



The Dartmouth Review

Dartmouth's Only Independent Newspaper

The Punishment Does Not Fit the 'Crime'

by Alexander Harrison

Wah-hoo-wah! There, I've done it. I have espoused a traditional, and by some views racist, cheer. I have done it in a public forum, and although I may be sober, my cheer is directed at everyone—both those who might be offended and those who aren't. Scalp 'em, scalp 'em!

Thus far, the debate surrounding the Psi Upsilon chanting incident has centered around the rights of those involved. The Anonymous victim's rights, the fraternity's rights, the chanters' rights, and the Dartmouth Community's right to an appropriate atmosphere have all been fiercely defended. Perhaps most discussed are the rights of the Anonymous victim. However, while she has many defensible rights, the 'right' not to be offended is not one of them.

Whether or not the chanting at Psi U was offensive—nay, disgusting—has already been agreed upon. From Deans to editorialists to minority organizations to the two fraternity members, everyone with a voice to be heard has denounced the actions of that night as wrong and bigoted. However, if I were to walk outside this moment and scream "wah-hoo-wah, scalp 'em," I would not be violating anyone's rights, but merely expressing an opinion. If I yelled it at a passing girl, I would not be violating her rights, but rather offending her. Dean of Residential Life Redman's treatment of Psi U suggests otherwise.

The fraternity is being punished in part for violating the college's Principle of Community. While that document certainly condemns bigoted and harassing behavior, it also staunchly defends every community member's right to be heard. The Principles of the Dartmouth Community states that "The College...both fosters and protects the rights of individuals to express dissent."

Hillary Miller, writing in the Dartmouth, likens the "Wah-hoo-wah" chant's hateful message to the traditional fraternity Indian jackets. Indeed, many students are offended by both expressions. Perhaps Dean Redman should punish any student found wearing this symbol, as the jackets represent bigotry and offend many. Wouldn't Dartmouth be a friendlier place without the jackets? What would be so wrong with prohibiting a few jackets and punishing students uttering a hateful cheer? Perhaps this column offends you; perhaps harsher censorship would create a community that offends even fewer people. Fortunately, the college fosters and protects the rights of individuals to express dissent.

That Will Hughes' and Gene Long's chant was disgusting and bigoted is a mute point. It is not the college's business to adjudicate the sensitivity of opinions, regardless of what dissent is expressed. That the chanting was based on a traditional college sports cheer is irrelevant as well. Expressions of opinion are 'fostered' and 'protected' by Dartmouth, as the Principle states. Dean Larimore's open letter to The Dartmouth on March 2nd diplomatically addressed the Psi U situation in an attempt to draw our community together in the face of divisiveness and hate. However, as he wrote, "the world needs people who are willing to speak their minds." The Dean might not want to forget that the world needs people with minds unlike his own as well.

That said, it is not this writer's responsibility to interpret the Principle of Community; it is the Greek Judicial Committee's responsibility. The JC decided to address the behavior of Hughes and Long by holding Psi Upsilon responsible for the actions of its members. Surely the Committee based its decision on the Student Handbook's Group Accountability Statement, which declares, "unacceptable behaviors by individuals functioning as members or officers of a student organization may have consequences for those individuals as well as for the organization." The issue of free expression aside, the college's response to "Wah-hoo-wah" was very, very wrong.

Even if the Administration could justly find a reason to restrict student expression, Dean Redman unjustly tied the behavior of two brothers to their entire house. A student organization should be held accountable for its members' actions only when those actions are tied to that organization. If a Greek House's social chair is caught buying kegs of beer for his or her members, then the fraternity or sorority should be punished as a body, since the infraction relates to all members and not just the social chair.

Whom should the college punish if two house members were caught plagiarizing? Even if those two members were caught cheating on their house's property, surely the entire brotherhood should not be Parkhurst. Part of maturing beyond our teens is the need to take personal accountability for our actions. Both Long and Hughes took accountability for their actions, and, even if the Administration deems their chant as punishable, a group of seventy students should not be punished along with them for what was clearly individual behavior.

The chant was not in conjunction with a house activity, was not condoned by house officers, and certainly does not relate to the functions of Psi U as an organization. Some of the most embarrassed and disgusted members of our community regarding the chant are other brothers of Psi U; why should they be punished for the transgression of another?

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Perhaps Dean Redman would answer by citing the social and cultural functions of fraternities and that Mr. Long and Mr. Hughes were chanting from house property, intimidating Ms. Anonymous in their roles as 'fratguys', perched upon the social and physical support of their fraternity. Or perhaps Dean Redman is leveraging the campus outrage to clamp down upon a Greek House as part of an overall, concerted effort to drive the entire system from Hanover. Any violation of college policy was made by the two men as individuals, and although they stood upon the Psi U building while chanting, they did it not as representatives, but as individuals.

Perhaps the most egregious aspect of the college's behavior is the nature of punishment handed down to Psi U. Is it not the hope of our community that responses taken will ultimately ameliorate the social divisions and create a more open environment at Dartmouth? Immediately after learning what had taken place, the Psi U brotherhood took actions to repair the damage Hughes and Long had inflicted. Days following the chant, the brotherhood met with Sigma Delt to discuss gender experiences, sexism and harassment at Dartmouth and more specifically, what actions members could take to bring people closer together and further from the hurt inflicted. The fraternity's officers invited members of Native Americans at Dartmouth (NAD) to Psi U and the resulting discussion centered around bigotry and the use of an Indian as an icon and mascot in the community. Psi U officials are currently planning more such events, and had been well before the Judicial Committee first met. Ironically, it is here that the organization of this fraternity became relevant. The brotherhood punished its own and is working collectively to heal the damage inflicted by two of its members.

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If Dean Redman found that the house's own actions, which included severe individual punishments for the two chanters, did not go far enough to heal the wound inflicted, then he should have demanded further public and private social action from the house. Simply put, the punishment should fit the crime. If two brothers had thrown a brick through a window, it seems just that they should have to pay for and repair the damage done. They should pick up the proverbial glass. Similarly, if a Greek House were caught buying illicit kegs, they should not be allowed to serve alcohol for some time, creating a dry basement as punishment for an improperly wet one. Where, then, is the link between

"Wah-hoo-wah" and social probation?

The disconnect between Long's and Hughes's chant and the resulting organizational punishments becomes evident when light is shed on the process by which social probation was chosen.

Both the chair of the Judicial Committee and the President of the Coed Fraternity Sorority Council expressed disapproval when Deans Redman and Barnhardt overruled the Judicial Committee's punishment (which included extensive programming initiatives) and put Psi U on probation. "Adjudication in an institution of higher education ... is an educational process," commented Assistant Dean Barnhardt. What does that mean anyway? Could anyone obfuscate more skillfully?

Although the punishment does not fit the 'crime' and although an organization is being unfairly held accountable for two student's actions, the trumping issue here remains free speech. One cannot help but recall a 1993 event at the University of Pennsylvania, which is best summarized in the words of a Candace de Russy book review entitled, "Where the Water Buffalo Roam":

"This convoluted incident began when Penn freshman Eden Jacobowitz, attempting to write a class paper, was disturbed by a boisterous group of female students celebrating in the early hours beneath his dorm window. Exasperated, Jacobowitz threw open his window and shouted, "Shut up, you water buffalo!" Because the revelers were black, he was soon hauled before Penn administrators on charges of racial harassment. After much-publicized hearings that brought a new wrinkle to the accusation "McCarthyite," the campus retreated and Jacobowitz was exonerated."

The differences between this and the Dartmouth debacle include the racial anonymity of the victim and the overtly racist tone of the "Wah-hoo-wah" chant. These details, however, become irrelevant when stood next to the granite pillar of free expression. As much as Hughes and Long's chant may offend some, we must all be allowed to express ourselves, in jest or seriousness. The anonymous student believes she has a right to walk through life and not be offended. While it was certainly her right to publicize the occurrence, which is both a brave and good thing to do for our community, punishing dissenting opinions encumbers and insults Dartmouth's public forum.

Surely Dean Redman understands this point; why then were the students punished for their words? Why was the fraternity immediately held accountable for individual behavior neither sanctioned nor promoted by the organization? Psi U took immediate and severe action in punishing Gene Long and Will Hughes and at the same time began a process of communal discourse with sororities and minority organizations.

Why then was the house put on social probation? "It seems to be boiled down to being for or against the Greeks. Either you are angered by the incident and are thus in favor of abolishing the Greek system, or you think the whole thing has been blown out of proportion and have no real problems with the Greek system. Where is the middle ground?", asks Linda Romano in *The Dartmouth*. Perhaps the incident has become a pawn for the Administration to pursue its other community goals. This would explain the severity and unfairness that characterize Psi U's punishment.

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The Administration's handling of 'The Wah-hoo-wah incident' illustrates just how much Dartmouth has changed. Well, hopefully this house's probation has made some students feel better about their community. Hopefully prohibiting Psi U from drinking beer will reduce bigotry on campus yet retain our open forum of expression. Let's not forget, the Principles of the Dartmouth Community states that "The College... both fosters and protects the rights of individuals to express dissent." I've finished writing, and now I think I might venture out to the Green and issue forth a loud, free "Wah-hoo-wah"! I am sorry if you are offended, but, for now, we all have the right to offend each

other.

(more from [Administration](#), [Free Speech](#), [On Campus](#), [The Arts](#), [The Greeks](#))

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"Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win great triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat."

-Theodore Roosevelt

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