3-15-2014

The Portland Spectator, March 2014

Portland State University. Student Publications Board

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.
Follow this and additional works at: http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/spectator

Recommended Citation

This Book is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Portland Spectator by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. For more information, please contact pdxscholar@pdx.edu.
12 Volunteer, Non-Violent, and Possibly Anarchist
TJ Love
A new student organization sits down to talk about the faculty strike, commies, and secret handshakes.

20 From the Bahamas and Jamaica to Tour Bus Accidents and Wingless Chicken
Ariel Devros
One man’s journey to validate his spring break experiences—or lack thereof.

24 Cookie Madness, Part Two
Matt Reynolds
How to make the perfect chocolate chip cookies, continued from our February issue.

26 Spring Breakers
Colin Staub
The best movie to launch you into spring break actually has some depth to it.

4 Wim on a Whim
Jake Stein
The president is awarded for his actions—but are his actions in the best interest of the students, or the administration?

8 Violate Privacy, Or Violate National Security?
Matt Reynolds
Edward Snowden: whistleblower, treasonous criminal.

10 Doing Time
Tamara Alazri
From Dublin Prison to Subway Manager

14 Higher Fees, Higher Profits, Higher One
Colin Staub
You know that green ID card PSU gave you? Read this.

17 Health Insurance Is A Must-Have For Students (Literally)
Morgan Knorr
With students required to have healthcare, how does PSU’s plan size-up with Cover Oregon?

18 A Point of View…
Eugene Messer
Compromise: A four Letter Word?
HERE AT THE SPECTATOR, WE ARE ALL ABOUT STUDENT VOICES.

It’s close to the end of the term, and many of us are experiencing that recurring feeling of being over-encumbered with finals and essays. Plus, many of us have jobs—and second jobs—to worry about, especially if we ever plan on escaping that ball and chain of student debt. And we’d like to try and keep a social life going through all of this.

We’ve got a lot going on. When you’re busy worrying about finals and jobs and having a life, it’s easy to feel like you’re helpless to change the big picture. We are directly affected by the policies and operations of this university, yet we often don’t feel like we can do anything about... anything.

But we can do something. If nothing else, we can make our voices heard.

The fact is, just by educating ourselves we are changing the world. Slowly but surely, we are changing—our brains are learning, experimenting, and holding important moments. We should not discount our personal education, our individual changes, for the world is made up of individuals who are enacting change every day.

I am a strong believer that only through examining each individual viewpoint, committing to having all parties seated at the same table, can we progress in any dialogue. In this issue we have truly succeeded in creating such a forum of thoughtful debate.

Remember Snowden? What do you think of him? You might be surprised by a student’s researched opinion on page 8. We’ve also got a rundown on Higher One which will make you want to shred your student credit card (page 14), and we’ve got a convincing column advocating gun control written by a northwest liberal who has, quite literally, been there and done that with most things political (page 18). On top of the politics we’ve got a recipe, a movie review, and a personal essay. In these pages, you might find the opinion you’re looking for, but you’ll also find the other opinion—and the other other opinion.

Since you’ve picked up this magazine, you probably noticed our cover. We have depicted President Wim Wiewel and Higher One as UFOs sucking money away from PSU, because there lies a common sentiment amongst students that our school’s administration and “financial management firm” are sucking money out of students’ pockets and residing on a completely different level than the rest of our community. They appear to be living in the clouds, as many national politicians seem to be these days, occupying a luxurious, alien space which has little to no connection with the day-to-day trials and opinions of the rest of us.

If you agree with this sentiment, we’d love to hear from you. If you don’t agree, we’d love to hear from you even more.

Here’s the bottom line: we are doing everything we can to get your voices out there. Yes, you. Contact us with an article idea, or write a response to an article. Read something, write something, and educate us, as well as your community. Voice an opinion about anything at all. Shout! Scream! You deserve to be heard!

Sometimes it feels like we just can’t change the big picture. Sometimes it’s a valid feeling. Maybe even most of the time. But if we have a voice, we will be heard.

The big picture is not painted by any single person—it’s painted by all of us.

Jake Stein
Editor-In-Chief
Whatever President Wiewel is doing, apparently it's a pretty big deal. On Feb. 12, Wiewel received a "Leadership Award" from The Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) District VIII. Wiewel is no stranger to accolades: last year he was decorated with a Climate Leadership Award, and the previous year Wiewel received the inaugural Presidential Leadership Award from the U.S. Green Building Council's Center for Green Schools.

What did our president do to deserve these honors? According to the language of the CASE District VIII award, Wiewel demonstrated "a clear vision for civic leadership," "educational opportunity," "global excellence," and a half-dozen other abstractly-worded administrative virtues. Wiewel was also recognized for "restructuring higher education," by lobbying for the new university board of trustees. (Starting this June, the oversight of PSU will be conducted by an individual board in place of the OUS Chancellor's office.)

But it appears Wiewel primarily earned this CASE award based on a good application. In the words of Cheryl Nations, District VIII Chair, "We don't do research into this. We take the package which is provided to us." The package, meaning the application, is a combination of press clippings, letters from community business leaders, Wiewel's CV and past awards. "All you have to go by are the papers in front of you," explains Nations. "We put the nomination package in front of us, and that's what we judge by."

So for a popular man like President Wiewel, life is an upward spiral of awards—which leads to more awards. Just how exactly did PSU end up with this decorated president?

It's a Funny Story…

Once upon a time in early 2008, PSU had gone about a year without a real president and it was starting to look embarrassing. Out of three final candidates—a university president from Texas Tech, a deputy director of the National Science Foundation, and a vice president from the University of Baltimore—two withdrew their names in a span of two weeks. PSU was left with Wim Wiewel.

The president's leadership is recognized from afar, but does his business-like administration serve to build academics, or build resumes?

Wim On A Whim

The president’s leadership is recognized from afar, but does his business-like administration serve to build academics, or build resumes?

Editorial | By Jake Stein
Ask PSU’s top administrators what they think of President Wim Wiewel, and they’ll tell you he’s doing a pretty swell job. Ask PSU professors, faculty and students, and you’ll get a different story.

Whatever President Wiewel is doing, apparently it’s a pretty big deal. On Feb. 12, Wiewel received a “Leadership Award” from The Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) District VIII. Wiewel is no stranger to accolades: last year he was decorated with a Climate Leadership Award, and the previous year Wiewel received the inaugural Presidential Leadership Award from the U.S. Green Building Council’s Center for Green Schools.

What did our president do to deserve these honors? According to the language of the CASE District VIII award, Wiewel demonstrated “a clear vision for civic leadership,” “educational opportunity,” “global excellence,” and a half-dozen other abstractly-worded administrative virtues. Wiewel was also recognized for “restructuring higher education,” by lobbying for the new university board of trustees. (Starting this June, the oversight of PSU will be conducted by an individual board in place of the OUS Chancellor’s office.)

But it appears Wiewel primarily earned this CASE award based on a good application. In the words of Cheryl Nations, District VIII Chair, “We don’t do research into this. We take the package which is provided to us.” The package, meaning the application, is a combination of press clippings, letters from community business leaders, Wiewel’s CV and past awards. “All you have to go by are the papers in front of you,” explains Nations. “We put the nomination package in front of us, and that’s what we judge by.”

So for a popular man like President Wiewel, life is an upward spiral of awards—which leads to more awards. Just how exactly did PSU end up with this decorated president?

It’s a Funny Story…

Once upon a time in early 2008, PSU had gone about a year without a real president and it was starting to look embarrassing. Out of three final candidates—a university president from Texas Tech, a deputy director of the National Science Foundation, and a vice president from the University of Baltimore—two withdrew their names in a span of two weeks. PSU was left with Wim Wiewel of Baltimore and, perhaps fearing the humiliation of prolonging the already year-long quest for a president, the search committee decided to stick with Wiewel.

Suddenly our new President Wiewel became the best thing since sustainably-packaged sliced bread.

A 2008 PSU Vanguard headline boasted, “Wim Wiewel heads into final stretch with high regards,” and that was putting it mildly. George Pernsteiner, Chancellor of the Oregon University System (OUS) until recently, stated, “I was pleased with his understanding and vision for a connected university.” Jim Francesconi, chair of the search committee and former mayoral candidate, joined Pernsteiner’s enthusiasm, stating he was “excited” for Wiewel. Board member Brian Fox publically decided that Wiewel had “a tremendous skillset,” and board member Dalton Miller-Jones described Wiewel as “charismatic and very articulate.”

Despite being whisked into his presidency at a time when the other candidates were out of the picture, and at a time when PSU and the OUS would rather spare themselves the embarrassment and resources of restarting the search, President Wiewel garnered nothing but approval for the position.

Only one member of the presidential search committee, former PSU Student Body President Rudy Soto, spoke about the search as a failure. “I don’t think this looks good from an outsider’s perspective,” claimed Soto.

Back to Now.

Fast-forward to the present and, from an outsider’s perspective, it appears that Wiewel is doing everything right. He is winning awards, he is forging business partnerships, and he is pushing the reputation of PSU to a national level.

The administrative reputation of PSU, that is.

Emily Lehr, member of PSU’s Student Action Coalition, puts it shrewdly: “Our administration excels at pouring money into administrative bureaucracy, slick capital development projects, and
marketing Portland State as a hip, ‘green,’ urban university.” After all, the CASE District VIII Leadership Award recognizes the CEOs of the educational world, judged purely by merit of application, for administrative success.

“It makes sense,” says Lehr, “that Wim would receive their award.”

For the Earth, For the Students, For the PR.

By receiving this award, President Wiewel is acting as spokesperson of the entire administration, the entire school. But to say that Wiewel lit the spark of sustainability at PSU is a longshot; Portland has long been a leader on the green front, and PSU began its push for sustainability with a student movement in 1999. The Institute for Sustainable Solutions—a campus-wide institution often credited to Wiewel’s leadership—in fact originated in 2006 under a different name.

Similarly, the $25 million PSU received in 2008 for sustainability research—a challenge grant from the James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation—is sometimes attributed to Wiewel’s leadership, but in fact the donation was in process before our new president joined us that year.

It is usually overlooked that President Wiewel was not, in fact, hired due to a background in Sustainability with a capital “S”. He has a Ph.D in sociology from Northwestern University and degrees in sociology and urban planning from the University of Amsterdam; he has taught economic development and urban sociology, and he has written extensively on urban planning. But prior to PSU, Wiewel had no apparent interest in “Sustainability” as a field of work, teaching, or research, aside from how it fits into “Urban Planning.”

Luckily, “Sustainability” is a chameleon of a term, and very loosely applicable. It only makes sense that Wiewel would jump on the green wagon and capitalize on PSU’s sustainability enthusiasm. For the earth, for the press—why not both?

“I didn’t bring sustainability to PSU,” the president admits in an interview, “but it’s one of the primary reasons I took the position of president, and I’ve tried to create and maintain a space for it to flourish, so I talk about it all the time.”

As for “restructuring higher education,” Wiewel certainly played his part in advocating for the institutional governing board of trustees. Some view this new “I-board” as a great opportunity for PSU to strengthen its reciprocal partnership with Portland community leaders. Pamela J. Campos, director of Las Mujeres and the first student voting member to sit on PSU’s board of trustees, sees how this institutional change can “serve as a great attribute in maximizing our potential.” In theory, Portland’s board will hold PSU’s administration accountable to the community. “Rather than having a governing board that is responsible for seven institutions, we now have a board that is focused entirely on PSU,” explains Campos. And the good news? The board of trustees will be unable to raise the cost of resident undergraduate tuition by more than five percent a year.

The bad news? The board will be able to raise the cost of tuition by five percent a year.

And while it’s nice to think that Portland community members—i.e. CEOs and investment managers—will virtuously act as an institutional check to President Wiewel and his administration, an autonomous community-based board could mean head-honchos in the president’s back pocket, which means more leniency.

All’s Well That Administrates Well?

When you consider all this, it seems President Wiewel has earned his leadership awards. According to Scott Gallagher, PSU director of communications, Wiewel provides leadership by directing strategy and telling the deans to look for opportunities, but “he can’t sign off on every little thing.”

Understandable. He is too busy securing donations and partnerships. “A lot of what the presidents of universities do is ask for money,” says Gallagher. Wiewel talks to businesses, constituents, donors, and tries to rake it in.

In this, Wiewel succeeds. Private gifts to PSU have doubled in the last three years. But how these dollars are invested raises controversy.

The administration commends new real estate projects—the $44 million Viking Pavilion which will replace the Stott Center as PSU’s sports haven, or the OHSU-PSU Collaborative Life Science Building,
a 650,000-square foot project with a $295 million price tag.

Student and faculty voices, however, point out irony in a university investing in lofty real estate and athletics projects, while faculty salaries decline and the student/full-time faculty ratio worsens. Mary King, professor of economics and president of the PSU chapter of the American Association of University Professors, sees athletics and real estate as secondary. “It might be great to have an urban development zone and to really think big about the future, but not on the backs of today’s students.”

52 percent of faculty at PSU are part-time—compared to the 55 percent average among OUS schools—and these part-timers are teaching a whopping third of total credit hours. Meanwhile, our number of tenure line faculty has been halved in the last two decades.

All the while, PSU administration is seeing nothing but positive numbers. The amount of executive administrative positions has grown by 65 percent since 2002, and administrator salaries have seen increases across the board.

And as executives pour money into football and real estate, it’s not totally clear whether there will be worthy returns on such investments. PSU still hemorrhages money from poor real estate ventures of the past, such as the University Place Hotel. Even our Smith Memorial Student Union was planned poorly, built in awkward layers, and is currently sitting on a dangerous nine million dollars of deferred maintenance, with a 55-year-old kitchen hood which urgently needs replacing, and faulty fire alarm wiring.

According to electricians’ estimates, up to one half of the fire alarm wiring in Smith does not need to be there, and people are quick-fixing it on a weekly basis.

As for athletics, two years ago Portland State Football couldn’t bring in more revenue than total expenses. We can hope Viking Pavilion might change that, but we have a right to remain skeptical.

Meanwhile, King reminds us, “Portland is probably the biggest city in the country without a major research university.” Nestled in the last affordable city on the west coast, King believes PSU could reign in the right students and professors to make this school Oregon’s finest research university, if dollars were prioritized in academics and not sports or business start-ups. “We could be that research university,” King insists.

With massive real estate investments, pandering to investors, and juiced-up administrative salaries, one thing is clear: PSU is run like a business. But whether business tactics pave a good long-term strategy for PSU is up in the air. Endeavors like Viking Pavilion and community business partnerships are great at raising PSU’s national recognition; such investments are also splendid administrative resume-boosters.

“Yes,” these administrators can claim, “I was a part of that urban development legacy.” And in a few years, a hiring committee at a school across the country wouldn’t know that such legacies may have been financed at the expense of tenured faculty, affordable tuition, and buildings like Neuberger Hall and Smith Memorial Student Union falling apart. If PSU wasn’t run like a business, it might just succeed in becoming Portland’s imminent research university.

The only problem is, you don’t get CASE VIII Leadership Awards for running a school like that.
Violate Privacy, Or Violate National Security?
Edward Snowden and the NSA

Beginning in June 2013, National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden, working with the help of several news outlets, illegally disclosed classified NSA documents revealing details of the extent and methods of its data collection. Snowden, while applying for asylum in other foreign nations, has accepted temporary asylum in Russia. Snowden’s unauthorized disclosures of NSA documents have sparked outrage over perceived abuses of power by the NSA and legislative branches.

In a previous article I noted the way that politicians tend to distort facts for the sake of headline-grabbing news. To some extent I believe that U.S. news agencies have been extremely quick to praise Snowden’s actions because “abuse of power by the NSA” provides them with fantastically controversial headlines. Most articles I read relating to the Snowden disclosures provide the public with a fairly inaccurate understanding of the operation of the NSA and the nature of its spying activities. This article will aim to provide an unbiased and well-grounded understanding of the scope of NSA activities, the nature of Edward Snowden’s disclosures, and the extent to which the NSA has committed privacy violations.

Why should the NSA operate in the shadows?
Hypothetically, let’s say you are a terrorist and you use text messages to conspire with other terrorists. Suddenly, an unauthorized disclosure of classified documents reveals that the NSA can track you via your text messages. How do you respond? Any smart terrorist will likely stop using text messages. Keeping the capabilities and methods of the NSA secret are essential for ensuring it can collect important information. Through his disclosures, Edward Snowden obviously revealed some of the methods that the NSA uses to collect information, thereby undermining its ability to do its job.

- In an NPR interview with former NSA Deputy Director John C. Inglis, he was asked if, as a result of the Edward Snowden leaks, there were “specific instances in which you... believe trails you were following disappeared?”
- He responded, “We do.” Essentially, the Snowden revelations increase the ability of terrorists to hide from intelligence agencies.

Most news articles following Snowden’s disclosures paint the NSA as a clandestine organization maliciously violating the privacy of U.S. citizens and hiding behind security clearances. This viewpoint ignores the reasons the NSA keeps its capabilities classified, and provides readers with sensational but inaccurate information.

Is the NSA illegally violating the privacy of Americans?
The NSA’s collection of phone metadata came under especially heavy criticism in the wake of the Snowden disclosures. “Metadata” means data about data. In the context of phone calls, metadata records the phone numbers of the caller and recipient of a call, the length and time of the call, international mobile subscriber identity numbers, and calling card numbers. It’s unclear whether the NSA records the content of U.S. citizens’ phone calls.

The NSA collects metadata on virtually all phone calls that begin or end in the United States. However, if the NSA wishes to access this data it needs a specific warrant—issued by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court—against the person making or receiving the call in question. Each warrant requires clearly articulated probable cause. Despite having a vast collection of metadata, the NSA can only review and use that data in specific cases, which require it to obtain federally-issued warrants. The metadata collection program does not arbitrarily or maliciously violate an individual’s privacy.

What about reports of thousands of privacy violations?
If you choose to read other articles about the NSA, you will likely be confronted with a statement like this headline, taken from an article published in the Washington Post: “NSA broke privacy rules thousands of times per year, audit finds.” But of the 2,776 violations, 2,065 are irrelevant. These resulted when, after obtaining legal authority to search information, the target of the search had simply moved, prior to the search, without the NSA’s knowledge. Therefore, the NSA accidentally looked for information about unintended targets. Upon realizing this situation, the NSA’s oversight measures step in to make sure the NSA disregards and deletes the information.
The current legislation surrounding the National Security Agency (NSA) is already broad enough. Congress is concerned with what information the NSA can gather, while the agency expressly concerned with performing its explicit job with the best possible performance will use all the tools it has available. If any of these remaining incidents can be attributed to human error—an analyst accidentally typing a six instead of a seven. The remaining incidents can be attributed to programming errors or instances where individuals failed to follow the required operation procedure. In short, these incidents can be attributed to the errors that will occur naturally whenever a human is involved.

Does it seem just a tad suspicious that these errors are occurring hundreds of times a year? Yes, unless you take into account that these mistakes have all been caught by the NSA, corrected and reported in an audit written with the purpose of improving performance. Additionally, it turns out that the average accuracy rate of an NSA analyst is 99.99984 percent—meaning that from each analyst we can expect a mistake about once every ten years. I am willing to let someone off the hook for making a mistake once during a decade.

Other headlines have claimed that NSA analysts spy on their romantic interests. These claims aim to misrepresent the NSA by implying that this is a common practice. Digging deeper will reveal that this has only happened a handful of times during the last 10 years, and that all of these instances ended with the NSA employees in question being fired.

Looking at the actual practices of the NSA, its protocols, and allowing for the occasional human error, it seems unfair to accuse the agency of unlawfully violating the privacy of individuals. Additionally, one should note that the NSA does not control the nature of legislature concerning what information it can gather. An agency expressly concerned with performing its explicit job with the best possible performance will use all the tools it has available. If any of the practices of the NSA seem morally questionable then it actually makes more sense to direct outrage toward legislation, not the NSA itself.

How should Edward Snowden's actions be judged?

Keep in mind that Snowden released classified information, and in doing so committed actual crimes. Also keep in mind that the amount of information he disclosed was not all directly related to the NSA activities he thought immoral. These extraneous documents have actively damaged the NSA’s ability to gather intelligence information.

If Snowden was acting on a desire to foster national debate, his disclosures also failed miserably. News agencies have almost universally failed to accurately report on the NSA spying activities. In almost every instance they consciously misrepresented reality out of a somewhat transparent desire to create scandalous and sensational headlines. Therefore, Snowden has not fostered positive debate but enabled poor uninformed debate that might prove harmful to our intelligence agencies’ abilities to collect information and protect Americans.

Even another famous whistleblower, Frank Snepp, has denounced Snowden harshly. “Yes, he may have sparked an important national privacy debate,” said Snepp. “But he did so through reprehensible actions that harmed national security.” This statement comes from a man who, following the Vietnam War, also revealed classified information in an unauthorized manner.

It’s clear that news agencies have fallen prey to their incentive to write sensational stories at the expense of providing clear and accurate information to readers. They have, in many cases, clearly and intentionally misrepresented information, and in other instances unintentionally misrepresented information. Snowden’s releases have damaged national security and international relations, and have sparked an unreasonable public debate. Be your own judge of his actions—but before pronouncing him a hero, try to fully understand the situation.
Jeanette Espinoza spent five years of her life in a cold, concrete prison cell that was only big enough to hold a locker and two bunk beds.

She compares her stay in California’s notorious Dublin Prison with a college dorm—only take away the cushy lifestyle of freshman dormitories filled with boozy encounters and pot-smoking frat boys looking for a hook-up, and replace it with steel bars and a daily routine consisting of cold showers, shitty food, and a curfew. The Federal Correctional Institution, Dublin (FCI Dublin) is one of the largest and most cramped prisons in the U.S. Three inmates are forced to share one cell.

Jeanette describes her stay in prison as a reflective and scary time. “Prison is a mind frame. You can either choose to let it destroy you or rehabilitate you. I made a choice to better myself,” says Espinoza, sitting across the table at PSU’s Rogue’s Brewery. Looking at her fresh-faced complexion, you wouldn’t think you were speaking with a former convict. During our interview, she wears a navy blue tracksuit, her dirty blonde strands pulled back in a sleek bun, and she orders an ice water.

She currently manages a Subway restaurant on Portland State’s campus, where she’s worked for seven years. In fact, she began her job as a sandwich artist exactly one week after getting out of prison. That’s a pretty remarkable accomplishment.

Growing up in Medford, Ore., both Espinoza’s mother and father were drug dealers, but Espinoza was not. “I wasn’t about that.”

Espinoza was left alone to care for their daughter, who is now a best of friends, even from behind the prison glass. It took a lot of time, self-control, and focus to make her daughter proud of her mother. “I accepted my role as a citizen and didn’t particularly want to. “I accepted my role as a citizen and didn’t particularly want to. "I accepted my role as a citizen and didn’t particularly want to."

She currently manages the Subway below the Vue Apartments, where she began working exactly one week after her release.

Jeanette Espinoza spent five years in California’s notorious Dublin Prison. She currently manages the Subway below the Vue Apartments, where she began working exactly one week after her release.
Dark Glamour and Fast Money.

She was barely a teenager when Espinoza met her boyfriend, and found herself in the midst of drug dealers and drug users. She easily got wrapped up in the dark glamour and fast money of the drug world. “It becomes a way of life, and the money flows in like water,” says Espinoza. “It’s just convenient.”

But things get more complicated when you become pregnant with your first daughter at 15-years old, and your boyfriend is sent off to prison.

Espinoza was left alone to care for their daughter, who is now a senior in high school. They were once close. “We used to be the best of friends, even from behind the prison glass. It took a lot of adjusting for our relationship to maintain any sense of normalcy. There was still a lot of resentment.”

Despite being away from her daughter, Espinoza stayed busy and fulfilled numerous educational and fitness certifications in various subjects like Tai-Kwan-Do, Ceramics and Parenting. She was consistently an obedient inmate who never broke the rules, and didn’t particularly want to. “I accepted my role as a citizen who broke the law, and I was okay with that,” says Espinoza. “I never set out to get in any trouble. If you broke the rules, you were immediately sent to the hole until released by a prison guard. I wasn’t about that.”

With just a few months remaining on her sentence, Espinoza was sent to the YWCA halfway house in Portland. The YWCA, which no longer exists, was a transitional institution for felons who were about to be released back into modern society, but were still living as prisoners with set curfews. The only measure of freedom they were given was driving to work and back, and spending one to two hours per week on extra recreational activities like shopping at the mall or eating out, unsupervised.

It was here that Espinoza met Vicki Lee, director of operations of six Subway restaurants in Portland.

Lee, who just celebrated her 60th birthday, was also coming off a 23-month sentence at Geiger Corrections Center, located in Spokane, Wash., for medical billing fraud. “I ran a billing company for several years, and was basically taking people’s money,” says Lee, at her Subway office located on 3rd and Yamhill. “My self-esteem was low and I felt I needed to buy friends. It wasn’t until my forties that I decided to do something really stupid.”

Lee was 50 years old when she was released from prison, and was absolutely terrified of what her future held. Prior to her conviction, she had never been to jail, so you could imagine the built-up anticipation that resided in her. “I lost all sense of boundaries in prison. It was an enlightening and scary place to be,” claims Lee. “I really owe the majority of my success to Jim and Jodie Westing.”

The Westings.

Jim and Jodie Westing have been franchisee owners of six Subway restaurants for well over a decade.

Although Subway, as a company, does not set out to provide former convicts with an equal opportunity for employment, Jim and Jodie have dedicated their time and chain of restaurants to working with several second chance programs in Oregon.

“Without the help of Jim and Jodie Westing,” says Lee, “this would be an even sadder world.”

Lee began her career at Subway exactly one day after she got out of prison. She currently oversees six managers. Out of those six, four of them are ex-convicts, but she firmly states that they are, by far, her best employees. “They give 100 percent of who they are,” assures Lee, “and they’re all trying to better their lives—and most of the time, they’ve managed to succeed.”

Espinoza and Lee have much in common. They both have children. They both come from a lower socioeconomic status. They’ve both managed a Subway. They value honesty. They’re forgiving of themselves. They’ve both had to overcome major adversities. And they’re both former felons who can educate others about life on the opposite side of the track. How does anybody start their life over at 50? How does anyone start their life over after years in prison?

As of right now, both women are content working at Subway.

“I love my job and I love my managers,” says Lee.

Espinoza and Lee have much in common. They both have children. They both come from a lower socioeconomic status. They’ve both managed a Subway. They value honesty. They’re forgiving of themselves. They’ve both had to overcome major adversities. And they’re both former felons who can educate others about life on the opposite side of the track. How does anybody start their life over at 50? How does anyone start their life over after years in prison?

“How It Is.”

Most 22-year-olds are embarking on life-long and memorable adventures; Jeanette Espinoza began her adult journey behind the steel bars of prison walls. After being exposed to drugs at a young age, Espinoza has tried to maintain a traditional parent-daughter relationship, but it didn’t work the way she’d hoped. Espinoza’s relationship with her eldest daughter, who resides with her sister in Medford, has remained distant. “Things are definitely strained between us,” Espinoza says.

Espinoza is also mother of a four-year-old daughter, whom I meet one night while crossing paths near a local McDonald’s. They are headed inside the fast food chain for a bite to eat. When asked whether she plans on telling her daughter about her past, Espinoza replies, “I believe in complete honesty. I don’t believe in not being truthful. I plan on telling her how it is.”
Volunteer, Non-Violent, And Possibly Anarchist

Cameron Frank and Inna Levin talk about the “Inside Strategy” and the “Outside Strategy” of a new student organization.

There’s a new student organization here at PSU. They organized the Feb. 27 student walkout in support of the faculty strike, and they’ve got some great ideas on improving our experience in the state’s largest public university. The Spectator had a chance to interview two members and get down to the nitty gritty: what they’re about as an organization, what issues they’re working on, and their rigorous membership requirements.

The Spectator: I am sitting with the esteemed Cameron Frank and Inna Levin. These commies are trying to take over PSU. The name of your organization is...?

Cameron: “Soo Soo,” PSUSU.
Inna: The Portland State University Student Union.

The Spectator: So how are you all any different from ASPSU?
Inna: ASPSU for the most part is an elected student body with representatives that are appointed. Which is great. But they work within the administration, so there’s certain political relationships that they have to be responsible and mindful of when setting their agenda. Whereas PSUSU isn’t elected by anyone, it’s all volunteers, it’s a horizontal decision making structure.
**Cameron:** We don’t have a president. We don’t have a vice president. We just have… people, basically. [Laughs.]

**The Spectator:** So to be a member do you have to complete the Seven Wonders like American Horror Story?

**Cameron:** You have to fill out a form on the internet.

**The Spectator:** Really?

**Cameron:** Or just decide that you’re a member, that counts too.

**The Spectator:** Do you get a secret decoder ring?

**Inna:** We’re working on it…

**Cameron:** We’re going to get a 3D printer and we’re going to start making decoder rings.

**Inna:** We’re working on a secret handshake as well as a secret dance. [Laughs.]

**Cameron:** I’m not involved in that work.

**Inna:** Basically the only thing you have to do to be eligible for membership is be a PSU student. And the only people the members of PSUSU are answerable to are each other.

**Cameron:** To go back to the question in regards to the difference between PSUSU and ASPSU, it’s sort of like the difference between representative democracy and direct democracy. If you’re voting, you’re sort of giving up some of your agency to another person and concentrating power in their hands to do what they will with it, hoping that, ideally, they serve your best interests. PSUSU is more like direct engagement with your own circumstances, your own needs and the people around you to try to organize to make your school better. Also, PSUSU works outside of the bureaucratically acceptable means that the administration has laid out for students to participate in the university system with.

**Cameron:** We’re a nonviolent organization, not that I consider property damage to be violence. I don’t think breaking windows is an effective tactic for doing anything really. Aside from drawing a lot of negative attention to yourself.

**The Spectator:** Do you have any plans for violence in the future?

**Cameron:** No. None. None whatsoever.

**The Spectator:** So what are the most pressing issues that you all are dealing with, that you feel like nobody else is trying to tackle right now on campus?

**Cameron:** I don’t that nobody else is trying to work on the issues that we’re trying to work on. I think that it’s a matter of approach. I think that need an inside strategy and an outside strategy.

**Inna:** We work very closely with ASPSU. It’s been a really beneficial relationship to both organizations. They can interface with the administration in ways that we can’t because they don’t want to talk to us. Which is fine, because we can speak more directly to the student body and for the student body with the student body, if that makes sense?

**Cameron:** We’re working on stuff like administrative bloat, administrative pay. The average administrative salary here is something like $182,000 a year…

**Inna:** …compared to an average faculty salary, which is…

**Cameron:** …I don’t know off the top of my head…

**Inna:** It’s definitely in the lowest ten percent in the nation.

**Cameron:** The Oregon University System puts out a fact book every year. In the 2012 fact book they listed 19 peer universities for PSU, UO, and OSU. In that list of 19 universities, PSU ranked dead last in faculty pay. So, while students are paying more and more for education we’re getting less and less in return.

**The Spectator:** Why do you think that is?

**Cameron:** The folks in charge of dispersing that money ultimately have been…

**Inna:** …concerned with paying themselves more than they are with prioritizing other aspects of running the university.

**Cameron:** There’s a really good Oscar Wilde quote. “The expanding bureaucracy is expanding to meet the needs of the expanding bureaucracy.”

**Inna:** It’s always good to start the morning with an Oscar Wilde quote.
Higher Fees, Higher Profits, Higher One

Amended House Bill 4102 offers some changes, mostly compromise.

Editorial by Colin Staub

Higher One, the financial company responsible for Portland State University’s credit-card-like student ID cards, has long been a source of controversy. In particular, the fees charged to students have provoked anger, partially because they are not clearly explained to students and partially because the whole idea of borrowing money for school, only to have that money garnished by a financial firm whose existence is based solely on a university’s desire to offset costs, is rather revolting. (In case it’s unclear, this writer has had personal experience with Higher One’s “fee schedule”). After years of complaints and grievances, students will finally begin to see some improvement in the way Higher One handles student accounts.

Some improvement.

In early February, the Oregon Legislative Assembly read House Bill 4102, which aimed to bring college financial management firms under increased regulation. Requested by the House Interim Committee on Consumer Protection and Government Efficiency, the bill initially called for sharp changes to the way “student financial aid management firms” handle student accounts. Specifically, these financial firms would be prohibited from “deducting charges, fees or other administrative costs from a student financial aid account that the financial firm manages.” This would have addressed most of the complaints against Higher One, as its fees are generally the target of criticism. Unfortunately, this was too radical for the House.

On Feb. 17, the House passed the bill in its amended form. Its amendments fundamentally changed the nature of the bill—rather than prohibiting all charges and fees, the amended bill “requires the third-party financial firm to provide a student with a clear and concise fee schedule before the student agrees to open an account…” While this is undoubtedly a good idea, Higher One has long contended that it already makes its fees clear. According to a Nov. 2013 “Company Update,” Higher One claimed to “require that all account holders read and accept our fee schedule on a ‘pop up’ screen before they can even open an account.” It seems likely Higher One can contend that, on a basic legalistic level, it provides accurate disclosure of fees.

Why was the bill watered down? While it’s not explicitly stated, logic would dictate that too many restrictions could make Higher One less inclined to renew its contract with Oregon schools. And, as a document submitted by the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group (OSPIRG) during the House hearing acknowledged, “Colleges obtain revenues and reduce costs by outsourcing certain services to financial firms…” Naturally, colleges want to continue obtaining revenue and reducing costs, and overzealous legislation could stand in the way of that. Eric Noll, chair of the Oregon Student Association Board of Directors, acknowledged this compromise in a letter to the committee. “Passing [the amended bill] will not create an inhibition that prevents institutions from contracting with third-party firms,” he wrote, adding that, while the bill will not achieve the ideal outcome, it “represents a quality compromise between students, institutions and third-party firms…”

What is a “Quality Compromise?”

The bill will put a stop to some of the more outrageous Higher One fees, including a fee for a “merchant PIN-based transaction.” Although not charged at PSU, at other schools Higher One has charged a fifty-cent fee every time a student swiped a Higher One
Harris Foster, ASPSU student body president, says the bill in its final form will have two main effects. “It will increase transparency,” he says, pointing to the stipulations that will require Higher One to disclose specific information to account holders. Besides being clearly informed of fee schedules, students will be made aware of their options for financial aid disbursement, such as receiving a paper check or a wire transfer—alternatives to using a Higher One checking account.

In addition, the bill will reign in some of Higher One’s more extreme practices. “Higher One will become more comparable to other banks,” in terms of its fees and general practices, Foster claims. While this means there will still be fees charged to students, they will be in line with what would be expected of a normal bank. “There will still be overdraft fees, as most banks charge those,” Foster explains, “but charges like the swipe fee will be removed.”

The Oregon bill joins a growing recent effort to change how
Though Higher One was able to email me monthly telling me my statement was ready, they were unable to inform me that my account was then considered “abandoned,” and was going to be drained. I got to find that out for myself.

financial aid management firms, in particular Higher One, operate. Several of these efforts have been remarkably successful. In the same Nov. 2013 “Company Update,” the good people at Higher One reported that “we are always listening to our customers,” which sounds a lot better than, say, “responding to the multitude of lawsuits filed against us.” Regardless, as a response to their customers’ complaints, they removed the infamous “account inactivity fee,” which, after nine months of no account activity, would begin to drain a student’s account balance, at intervals of $19 per month. (This is the fee that got me. Oddly enough, even though Higher One was able to email me monthly telling me my statement was ready, they were unable to inform me that my account was then considered “abandoned,” and was going to be drained. I got to find that out for myself). The removal of this fee was a very positive move on the part of Higher One—it indicates some awareness that certain practices have been antithetical to student interests.

Fees, ATM Access, and Neutrality.

There is also an effort to increase regulation of college financial aid management at the national level. The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a Feb. 13 report on college debit cards. In the report, the GAO explained that “a growing number of colleges and universities have entered into agreements with financial firms to provide debit and prepaid card services for students.” As a result of this rapid increase, “questions have arisen over fees and issues such as student choice.” The report identified “fees,” “ATM access,” and “neutrality” as three significant concerns regarding financial aid management firms. The GAO found the same issues with fees as did the Oregon committee.

The ATM access issue was not mentioned in the Oregon bill, but it is pertinent at PSU. Higher One charges a $2.50 fee for using a Higher One debit card at a non-Higher One ATM. This is on top of any fee charged by the ATM itself, which often leaves students paying upwards of five dollars in fees just to withdraw funds. Again, the Higher One website has a simple solution for avoiding this fee. “Make sure you use FREE Higher One ATMs,” it says, with a link listing four Higher One ATMs on-campus at PSU. Below the list, however, it informs users: “Our ATMs are not accessible on your school’s campus 24 hours a day, 7 days a week,” which leads to the GAO’s “ATM Access” issue.

The report acknowledged that current Department of Education regulations require “convenient ATM access” be provided by the financial firms, and that the nine surveyed schools did not report significant issues with ATM access. But it recommended that “the Department of Education should specify what constitutes convenient access to ATMs,” because “the lack of a more specific definition may make avoiding unnecessary fees difficult for students when making cash withdrawals of federal aid.”

The “neutrality” issue identified by the GAO is also relevant to PSU and Higher One. The GAO’s report “found instances in which schools or card providers appeared to encourage students to enroll in a college card rather than present neutral information about payment options.” While the Oregon bill will require more detailed information about PSU students’ alternatives to Higher One, the fact remains that using a Higher One checking account ensures the fastest, easiest access to financial aid funds. PSU’s Financial Aid website identifies three methods of financial aid disbursement: “ACH Direct Deposit,” which has a “refund processing time” of “two to three days;” “Paper Check,” which “increases the time it takes to receive your refund to five or more days” and is “not recommended;” and, finally, “PSU One Account,” dubbed “Easy Refund,” which requires a checking account with Higher One and has a “refund processing time” of “one day.” It’s clear which option PSU would like students to employ.

As of press time, the Department of Education appeared receptive to the GAO’s recommendations, and “said it will address these issues in an upcoming process to develop new rules.”

It’s Just Too Profitable.

During all this discussion of regulation, there has been no push to remove companies like Higher One from the equation altogether. Presumably, it’s just too profitable for both schools and financial firms. “The Campus Debit Card Trap,” a 2012 report by U.S. PIRG, the national coalition of state public interest research groups, gave an example of this profitability. “A new contract between Ohio State University and Huntington Bank includes $25 million in payments to the school over 15 years,” it reported, adding that the contract “also includes an additional $100 million in lending and investment to neighborhoods surrounding campus.”

Removing fees, though, does a major blow to Higher One. Its 2013 revenue was $211.1 million, according to Marketwatch. The U.S. PIRG report found that 80 percent of Higher One’s revenue came from “account holder revenue (fees),” including “interchange fees, ATM fees, non-sufficient funds fees,” and more. This would indicate that, in 2013 alone, Higher One made $168.8 million from charging fees. Prohibiting any of these charges will undoubtedly cut into Higher One’s profit margin.

And a penny taken from Higher One is, truly, a penny saved for students.
Students at PSU have been required to maintain health coverage for over 20 years. The Student Health and Counseling (SHAC) website states that the majority of students use the PSU Student Health Insurance Plan, although students are allowed to opt out if they receive health benefits from another source. The goal of required coverage is to minimize students’ risk while attending the university.

Prior to the current plan offered through PSU, only basic accidents and illnesses were covered, with “set limits on how much it would pay per illness that were quite low and did not cover a number of important health related costs,” says Nick Walden Poublon, student health advisor and transgender health advocate for SHAC.

An alternative, optional plan has rates ranging from $700 to nearly $2,000 per term, in contrast to the current fee of $594 three times per year. “It became apparent as early as 2007 that neither of these plans were sustainable,” says Poublon.

With the shift to PSU’s current insurance plan, students are given “access to more coverage and benefits than [they] have ever [had] available,” says Poublon.

During the first two weeks of every term, SHAC invites students to drop in and get help understanding the plan by asking questions and receiving answers from the insurance team. They also provide informational workshops to students who would like to know more about the Oregon Health Exchange through Cover Oregon and to clear up any confusion about the Affordable Care Act.

Students are now given a $500,000 medical and prescription maximum per academic year, and there is no deductible with an Aetna provider. They are offered preventative, routine and specialized health benefits.

However, those who are enrolled in a comparable insurance plan with an outside provider may waive the Student Health Insurance Plan.

**How Easily Can You Opt Out?**

In order for domestic students to waive out of the PSU health insurance plan, they must have coverage that requires no more than a $2,500 deductible, including prescription drug coverage, mental health coverage, and at least 80 percent hospitalization coverage.

International students follow different criteria for the waiver process: they must either be on an Exchange Visitor non-immigrant visa, known as a “J visa,” and have purchased adequate health insurance before arrival in the United States, or their government or embassy must pay for their insurance, or they must have insurance through their spouse or parent’s U.S. employer.

Even if students decide to waive PSU’s health insurance plan, opting for outside coverage, all domestic students taking five or more in-load credits have access to the basic resources offered at SHAC, as their services are subsidized by the cost of tuition. All of the medical and counseling services offered at SHAC are free of cost—with the exception of those in need of blood work or x-rays, which need to be sent to an outside lab, or if specific medical equipment is required. Students also have access to dental care at significantly reduced costs.

**How Does PSU Stack Up Against “Cover Oregon”?**

As for Oregon’s new health exchange provided by Cover Oregon, individuals must lack access to affordable health insurance through employment in order to be eligible to apply for the services. Those wishing to gain coverage through Cover Oregon must fill out an online application, and will then receive information in the mail regarding their qualifications for different plans and what their monthly tax credit will be.

Upon assessment of their qualifications, individuals are invited to shop for insurance plans on the Cover Oregon website, where they will be able to see the monthly costs of each plan and how their tax credit will affect that expense. After their tax credit is assessed, “the individual then pays the difference, which depends on the sort of plan they select,” Poublon explains.

Many college students are young and may maintain that invincibility complex we hear about being common in youth. However, accidents do happen and everyone is at risk of being affected by illness at any given time. PSU’s health insurance requires every student to stay covered, one way or another. Whether students choose to maintain coverage through the university or to purchase a plan through the Cover Oregon exchange, while attending PSU you will be insured.
Don’t even mention the “C” word...

Compromise: A Four Letter Word?

It seems that compromise has become an art and skill of the past, like RSVPs and “thank you” notes. Many Republicans say they want to compromise and yet offer nothing but time worn ideas reconstituted, while Democrats seem incapable of encouraging them to do otherwise. Then again, when met with a brick wall, one can only slam one’s head against it so many times before giving up and searching for other avenues.

Brick Walls are Usually Red.

The founding fathers of this nation united thirteen free colonies—with varying ideas of what this “freedom” meant—into one nation founded on the principle of democracy, and did so by compromising with one another. Granted, some of the early compromises had to be settled later, and sometimes at great cost, such as slavery, which continued to divide the North and South—though many historians feel the Civil War was not actually fought over slavery but over states’ rights (the right of a state to make its own choices, i.e. Washington and Colorado legalizing marijuana in the face of federal laws), something the South felt it could no longer compromise on. At the time the aim was to form a lasting nation and not a neighboring conglomerate of bickering fiefdoms.

The Constitution, the document which makes it all work and has been called man’s greatest political achievement, is often referred to by Republicans as holy writ, though they have an inordinate ability...
I doubt the founding fathers would have foreseen or approved of a Howitzer or bazooka sharing an honored place by the family fireplace.

to misread and misquote it—an obvious case is the matter of gun control when facing the power of the National Rifle Association with its cash for campaigning and votes. They state that the constitution gives “the right of the people to keep and bear arms,” forgetting or ignoring the line which precedes this statement: “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State.” I doubt the founding fathers would have foreseen or approved of a Howitzer or bazooka sharing an honored place by the family fireplace beside the deer rifle used in securing dinner or warding off pesky redcoats.

A Different Plan?

When I began my political work, the individuals I worked for favored the following: cradle-to-grave health care for all citizens, free education for all, gun control, and affirmative action. Today, though we finally have a workable and all-encompassing health care program in the Affordable Care Act, we continue to debate, argue and curse one another over the program. It may have flaws, but these can eventually be ironed out. It is profoundly clear to me that the wealthiest nation in the world should, like other civilized nations, care for its citizens, and refuse to saddle them with massive health care costs.

The Republican side says it has offered substitute suggestions and compromises for everything. Where are these offers and programs? They have been against national health care for decades. They say, “We need more time to work on a better program.” They have had decades of time; it was a Republican candidate for president, Senator Barry Goldwater, who rushed home from a conference in the Pacific to catch a voting deadline in election year, and ran onto the Senate floor to vote a resounding “NO!” against Medicare. He was defeated. Perhaps like many claim today, he had a different plan. I think not.

How many school shootings, mall massacres and drive-by must we endure before we can compromise and come to our senses with a workable plan to control the violence?

A Loss of Statecraft.

In 1969, I debated soon-to-be Senator Bob Packwood on television regarding gun control, and all he could shout was, “Guns don’t kill people, people kill people,” and, of course, selectively quote the Constitution. How many school shootings, mall massacres and drive-by must we endure before we can compromise and come to our senses with a workable plan to control the violence? Of course, there are many other areas that must be considered and developed to stop the violence, but increase gun control is a start.

One of the problems with compromise during the Obama administration is that, though I support President Obama, I have to admit he did not serve long enough in the Senate before his election. He did not develop friends there.

Senators can work with one another to pass a favorite bill by compromising. President Lyndon B. Johnson and Vice President Hubert Humphrey were geniuses at this statecraft—they could pick up the phone and say, “Hey, remember that bill I helped you with? Well, I have this program I’d like you to help me with, and also a bill or two.” Hubert Humphrey passed more lasting and positive legislation in Congress than anyone else, in my opinion.

The Essential Tool of Politics.

Compromise is not a four letter word. Rather, it is the essential tool that allows us, in our daily situations, to move forward and to give and take—and for government to give and take toward the common good. Usually, anything held obsessively without compromise is dangerous and divisive without being worth the effort. This is a lesson that the so-called Tea Party, which has been a cross to bear for the Republican Party, needs to learn.

There is some hope on the horizon, though I feel that the Republicans’ decision to compromise and raise the Debt Ceiling is probably simply based on their desire to be able to return to their constituents in this next election year and say, “See, I told you about those free-spending big government Democrats!”

Inspiration and magnanimous thoughts are not common on the other side of the aisle. But one can hope that, in the coming months, we will all learn again to use the power and success of compromise and move forward toward more promising dawns. As I said in 1974, when I was a candidate for Congress in Washington state, “It is time to throw open the doors of that pompous private club on the Potomac and let some fresh air in!”

Alas, I was not elected, and the need still remains.
At the mention of spring break, even the most unimaginative amongst us can conjure rudimentary images of crowded pool parties and beaches writhing with tank tops and popped collars. We think of the neon-framed sunglasses and body shots of music videos and television. Vomitus cascading over dingy second story hotel balconies. Gnocchi and Patron buffets. Skrillex themed orgies. Dionysus's corpse strung above an Olympic-sized swimming pool. The great orchestra of higher education on hiatus. Is this a stereotype fueled by television and pop culture, or have I been missing out on some huge week-long secret for the past several years?

The term “spring break” carries with it a social expectation. There are gender and socioeconomic connotations that go along with spring break stereotypes—not many imagine the pale and greasy peeling themselves away from Skyrim to cavort on Daytona Beach. Obviously the adages of spring break are well known. The stereotype of fraternity and sorority shenanigans taking place on a large scale, somewhere warm, near water, and with lots of alcohol, can be observed in movies and advertising.

Marisa Bell, a friend of mine who was a member of a sorority in Missouri, sums up the spring break stereotype for me: "Day drinking, beach, frat tanks, neon clothes or bikinis, clubbing, all-inclusive resorts. Spring break is just a weeklong holiday in the life of a college student. It's the same as other party days but longer and all day."

From The Bahamas And Jamaica To Tour Bus Accidents And Wingless Chickens

One man's journey to validate his spring break experiences—or lack thereof
At the mention of spring break, even the most unimaginative amongst us can conjure rudimentary images of crowded pool parties and beaches writhing with tank tops and popped collars. We think of the neon-framed sunglasses and body shots of music videos and television. Vomitus cascading over dingy second story hotel balconies. Gnocchi and Patron buffets. Skrillex themed orgies. Dionysus’s corpse strung above an olympic-sized swimming pool. The great orchestra of higher education on hiatus. Is this a stereotype fueled by television and pop culture, or have I been missing out on some huge week-long secret for the past several years?

The term “spring break” carries with it a social expectation. There are gender and socioeconomic connotations that go along with spring break stereotypes—not many imagine the pale and greasy peeling themselves away from Skyrim to cavort on Daytona Beach. Obviously the adages of spring break are well known. The stereotype of fraternity and sorority shenanigans taking place on a large scale, somewhere warm, near water, and with lots of alcohol, can be observed in movies and advertising.

Marisa Bell, a friend of mine who was a member of a sorority in Missouri, sums up the spring break stereotype for me: “Day drinking, beach, frat tanks, neon clothes or bikinis, clubbing, all-inclusive resorts. Spring break is just a weeklong holiday in the life of a college student. It’s the same as other party days but longer and all day.”
That being said, she admits she hasn't actually experienced any of this. I think back on my own spring breaks: I am quite positive that more of my spring breaks have been spent in quiet, varying degrees of isolation than wild partying. I have most certainly imbibed more water than Jager bombs. I have touched myself more than anyone has ever touched me and I don't really like whip cream. Or chlorine. I turn to the world wide web.

Online, I find that airlines have whole pages of suggestions geared towards people looking to do things over spring break. There are suggestions just for students. Package deals. The website “cheapflights.com” beholds a pretty specific summary of spring break: “It’s that time of year when beer pong and bungee jumps are the games of choice, and MTV rules the beach house.” The website recommends Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., Cancun, Bahamas and Jamaica as prime destinations for college students.

After looking at this website, I pester my roommate. I yell up the stairs for her. She leans over the railing. “Hey what do you think of when I say ‘spring break’? Do you have any spring break stories?”

She looks down at me. “Uhhhh… Did we have spring break in High School?”

“I don’t really remember spring break.”

She looks at me sadly. The look that says, “You are an idiot.”

The look is oddly familiar. It’s all coming back. Meeting my friend Bruno Michele Mendoza. I had stepped out of a public shower in a hostel in Mexico and there was Michele cleaning a toilet. He leaned out of the stall and looked at me. I looked at him. He looked at me. He had a mop. Although I was wearing only a towel and sandals I wanted this man in the bathroom to know that I would never be so arrogant as to let another man mop up my body drainage. I clumsily tried to convey this in Spanish: “Pues...Hola! Debo hacer el limpiando por el piso?” He tilted his head. I tried a second time using my wet hand to grandly gesture to my puddle: “..Agua…ehh...mop?”

Luckily, he spoke flawless English, and we became friends. Currently Michele attends University in the city of Guadalajara in Mexico. The following interview happened in real time over a social media website:

**Ariel Devros**: Hey, do you celebrate spring break? What do you do?

**Michele Mendoza**: Hello little mermaid jeje. We have like 2 weeks off in like a month. We go to the beach and stuff! and u? when you are coming back?

**A**: Well I’m writing an article about spring break. So I figured I’d ask a Mexican student as well as Americans. Is it a big deal? The partying? Is it like in the movies?

**M**: Mmmm not really. Thats a really gringo thing. We go out to puerto vallarta o beach and its cool! Lots of people+alcohol+beach+music. But nothing like burning the house.

**A**: Oh. Have you ever drunk alcohol out of someones belly button?

**M**: Yes but not on spring break. Hehe. Google vallartaso. Thats our spring break

**A**: Okay. What do most Mexicans think of the gringos coming down to party in Mexico? Is it annoying? Or fun?

**M**: Some times its annoying! Because prices go up! And everyplace its full of americans! They will let them in first and stuff like that! They go crazy. But not everyone its like that. You can find cool people to hang out and get with together. Its annoying because they are younger than us and some time their first time drinking! They get in an ashoole teenage attitude! Rude, racist some ill like it cause its fresh meat! And easy to get laid.

**A**: Interesting...okay this is perfect. Thank you.

Following the interview, I Google this “Vallartaso” that my amigo had suggested.

A series of videos. I watch the first one. It’s a series of pictures set to “Shake That” by 50 Cent. So far so good. I watch overweight men drinking beer and smoking cigarettes in the back of a pickup. That seems strangely spring-like to me. Then there are pictures of the same men, beers in hand, wearing Lucha Libra masks frolicking in the waves, the beach-front high rises of Puerto Vallarta in the background. The next few minutes seem to be a bunch of surreptitiously taken photos of female behinds in bikinis. I turn the video off. Is this what Bruno wanted me to see? I talk to him again and ask him what “vallartaso” means and what was happening in that video. He explains that “vallartaso” is slang for “in Puerto Vallarta” and the area is known for it’s beach parties.

Emboldened by my interview with Bruno, I decide to talk to a particularly interesting friend of mine who has attended two different universities, one in Los Angeles, the other in New York City. There are bound to be spring break experiences locked away in the slimy coils of her brain. Using the element of surprise, I call her up unexpectedly.
A: Can I interview you for an article?
Lillian Weber: Yeah sure, what about?
A: Spring break. Are you at home right now?
L: No, I’m on my way to work. You realize I don’t take spring break, I’m not in school.
A: Well you have been in school. Do you have any spring break stories? Did you party? Has anyone ever eaten whip cream off your body? Have you ever eaten whip cream off of someone?
L: No, to all of those.
A: So, what do you think of when you think of spring break?
L: Is this the interview? I don’t know, I mean I guess it’s kind of inevitable these days to think of that movie [Spring Breakers, see page 26]. But nobody I knew in college was into that whole Cancun/“Girls Gone Wild” kind of situation. Like, we knew it existed but I don’t remember it ever seeming like something we’d want to actually do. It was just a week off school.

I decide to turn to a man whom I have known for a long time. A man who has seen a lot and done a lot. He is taller than me. Stronger than me. And his hair is longer than mine.

One night, we have plans to go to a show together. He rolls up to my house in his car, wearing his leather jacket. I ease myself into interview mode, and say, “Thanks for the ride… Dad. So did you ever go anywhere for spring break? Do anything exceptional?”


“How many spring breaks did you have?”

“Well we travelled during the summer too. It was great. Just loaded up the van and we’d all go camping. Once we had some extra time so a friend and I hitchhiked from the Grand Canyon to Lake Tahoe. Then we decided to hitchhike back home to St. Louis. We got picked up by this young black guy in a pimped out Cadillac near Denver. He was heading to Salina. I drove for a bit so he could sleep, and those rednecks weren’t friendly at all. Two hippies and a black dude driving a Cadillac in Kansas? When we stopped for breakfast we were getting vibed out. I think the only reason we didn’t get our butts kicked was because it was a Sunday. Folks were on good behavior.”

He pauses for a bit to watch the road and steer back into his lane.

“Yeah, another time I saw a tour bus in Glacier get in an accident. The driver had fallen asleep and crashed into the cliff side of the ‘Going to the Sun’ Road. There were bloody people everywhere. I helped bandage some people up while an EMT took care of the gorier stuff. Pretty intense.”

This makes me wonder about all the stories he hasn’t told me.

***

Later, while preparing a chicken dinner, I ponder all that I’ve learned from the people around me. I think fondly of conversations. There’s nothing I’m missing out on. No great exclusion taking place. I’m validated as a normal human being. I look at my future dinner. A whole chicken waiting to be roasted. Nested root vegetables and olive oil and salt. A dusting of paprika makes the yellowed and bunched skin look uncomfortably appetizing. But something isn’t quite right… is my chicken uneven? There are two legs but there is only one wing. My chicken only has a right wing. I flip it around, inspecting its floppy body. Has it been born this way? Was the wing lost in the gnashing machines of industrial meat production? Is this a message? What does it mean for spring break? There isn’t much I can do. I check the plastic wrap. No wing. I look on the ground just in case. Still no wing. I look where its left wing should be. There are no discernible clues. The oven beeps. I return the carcass to the bed of vegetables and slide my chicken into the oven. It’s a mystery. I may die never knowing the answer. ☝️
How to make perfect chocolate chip cookies... with science!!

By Matt Reynolds

You are currently about to enjoy Part 2 of “Cookie Madness,” continued from our February Issue, on how to bake the best chocolate chip cookies tailored to your taste buds. Previously we covered eggs, butter, and experimenting with your flour, baking soda, and salt. Now let’s dive into sugar.

The trick with sugar is to let some dissolve, and some remain granular. This allows the sugar to caramelize during the baking process and provides greater depth in the flavor and texture of your cookies. To achieve this you can mix in some of your sugar before adding your browned butter, then mix the rest in with your browned butter so that it will dissolve.

White sugar does not have the acids required for the necessary baking soda reactions to occur. If you use only white sugar, less gas will be released during baking and the cookie will be thin, spread out, and crispy. On the other hand, brown sugar does contain the acids for these reactions and a cookie baked using only brown sugar will be tall, moist, and less widely spread. Brown sugar also caramelizes more easily than white sugar, so if you are especially keen on a caramel flavor to your cookies, going heavier on the brown is the way to go. An unbeatable mixture of these two sugars, according to your desired cookie height, spread, and caramel-ness, will only be unveiled through trial and error. When working your way through test batches keep in mind the true satisfaction you will have with the cookie that is perfectly crafted to your tastes.

Depending on your butter preference, the eggs, vanilla, sugar and butter will be mixed together in different ways. If you are browning your butter, adding the butter and some brown sugar together after the vanilla, eggs, and white sugar have been mixed works well. If you are creaming your butter, adding all ingredients at the same time works fine.

After this mixing stage, it’s time to add your liquid mix to your dry mix. Pour your egg-sugar-butter-vanilla mix to your flour-baking soda-salt mix. This stage, like all other stages, gives you an opportunity to control your cookie outcome.

More well-kneaded dough will give you a smoother cookie while less well-kneaded dough will give you a complex texture. My preference is for a more complex texture, so I try not to knead the dough too much.

In most recipes, this is also the stage where you incorporate your chocolate. Everyone has different preferences for chocolate; at this point, it makes sense to go with chocolate you really like. The type of chocolate you choose can impact the baking process. You can buy chocolate as chips, chunks, or bars that can be chopped. Standard chocolate chips and chunks come prepared for ease of use, but chopped chocolate will provide an interesting mix of flakes and chunks that will give your cookie’s texture some diversity.

When mixing in your chocolate, do not forget that chocolate...
will begin to melt at around 95 degrees Fahrenheit. This can change the composition of your dough in interesting ways and is worth experimenting with. Try placing your dough in or near your preheating oven to warm it up and see how that affects the consistency of the chocolate throughout the dough.

An important step, one that appears in many of the recipes I viewed, is to let your dough sit in an airtight container in your refrigerator overnight. This allows time for some of the starches and proteins to begin breaking down and improves the flavor of your cookies. Waiting is not going be easy, but trust me on this.

Even Mr. Chocolate, the renowned pastry chef also known as Jacques Torres, tells you to wait!

The last major concern when baking cookies is the temperature that you bake them at, and how long to bake them. How hot you set your oven and how long you bake your cookies will depend on your preferences, like everything else, but there are some important considerations to keep in mind. Caramelization begins at 356 degrees Fahrenheit, so I strongly recommend this as a minimum temperature for consideration, but there are numerous recipes that only call for 350 degrees Fahrenheit. On the issue of bake time, I have seen recipes call for anywhere from 11 to 20 minutes, but this will be primarily determined by your preferences. I tend to set the oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit and cook my cookies for about 12 minutes.

**Some recipes to consider:**

Looking for a starting point to develop your own recipe? Here are two good recipes to get you started that are only a quick Google search away. If you search for “The Food Lab best cookies,” you can find a link to the recipe by Kenji López-Alt. He also has a fairly incredible discussion of cookies and even further discussions on vanilla extract, as well as the differences between baking soda and powder, in his blog, The Food Lab.

Alternatively, you can search for “Jacques Torres cookies” and find a link to his recipe published in the New York Times. Several authors have referred to this recipe as infamous.

Now go make some cookies and enjoy life a little more. The perfect cookie is hard to find, but the road to deliciousness is paved with tons of test cookies... so I don’t see too much to complain about! 🍪

---

Understand what you defend.
The Institute of World Politics has the only graduate program in national security and international affairs that gives its students an understanding of American founding principles and the Western moral tradition.

www.iwp.edu
202.462.2101
THE INSTITUTE OF WORLD POLITICS
A Graduate School of National Security and International Affairs
Spring Break Forever

The unexpected substance of “Spring Breakers”

Spring break is approaching. As droves of college students descend on popular spring break locations, others will stay where they are, barred by finances, distance, and possibly commitments to morality. If you are staying put this March, you may find yourself wanting to live vicariously, and, noticing the 2013 film “Spring Breakers” streaming online, you may decide to put it on and enjoy a couple hours of mindless, hedonistic entertainment.

You’re in for a disappointment. This is a film of surprising depth. The basic premise involves four college girls who desperately want to get away from their school to join their classmates on the beach in Florida. But they lack the necessary funds, so they rob a local restaurant. Once in Florida, they find everything they ever wanted. It’s all it’s cracked up to be… until it isn’t. Drugs, drinking, partying, then an arrest, which leads to the girls meeting an interesting local character who fundamentally changes their spring break experience.

But beneath this straightforward plot, there are striking thematic and stylistic elements to the film.

There are questions of morality. Is the price of paradise worth it? Faith (Selena Gomez), is the most straight-laced of the girls, and didn’t participate in the robbery. She struggles with this dilemma—she is aware of the crime that funded the trip, but she is also having the best time of her life. “I know you did a really bad thing,” she says. “But I’m really glad you did it. I feel...better here.” But she can’t hide her shock when her friends (Ashley Benson, Vanessa Hudgens, Rachel Korine) re-enact the robbery in front of her, repeating everything they yelled at their victims. “You gotta learn, man,” they tell Faith, suggesting that she’ll get whatever she wants if she becomes like them. But she can’t mesh the violent robbery with her overwhelming enjoyment of their experience in Florida, and she simply shakes her head, turning away from them.

The film examines the influence of pop culture. From the opening sequence we see loads of college students seemingly re-enacting MTV music videos, scantily-clad women, the whole works. Same old, same old. But the film looks at pop culture through other lenses as well. We see Alien (James Franco), the drug dealer/rapper who befriends the girls, as a ridiculous hyperbole of hip-hop culture. I was reminded of Krazee-Eyes Killah from “Curb Your Enthusiasm” (Killah was thinking about getting a plasma TV and playing “Scarface” 24/7; Alien already does this). Alien is unabashed about his materialistic lifestyle, flaunting his possessions as demonstrative of his status. “Look at my shit!” he yells, over and over.

But the most surprising comment on pop cultural influence, coming from a movie about college girls on spring break, is the question of fictional violence influencing real violence. As the girls prepare for their robbery to obtain money for their vacation, they tell each other to “pretend like it’s a video game. Act like you’re

The film questions ideas of dreams versus reality. Can paradise be forever.” Her friends look confused, possibly because they don’t see that as a nice idea. But Faith knows it—she says, “I think paradise has to end, and a subsequent arrest is the thing to end it. “This isn’t doing. But Faith knows it—it’s what they see that as a nice idea

The style means ignoring the whole movie. But a summary ignores the thematic out by a drug and arms dealer.” But a summary ignores the thematic and stylistic elements of the film, and in “Spring Breakers,” ignoring the depiction of the criminal world in Florida—both Alien and Hudgens, Rachel Korine) re-enact the robbery in front of her, repeating everything they yelled at their victims. “You gotta learn, man,” they tell Faith, suggesting that she’ll get whatever she wants if she becomes like them. But she can’t mesh the violent robbery with her overwhelming enjoyment of their experience in Florida, and she simply shakes her head, turning away from them.

The film examines the influence of pop culture. From the opening sequence we see loads of college students seemingly re-enacting MTV music videos, scantily-clad women, the whole works. Same old, same old. But the film looks at pop culture through other lenses as well. We see Alien (James Franco), the drug dealer/rapper who befriends the girls, as a ridiculous hyperbole of hip-hop culture. I was reminded of Krazee-Eyes Killah from “Curb Your Enthusiasm” (Killah was thinking about getting a plasma TV and playing “Scarface” 24/7; Alien already does this). Alien is unabashed about his materialistic lifestyle, flaunting his possessions as demonstrative of his status. “Look at my shit!” he yells, over and over.

But the most surprising comment on pop cultural influence, coming from a movie about college girls on spring break, is the question of fictional violence influencing real violence. As the girls prepare for their robbery to obtain money for their vacation, they tell each other to “pretend like it’s a video game. Act like you’re
in a movie or something.” And they do, using lines that would be ridiculous if they were not so purposefully cliched—these girls are acting out what they’ve seen in movies. This notion continues throughout the movie. Near the end, as the girls climb into a speedboat with Alien at the controls, the camera hovers behind and slightly above the actors, and the shot would be right at home in “Grand Theft Auto.” The voiceovers repeat, “Pretend like it’s a video game. Act like you’re in a movie or something.”

The film questions ideas of dreams versus reality. Can paradise last? “You know what would be really cool?” Faith asks her friends. “If you could freeze life… and just say, ‘This is the way it’s going to be forever.’” Her friends look confused, possibly because they don’t see that as a nice idea—it’s what they are doing. But Faith knows it has to end, and a subsequent arrest is the thing to end it. “This isn’t supposed to happen,” she says, showing her growing disillusionment with their situation. “This wasn’t the dream. It’s not supposed to end this way.” When reality finally catches up with her dream, she bails. She realizes paradise cannot last. Her friends find a way to prolong the experience, altering their dreams to fit with their new circumstances.

Dreams are a recurring theme in the film. “It was so nice to get a break from reality for a little while,” the girls say. When Faith becomes disenchanted, she says that “this wasn’t the dream.” Alien looks at the girls and says, “I must be dreaming.” As he tells them about his lifestyle, he explains, “This is my dream. I made it come true.” Later, as he and the girls approach the climax of the film, we hear his voice-over: “Seems like a dream… seems like a dream…” It’s as if everything that takes place in Florida is wrapped up in dreams. Not to mention the American Dream theme that surrounds the depiction of the criminal world in Florida—both Alien and his rival think of themselves as self-made men who rose to the top. Alien’s rival somewhat ridiculously announces, while in bed with several women, “I feel like I’m livin’ the American Dream.”

It’s as if everything that takes place in Florida is wrapped up in dreams.

All of this is portrayed in a surreal style. The most striking stylistic element is the color. From the beginning of the film, neon colors abound. Sitting in class, laptop screens reflect a neon rainbow onto students’ faces. The girls’ clothing is vibrant always, their shoes, shorts, and tank-tops appearing stark against the drab background of their college campus. Once they arrive in Florida, the effect intensifies. They sit at a hotel pool, and the scene is visually hypnotic: the neon-blue water, purple swimsuits, red overhead light, neon-green grass, reddish-purple hue. Every color of the dayglo rainbow is present. This shot cuts back and forth with a stained-glass window from Faith’s church, in which every color is also represented.

The surreality is compounded by the frequent voiceovers that pervade the film. At times phrases are repeated by alternating characters, and we’re not entirely sure what they mean. But at all times they add to the dream-like nature of the movie. They also provide insight into the characters’ minds. Consider a scene in which Faith speaks to her grandmother on the phone. “The people here are so much fun… they’re all really sweet,” she says, as we see scenes of one of the girls surrounded by drunken, shady guys. “You would love it here.” How can Faith see such a different reality than we do? “We’re fine, we’re safe.”

This is a movie that is not so much about its plot, but about how it presents its plot. Which is not to say the plot is uninteresting, only that it takes a secondary role to the film’s deeper elements. The movie is easily summarized, and does not suggest a story of many layers—from the IMDb synopsis: “Four college girls hold up a restaurant in order to fund their spring break vacation. While partying/drinking/taking drugs they are arrested only to be bailed out by a drug and arms dealer.” But a summary ignores the thematic and stylistic elements of the film, and in “Spring Breakers,” ignoring the style means ignoring the whole movie.

This is a multi-faceted film of surprising depth and stunning visuals. “Spring Breakers” feels like a combination of “Miami Vice,” “Drive,” and Terrence Malick, with elements of “The Beach” thrown in as well.

For mindless, vicarious hedonism, stick with “National Lampoon’s Spring Break” (streaming on Amazon!).
DON'T LET YOUR VOICE GET ABDUCTED

SUBMIT WRITING, PHOTOGRAPHY, AND ART TO
PDXSPECTATOR@GMAIL.COM