

4-1-2007

## Interview with Brian Eller

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### Recommended Citation

Small, Nicole (2007) "Interview with Brian Eller," *Moebius*: Vol. 5: Iss. 1, Article 16.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/moebius/vol5/iss1/16>

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Brian Eller

## INTERVIEW WITH BRIAN ELLER

### Engineering Student

Brian Bernard Eller, 20, writes a weekly political column for the *Mustang Daily* that has caused many letters to the editor. Originally from Kansas, this is Eller's third year studying materials engineering and he seeks a minor in history. He wants to finish in four years, although most engineers finish in five. Eller is also a member of the Cal Poly College Republicans.

*Moebius: How did you come to write for the Mustang Daily?*

*BE:* At one point the *Mustang Daily* was only running a liberal column so they came to ask the Cal Poly College Republicans if someone would like to write one. No one else wanted to do it and I thought it would be fun.

*Moebius: What made you decide to join the Cal Poly College Republicans?*

*BE:* I vote Republican, but I would consider myself more of a Libertarian. Most foreign issues I agree with the Republican party. My parents never told me their political affiliations, but I could guess. Both my grandparents give me books about Kennedy and such.

*Moebius: As a materials engineering student, do you feel out of your element writing?*

*BE:* I like to write. It's hard to come up with ideas every week. I get lots of hate mail and the funny thing is most letters to the editor are from engineering students, like me. It gives them an outlet to express themselves.

*Moebius: How do you pick your weekly topic?*

*BE:* A lot of political columnists take on global issues and then apply them to people, making everything a huge cause—life or death. I write from the perspective of a college student. I don't try to be a top notch political columnist. Usually I don't know my topic until twelve hours before deadline. I scramble through blogs, read *The Tribune*, *The Week* magazine, and *The Wall Street Journal* editorial section. I don't only read conservative standpoints.

*Moebius: What do you hope people will come away with after they have read your column?*

*BE:* I hope they've been exposed to something new. I hope they read the entire column and have been partially entertained. Most of the time I get a selected few that write back. I like to give people a side they haven't thought of before, I felt the column on the spanking bill did this.

*Moebius: How do you deal with the letters to the editor in response to your column topics?*

BE: Most recently I did an article about *The Vagina Monologues* and I gave a quote from the original version, yet that same quote is not used in Cal Poly's production. The *Mustang Daily* received lots of calls and letters from the cast saying that people would not show up because of the quote. A correction was made in the *Mustang Daily* saying that the quote was incorrect. The quote was from the original and not incorrect. I can't fit every fact into an article. I missed class a couple days after the controversy and one of my professor's joked that he thought I had been abducted by the cast of *The Vagina Monologues*. Most people only read one line of my column and then attack me. On the homeless article, I said I wouldn't give them money, that's different from not helping them. For instance, volunteering and giving money to a reputable charity is something I would do, but I wouldn't give money directly to them. Same thing with the V-day article. Just because I don't like the V-day idea or *The Vagina Monologues* doesn't mean I am insensitive to women or that I don't believe that violence against women is a real problem. I see a lot of emotional writing, it's good that people keep the topic going, but when people say I don't research enough, that one kinda bugs me. I would like to thank the Republican club for supporting me, along with many of my fellow materials engineers.

*Moebius: What article you wrote stirred Cal Poly the most in your opinion?*

BE: Probably the one about how there shouldn't be a black history month. I remember a guy from another club thought it was awful I had said such a thing. Every time we would drive past one another he would honk at me. I wasn't scared of him; we had equal respect for one another, it was just funny. In my columns I don't like to write after people, even though sometimes I'm attacked in other peoples' articles. I just hope people are sarcastic with their threats. I do have an article I've had in mind to do for a while, titled *Sensibility versus Sustainability* that might receive some heated feedback. When I write these articles I don't think people are going to respond, I just put down my viewpoint. When people write back, I think it's great. It just shows you that there are more ways to think about things.

*Moebius: What columnists or other media do you read and watch for inspiration?*

BE: I like Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times*. I read newspapers from back home and the *Mustang Daily*. I also agree almost entirely with the Wall Street Journal. I like watching *The Colbert Report*. When I read over my article I picture Stephen Colbert reading it on his show. And I like Bill O'Reilly.

*Moebius: What issue do you believe the media is not giving enough attention to?*

BE: Immigration. This is where I don't agree with my party. Republicans care more about economics and that immigrants take more things from our society then give. I

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think that these people are the hardest working people in this country. In history when one group of people feels another culture or race is not significant — not too many good things have happened. I went to this convention with the Cal Poly College Republicans that was held at a hotel. A speaker there went on a rant about getting all the immigrants out of the country; the sad part was half of the servers there were immigrants.

*Moebius: Cal Poly is not known for being politically active, why do you think not many Cal Poly students get politically involved?*

*BE:* Students live very busy lives. I encourage students to join Cal Poly College Republicans, Cal Poly Democrats, or even the Progressive Student Alliance. Each club brings speakers that take a lot of funding to bring out and I wish more people would take the opportunity to see them. Students can refute them and ask them anything; it can be an intellectual battle that is an honest argument, more than a classroom disagreement with a professor in a class. Join one of the clubs, you don't have to do very much and you get free pizza. ☺

*Interview on behalf of Moebius conducted by Nicole Small, Winter, 2007.*