

O R E G O N

COMMENTATOR

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NEWS SUPPLEMENT

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Molding the Truth

The Emerald Ends The Year Covering Up For ASUO Candidates And Using A Student's Death as Ammunition



| From Tragedy To Agenda • Page 2 | Playing Favorites • Page 4 |
| Spin Analysis • Page 5 |

With Malice Aforethought

Family, Friends were angered by the *Emerald's* slanted story about a student's suicide.

By Tyler Graf and Pete R. Hunt

Grieving friends of University student Kyle Richmond, who took his own life on May 15, are upset over the *Oregon Daily Emerald's* coverage of his death. In a recent article entitled "Suicide Spurs LGBT Support," published on May 28, the *Emerald*—citing unnamed sources—implied a connection between Richmond's suicide and the possibility that he may have been questioning his sexual orientation. According to loved ones, the *Emerald's* coverage amounts to an invasion of privacy, recklessly disregarding those still suffering.

The inflammatory article, the second covering Richmond's death, ran with a sub-headline that read "After Kyle Dalton Richmond's recent suicide, the community has been raising awareness of available resources for LGBT." The article stated that there was a connection between "an increased feeling in the LGBT community that the University campus is not a safe environment" and the death of Richmond, who, according to unnamed "community members," was suffering from depression and "questioning his sexual orientation."

Friends were upset with the focus of the second story, which some claim was used to push an agenda.

Joseph Cooley, a long-time friend of Richmond's, was incensed by the article.

"Kyle was a real private person," Cooley says. "He wouldn't have wanted the pain he'd been feeling over the last few months spread over the mass media."

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. "[The *Emerald*] is trying to use Kyle's death to further their cause," he says.

The *Emerald* ran a clarification on May 29 that stated that "the article did not mean to imply that Richmond's sexual orientation, whatever it was, was the cause of his suicide. 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.

"[News Editor] Brook [Reinhard] changed the entire lead around with the suicide as the focal point," states Gokhman. "I didn't agree with that."

And according to Gokhman, who wrote the "Suicide spurs LGBT support" story, the unnamed community "members" was actually a single source from within the LGBT. Gokhman also says that it was *Emerald* editor-in-chief Michael Kleckner who insisted on pushing the sexuality angle.

Reporter Caron Alarab wrote the first story about Richmond's death, "Unforgettable Student Commits Suicide", which was published on May 27. Leslie Perdue, a friend of Richmond's,

says she was not angered by the first story, but found some of the content questionable, including a few factual errors. For example, the *Emerald* reported that Richmond's body had been found in a running car parked in the garage of his mother and stepfather's house, when in fact the car had not been running at all. "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 LGBT 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 it was Alarab who had interviewed the unnamed community member that made the dubious sexuality claim that went in the second story.

"Personally, I'm upset that the *Emerald* would run a story like that without naming sources," says Gokhman.

While Kleckner declined to comment on this story, *Emerald* board member George Evano says that Kleckner had mentioned the story at a board meeting and stated that its newsworthiness was based on an ongoing discussion of a guest commentary written by Vincent Martorano, who some claimed bordered on hate speech in denouncing public displays of homosexual affection. Chris Frisella, chairman of the *Emerald's* board and the news editor at the *Register-Guard*, confirmed Evano's account that Kleckner offered that newsworthiness argument at the board meeting.

The *Register-Guard's* obituary to Richmond did not include the cause of death on behalf of the parents' wishes. But Frisella says that the differences in approach to the story by the *Guard* and *Emerald* were justified.

"The principles of news-judgment are universal, but for different audiences the values of a certain story are higher. Proximity is what makes a news-story," Frisella says.

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. "You're damaging somebody's reputation even after they're dead."

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,"

says Perdue. She believes that Kyle would not approve of the *Emerald's* article.

According to Perdue and Cooley, Richmond's mother Cindy Schweigert had an audience with University President David Frohnmayer to address the *Emerald* story. When reached for comment, Frohnmayer didn't address Schweigert's specifics

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grievances, but did say through a spokesperson that the concerns of the family were of prime concern.

"I rarely comment on student publication," the statement said. "The facts and circumstances concerning this situation are very complex. The most importance thing for all of us is to acknowledge the dimension of personal tragedy so centrally involved."

The May 28 Emerald Ties Richmond's Death Into LGBT Concerns Without Citing Named Sources

Wednesday, May 28, 2003 SINCE 1900 UNIVERSITY OF OREGON EUGENE, OREGON

Suicide spurs LGBT support

After Kyle Dalton Richmond's recent suicide, the community has been raising awareness of available resources for LGBT

Roman Gokhman
Campus/City Culture Reporter

As the school year draws to a close, there is an increased feeling in the LGBT community that the University campus is not a safe environment. At the same time, the community is reaching out to make students aware of the resources available to them.

Many people were disturbed by comments made by Vincent Martorano in a guest commentary published in the *Emerald* ("Homosexual men should hide their disgusting acts," May 9). And the recent suicide of University student Kyle Dalton Richmond, who community members say was suffering from depression and was questioning his sexual orientation, has generated concern about the campus atmosphere for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students.

Richmond, a resident of Junction City, committed suicide May 15, and a memorial service was held for him Thursday. According to his mother, Richmond was severely depressed at least as far back as March and had previously attempted to commit suicide. He had also gone to the University Health Center and was prescribed anti-depressants.

Elise Self, co-chairwoman of the local chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians And Gays, specifically pointed to the guest commentary published by the *Emerald* earlier this month that she said could have been one of many factors that contributed to

Turn to **Suicide**, page 7

Covering Up For ME?

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 OREGON COMMENTATOR, 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 leveled upon his campaign managers, Eddy Morales conferred with Maddy 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 ciphred 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, adducing corporate policy that prohibits local branches from discussing these 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 said 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 their budgeting prowess or fiscal acuity. It was only after all the votes had been counted, and the Maddy and Eddy campaign had slipped into the executive seat by a slim margin, that the *Emerald* ran a story detailing possible discrepancies in Maddy and Eddy's handling of campaign donations. As the reins of the *Emerald's* editor-and-chief are passed to the next generation, it remains to be seen whether or not the *Emerald's* standards of newsworthiness will change or be copied.



Tyler Graf, a junior majoring in journalism, is a staff writer for the OREGON COMMENTATOR.

OREGON COMMENTATOR

Spin, Clarification, Spin ...

[The Emerald Was Forced To Make Clarifications About The Richmond Story, But Even Then Their Actions Aren't Defensible. Here Are Their Clarifications]

Print:

The recent suicide of University student Kyle Dalton Richmond, **who community members say was suffering from depression and was questioning his sexual orientation**, has generated concern about the campus atmosphere for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students.

Clarification:

The article did not mean to imply that Kyle Richmond's sexual orientation, whatever it was, was the cause of his suicide. 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.

Missing:

Why no clarification as to the mysterious identity of the community members who circulated the sexual orientation rumor? Why does the Emerald see fit to dig up dirt about a recently deceased student? What does somebody's sexual orientation have to do with anything? There never was a good reason to include Richmond in an LGBT story, and this clarifier still doesn't fully explain why the ODE would cross such a line.

Print:

Elise Self, co-chairman of the local chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, **specifically pointed to the guest commentary published by the Emerald** earlier this month that she said could have been one of many that **contributed to Richmond's decision to end his life**.

Clarification:

[The article] should have stated that Elise Self of PFLAG pointed to an anti-homosexual guest commentary published by the Emerald as the type of thing that contributes to a climate where LGBT students feel fearful or unwelcome. She did not mean to draw a direct link between the guest commentary and Kyle Richmond's death.

Missing:

Again, why was this even brought up? Did the Emerald really believe that anybody would benefit from a dubious connection between Vincent Martorano's guest commentary and Kyle Richmond's suicide? Even more astonishing: the ODE misquoted the source that suggested there was any possible connection at all.

June 5, 2003

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

It is now clear that this year the *Emerald* hasn't tried to inform 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 rumors of election wrongdoing, but chose not to investigate any of them. In particular, he cited a perceived fishiness in the allegations against Melton and Morales. How would one arrive at such a conclusion without properly investigating the matter, unless his or her own bias led to such a belief?

There's no argument that student publications need the freedom to carry out coverage and editorial judgments as they see fit, but in close elections the actions of a motivated and partisan news editor undermines the process by which student leaders — who ultimately have sway over the spending of millions of dollars — are chosen. Whether there was a cause and effect relationship in this case is unlikely to be known. But the stain of doubt will remain as long as an agenda-driven press is on the side of win-

ning candidates.

But while Kleckner must be charged with callously carrying out his own agenda, there are no signs that any protest was made by his reportorial or editorial staffs. In fact, quite to the contrary: in the case of the Richmond death, ODE reporter Roman Gokhman has stated that his immediate editor moved up the mention of Richmond's death in the LGBT community support article while Kleckner insisted on inserting the suggested motive of sexuality concerns. Not exactly a hands-off, objective editing effort.

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 family 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 there 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 didn'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 *Emerald'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 *Emerald* 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 spokesperson. 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 lose 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.

THE COST OF 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.



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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 paper 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.

