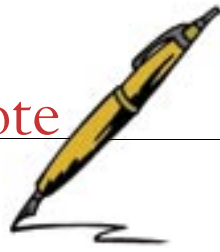


## editor's note



I find that I can no longer read the letters to the editor in the local paper. I used to check them out at least a couple times a week, thinking that I'd be able to gauge the pulse of the Spokane area by the musings of its residents. And I'd often find thoughtful, interesting letters that appealed to my better instincts and brought light to subjects that I thought needed attention. There was also a lot of silly, self-important prattling, but I usually found that interesting (and funny), too.

Over the years, the tenor of the letters has changed. I've noticed that they've become less reflective and more shrill – that many people have lost interest in shedding light and have become more focused on generating (or maybe dissipating) heat. There's much frustration and discouragement and garden-variety anger out there, and a lot of it finds its way into the op-ed section. Chockablock with the acid opinions of the professional columnists, local letter-writers attack their leaders and, often, one another, indulge in name-calling, and decry others' beliefs as stupid and callous. Reading the letters is just about as illuminating as witnessing a fistfight in which the participants, having abandoned every semblance of civility, just wade in and slug it out for all they're worth.

When I was in **Dale Soden's** 19th-century American history class here at Whitworth, he told us that public debate had come to a sorry pass in our era. If we watched *Crossfire* and *The Capital Gang* and some of the other opinion shows on television, he said, we'd see that philosophical and political debate had degen-

erated into shouting, sarcasm, and ad hominem attacks. (And this was before the emergence of Rush Limbaugh and Al Franken.) Dale wanted us to learn how to engage in civil discussion of philosophical issues and to back up our assertions with facts rather than with heated emotion. And always – *always* – we were to be respectful of those whose opinions differed from our own.

It's a great lesson for anyone immersed in the events and issues leading up to the 2004 presidential election. And it's a lesson that our four faculty writers for this political issue have learned well. **Jim Edwards, Ginny Whitehouse, Sharon Mowry** and **Rich Strauch** provide important tips for voters based upon their personal ballot battles. You'll find that their background stories range from funny to poignant, their insights run the gamut from homegrown to biblical, and their political affiliations bound right across the spectrum.

But these four share a rock-solid commitment to American citizenship, to Christian values, and to responding respectfully both to their political soul-mates and to those whose ideas range far afield from their own. They're not afraid to share their convictions, and they do so in a way that encourages an equally thoughtful and civil response.

I think you'll enjoy reading our features, along with all of the other information included in this issue of *Whitworth Today*. And I hope that you'll write to this editor and respond to some of the ideas that you've encountered here. Since I can't bring myself to read the letters in the paper anymore, I look forward to reading yours.

# WHITWORTH Today

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