

# THE BULL



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*Ceci n'est pas une bull.*



Dear Bull,

Just something quick in response to Ruchir's response to Dan's response to Justin's (the other one) article on VSU. Fee refunds were offered by both the SRC and the Union under compulsory student unionism, but both required students to show cause for why they should be given such a refund, and the Union's form informed the applicant that "financial hardship of itself is NOT sufficient grounds for the General Manager to exercise discretion and allow an exemption or a refund." [USU website, 2006]

It is true that students could choose not to be members of a student organisation, but they were still compelled to pay their \$600 and it was instead directed to a scholarships fund.

Cheers,  
Justin Simon

Dear Anna,

I feel that people may be more amenable to change and shifts in perception when they receive actual information regarding the current situation; rather than a chickenscratch psuedo-polemic that touches less on the fundamental issues leading to xenophobic behaviour and less on your own self-promotion.

Perhaps a substantive argument other than painting all Australians as racist and not liking the word 'tolerance' might actually lead for people to be more interested in the concepts of societal change.

Warm Regards,  
Dan Nolan

The views expressed are not those of the University of Sydney Union or the USU Board of Directors

Want to take issue with what *The Bull* publishes? Like to polemicise with some of our letter writers? Send your letters, comments and questions to [thebull@usu.usyd.edu.au](mailto:thebull@usu.usyd.edu.au)!

## THE BULL-IT

### IN THIS WEEK'S BULL-IT:

#### Israel: a multicultural mosaic

By Galina Pinski, USU Multicultural Convenor

"At first thought, Israel does not often conjure up the image of a budding multicultural community, a positive plethora of cultures and cultural experiences. Usually known for its conflict in the international community, Israel's burgeoning multiculturalism is lamentably less celebrated."

#### "Fake" News

By Alexa Roach

"While *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* are brilliant, entertaining shows, what does it say about America when satirical 'news' coverage is declared to be journalism superior to that provided by 'real news' networks?"

To check out both articles,  
go to [usuonline.com](http://usuonline.com) > Publications > The Bull

## O- WEEK 2009

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James Clifford (BCommerce/BLaws, Maastricht University The Netherlands)

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# UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY UNION

## SAVE WITH ACCESS



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### Bull-IT "Fake News"

Email to a friend

Alexandra Roach examines whether the rise of satirical "fake" news spells the demise of "real" news.



When journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein revealed to the people the truth about Watergate in the 1970s, not only was there an explosion of government-related paranoia within American society that would manifest itself most noticeably in products of popular culture such as *The X Files*, but also a marked increase in the number of journalism students across the country. Inspired by Woodward and Bernstein's book, *All the President's Men* – or, more likely, the famous film adaptation starring Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman – many of the best and brightest shipped themselves off to complete journalism courses at colleges and universities all over the world, seeking truth and justice and the lucrative book deal that would surely follow when they brought down corrupt governments and revealed conspiracy theories to the world.

While this idealistic dream of the future of journalism and free speech has not exactly come true in a culture too often dominated by censorship and the politics of fear, surely journalists never foresaw a future in which America's 'most trusted' news anchors are two comedians who revel in mocking the very news they are (satirically) reporting to their substantial audience, tongues firmly in cheek.

Of course, like so many phenomena of the media age, it was not an immediate success. On July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1996, American cable television channel Comedy Central launched a new program that would eventually become a groundbreaking, controversial success that would usher in a new era of political and social awareness amongst the supposedly apathetic youth of America. As well as inspiring the all-important 18-49 age demographic of television watchers into a level of political attentiveness completely unexpected by most social commentators, this television program also launched the careers of comedians Stephen Colbert, Jon Stewart and Steve Carell into the stratosphere. What mere television program could ever accomplish such a feat? And how could a show from Comedy Central – a channel whose crowning achievement is often considered to be the expletive-ridden, irreverent *South Park* – awaken the social conscience of the cynical youth of America?

The program I speak of is one that many Australians who have neither cable TV nor high-speed internet may never have heard of: *The Daily Show*. Conceived as a parody of conventional newscasts, *The Daily Show* offers a comedic perspective in regards to the day's headlines and mockumentary-style reports 'direct from location', all performed by comedians with over-styled hair, carefully modulated voices and overwrought facial expressions and head movements. While initial host Craig Kilborn suffered from poor ratings and was criticised for being "mean spirited", current host Jon Stewart is often credited as being the driving force behind the show's phenomenal success: *The Daily Show* averages 1.6 million viewers a night in America (highly impressive audience numbers for a cable show), has won eleven Emmys, two Peabody awards, and has spawned an equally-popular, award-winning spin-off, *The Colbert Report*.

The presentation of *The Daily Show* – Stewart as anchorman, along with various 'correspondents' and 'experts' (such as Carell and Colbert, who portray ridiculous, over-exaggerated parodies of the pundits as presented on traditional news programs) – is where much of the show's success lies. *The Daily Show* is a self-proclaimed bulletin of "fake news", satire derived straight from the headlines, delivered with a deadpan humour that leads some viewers to mistake parody for reality despite the show's disclaimer: "The show you are about to watch is a news parody. Its stories are not fact checked. Its reporters are not journalists. And its opinions are not fully thought through".

While some fail to detect either the satire or the fun in *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report* – in which Colbert depicts a politically-minded, right-wing newsreader he describes as "a well-intentioned, poorly informed, high-status idiot", and is a parody of conservative commentators like Fox News' Bill O'Reilly (whose "real news" show, *The O'Reilly Factor* regularly causes fury and offence) – is mistaken for a real news program often enough for extracts to be used as fodder for "real news".

While the laughing audience might render obvious to most the true nature of both programs' content, it is troubling to think that many Americans consider two programs emblazoned with the Comedy Central watermark to be a trustworthy news source. It is even more troubling to discover that viewers of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* are often better informed in regards to important issues than the audience of such "real" journalists as Bill O'Reilly and PBS's Jim Lehrer.

In 1999 *The Daily Show* began airing a series of comedic, yet informative, reports about the 2000 presidential election: the candidates, the scandals, the tax cuts. These segments – titled *Indecision 2000* – were so popular with viewers that *Indecision* has been revived every election (*Indecision 2008* being an absolute goldmine for Stewart, Colbert and their respective "news teams"; Obama, Clinton, McCain and Palin seemingly a gift for the comedy gods themselves), they are also respected by real journalists: the *Indecision* coverage of 2000 and 2004 won two highly prestigious Peabody Awards, which celebrate excellence in television and radio broadcasting (2008 also brought another Peabody Award, this time for *The Colbert Report*).

While *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* are brilliant, entertaining shows, what does it say about America when satirical "news" coverage is declared to be journalism superior to that provided by "real news" networks? Is the state of the nation really so poor that those who get their news from comedians should score higher on a political knowledge test than those who watch "real" news? How is it possible in the richest country in the world that mock "news teams" of comedians are able to keep their audience just as – if not more – informed about news, current affairs and politics than CNN and Fox News?

While satirical "fake news" is not a new concept either in print or on television, *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* have not only elevated satire in the social conscience, they also serve society in an age where government censorship is once again infringing upon free speech, the dark, dry wit of Stewart, Colbert and their team is inspiring discussion and social and political awareness

#### WHAT'S ON

March 2011						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
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27	28	29	30	31		

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