IS A SEARCH WARRANTED?
Leeor Schweitzer

This past year at Monte Carlo and Crystal Ball, the students of this college lined up at the side entrance of Hicks Student Center so that they may be checked off of a list and searched before entering the dance. While many were reminded of airport security, the searches were not looking for signs of weapons or potential for violent outburst, but for a much more dangerous foe: alcohol. As a private institution holding an event on private premises, the college was fully within its legal rights. While the college did not need a warrant to search us, I would like to reflect on a different question: were the searches warranted?

The intent of searching each person was to decrease drinking on a night when most people drink, and many drink more than is healthy for them. It is not at all clear that these searches achieved that aim. While some claimed that the events themselves were tamer than last year, others noticed no difference. Furthermore, if people who drank too much are turned away at the door and go sit alone in their rooms they may be in even greater danger than if they had stayed surrounded by others. I would hope that the health of all students is the top priority for Student Development.

But regardless of whether the searches were effective or not in promoting their goal, I believe there are much deeper issues, which should cause us to think twice before proceeding with these searches. It is a common notion that giving up liberty for the sake of safety should always be treated with extreme suspicion and caution. It is for this reason that so many people oppose programs such as Bush’s warrantless wiretapping programs.

From Bush’s perspective, why should one worry if one is not doing anything wrong? At which point we can question why they even bothered to draft the fourth amendment. I am not trying to argue that major violations of our rights and liberties happened this year on campus, but I do think we should be cautious. A search is a very invasive act. It breeds mistrust, patronizes students, and deeply violates privacy. Searches are still occasionally necessary for safety reasons – such as in airports – or when there is reasonable suspicion that a person is violating the law. Alcohol does not breech that safety in any way that I can imagine.

We should continue to be wary of repeated, unwarranted intrusions. The extent to which students act responsibly and safely at dances will not be improved by searches; indeed, they may be counterproductive to such ends. I would encourage students not to passively accept such violations of our privacy.

WHY A PROGRESSIVE PUBLICATION?
Editorial Board

So what is our agenda, as we set out to create this progressive publication? What are our goals?

Quite simply, it is our hope that this publication will spark discussion. That it will provide food for thought about the issues that face our campus, our country, and our world. We do not have a hidden agenda, or a party line to promote. We have simply asked people with interesting opinions to share them with us and with you.

We hope that this publication will provide a forum for a debate about what it means to be “progressive.” What are the values that we share and how do we work to express these shared convictions? We hope that this debate will produce collaboration and understanding, but we also hope that it will allow us to challenge each other’s assumptions and ideas with the goal of broadening our personal and collective consciousness of issues with which we are constantly and inevitably confronted.

We hope you enjoy this inaugural issue of The ZooKeeper.

BEYOND CHOICES AND CHECKBOXES: THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT THE LIBERAL ARTS
Robert Foley & Andrew Tyner

Out of a multi-year process of research, discussion, proposals, and debates, the faculty has approved a new curriculum which promises both to affirm student agency and autonomy while ensuring an education marked by a breadth and depth of disciplines. This new curriculum, we are told, is a reaction against an onerous and alienating system of requirements that substituted process for passion and checkboxes for the liberal arts. The opposition has claimed that the new curriculum undermines the liberal arts tradition by failing to acknowledge that students may too readily follow their passion to the exclusion of intellectual and disciplinary diversity. We acknowledge that both arguments have merit, insofar as the aim is to achieve breadth. But both sides of the debate miss the mark when they equate breadth with a liberal arts education. Equally, if not more, important to a liberal arts education is the fostering of critical thought, without which a breadth of coursework remains ineffective and inapplicable.

What is meant by our use of the phrase “critical thought?” Much of the discussion of what comprises both liberal arts

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**HUMAN RIGHTS AND ENGAGEMENT WITH IRAN**

*Carolyn DeChants*

In a thought-provoking article published in *The New Republic*, entitled “In Which We Engage”, Leon Wieseltier explores the role of human rights in the President Obama’s foreign policy and expounds upon a classic international relations conundrum: liberal ideals versus pragmatic realist strategies. While Wieseltier lauds the administration’s diplomatic engagement with various governments and regimes, he also has a sobering reminder: “But sooner or later we will hit the limit of what conscience can bear. There are only so many tyrants and terrorists we can engage before we stain our principles, before the politesse becomes repulsive.” Wieseltier’s comment raises a tough question: when does dialogue with a rights-abusing regime stop being diplomatically constructive and begin to be interpreted as a tacit acceptance of undemocratic practices?

This question is particularly relevant given recent developments in the U.S.’s policy towards Iran. President Obama sent a recorded video message to Iranian citizens, marking the Iranian holiday of Nowruz. Many analysts noted that the President’s use of Iran’s official name, The Islamic Republic of Iran, was a signal to Iranian officials that his administration would not continue the Bush administration’s policy of regime change. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has also vowed that the U.S. will continue to reach out to Iranian officials, despite their rebuff of the video message.

The Foreign Office of the United Kingdom, however, has recently published a report on human rights including Iran in its 18 “countries of concern”. British officials noted the harassment of activists, legal discrimination against women, and persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, concluding “Iran’s human rights record today is dismal”.

Even as someone who has consistently cheered the Obama administration’s efforts to engage Iran diplomatically, reports like this one do make me wonder whether or not these efforts are effectively rewarding, or even legitimizing, an oppressive regime. Does talking to the likes of Ahmadinejad reward his outrageous behavior? These questions are certainly not limited to Iran; the United States regularly engages with a number of governments who have less than stellar human rights records. But does that make it okay? Should we restrict or limit our engagement with governments who are abusive or undemocratic? Is that even a realistic option? How do we tell the “good” governments from the “bad” ones? It’s a double-edged sword; many countries are quick to point out America’s own questionable practices.

I don’t pretend to know the answers to these complex questions and I would be interested to hear others’ opinions. As far as Iran, I tend to think that the Obama administration’s strategy has so far been a good one. Diplomacy is necessary; the silent treatment and bullying of the Bush administration played directly into the hands of Ahmadinejad and other conservatives who exploited the role of victim for their own political benefit.

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However, the administration cannot forget that the Islamic Republic is in many ways a totalitarian regime. Discussions of human rights and political freedoms should be treated with equal importance as discussions of Iran’s nuclear program.

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and critical thinking has focused on a few dichotomies, none of which actually constitute critical thought.

These include a distinction between “good” and “bad” assigned readings, which mistakes the quality of the arguments presented with the development of a student’s cognitive capacities. Further, it is claimed that such abilities are fostered by the presence of discussion as a pedagogical tool, and that lecturing simply fosters passivity. Also considered is the extent to which classes embody an interdisciplinary perspective on the issues at hand, the implication being that contemplation of multiple angles implies critical analysis. Lastly, many claim a self-evident advantage of the analytic essay over other methods of demonstrating mastery of the material. The folly of these four dichotomies is that they mistake how knowledge is transmitted with how it is analyzed and applied. We do not claim that there are not benefits to assigning good over bad readings, employing a judicious mixture of discussion and lecture, etc. Rather, a focus on such considerations obscures those pedagogical elements that actually serve to foster critical thought.

Developing the capacity to think critically involves comparing, contextualizing, and valorizing pieces of information. Central to this is the ability to recognize that “where you stand depends on where you sit”; that is, arguments, facts, and paradigms never originate in a vacuum. Understanding their context is central to understanding their significance. The ability to differentiate feelings, beliefs, and opinions from analysis, argument, and critique facilitates this understanding. It is often assumed that a contrarian approach to intellectual engagement is the hallmark of a critical thinker. However, this misses the point that critical thinking aims to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of claims in order to build deeper understanding. Contrarianism’s singular focus on disagreement leaves no room for constructive debate. Finally, critical thinking necessarily involves interrogating assumptions and conventions, even – or especially – those foundational to a given discipline; blind acceptance does not serve intellectual development.

Our efforts to educate students in the liberal arts tradition will fall short if we do not place critical thinking at the center of curricular reform. Breadth has a place in a liberal arts education, and the discussion on how best to achieve it was necessary and appreciated. We thus hope that the recent faculty decision constitutes the beginning of a dialogue on creating a liberal arts curriculum, and does not mark its conclusion.

This journal is published by the Kalamazoo College Democrats. The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily espoused by the organization or any members thereof.