

Redefining the University

The University's two methods of budgetary review—the Hearing Panel on University Priorities (HPUP) and the "Minnesota Plan" for internal review—will undoubtedly be the subjects of much discussion, praise, animosity and controversy during the next two academic terms.

During that time, the University's review will come to a close and administrators will make recommendations concerning the budgets—thus deciding the ultimate futures of each department on campus.

Members of the departments selected to continue and grow will be pleased; they will praise the University's review as an accurate one based upon the school's needs. Members of the departments which are either designated for discontinuance or marked to remain at their current levels of funding, with no future growth, will grumble at the decision. They will say that from the outset HPUP and the Minnesota Plan were inaccurate systems for reviewing the needs of the individual departments on campus.

There will undoubtedly be controversy—and no small amount of protest—from those who are displeased with the results of the review as they try to change the recommendations made by the University's reviewers.

But before persons are given the opportunity to protest or praise the decision from so narrow a perspective, indeed before the reviews take one step nearer completion, it is necessary that members of the University community—and the statewide academic community of higher education—realize the ultimate value the reviews could have.

The reviews must be looked at as deciding the priorities of the University; as redefining the contents of education as it is offered here. And it must be that total definition, not just one or two small parts of it that is looked at either praised or put down.

These reviews and the similar studies going on at the state's other campuses will probably either make or break the future of higher education in the state of Oregon. Before the personal, interdepartmental infighting for funding begins, it is necessary that each person recognize the ultimate worth of the reviews in redefining the priorities of this school and of the entire state system.

Instead of cutting this or that program because its administrators can't convince HPUP members of their need or merit, the entire spectrum of academics at the

University must be examined. Priorities must be set and adhered to during the final budgetary recommendations. Each college and university in the state should review its own priorities in light of its needs and the needs of the entire system of higher education.

In setting these priorities, the University needs to look at where it is now—what courses and departments are valuable and educational and which have become deadwood. From this base, the reviewers then need to look at the future of this school—being certain to examine it in the perspective of the future of the state system of higher education—and examine which courses and departments are not needed, which are valuable and which might be better offered elsewhere within the system.

The most valuable aspect of the current budgetary reviews is the opportunity it offers the University and the state—to take each

college and university from its position of competing with the others and place it in a unique niche in the state's higher education system.

Based upon this type of review, higher education has the opportunity to insure its validity and prosperity in the future. To do otherwise will cheat the institutions—and the students—within the state system.

In HPUP and the "Minnesota Plan" the University has its opportunities to insure the validity of this institution. The opportunity is here for reassessing priorities and redefining the University. All persons on this campus must insure that the reviews attempt to do so.

Only if the redefinition does not take place will there be grounds for animosity and protest.

For if the University's priorities are not examined and the school is not redefined, then the reviews will have failed.

Can pass/fail work?

Pass-fail is part of a trend in higher education to ostensibly take pressure off students and allow them to learn rather than merely perform for the instructors. A recent article in Newsweek magazine shows that the system doesn't really help that much.

The article shows that fewer students are taking fewer courses pass-fail, mainly because graduate schools, most notable law and medicine, still demand letter grades.

The most interesting statistic came from Brown University, which started an extensive pass-fail system three years ago. When the system was first introduced, 52 per cent of students took a majority of their classes pass-fail. That figure has dropped to 29.4 per cent. A university official was quoted as saying this trend is due to graduate school requirements.

Until graduate schools accept this system it will be of little benefit to undergraduates, most of whom do not make a decision to apply to graduate school until their junior or senior year.

Graduate schools are opposed to pass-fail because they say it leaves them no criteria for admission. If schools are truly dedicated to educational innovation though, they should be able to come up with new criteria which will enable pass-fail to become effective.

One of the most talked about systems used to make pass-fail acceptable to graduate schools and even universities that refuse to accept pass-fail classes when a

student transfers, is the teacher evaluation system. Students receive pass-fail for the class but the teacher writes an evaluation of the student's work for his or her record. While this is best suited for small classes, the larger universities with their huge lecture classes could have the graduate assistants who lead discussion groups do the evaluations. They are usually closer to the students anyway.

Another viable system is the comprehensive examination plan. Students could pursue a course of studies receiving only pass-fail grades, and then take comprehensive exams in their major at certain points in their academic career or even at their own request.

The problem with making these changes is the nation-wide cooperation needed to institute them. The major, highly respected schools, would have to lead the movement for such changes and considering their elitist nature, this is not likely.

The place for such changes to begin is at the state level. Schools within a state system could agree to a common system, acceptable for transfer and entrance into each other's graduate schools. From there states with a high transfer rate back and forth could cooperate. The next step and the most difficult would be cooperation among private colleges.

If pass-fail, the basis for real change in higher education, is to be the vanguard it must be made to work.

'I RUSHED DOWN TO
WELCOME YOU BACK!'

