Molding the Truth

The Emerald Ends The Year Covering Up For ASUO Candidates And Using A Student’s Death as Ammunition
Family, Friends were angered by the Emerald’s slanted story about a student’s suicide.

By Tyler Graf and Pete R. Hunt

Cooley also didn’t think Kyle would have appreciated a third party attaching his name to the LGBT, a cause for which there is no evidence Richmond advocated. “That’s the Emerald trying to use Kyle’s death to further their cause,” he says.

The Emerald ran a clarification on May 27 that stated that the article did not mean to imply that Richmond’s sexual orientation, whatever it was, was the cause of his death. The intent was to show that recent campus events had engaged the LGBT community to show a welcoming climate on campus and to offer support.

Reporter Roman Gokhman agreed that the original purpose of the story was to enumerate the resources available to LGBT students. But he says that his article changed drastically as it was moved up the chain of command for revisions and corrections.

“The facts and circumstances concerning this situation were of prime concern,” says Perdue. “It was carelessness, which I didn’t appreciate very much, but since it was reported in an obituary, I didn’t find it too disturbing.” Perdue says.

It was the second story, implying Richmond committed suicide as a result of sexual confusion, that was the impetus for the vast sense of anger that Perdue currently feels toward the Emerald’s reporting.

“The entire article was based around one assumption by one lady who didn’t even know Kyle,” Perdue says. “It seemed like they were using Kyle’s suicide to talk more about LBGT issues.”

Kleckner refused to comment on newsroom decisions. Kleckner also ordered Reinhard and Caron Alarab, who wrote the first story on Richmond’s death, not to comment.

Gokhman says that is was Alarab who had interviewed the unnamed community member that made the dubious sexuality claim that went in the second story.

“You're damaging somebody's reputation even after they're dead,” Gokhman says. “To speculate is really crossing the line.”

Proximity is what makes a news-story,” Frisella says. “Different audiences the values of a certain story are higher.

But beyond proximity, there are other concerns when dealing with a suicide.

Journalism professor Tom Bivins says that though suicides are newsworthy, the media should refrain from speculating about the cause. “To speculate is really crossing the line,” Bivins says.

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Perdue says that was precisely what the Emerald had done. “[The Emerald] was causing more pain for an already really painful issue; I mean, everybody is still really upset.”

“Tyrone Graf is a junior majoring in journalism. Pete Hunt is a senior majoring in political science, also contributed to this article.”
Questions Remain After The *Emerald* Refused To Investigate The ASUO Ticket Endorsed By The ODE’s Editors | By Tyler Graf

In another questionable news decision, the Oregon Daily Emerald this year chose not to investigate a story of a possible theft by ASUO candidates who had been endorsed by the ODE’s editorial board. During the height of the previous ASUO election season, a series of phone calls and e-mails were circulated to various student publications, including the *Emerald* and the *Oregonian*, alleging that two Maddy and Eddy campaign staffers, Oscar Arana and Lacy Ogan, stole copies of campaign materials from a local Kinko’s, only to return later to finally pay for their merchandise.

In an e-mail sent during the elections, Ryan Coussens, a freshman business major who was officially unaffiliated with any campaign, alleged that Arana and Ogan had been using the computers at Kinko’s, but then bolted from the store before they could pay for their goods. They returned later, Coussens stated, “out of guilt.”

Michael Linman, who was the campaign manager for the Shively/Bae ASUO ticket, heard the allegations first-person from a male employee of Kinko’s who was working the night of the alleged incident. Linman had just finished making copies of campaign materials when he walked to the back of the store to use the paper cutter. The store employee noticed the campaign fliers and asked Linman if he was running against the Maddy and Eddy campaign, to which Linman responded in the affirmative.

“I hope you beat the crap out of them,” the employee said, according to Linman’s recollections. Linman was interested in what the employee had meant by the outburst and asked him to elucidate. “Apparently [he] told lots of people about it,” Linman said.

When asked about the allegations levied upon his campaign managers, Eddy Morales confronted with Melton because he was unsure what the allegations were, despite the fact that *Emerald* editor-in-chief Michael Kleckner had notified the campaign of the rumors during the election and had asked for Maddy and Eddy’s side of the story.

“The allegations that people working on the ME campaign stole copies is completely false,” stated Morales. According to Morales, the incident amounted to little more than a minor misunderstanding.

Morales said he, Ogan and Arana were working on campaign fliers at Kinko’s when Morales had to leave. He gave the female employee his credit card and personal information, instructing her to charge all expenses to his account. Ogan and Arana left the store assuming that the charges had been made to Morales’s card. Before they reached their destination, they remembered a male employee with whom Eddy had not discussed his method of payment. They returned to the store, where the employee was livid, accusing Ogan and Arana of theft. The two staffers eventually crippled their balance by paying for their merchandise with cash.

Employees at the local Kinko’s branch confirmed that an incident had taken place, but they were unwilling to give details, adding corporate policy that prohibits local branches from discussing matters with the press. However, an official Kinko’s spokesman stated that the current Kinko’s payment policy would not prohibit the payment method Morales chose, but employees would not recommend such a method either; it would simply create too much confusion.

But the voting members of campus never had the opportunity to weigh the allegations against Melton and Morales because the *Emerald* chose not to print any version of the story. Kleckner stated he received an e-mail from the Kinko’s employee but he refused to run the story, citing its lack of newsworthiness. “The version of events from the Maddy and Eddy campaign made more sense than the other side, and given that there was no police report, nothing stolen—in short, nothing at all in verification of one version or another—this was a non-story,” Kleckner stated via e-mail.

Kleckner said he believed there were political motives behind the string of e-mails and phone calls received by his office, citing the timing of the initial e-mail message, which was received a day before the primary, as an indication that there “was some fishiness involved that smelled gamey.” Many of the subsequent phone calls and e-mail messages were placed to different reporters to gauge their reactions to the information.

On April 9th, the editorial board endorsed the ME ticket, lauding Melton and Morales for their lobbying skills but not to weigh the allegations against Melton and Morales because the “was some fishiness involved that smelled gamey.” Many of the subsequent phone calls and e-mail messages were placed to different reporters to gauge their reactions to the information.

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ODE: The Truth, Half-Truths
And Nothing But Half-Truths

I t is now clear that this year the Emerald hasn’t tried to inform its students. It has chosen, instead, to lie to the campus with little or no regard for those they hurt along the way.

As outlined in this *Commentator*, it is clear that the Emerald intentionally chose to make unsubstantiated links from unquoted sources that tied the tragic suicide of student Kyle Richmond to LGBTQ community concerns. The Emerald also chose not to follow up on the valid story of accusations leveled at this year’s LGBTQ-friendly candidates Maddy Melton and Eddy Morales, the eventual executive successors.

These are not simple accidents. They are blatant and galling attempts to shape public perceptions, and those attempts spared no one in their path.

**ENGINEERING ELECTIONS?**

It is no secret *Emerald* editor Michael Kleckner has a different take on the world than most; he is a self-described gay anarchist. And now there is no doubt that he has used the ODE as a tool to push his own ideology. In his personal web site he even writes that he attempts to “make the world look a little bit more like [him] everyday.” That effort, it seems, largely deals with gay and pacifism issues (Kleckner’s war coverage is another story entirely).

It now appears Kleckner was more than willing to use the Emerald as a vehicle to achieve his goal of making the world reflect his lifestyles and ideals.

And in the case of the ASUO elections, Kleckner found candidates that already looked a bit more like him than the rest of the world in Melton and Morales.

While you can’t accuse Kleckner of tampering with the election, there is no doubt his “news sense” directly correlated to his personal leanings. Kleckner claimed that he heard many different candidates that already looked a bit more like him than the rest of the world in Melton and Morales.

**ETHICAL FAILURES IN DEATH COVERAGE**

The decision to include Richmond’s death in any story was flawed from the beginning. Suicides aren’t necessarily public acts, and in this case it is clear from friends and families that Richmond was not one to seek public attention for his private life. So it is even debatable whether or not the ODE should have covered the event in the first place.

Even worse, once there was an initial mention of Richmond in Gokhman’s story draft, *Emerald* editors intentionally moved up that reference. There is no doubt that Kleckner was playing on the death and making a direct connection.

Finally, any basis for including Richmond in the LGBTQ campus story instantly dissolves when the sources indicating the young man was possibly considering suicide was questioning his sexuality were unnamed “community members.” That is not even a named source should indicate that no one close to the young man wished to discuss any possible motive for his decision, and the Emerald should not have ventured into speculation about a topic with that much gravity.

Kleckner’s explanation for covering Richmond’s death revolved around the editorial page exchange started by University student Vincent Martorano, who wrote that he wished he hadn’t have to see homosexual activity in public. There was then a flurry of letters expressing varying levels of disagreement, including one from a Commentator staffer.

The ODE’s printed claim that the University environment was hostile to gays, which they stated could have been a factor in Richmond’s ultimate decision, is ridiculous. There is, of course, the logical problem for the ODE that there really isn’t sufficient evidence to suggest Richmond was concerned with such matters. Even more importantly, the wave of sentiments expressing exactly the opposite view from that of Martorano should suggest anything but a hostile environment at the University.

There can be no explanation for including Richmond’s tragedy into Emerald coverage of LGBTQ matters other than a willful attempt by the paper to shape the truth. In what can only be described as an act completely devoid of personal and professional sensitivity, the Emerald used Richmond’s death to promote its own agenda. Sadly, it wasn’t the first case this year the ODE so badly mishandled a story with such gravity.

**NOT THE FIRST TIME**

The ODE already botched another suicide story this year. And in that case, there is room to argue that the ODE even played a central role.

When the ODE ran a March 13, 2003 story about Eric Dylan Jones, a suspect in the beating of UO football player Devan Long, it ran a full color mugshot of Jones along with a banner headline on the top fold of the front page. In that story Jones was not available for comment and only football coach Mike Bellotti is a named source beyond the Eugene Police Department spokes-person. The date of the alleged attack was March 1.

On March 31 the paper ran a headline that read “Wanted student found dead; possible suicide” in which the ODE reported Jones had killed himself on March 21.

In its next story, dated April 1, the ODE reported a very different side of the event from Jones’s girlfriend, who blamed Jones’s death on the Emerald’s coverage. The girlfriend added that Jones had been planning to turn himself into police on the very day the first *Emerald* story named him as the suspect in the “vicious attack,” but then decided the story would lead everyone to believe he was a violent individual and respect for him. In that story the Emerald responded “But because Jones fled the scene and did not immediately return to his only known address, his side of the story was not attainable.”

Not attainable? The original story was published 12 days after the alleged incident took place which indicates that further time to perform a well-researched piece was the best option.

Perhaps the Emerald’s callously flippant attitude toward its responsibilities can be summed up in that April 1 article in which they wrote, “But the details of the incident are not as important now in how [Jones’s girlfriend] and others want Jones to be remembered.” It’s no wonder the ODE felt like moving on.

**TIME COST OR LIES**

The Emerald may have a budget of $800,000, but it isn’t worth a damn now. Students pay a significant sum to the ODE in form of a subscription, for which it is supposed that the Emerald will act as the paper of record. But now that it has gone beyond missing key stories and into the realm of intentional lies, students shouldn’t have to pay $100,000 to a rag that distorts instead of debates and lies from the front page to the editorial.

While Kleckner is leaving the editorship at the end of this year, the damage done to the ODE in the long run may be incalculable. This stain can’t just be washed away by improving next year.

June 5, 2003

**MISSION STATEMENT**

The *Oregon Commentator* is an independent journal of opinion published at the University of Oregon for the campus community. Founded by a group of concerned student journalists Sept. 27 1983, the *Commentator* has had a major impact in the “war of ideas” on campus, providing students with an alternative to the left-wing orthodoxy promoted by other student publications, professors and student groups. During its nineteen-year existence, it has enabled University students to hear both sides of issues. Our paper combines reporting with opinion, humor and feature articles. We have won national recognition for our commitment to journalistic excellence.

The *Oregon Commentator* is operated as a program of the Associated Students of the University of Oregon (ASUO) and is staffed solely by volunteer editors and writers. *The Commentator* is funded through student incidental fees, advertising revenue, and private donations. We print a wide variety of material, but our main purpose is to show students that a political philosophy of conservatism, free thought and individual liberty is an intelligent way of looking at the world — contrary to what they might hear in classrooms and on campus.