Saders Take Sides

By Charlie Geier

The Daily Jolt: free speech or forum for hate?

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While seeking to avoid the particularly tedious task of writing a research paper one night, I found myself turning to a popular distraction for Holy Cross stu-

dents, the Daily Jolt. For those who don’t know, this student run website provides a forum to many college campuses throughout the country. The specific fea-
tures of each school’s personal website vary based on the choices of those who maintain it. One of this school’s site’s most popular features is the forum, a place that allows students to post topics for discussion and respond to the queries of others. Here, students can post their opinions and ideas, and see how others from their campus react. There is a gener-

al forum and also a forum for registered Holy Cross users, though the former ap-
pears to be much more widely used. Stu-
dents on the general forum can post under any name they choose, allowing the ma-
jority of users to maintain anonymity. While the idea of an internet student forum may seem innocent enough, it has recently become a subject of controversy among students at Holy Cross.

Normally the student posts on the forum relate to issues generally relevant to Holy Cross students. Be it a question about which professor to take next semes-
ter or a rant about the quality of Kimball food, these posts are pretty tame in na-
ture. However, as it is a forum for people in the college age bracket, posts of a juve-
nile nature are also to be expected. One can find posts ranking the “hottest guy/girl on campus,” or posts where stu-
dents poke fun at one another. These posts may not always be made in the best taste, but they are also generally harmless. The real controversy arises when stu-
dents take advantage of the forum to post things that are particularly offensive to people. This occurs when attractiveness polls change into posts touching rather cruelly on the sexuality of people on campus, and when poking fun turns into anonymous character assassination. There are instances when this good-na-
tured platform for uniting students across campus is utilized by some to spread hate and cause rifts between people and groups. This abuse of the forum has lead many on campus to condemn the Jolt, and call for its abolition.

While I certainly agree that there is no place for such comments and that many posts would be better off never hav-
ing been made, I cannot simply write off the Jolt forum as a forum for hate. Firstly, there is an option on the forum that allows students to censor posts they find offen-
vive, removing them from the site. This option allows students to police them-

selves and their peers, without requiring a higher authority to regulate the content. The maintainers of the site have this cen-
sorship option as well, where they can act as the final arbiter for the posts.

Secondly, the blame for offensive posts should fall on the students who make them, not upon the forum where these ideas are posted. Whereas a newspaper may be blamed for printing an offensive editorial, this is a forum for students, where they are given the freedom to say what they want but are responsible for self-censorship. While some may say that the anonymous posting option allows stu-
dents to say what they want in a conse-
quence-free environment, I would argue that this places the blame squarely on the students for the comments that they make. The Jolt provides students with the oppor-
tunity to register for the forum, allowing others to know who is making the posts they read. If a student chooses not to reg-
ister, they should be held accountable for making offensive remarks without the in-
tegrity to take credit for their ideas. Those who use the forum for the purpose that it was intended should not be pun-
ished for those who abuse the site.

Freedom of speech is a right that is prized by many Americans, and this forum allows students to exercise this right. Offensive posts should not be con-
donned, but removing a student’s right to post their opinion would be quite unfair. The forum should remain as a place for students to exercise their freedom of speech, with the responsibility placed on the students to think before they post.

Freedom of speech is our given right as Americans, yet I would hope that any intelligent, compassionate being would exercise self-restraint and respect others when using this right.

During my recent visit to the site, I happened across a comment by someone who had written a derogatory comment about a particular group. The comment was posted in the anonymous posting option, allowing the author to exercise their freedom of speech without worrying about the repercussions. This is an example of how important it is to have a forum that allows students to exercise their freedom of speech, but at the same time, it is important to have a forum that allows students to exercise self-restraint and respect others when using this right.

The Daily Jolt provides the Holy Cross community with many useful services that make students’ lives undeniably easier — its weather report, food reviews, and the course catalog are all a mere click away from any net-

worked computer. Instead of struggling with a calculator, it provides a GPA calculator. For a good laugh, it’s easy to check out the week’s featured MP3 (make sure not to miss this week’s “Tong Song Parody”). All of these features make the Daily Jolt a necessary, I-can’t-live-without-it student institu-
tion.

One of the most popular features of the site is the forum, where students can post notes on any topic. Al-
though I’m sure that the forum was created with the idea that it would be benefi-
cial to have a space for stu-
dents to leave questions and comments for their peers, the forum has gone far be-

yond simply that.

While the line between expressing one’s opinion and making a derogatory comment can sometimes be ambiguous, here it has clearly been crossed. I would also like to offer another example that did not just anger me like my previous ex-
ample, but enraged me. “How did all these [derisive term for homosexuals] find each other and decide to live together. I’ve never seen such a team of complete losers. These [expletive and derogative term for homosexuals] make me feel uncomfortable around them as if their gayness is going to contaminate me. Would anyone even care if these homos died of anthrax - or AIDS for that matter - you know one of them probably has it and you know how that disease spreads. Yeah - I bet they all have AIDS.”

I would like to ask you, the reader, how could any person intelligent enough to be accepted into Holy Cross make such a nar-
minded comment? Not only is this comment unfounded and based solely on the speaker’s preju-
dices, but it clearly insults a specific group of people without letting them de-
fend themselves.

The Daily Jolt has come under criticism in the past for allowing what was considered inappropriate gay bashing. Obvi-
ously, this issue has not been solved since it is recurring again today. Freedom of speech is our given right as Americans, yet I would hope that any intelligent, compassionate being would exercise self-restraint and respect others when using this right.

The Daily Jolt is an excellent resource where many students post questions about cer-
tain professors or classes. Meanwhile, other students have the courage to hide behind a shield of anonymity and ruin the privilege of free speech. I would hope that mature college students would use discretion when deciding what was appropriate to post on The Daily Jolt.

It’s unfortunate that such a wonderful re-
source can be missed by the poor judgement of a few. Censorship is not necessarily a solu-
tion. The answer must come from each indi-

vidual.