

EDITORIAL

YOU ARE BAD

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Ivory-tower blunder

Choice of murderer to address grads sends bizarre message

12 You're a college looking for a graduation speaker. You want someone of stature, someone who will impart a lasting message to your newly minted alumni. A diplomat, maybe, or a Pulitzer Prize-winning author. Julian Bond comes to mind. Sandra Day O'Connor. Walter Cronkite.

If you are Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, your search takes you in a slightly different direction. True to your mission statement — that to learn, students must be exposed to diverse voices — you opt for ... Mumia Abu-Jamal.

With all due respect for academia's laudable goal of opening students' minds, inviting a convicted murderer to deliver your commencement address is not the most appropriate move.

The choice makes a mockery of what should be a day of pride, dignity and achievement, and it deservedly has raised eyebrows and ire among faculty, students and family members.

Abu-Jamal, whose message to the grads will be shown via videotape, has been sentenced to death in Philadelphia for murdering Daniel

Faulkner, a police officer, in 1981.

An outspoken journalist and activist, the inmate has attracted international attention with his repeated claims of innocence and his unflagging pursuit of a new trial. Such luminaries as Ed Asner and the Rev. Jesse Jackson have jumped on the Mumia bandwagon.

Wherever one stands on the issue of guilty versus railroaded, there's no question that Evergreen's choice of graduation speaker is bizarre and grotesque.

It becomes even more socially irresponsible — the words of House Majority Whip Tom DeLay — when you learn that the school denied Officer Faulkner's widow, Maureen, permission to speak at the ceremony.

Evergreen State, which prides itself on what it calls "teaching across differences" and understanding abstract theories by applying real-life situations, has twice been cited by U.S. News & World Reports as a top public, liberal arts college.

We're curious to see how the college will get itself out of *this* regrettable real-life situation.