

**From:** Tuttle, Ilene [BOARD]  
**Sent:** Monday, March 17, 2008 2:36 PM  
**To:** Campbell, Bonnie J.; Connolly, Jenny; Downer, Robert; Evans, Jack B.; Gartner, Michael; Harkin, Ruth; Lang, Craig A.; Miles, David; Vasquez, Rose  
**Cc:** Brunson, Marcia R [BOARD]  
**Subject:** FW: Inquiry #175 Letter to the Ames Tribune on Preventing a 2008 Veishea Riot [Executive Summary]

[On behalf of Andy Baumert:](#)

This inquiry was received through the Board of Regents website.

From: **Jon Shelness** <[shelness@gmail.com](mailto:shelness@gmail.com)>  
Date: Sun, Mar 16, 2008 at 2:31 PM  
Subject: Fwd: Letter to the Ames Tribune on Preventing a 2008 Veishea Riot [Executive Summary]  
To: Greg Geoffroy <[geoffroy@iastate.edu](mailto:geoffroy@iastate.edu)>, [herman.quirmbach@legis.state.ia.us](mailto:herman.quirmbach@legis.state.ia.us), Rich Olive <[rich.olive@legis.state.ia.us](mailto:rich.olive@legis.state.ia.us)>, [Beth.Wessel-Kroeschell@legis.state.ia.us](mailto:Beth.Wessel-Kroeschell@legis.state.ia.us), [Lisa.Heddens@legis.state.ia.us](mailto:Lisa.Heddens@legis.state.ia.us), [news@iowastatedaily.com](mailto:news@iowastatedaily.com)  
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Thank you for your continuing interest in this important matter.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Jon Shelness** <[shelness@gmail.com](mailto:shelness@gmail.com)>  
Date: Sun, Mar 16, 2008 at 1:20 PM  
Subject: Letter to the Ames Tribune on Preventing a 2008 Veishea Riot [Executive Summary]  
To: [letters@amestrib.com](mailto:letters@amestrib.com), "Kraemer, Dave" <[Dave.Kraemer@amestrib.com](mailto:Dave.Kraemer@amestrib.com)>, Steve Schainker <[sschainker@city.ames.ia.us](mailto:sschainker@city.ames.ia.us)>

To the editor of the Ames Tribune:

I just wonder if readers of the Ames Tribune, the Iowa State Daily and the Des Moines Register think that the way undergraduates are being treated this 2008 Veishea season is somehow different than the way students have been treated for the last three decades. What I am hoping readers are beginning to see is the cyclical nature of the rioting problem, and the role university administrators, staff and professors play in exacerbating the problem.

Let me remind readers that I am in no way condoning rioting. Young adults must be held accountable for their actions. But I would also like to remind readers of an analogy that when a troubled child sets the curtains on fire in his or her home, the Department of Human Services does not merely blame the kid. The family dynamics are thoroughly investigated and major changes made before the child re-enters the home.

It is my opinion that the Cyclone family homestead is dysfunctional.

University administrators, staff and professors are obviously gifted people, most of whom hold advanced degrees. But I would like to remind readers that an advanced degree is the result of a highly specialized piece of research that is a mere sliver of knowledge. In other words, if experts at ISU have an opinion about something outside of their area of expertise, then that opinion is likely no better informed than that of a layperson. In fact, I have always argued that the local hairdressers, barbers and bartenders in Campustown would have had better suggestions for fixing Veishea than the members of the 2004 Veishea Task Force.

In *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future*, Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg and Steve Van Bockern state that most adults in authority in the United States are likely to embrace a medieval, Eurocentric cultural bias where serfs (students) must obey their lords—a concept which has no basis in science, but seems alive and well in public education. The authors state,

"Much of the current literature on difficult youth is negative and pessimistic, and occasionally even cynical. It is not difficult to locate articles in professional publications in which "experts" gather selective evidence to reinforce their *a priori* views that education or treatment doesn't work, that problem children are likely to be intellectually or constitutionally defective, or that segregation and punishment are efficient and defensible interventions."

Imagine how Ames voters might react if an unelected, misinformed and paternalistic city government—something you might find in China—constantly shifted the sands beneath infantilized residents' feet. Yet this is exactly what Iowa State University, and other large, land-grant universities do on a regular basis with tens of thousands of undergraduates. The people in charge are mere appointees and are, therefore, in no way directly accountable to their constituents. I hope you don't think the Government of the Student Body fills the void of representation? It is no more powerful or influential than your average high school student government. As young people become more sophisticated and socially connected, there seems to be mounting evidence that one of the main problems is that undergraduates—legally emancipated adults—are woefully underrepresented.

Additionally, I would like to point out that immediately after the 2004 Veishea riot, I hired a senior partner of a large Des Moines law firm, Dreher, Simpson & Denson, to draft a position paper on exactly what the rights of students are. In my follow-up meeting

with my attorney, he concluded that the laws and policies in college towns essentially treat undergraduates as gypsies.

Of course, it is one thing to identify the problem, but a whole other matter to suggest changes. The adults in authority are in a tight spot. They have historically used one of four broad approaches to interact with young adults, marked by the following clichés: "If you can't beat them, join them;" "Go ahead and do your own thing, you are old enough to decide for yourselves;" "There is nothing we can do, they won't listen anymore;" and, as a last resort, "We'll show those kids whose boss."

There is a healthier, alternative response described in the *Positive Peer Culture* by Harry Vorrath and Larry Brendtro. They advocate "enlisting the opposition" as a practice-based approach for dealing with young adults. The authors suggest that "adults should neither become locked in combat with [youth] nor capitulate to them." The philosophy was developed in a few juvenile placements around the country that perennially struggled with out of control youth, and has now been adopted, in modified form, by Iowa's Woodward and Clarinda Academies, and Story County's Youth and Shelter Services.

In *Without Locks and Bars: Reforming our Reform Schools*, Grant Grissom and William Dubnov chronicle how dysfunctional, university educated experts, with advanced degrees, would rather see their institution shuttered than admit that they are wrong.

Being open to new ideas is just as difficult for the educated—maybe harder—than it is for the ignorant. It is easy to see how small institutions might be allowed to die, but a place like Iowa State University would never be permitted to go under. ISU is too intimately tied to federal and state institutional law, and can even call in the National Guard to defend its property from renegade students. In other words, ISU will never be in such difficult straights that it will be on its knees. Therefore, ISU has zero incentive to change the way it interacts with undergraduates. That is why I have repeatedly asked for the state legislature and the governor to call for hearings in order to demand reforms, so we can end the cycle of rioting once and for all.

My suggestion for change has always remained the same. Iowa State University leaders need some education. They are biased and lack the skill-set to move the student culture in a new and healthier direction. And the people who can help are the very inexpensive trainers from the school that *Without Locks and Bars* is written about.

The Glen Mills School is the oldest, juvenile placement in the United States, established in 1827. Glen Mills is a large, private school for adjudicated adolescents outside of Philadelphia. The school has a large capacity, but under the auspices of post-World-War-Two-trained university academics, using what Glen Mills describes as the "custody/clinical model," there were a mere 25 students left.

In a major shakeup in the mid-70s, Glen Mills established a new sociological paradigm called "the positive, normative peer management technique." Glen Mills, in short order, defied the experts by letting most of its professionals go, closing its security department,

tearing down its fences and unlocking its doors; all the while expanding its population to just shy of 1000 students. Remember, these are gang-bangers from across the nation, and mostly inner-city Philadelphia, yet there are no fights, no vandalism, and no truancies. (They have a shockingly low recidivism rate of 32%.) Unlike the clinical/custody model that has led to the idea that smaller is better, the sociological model defies academia by stating that there is no upper limit on how large an institution can become while still administering to all the needs of its members in a prosocial way. Glen Mills is so safe that private pay customers send their children there, and some students have run away from home to return to Glen Mills in order to feel more secure.

Let's examine what Iowa State University has done for the safety and security of its students. By its own admission, one-third of graduates are indifferent and one-third of graduates despise ISU. Veishea was canceled in 2005. Now Veishea events are being restricted, and private security hired. The university endures massive amounts of litter and vandalism, and repeated riots and a myriad of self destructive behavior. Ironically university students are at the extreme opposite end of the spectrum as are our nation's gang-bangers. University students are the most compliant in their age category, yet ISU seems unable to control them. Yes, there are outside agitators, but if ISU would "enlist the opposition" as the *Positive Peer Culture* recommends and as Glen Mills can help institute, the problem would be mitigated.

Historically, the approach I am advocating was used by the military in WW II to ready soldiers deemed psychologically unfit to fight. It was used to help Coca Cola's Minute Maid Division overcome a repressive management culture in its Florida orchards. The approach also helped Johnson & Johnson overcome a problem with employees sabotaging equipment at facilities across the nation. All supermarkets and large retail chains use these concepts to manage employee theft and other delinquent behavior. All of these successes grew out of the practice-based research I am advocating.

Specifically, what I am asking is for Iowa State University President Gregory Geoffroy, ISU's head of household, to reach outside the front door and contact the trainers at the Glen Mills Schools at 610-459-8100. He should ask for Jack, the head trainer, and invite him to Ames for a tour and discussions.

For further information, please consult my Web site at <http://shelness.googlepages.com>, particularly the literature review at <http://shelness.googlepages.com/research>.

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