
From the Editors

This semester, *Kedma* was very excited to publish our second round of personal essays, this time dealing with how people's religious beliefs affect their political affiliation. So why doesn't this issue of *Kedma* feature a personal essays section? Because we didn't receive any personal essay submissions. Not a one. At the beginning of the semester, we announced that we would award a \$50 prize to the best personal essay and publish the runner-up. We received a lot of positive feedback regarding the contest topic, but as the semester progressed and our gmail inbox remained empty, we grew more and more disheartened. As the deadline approached, we had to face the fact that this semester, no one would respond to our essay contest. We do not want to point fingers; after all, would we, the editors, have taken the time and energy to write personal essays had we not been so directly involved with the journal ourselves? Perhaps not. From this experience, we would like to understand how we can more successfully engage Penn students. When *Kedma* gives you lemons, make lemonade!

While there are many successful events on campus, there are always a few that suffer from low turnout. *Kedma* is no different. Many students here at Penn understand what it feels like to organize an exciting event, publicize it well, and still only have five people show up. Of course, events with only five people can end up being very rewarding. Despite the lack of a personal essays section, we are very proud of this issue, our sixth. We received terrific general submissions, many more than we've received in the past. So what was the specific aspect of this contest that failed to motivate students to submit a personal essay? Why does an intelligent, highly active student body often fail to get involved in all the great things this campus has to offer?

It's a sad story that we all know too well: it's a Thursday night, and Josh (our "Joe Schmo" Penn undergrad) has worked himself to the bone during the week – three midterms, two papers, club meetings – and he's absolutely exhausted. All he wants to do is sit back, relax, and watch the basketball game on television. But there's also a speaker event that night Josh had been to hoping to attend. Some students would choose the speaker, some the game, and either decision is perfectly understandable. A speaker that draws a large crowd in the middle of midterm season usually has some sort of magnetic draw on the students that attend. We want to understand the magic of that draw. In order to successfully fulfill *Kedma's* mission, we *need* to understand the magic of that draw.

Kedma is not simply published for students to read. We seek to engage students, excite them, challenge them, and even sometimes offend them. We strive to be a vessel through which students engage in dialogue with each other about Zionism, Judaism, and the Middle East. These are topics that many students on campus are invested in. We, the editors and your fellow students, would like to know what we can do to motivate you to become an active part of this dialogue. What did this essay contest not do that made students feel disinterested or unmotivated? Was it simply a matter of publicity, or was it something deeper? Perhaps the topic was too broad, or perhaps students felt that the topic was not relevant to them. Or, in light of the heated primary race, perhaps students were already too busy campaigning on campus or too sick and tired of politics to want to engage with the issue.

We want to excite students enough to see *Kedma* as more than just something interesting to read on the way to class. Penn students, we want to hear from you. Tell us what excites you, what motivates you, what makes you want to go hear that speaker on a Thursday night.

You know where you can reach us.

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