. Incentivizing primary and preventative care, preventing insurance companies from denying coverage for pre-existing conditions, and offering federal insurance programs for the low-income uninsured could serve as a band aid for our current problems.

Throughout the film, the need to address the plight of patients in pain and in debt was stressed repeatedly, but several questions remain about how to deal with the current system in place. How do we confront the for-profit insurance companies that would oppose reform-minded legislation? Moreover, how do we change the priorities of politicians whose pockets are lined by these same insurance companies? Can a country as large and populous as the U.S. implement the same strategies that found success in a country of smaller scale like Cuba or the U.K.? Perhaps these issues are so daunting that it's unreasonable to assume one movie could effectively tackle them.

Some of the criticism about the lack of constructive dialogue could be lodged against Moore's directorial style and his persona in the U.S. political arena. Moore has crafted his identity as a polarizing figure that, for better or worse, has come to represent part of the American left. Even those who agree with his substantive points may feel his arguments are cheapened by the stunts he pulls or the closeups of crying

faces that border on manipulation. Louder members of the conservative movement prop up Moore for strawman tactics in much the same way some leftist pundits frame Ann Coulter or Rush Limbaugh as the only faces of the right. As a result, most of the people who listen to Moore and take his documentary claims seriously are those who already agree with him, creating an echo chamber effect. Predictably, many of the 50 or so people who attended the screening laughed appreciably at the Bush jokes interspersed throughout the film, which start to ring hollow now that he is out of office.

Overall, "Sicko" could rightfully be considered a penetrating look at the failures of the U.S. health care system. However, it misses the opportunity to offer a detailed alternative and to sell its message to the entire country rather than just a segment that is already amenable to change.

Health Care Systems: By the Numbers

Ranking of World's Health Systems

(World Health Organization, 2000)

France- #1

United Kingdom- #18

Canada- #30

United States- #37

Cuba- #39

Average Life Expectancy

(CIA World Factbook, 2009)

Canada- 81.23 years

France- 80.98 years

United Kingdom-79.01 years

United States- 78.11 years

Cuba 77.45 years

Infant Mortality Rate

(per 1000 live births; UN study 2006)

France- 4.2

United Kingdom- 4.8

Canada- 4.8

Cuba- 5.1

United States- 6.3

Per Capita Health Care Spending

(in USD; World Bank, 2002)

United States- \$4,271

France- \$2,288

Canada- \$1,939

United Kingdom- \$1,675

How do we confront the for-profit insurance companies that would oppose reform-minded legislation? Moreover, how do we change the priorities of politicians whose pockets are lined by these same insurance companies?

Obama's trip abroad

Soft power on the rise in American foreign policy? A few good signs emerged from Obama's trip to Europe

By Nakul Shekhawat
STAFF WRITER

The contrast to previous years could not have been greater. Addressing a crowd of an estimated 30,000 in Prague, President Obama seemed to have briefly returned to his old campaigning mode. He outlined his plans to combat climate change and reduce the world's arsenal of nuclear weapons, eliciting enthusiastic applause from people who were not even eligible to vote him into office. A short distance away, protesters objecting to U.S. plans to build a missile defense shield in the Czech Republic threw effigies into the river. However, even these effigies were not of Obama, but of President Bush and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

But will such international popularity and unwillingness to resist Obamania ever translate into actual results? Obama's address in Prague was delivered shortly after North Korea's attention-grabbing, if failed, missile tests over the North Pacific. The president recently repudiated statements by the Israeli foreign minister regarding Israel's unwillingness to pursue a two-state solution with Palestine. While Obama makes long overdue overtures to an international community still smarting from the blunders of the Bush era, many question whether any such attempts at reconciliation will pay off. Three months into the new administration, however, there are some good signs. A few moments from Obama's recent foreign excursion serve to highlight ways in which the president's popularity might eventually be used to generate substantive changes in foreign perception and policy.

While traveling through Great Britain and France, Obama was greeted with the usual throngs of outstretched arms and



President Obama poses with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and Russian President Dmitri Medvedev during the G-20 summit.
Photo: Eric Feferberg / AFP / Getty

beaming, camera-wielding fans. Equally noticeable was the lack of public love shown for British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Brown is fighting for his political life while trying to resuscitate his unpopular Labor Party and deal with the global financial crisis. The controversial Sarkozy faces increasing opposition from frustrated French workers. His bold antics and tabloid-worthy marriage to singer Carla Bruni have made him famous throughout the world, but Sarkozy's celebrity pales in comparison to that of the Obamas. Brown, Sarkozy and several other leaders at the G20 Summit in London made it a point to cozy up to the American president, hoping to glean some of his seemingly infinite international popularity and channel it for their own political ends. The hope for the United States, of course, is that the president's global political capital can be leveraged in order

to convince European politicians to follow through on unpopular American proposals, such as increased foreign aid and troop commitment to Afghanistan.

Even more interesting was the reaction Obama received in Turkey. Geographically bridging Europe and the Middle East, the historically secular state contains a majority Muslim population and has recently seen a rise in religious conservatism. While praising Turkey's proud secular tradition and indicating its usefulness as a model for the rest of the Middle East, Obama made it a point to emphasize to the Turkish Parliament that America was not antagonistic towards Muslims. The president even went so far as to reference details about his own life which had dogged him on the campaign trail. Obama's Kenyan grandfather was Muslim, while Obama himself spent part of his childhood in Indonesia, a country with the largest Muslim population in

the world. In bringing up details which any other politician would prefer remain under the radar, Obama seems to be banking on his internationalist image in order to allay Muslim concerns about America's ability to relate to the Middle East. This was in sharp contrast to President Bush, who repeatedly claimed not to oppose Islam but still managed to use terms such as "crusade" and "Islamic fascists" that implied a struggle between cultures and religions.

After speaking to the parliament, Obama held a town hall-style meeting with Turkish students, during which he emphasized that "young people can be very helpful" in promoting dialogue and understanding because "they can get rid of some of the old baggage and the old suspicions" that perpetuate conflict. Preempting the inevitable critiques of his somewhat idealistic declarations regarding nuclear disarmament in Prague, a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine, and the potential for improved U.S.-Iranian relations, the president acknowledged that such issues were challenging. "I'm not naïve. If it was easy, it would have already been done," he said. "But if we don't try it, if we don't reach high, then we won't make any progress. And I think that there's a lot of progress that can be made."

When one member of the audience questioned whether Obama's policies, especially his decision to slow down troop withdrawal in Iraq, represented a truly meaningful shift from those of his unpopular predecessor, Obama replied that "moving the ship of state is a slow process. States are like big tankers. They're not like speedboats." While the tangible results of the president's efforts remain to be seen, the very fact that Obama was in Istanbul holding the sort of easygoing dialogue he might have held in Indianapolis was indication enough of a bold new course for American foreign policy.

Mysteries continued from page 7

Drug Prevention's campaign - a flurry of posters, flyers, and even coffee mugs that are emblazoned with bold statistics about the Vanderbilt student body drawn from the 2008 CORE survey of student habits.

This campaign is confusing because many of the statistics seem ambiguous at best, and at worst, downright alarming. One sign reads: "5 out of 6 Vanderbilt students do not smoke." That is, uh, great, I guess - but what am I supposed to draw from that piece of information? And another sign reads, "63% of Vanderbilt students reported having 0-4 drinks in a typical week." So is that a good thing? Are we bragging here?

Another flyer states that "92% of VU Undergrads believe that engaging in unprotected sexual activity with multiple

partners is a GREAT RISK." So who exactly are the other eight percent? Shouldn't we be reaching out to them?

An even more troubling statistic reads "97% of Vanderbilt men said they would not have sex with a partner who was too drunk to consent." Uhhh - that's great, I suppose, but that means that 3% of Vanderbilt men would essentially admit to rape, in a survey. And that scares me. These flyers have subsequently disappeared from campus. And it's worth noting that, although the OATODP has extensive information about the awful side effects of date-rape drugs on its website, they do not display any of this information publicly around campus. I'm sure that would scare off any prospective students immediately.

The OATODP claims that they conduct the CORE survey to correct student misconceptions about alcohol and drug use. And yet, these statistics only provide a strange snapshot of the admitted drug habits of a small portion of the student body without commenting on them critically. We are left to wonder if it is a good or a bad thing that 30% of sophomores report never having used alcohol. Whatever you think of this statistic, I seriously doubt it is going to change your own personal drinking habits.

In the future, I would hope that the OATODP will consider a less ambiguous campaign and perhaps will consider providing information that is more relevant to student experience. Just please - no more mysterious, meaningless stats.

A new age in American thinking

Social spending programs do not change our fundamental American values

By Matthew Farina
STAFF WRITER

We are now in the midst of one of the worst economic downturns since the Great Depression. Daily headlines rail against speculative culprits and scapegoats. America, once the world's most prosperous and secure nations, is suffering one of the worst consumer crises we have ever seen. Some Americans have seen their retirements disappear and their homes devalued, furthering the downward spiral. Congress has passed measures to curb the fallout, focusing on assisting the middle and lower classes, and beginning a shift away from Reaganomics – but we have yet to see an end in sight.

Where does this leave America? Is this the decline of our country, or the signal of a new age in thinking and policies? What is our place in the world? One thing we should recognize is that people on both sides, liberal and conservative, want to see America succeed. We just have radically different views of how to make that happen.

For the liberal solution to financial crisis, let me offer a brief overview of social welfare legislation in the United States. The first major government support program passed was the Dependent Pension Act of 1890, making pensions available for disabled veterans and their families. The next big surge in social welfare spending came under Roosevelt, with the Social Security Act of 1935 establishing our current social welfare infrastructure. In 1944, Congress passed the GI Bill, creating for the first time educational benefits for those who had served in the military. Johnson's Great Society in the early 1960s created several legislative bills, from free legal services for the poor, civil rights measures, Head Start, Medicare/Medicaid, and the Food Stamp program.

The 1980s brought a new backlash to government spending, and since then, many social welfare programs have shrunk significantly. This appears to be changing, again, as the new administration is taking steps towards addressing the flagging economy – reinstating teacher merit pay, raising the minimum wage, reinforcing labor rights such with the Employee Free Choice Act, and attempting Social Security Reform.

The New York Times has interviewed concerned citizens across America for their reac-

tions to the economic crisis, and they quoted one man saying, "I came up in a world where 'socialism' was defined in popular parlance as 'liberalism.'" This misconception seems to be diminishing, and the truth is that liberal social policies are not going to turn us into a socialist state. Social legislation is a much-needed response to the crisis we find ourselves in. With the lack of consumer confidence, and many of our most vulnerable citizens falling further into poverty, the job of the administration is to restore faith and protect the American people from threats – even if these threats come from our own failed economic system.

While the government might be bailing out huge financial companies and small banks alike, the fundamentals of privately owned companies still remain. However, corporate profits should not come at the expense of individual workers living and prospering. We need some regulation to ensure a balance of benefits for both corporations and individuals. Big business is important and responsible for the success and prosperity of America, and we cannot deny that successful businesses are crucial to continued economic growth. People on the left acknowledge this but also think that sometimes this means putting a higher governmental stake in the companies that are crucial to keep the economy functioning.

We continue to stay grounded in the American fundamentals – particularly, the individual rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." But in order to maintain equal access to these rights, we must balance the prosperity from economic growth with social equity.

Americans are innovative, certainly, and

we are able to develop new technologies and ideas to ensure our continued prosperity. Each new generation brings a new perspective, a new way forward, as new ideas and solutions surface. Some policies may not be the best, but trying new ideas allows us to change and adapt. Fear can be good, some-

times, especially when we look at other examples of economic systems gone wrong. We can heed history's examples of failed socialistic and communistic states, but this should not lead us to avoid action in response to our own country's problems. We cannot let fear of a label, such as "socialism," affect our decision-making. When choosing the best course of action, we should not be scared to journey into uncharted territory when it

is the best option available to us. We are strong and will continue to shift thoughts and actions in response to the times.

Along with responding to our economic crisis on the home front, we must reestablish our place in the world as an international leader. The decline of America's international profile has challenged the new administration to reaffirm our core beliefs and reestablish America's good name. The new administration must restore beliefs in our responsibility as a nation, and restore efforts at cooperation with other nations. We inhabit this planet with other nations, which makes it critical to work with other nations' governments to promote peace through diplomacy or war and to protect our own people. The social legislation on the home front ensures that we retain our economic might, as other nations continue to devote billions into their own economies. We must signal to the world that America can respond to our own problems.

The social policies enacted under Obama's plan signal a shift of American

thought, one which once again promotes protections for all people, not just corporations. The times are changing, but our fundamental goals and values remain the same, even if the way we choose to attain these goals has changed.

The liberal response to economic hardship is best summed under President Johnson's "hand-ups," not "hand-outs" policy, which in turn benefits the entire nation through increased prosperity and stability. By taking care of our poorest citizens and providing more of an equitable chance to succeed, government provides and promotes the advancement of the people as a whole, and the best and most qualified individuals will succeed.

We, as a nation, really do want the same things: prosperity, stability, and success. The abundance and diversity of thought as to how to achieve these goals allows us to continue to succeed. Although hard times may await our generation, there is nothing we cannot achieve if we unite with one common goal.



A February Newsweek cover story raised alarm bells by using the "S" word. source: Newsweek.com

"THE NEW FACE OF THE CAMPUS LEFT... CAMPUS PROGRESS HAS PROVIDED PROGRESSIVE STUDENTS WITH TOOLS THEY'VE NEVER HAD BEFORE."

- THE NATION

"A SOCIALIST SMEAR GROUP."
- YOUNG AMERICA'S FOUNDATION

FIND OUT WHAT ALL THE FUSS IS ABOUT.

PROGRESSIVE YOUTH ORGANIZING

{CAMPUS★PROGRESS}

ACTIVISM, JOURNALISM, EVENTS

BUILDING A MOVEMENT, RIGHT NOW.

WWW.CAMPUSPROGRESS.ORG

What's the best way to procrastinate during finals?

Talking to strangers on Omegle is addictive

By Sam Abney
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

As busy as we college students often are, it hardly seems that we have a need for new distractions to eat up our free time, or our not so free time when we should be working on assignments. Still, for our last issue of the year, as we turn to more light-hearted themes, I wanted to introduce our readers to a fascinating, educational, and very international website called Omegle (www.omegle.com).

The idea behind Omegle, created just last month by a Vermont high-school senior named Leif K-Brooks, is to connect random strangers together in a chat very similar to what many of us already do regularly in AIM, MSN or QQ (the IM service of choice for the majority of Omegle's relatively small population). After one click to "start a chat," you find yourself talking to a randomly selected stranger who could be from any corner of the globe. While English is the most popular language on Omegle, two days of use suggest that the majority of its users speak English as a second language. Due to some key links placed on popular international sites and, I am told, a particular BBS (bulletin board system), you will find that most of your chat partners are Chinese, Finnish, or Brazilian, depending on what time of day you are using the site. Apart from these larger groups, I have encountered strangers from the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, Lebanon, and a variety of expatriates from the more common countries. You will also find that almost everyone on Omegle is high-school or college age.

While most of Omegle's users seem to be there for serious conversation and the learning experience, it does have its share of clowns. I talked to one supposedly Korean student for quite some time before she revealed that her name was (as translated by Google) "Kim Jong-Il." In a different short but humorous exchange, another apparent North Korean informed me, "Your english have engliand style." Other users of the site have less innocent aims, and these conversations can quickly take a turn for the worse. The best thing about Omegle, however, is that you find so little of this. As I told one of the strangers with whom I was paired, Omegle mostly feels to me like Wikipedia surfing with real-life tour guides across the globe.

So what have I learned so far? Riikka in Finland taught me that her town, Kerimäki, is home to the world's largest wooden church. I talked to her countryman Jaska briefly about the similarities between baseball and Pesäpallo and Finnish pizza-eating habits (he prefers ham and pineapple). From one Chinese student living in Australia, I learned about the difficulties of studying accounting in a foreign language. I discussed the intricacies of language difference between American and British English with a Brazilian expatriate in England. I helped a Chinese student named Catherine (or Linda—her English and Portuguese names, respectively) practice her English, and I taught her how to use the word "bingo" (although not before confusing her into thinking I was from a place called Bingo). Michael from China taught me about the traditional stringed instrument he plays, the erhu, and offered me a sample of the music made on it. Kang, a Chinese college student in Osaka, Japan, told me about his passion for films, especially those starring Bruce Willis, and asked me for some suggestions of what to see. Not one day later, I received a cheerful email (I suggest creating an alternate email account for Omegle friends, just in case) thanking me for our "happy conversation" and informing me that he had already seen two of the movies I suggested, liked them very much, and was working on obtaining a third.

In a time when some elements in American society, even on our own campus, would have us insulate ourselves from the world in fear or ignorance, celebrating only our own customs and our own heritage, I have found Omegle to be a refreshing, and humbling, celebration of the common human experience. Around the world, we can reach out to each other, see what we have in common, and learn about our differences. This is the miracle of the Internet generation—and a perfectly fine way to spend a Friday night when everyone else has gone home for Easter. So between writing papers and studying for exams, if you find yourself bored or restless, try out Omegle. You won't regret it, stranger.



Goofing off is no longer wasting time

By Jon Christian
ISSUES EDITOR

Wasting time is so much more productive in the information age. There, I said it: YouTube, Wikipedia and Facebook have no impact on the amount of time that I waste, and in fact the calibre of most of my online haunts by far surpasses that of their off-line equivalents. Online news, capricious research, and general frolicking are so much more interesting and informative with a world of information at your finger tips. In fact, I have no doubt that without such looming temptresses of the world wide web, I would be wasting just as much time on far less meaningful pursuits – watching reruns of the original Battlestar Galactica, perhaps, or reading Ayn Rand.

Indeed, Wikipedia is not only perhaps the most prominent example of a copyleft resource compounding the useful knowledge of many into a coherent whole, but its lively, enthusiastic community

fosters a friendly end-user experience that, by nature of its "In the news," "featured Article," and "Did you know?" features, changes constantly to embrace new users and to open new channels of research for the hardened Wikipedian. The hyperlinked structure of the Internet in general so naturally facilitates tangential perusal that the idea of sitting down with a standard reference material for fun now seems quite unnatural.

And even if it's not reliable enough for formal research, not even the crustiest academic could deny its usefulness as a compendium of relevant citations. Granted, I spent nearly all of last Sunday night reading about hypothetical megastructures and models of extraterrestrial contact – but with nothing serious to focus on, what else would I have done at such an hour? Certainly not catch up on my sleep schedule.

Since I've gotten out of the habit of tuning into public radio, the web also serves as my primary source for the news. The BBC headlines are built into my browser, so any time that I have a spare moment I leaf through them for interesting updates or quirky anecdotes. Did you know that in Venezuela, Easter feasts are traditionally centered around the capybara, a gargantuan rodent related to the guinea pig? I certainly wouldn't unless I had just checked the headlines! For a more thorough analysis of current events, Google News has surpassed the capabilities of any physical news stand with anything from a broad overview of breaking or sub-indexes to specific queries about more interesting and specific events. Venturing into the blogosphere, amateur pundits are often even more adept than the professionals at integrating different online technologies with embedded YouTube videos or frequently updated Twitter accounts.

The Internet isn't useful only for esoteric or course-specific research. Whether I'm legitimately bored or I have vast amounts of looming course work, my Internet routine keeps me up to date on news and gives me a boundless resource for tangential research or unusual reading. If I'm near a computer, I seldom talk to anybody without Googling anything interesting that comes up, and even if I'm doing homework it doesn't take long to Wikipedia something that seems fishy to see if I can get a different perspective. Now, the instructional uses of Facebook or Hulu might be a little harder to rationalize – but really, if you didn't have those, are you sure you'd be doing anything more productive?

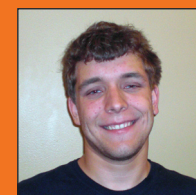
Orbis Asks

How do you waste your time on the internet?



Hallie Shoffner
Senior
Browsing videos on

Youtube, watching old Mad TV sketches with my room mate.



Troy Probst
Sophomore
Reaigns up on the news and checking for sports updates at ESPN.com.



Brad Tinsley
Freshman
Watching television on the net-

works' websites, chatting with friends, and watching YouTube.



Michael Thomas
Freshman
Perusing Wikipedia and reading about "random things" like the latest political updates in Bhutan.



Andrew Maze
Senior
Researching college football, playing games on Addicting Games, exchanging email messages with friends and family, and Facebooking.

- Compiled by Jon Christian