

January 3, 1999, Sunday

BLACKBOARD: THE MEDIA; Steal This Page

By **ABBY ELLIN**

Here is an innovative way to suppress the news: remove the newspaper. According to the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, a nonprofit group in Washington dedicated to academic freedom, 453,123 newspapers were either stolen or destroyed at 121 campuses between 1992 and 1998. Most of the publications were conservative, and the actions usually went unpunished.

In October, student-newspaper thieves made headlines when nearly 3,000 copies of *The Academy*, a Georgetown University publication, were taken from campus bins. The newspaper had questioned whether a new student task force exploring school diversity was a good idea. The paper also called for the resignation of the university's president, the Rev. Leo O'Donovan, for overseeing a school that, despite its administration by Jesuits, "seems hellbent on repudiating their religious, moral and educational values."

"At first we thought maybe people really liked it, but that wasn't the case," said Brooken Smith, a junior and the publisher of *The Academy*. "It's unbelievable that ideas are being thrown out just because people don't agree with what you're saying."

At the request of *Academy* staff members, Father O'Donovan issued a statement condemning the theft, and Mr. Smith is considering legal action against a student who was seen throwing away newspapers.

Student advocacy groups think schools should treat the wholesale removal of free newspapers as a criminal offense.

"Too many administrators feel that censorship is an appropriate response to publications that offend the politically correct norms of the day," said Anne D. Neal, vice president and general counsel of the trustees and alumni council. "It's the responsibility of a university to teach

students that the right way to counter ideas with which they disagree is with more speech, not less."

Organizations mentioned in this article:

Georgetown University

Related Terms:

Colleges and Universities; Freedom of Speech and Expression; Newspapers; Vandalism

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