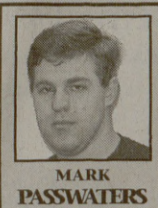


No interviews for murderers

In the minds of today's television journalists, "murderer" is a synonym for "real big story." Theodore Kaczynski, better known to the world as the Unabomber, has become the target of a great amount of verbal abuse from major members of the media.



MARK PASSWATERS

To make an even bigger name for themselves, these supposed journalists have violated the primary objective of reporting. They are making news, not reporting it. In the process, they have shown callous disregard for those who have died and those who could die as a result of their efforts.

The SmokingGun.com posted letters written to Kaczynski, revealing a lot of popular journalists who were slobbering for an audience with a maniac who killed three and maimed 20 others. The tone of these letters is sickening.

Shawn Efran, Dan Rather's producer on '60 Minutes II,' called Kaczynski a "hero and a pioneer" for trying to get his environmentalist message out to the public.

Showing that "network loyalty" is as great a myth as "journalistic ethics," Efran went on to say, "Please understand that '60 Minutes II' is not the same program on which your brother and mother (who discovered the Unabomber's identity and turned him into a authorities) appeared. They appeared on '60 Minutes' with Mike Wallace and Lesley Stahl. Our story will allow you to personally refute what they said about you."

The letter was sent with Rather's signed approval. This is not to say that CBS' producer was the only person willing to throw his morals and values out the window and snuggle up to a raving lunatic. Katie Couric, host of NBC's "Today" show, wrote that talking to her would "give (Kaczynski) a chance to explain your experiences to our huge audience and also the opportunity to share your views and concerns, which I know you've long wanted to do."

Barbara Walters was also happy to sell herself, signing off on a letter written by producer Katie Thomson that said her program, "20/20," "will provide a fair forum for [Kaczynski] to express your views, and you could reach the most people by appearing on '20/20.'"

Greta Van Susteren, host of CNN's "Burden of Proof" and "The Point," gushed in her letter to Kaczynski that "no one can dispute that you are an extremely smart man."

Apparently, members of the media have developed a theory that the rest of society would reject. Want to be taken seriously? Kill someone. This is a horrific concept for a variety of reasons. First of all, there is nothing newsworthy about anything Theodore Kaczynski has to say. The man terrorized the nation for two decades but has not been behind bars for a significant amount of time. People who opposed Kaczynski's wild environmentalist beliefs are unavailable to contradict him, because they are dead.

It seems obscene that a man who kills people would be given a chance to spout off his views when a person who lives a stable, responsible life cannot. It is even more scary that this person would be put on television without regard to the feelings of those who lost family members or to the effect it would have on society.

Kaczynski's reputation and the potentially horrifying effects of giving him a soapbox in front of a TV camera obviously pale in comparison to the massive egos of TV journalists. Their attempted cuddling sessions with the Unabomber show their lack of concern for the rest of society.

In a move that certainly caused an increase in angst and fears in New York, Kaczynski rejected all requests for interviews. Perhaps he is more socially conscious than those people who were willing to kiss up to him with the cameras rolling.

Mark Passwaters is a senior electrical engineering major.

No secrets for Gore

Columbia had no right to keep students from speaking to media

Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, one of the nation's top journalism schools, has hired former Vice President Al Gore to teach a class titled Covering National Affairs in the Information Age this semester. He will later lecture at Middle Tennessee State and Fisk University, also in Tennessee.



JONATHAN JONES

A problem erupted the first day of class when Columbia told students enrolled in Gore's class not to discuss it with journalists. An advance email warned them against speaking about the class. University spokeswoman Suzanne Trimel justified the gag rule by saying the class "was not a news event."

The other two schools made it clear their classes would be on the record. Last week, Columbia finally lifted the policy of restrictions. The failed attempt for classroom silence violated free speech and contract rights.

The irony of these restrictions at a journalism school was not lost on the three dozen professional journalists who showed up on the first day or on the students who were enrolled. "It definitely goes against what we're taught, but it's Al Gore, and we have to accommodate him," said student Benjamin Stein.

Attorney Floyd Abrams, a visiting professor at Columbia, said, "It is ultimately self-defeating for the school to believe it can really transform what is inevitably an event fraught with public interest into one purely of private or academic interest."

The question remains why the school did not want students to talk to the press. Journalism students are attending college to learn a difficult and, at times, controversial craft. This group especially should be taught to value rights to free expression. After all, journalists deal with the First Amendment on a daily basis. Exceptions for privacy should be made to protect sources when necessary. And no one has a right to slander or falsely represent a person. Gore is just teaching a college class, not discussing nuclear secrets.

A classroom setting with the goal of fostering a learning environment does not warrant secrecy. Ironically, the desire to keep

what was said under wraps has ensured that the students will now talk nonstop about how they could not talk to anyone.

Predictably, the New York Press had a field day over Columbia's attempt to muzzle its students. The *New York Post* ran the headline "Hypocrites Triumph at Free Speech Temple." *New York Observer* columnist Gabriel Snyder called Gore's veil of secrecy "a classic ivory-tower boondoggle" and said the gag was "sure to make Joseph Pulitzer and Edward R. Murrow roll simultaneously in their graves."

The students are now allowed to give their opinions of Gore's class and tell anyone what he talks about, and rightfully so. No one is going to suffer from that process.

The most interesting aspect of this situation concerns ownership of intellectual property. Gore defended the gag rule when he said, "I think normal classes are off the record. I think the students will get a better experience if it's as much as possible a normal classroom experience."

This incident also raises the question of who owns college lectures. Students should be free to do whatever they wish with any professor's pearls of wisdom. It is unlikely that much of this knowledge is ever prized highly enough by a student to be placed on any record.

Perhaps Gore thinks otherwise, but there is a big difference between a college class and a White House briefing. The buyers, or the students, are the owners of classroom intellectual property in the first place. They are the ones who have paid the fees and tuition and should thus be free to do with the lectures as they wish, short of passing



CHAD MALLAM/THE BATTALION

off someone else's ideas as their own.

Fortunately, Columbia lifted its ban on students talking about the class. *The Washington Post* reports that the college simply makes it known it prefers no one talk to the press. It is disturbing that a school would attempt to silence its own students. The journalists of tomorrow are in an odd position — privy to in-

formation but discouraged from sharing it.

Americans everywhere must keep a close watch on any potential threat to their right of free expression. Apparently, not everyone shares that value.

Jonathan Jones is a junior political science major.

Condom Day promotes AIDS awareness, is an overall good idea

In response to Cayla Carr's Feb. 14 column.

In her own article, Cayla Carr states that ASHA reports that an estimated 55 million Americans have an STI and that two-thirds of these cases occur in people under 25 years of age. When I take in these statistics and their gravity, I find National Condom Day to be a great idea — it and any other day to pass out prophylactics. Valentine's Day is a contrived "holiday" that, in most cases, benefits the greeting card and floral industries more it spreads true love. However, a true act of love is helping to save someone's life. Carr may not feel the need to express love or even lust sexually, but

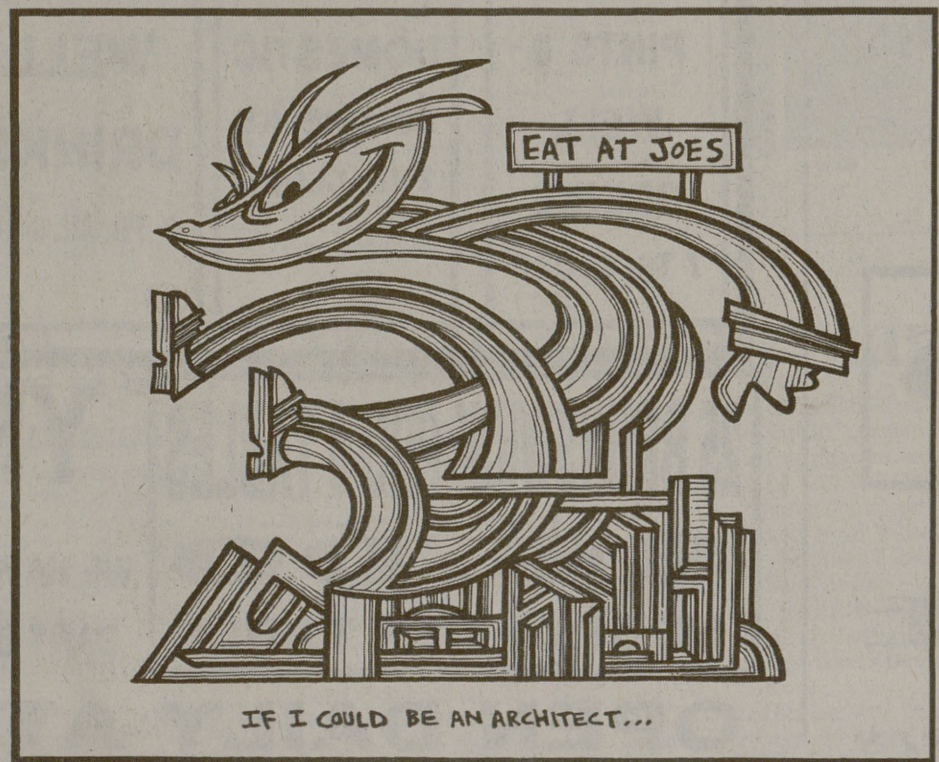
as the statistics show, many other Americans do, and many of them are killing themselves as they do so. I hardly believe that St. Valentine would agree with their behavior, but I doubt that he would have a problem with trying to educate and save lives on his day.

Truth be told, those who want to have sex will, and those who don't, won't. And Carr is correct that this really has nothing to do with Valentine's Day. Yet, as many do put love and sex together, I would rather educate today, on the day of love, than educate on how to live with AIDS later.

Passing out condoms does not devalue or corrupt Valentine's Day. It simply encourages responsibility and safety on this day and every other. You can still pass out your valentines, but be open-minded and let others pass out life-saving devices.

S. Shannon Davis
Class of '02

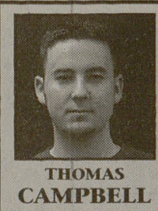
CARTOON OF THE DAY



THE UNCARTOONIST

Grading change is needed

Ideally, people attend higher educational institutions, like Texas A&M, to learn things necessary to become successful. Many times, students actually do whatever is necessary to get a good grade. It is the student's job to learn, but it is the professor's job to facilitate that learning. The professor also has the responsibility to assign grades that accurately represent the amount the student learned in the course.



THOMAS CAMPBELL

Grading styles should reflect the learning that has occurred, not the student's test-taking skills. Not all students are able to proficiently take a test, although they may actually know the material. Therefore, the test may not indicate how much people have learned. Some students easily get lost in the wording of true/false tests, while other students relish their simplicity and the 50-50 shot of getting the answer.

An exam should allow the student to demonstrate the learning that has taken place and put an objective number on that learning. Forcing students to take exams that do not suit their needs results in grade that do not represent the student's learning and retention.

Professors can more accurately test students and work with their needs by offering different types of

tests when circumstances permit. Because not all students are strong writers, essay exams should not be forced on all students. A student should not be penalized because his or her English skills are not spectacular. Writing is for the English professors to work with, yet many professors give essay examinations.

Other students do better on tests that are not multiple choice. Chris Durham, a sophomore genetics major, said, "Multiple choice tests are often confusing to me. Many times it is easy for a professor to trick students with questionable wording."

If students completely bomb a test, there should be ways that they can show proficiency in that class, instead of using a Q-drop.

Cumulative finals are the best way to test whether students have learned the material by the end of the semester. If students have shown they are trying to learn the material by doing all coursework throughout the semester and are able to earn an A on the final, then the students final grades should reflect that.

A certain accounting professor believes that if one can get an A on his cumulative final, and one has done all course work during the semester, then one deserves an A in the class. Everything may not "click" for a student during the semester, but during the extensive cramming for the finals, a student may suddenly understand how to work the problems.

Professors can also factor in the learning curve of taking that professor's test by the way each test is weighed. Many professors make each test weigh less than the next test. This helps students who did not know how the professor was going to test or how they should study for that test. Because each professor tests and grades differently, the students are forced to deal with these differences when the test is handed out.

Professors can grade students to reflect their learning in many ways, and it is their job to explore these ways.

Students should be allowed to choose the type of test they feel would best represent the amount of knowledge they have learned by test time.

Having each test count more than the test before it allows the student's learning curve with dealing with each professor and his or her test style to be taken into account. If students show the proficiency by the end of the semester, they should be rewarded with a good course grade.

The student needs to put forth the effort to learn the material, but that student should not be penalized because a professor writes tests that are difficult to understand, or because that student is forced to be tested in a way not appropriate for that student.

Thomas Campbell is a junior agricultural journalism major.