

John Orbell

Library woes hurt teaching

John Orbell is an associate professor of political science at the University.

As a teacher at this university, I believe it is my job to select the best possible materials in the area I know something about, organize them according to my best judgement, and present them to students in a manner that will arouse their interest and (even) enthusiasm. Designing a course always involves a series of decisions in these terms, and I always hope that my decisions result in the best possible course being offered.

This year the financial crisis at the university, and the manner in which the cuts are being made, make it virtually impossible to do this job adequately. Cuts are being made, at every turn, in such a way that the quality of the education offered is reduced almost to the vanishing point.

This is the way it works. I have to make an initial decision about a text book: will I use a text, or will I assign materials through the Reserve Reading Room? My best judgement is that there is no adequate text book in the area of public opinion. If I decide for a text, students will have to work through materials that are out of date, organized in a poor manner, poorly selected and sometimes downright wrong. I will have to teach from a book I do not like, and—inevitably—much of what I say in class will be critical of the text which students have had to buy. Class will be less exciting, more frustrating, and duller.

If I decide for the Reserve Reading Room, as I have in the Past, students will have to struggle with the inconvenience that involves (limited loan periods, and competition with other students for materials), but at

least the content of what they read will be better than otherwise. In past years, when the options are presented to them, students have always opted for these inconveniences; after all, good students want to spend their time reading good materials.

This year, the funds for the Reserve Room have been slashed. In order to do the best with what little they have been given, they can only:

1. Xerox one copy of each item (The class in question normally has about 60 students in it).
2. Xerox no more than twenty pages per item (Some of the most important materials are longer than this. What should I do? Give students the beginning, the middle, the end?)
3. Use the books presently in stock; they cannot purchase any new books for the Reserve Room.

In addition, they do not have the staff to search out materials not already on their shelves. Professors must get these for themselves. But (again because of the budget cuts—this time in the Office of Academic Advising) professors must now spend the week prior to classes advising undergraduates about their careers. Either I advise students or I help out the Reserve Room with books for my course. I have resolved the latter problem by taking my own copies in for them to Xerox; I would like to put them on reserve, but after they are read by 60 students they would be worthless for next year's students, quite apart from my own use.

The situation, as it stands, is simply this: 60 students must compete for one copy of each assigned item. The answer, of course, is to have fewer students in each class. But the Administration has explicitly urged

professors not to do this; we must "minimize closure of courses to enrollments" since the budget of the university depends on enrollments and students who are not satisfied are likely to drop out.

Certainly fewer students are enrolling at the University than in past years. One of the major reasons—as we know from endless studies, and from the mouths of our own students—is that what they learn is "irrelevant;" they are no longer excited by what they are expected to learn, and the manner in which they are expected to learn it. Yet here we are forced into teaching practices that can only make things duller, still more irrelevant, and more frustrating. The logic of the downward spiral is tragic: as funds are cut, the quality of the educational experience declines; as quality declines students (rightly, in my opinion) retreat from an institution they label "irrelevant;" as students retreat, available funds become smaller still . . . and so things continue. The process is accelerated by the exit of professors most concerned with the quality of the institution in which they work. These are usually the professors most able to excite students.

Who is to blame? Certainly not the Library which must work with what it is given. Perhaps not even the State Government that has to work within the limits imposed by the voters. Perhaps it is pointless to abuse the voters. But we can criticize the university itself for allocative decisions which not only royally screw the students, but which are in the long run (and that is the short run now) suicidal for the university itself.

What can an individual professor do? Nothing much more than yell.

Letters

Come on Charlie

One of the biggest problems in our governmental system is trust in the personalities in power. The level of faith is diminished when politicians speak out of both sides of their mouths. Holding this ideal as high as I do caused me to become concerned when I read some of Candidate Porter's campaign literature.

Here in Eugene at the DemoForum of May 18th Mr. Porter said "when someone comes up with a practical way to control guns I'll be listening." He continued on saying, "handguns are a sick symbol of internal virility."

In literature passed out on campus during registration Porter talks about the guns (handguns and rifles) which he personally possesses and says "confiscation of guns is one of the first acts of totalitarian regimes." He sheds a negative light on Dellenback even being willing to

listen to the arguments of those who favor gun control. Then he closes by saying that he will "vigorously oppose gun control legislation as a member of Congress." Political opportunism is really out of control enough in today's politics.

Come on Charlie, what's the deal?

Mike Marsh
ASUO Senator

Sock-Hop Reality

Your editorial, "Turning back the campus clock" (September 25) was a fine, fine piece of work—the best editorial I've read anywhere for a long time.

But why? Why are students participating in a "perverse exercise in academic nostalgia"? It is fun. It is secure. It is escape. Escape from the misery, the anguish, the suffering which threatens to tear us all apart.

If one is white, American, and affluent (ie. if one is in college), it is easier and

more satisfying to become wrapped up in a football game, to be overcome by excitement at a sock-hop, or to withdraw into a drugged or boozed euphoria than it is to face up to trying to do something meaningful about murderous and racist politicians, about political and economic inequality, or about the incessant destruction of our social and physical environments.

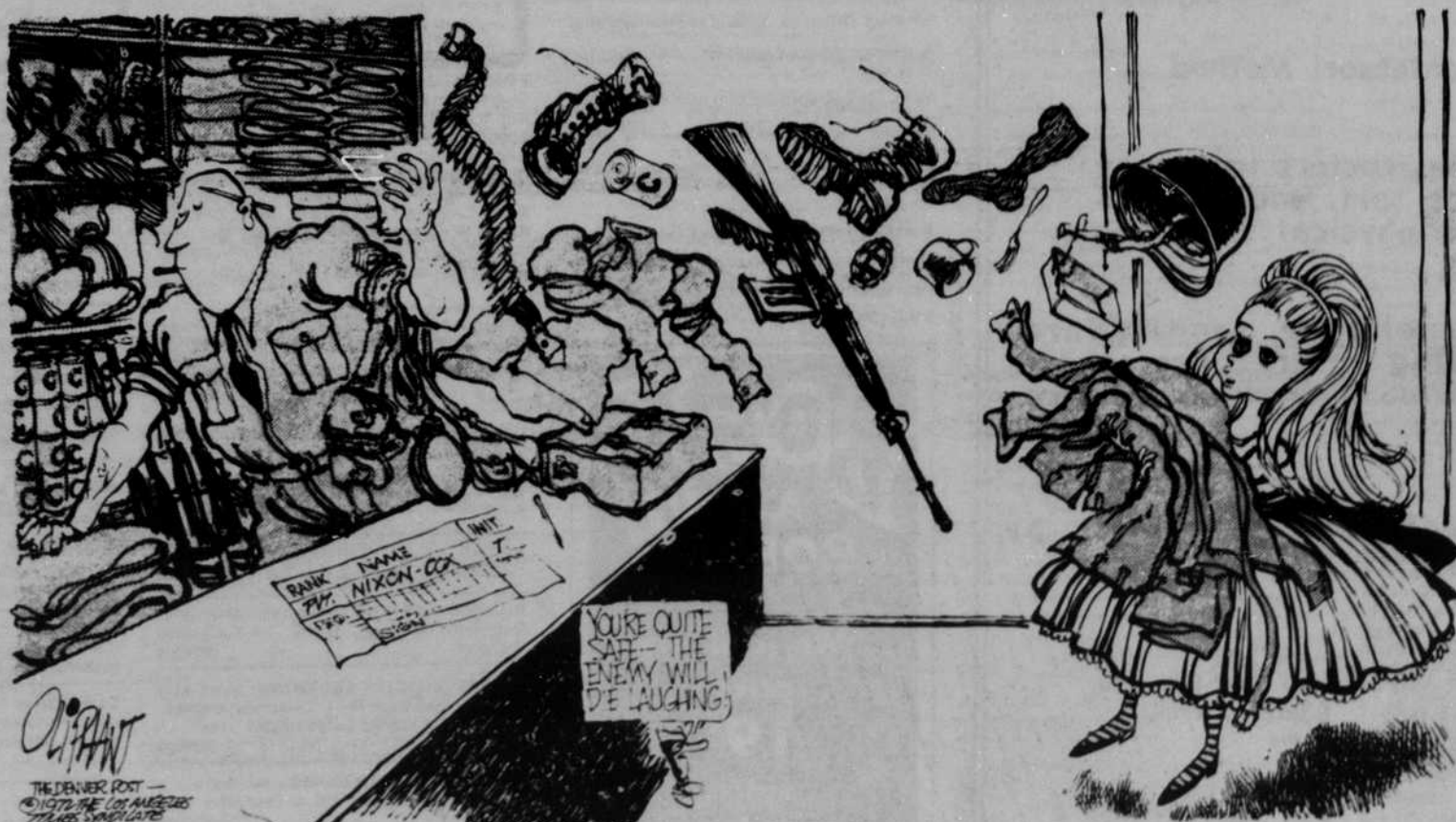
David Sonnenfeld
Independent Studies

Melodramatic

While reading the Student Government section of the Oregon Daily Emerald orientation edition we were surprised to learn that a "showdown looms between Senate, Program Directors". It would not be wise for ODE readers to take this melodramatic story seriously. What is "looming" is the development of a fiscal

procedure to provide for a previously unanticipated situation. With all of the things we have to do this year we won't have time for internal squabbling. Problems come to light in the ASUO to be solved, not to be used as a basis for power struggles. As students we are all in this mess together, and quite a mess it is. Through the ASUO the students of this University will have input this year to the State Legislature, the State Board, and the University Administration. In the midst of the present financial crisis and "relevancy crisis" it would be silly for the ASUO to become a house divided.

Cliff Zukin
President
ASUO Senate
David Novick
President Pro Tem
ASUO Senate
Tim Travis
ASUO Chief Administrative Officer



'GOLLY GEE, I KNOW I SAID I WOULD GLADLY DIE IN COMBAT TO SAVE THE THIEU REGIME, BUT THIS IS RIDICULOUS . . .'