

True student power

By David Sonnenfeld

Editor's note: Sonnenfeld is a junior in independent study at the University and one of the creators of the new form of ASUO legislative governance.

We now see the true nature of student "power" at the University: To whom do student leaders turn to resolve the dispute over the validity of the ASUO Senate's existence? None other than University President Robert Clark.

Students should realize that their "power" over incidental fee allocation is also at the will of, and subject to approval and modification by, President Clark and his superiors the State Board of Higher Education.

And one might note the "power" students have over substantive matters (ie. curriculum, grading, graduation requirements, faculty promotion and tenure) at the University: they (students) sit, in the minority, on committees advisory to the general faculty.

Squabbling over crumbs

As in the great majority of industries in this "corporate industrial state," the consumers (students) are bequeathed only enough "power" to co-opt their leaders and to keep them (students) squabbling over what crumbs (of "power") there are.

What is clear is that students do not have power. What is not clear, at least to this writer, is exactly who does have power at the University. To the degree that the University's Charter is still recognized as legitimate by the State and the State Board, the faculty does have power over curriculum, grading, and graduation requirements, at least subject to the approval of the State Board. The University President certainly has some power over the University budget: not the net amount, but the distribution. And it is the State

Board, apparently, who has final say over most everything, including the budget and promotion and tenure.

Clark has little power

But the above is not a complete picture; there is power other than policy-making power. President Clark in actuality has little, if any, power over the distribution of monies at the University. For there is the tremendous conservatizing power of the (stagnant) organizational structure of the University, aided by the power of "tradition."

The University cannot be responsive to consumer demand as long as financial, as well as personal, resources are locked in (via tenure and tradition) to the feudal departmental and college structure. For example, rather than put more resources into programs in the creative arts, for which there have been waiting lists of hundreds each term for years, the University (and Oregon taxpayers) not only subsidizes, but (through graduation requirements) creates an artificial demand for programs for which there is less demand (ie. physical education, English, history, some of the sciences).

Power also resides in the State Legislature. It is they who raise, allocate, and distribute state monies. It is also they who can, if they desire, establish state policy in schooling matters, including higher schooling. To date the State Legislature, however, has been but another conservatizing influence: by putting a financial "crunch" on the State System of Higher Education, while at the same time refusing to alter the organization of the State System, they have not only increased everyone's anxiety, but have further imbedded rigidity into the System.

Power of disruption

A third type of power extant, though

usually dormant, at the University needs little explication: the power of disruption. Both students and faculty members have this power. Students, as consumers, may, potentially anyway, refuse to consume (ie. may boycott) schooling, or may otherwise interfere with its delivery. Faculty members, as workers, may refuse to produce (ie. may strike), or may otherwise interfere with the production of schooling. Either students or faculty members, by disrupting "business as usual" may indirectly further affect the University by giving the University such a poor public image that students will no longer wish to study here, that teachers will no longer wish to work here, that the legislature will no longer wish to send money here.

So where are we? What will change the distribution of power at the University so that we, as students and consumers, have more control over the nature of the product which we consume? In my analysis, the only hope for meaningful change (both change in substance and change in governance) lies in the occurrence of one or a combination of the following events:

● **The Voluntary Redistribution of Power on the Part of the Faculty.** If the faculty were willing to open up its decision-making process to include and to empower students, this would certainly move us in the suggested direction. It is questionable, though, how realistic this alternative is; at best, the faculty might be willing to gradually involve students in their processes, as is happening in a number of individual departments.

● **A Change in University Leadership.** One of the reasons that President Clark has no real power is due to his tenure in office. If a new, and aggressive person replaced Clark as president, she or he would have at least a temporary opportunity to "establish her or his style" —

ie. to drastically restructure the University while "settling in." It is unlikely, however, that such a person will ever be selected by the Board: it is probably in their interests to have an administrator as powerless and as unaggressive as Clark.

● **Decided Action on the Part of the Legislature.** The Legislature certainly has a great amount of potential power to change the way the University operates. Again, it is another question as to whether the Legislature will ever use any of its power.

● **The Availability of an Extremely Large Amount of External Funds.** Change at the University could occur if a private or governmental organization decided to make available to the University funds for "innovation" or organizational "self-renewal." In fact, this is how the School of Community Service and Public Affairs was initiated. Some possibilities of obtaining external funds for such purposes exist in the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) in the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. With a budget for FY 1973 of \$10,000,000, FIPSE is one of the few new education programs left intact by the Nixon Administration. (A group, chaired by Bob Albrecht, Assistant Dean of Liberal Arts, is presently trying to put together a proposal to FIPSE.)

● **The Disruption of "Business as Usual" by Students.** If students, even 200 of them, were to do something as drastic as to boycott the University for a term, the University would be jolted out of "business as usual" and might (or might not) be more willing than at present to negotiate student demands. (Another potential action might be the disruption of faculty and/or University governing processes — the University would be forced to either negotiate or to call in the police in order to carry on "business as usual." I suspect they would do the latter.)

I HATE MYSELF
FOR NOT GETTING
ALONG WITH
PEOPLE.



AND I HATE MY-
SELF FOR THE
KIND OF PEOPLE
I DO GET ALONG
WITH.



AND I HATE MY-
SELF FOR SAYING
THINGS I DON'T
MEAN.



AND I HATE MY-
SELF FOR NOT
SAYING WHAT
I DO MEAN.



AND I HATE MY-
SELF FOR DRINKING.



AND I ESPECIALLY
HATE MYSELF WHEN
I'M NOT DRINKING.



BUT WHEN I PUT
TOGETHER ALL
THE REASONS I
HATE MYSELF—



THEY ALL SEEM
SO PETTY AND
FOOLISH AND
INADEQUATE—



THAT I KNOW I'M
TOO COWARDLY TO
DIG INTO THE TRUE
REASONS I HATE
MYSELF—



BECAUSE I'D
REALLY HATE
MYSELF.



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