Interview with Brian Eller

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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?


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.
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.*