

In recruitment of minorities

Eugene's past plagues the U

By TOM WOLFE
Of the Emerald

University Pres. William Boyd is right when he says the Bakke reverse discrimination decision isn't much of a threat to University affirmative action programs.

Largely, that's because the University philosophy is to assist ethnic minority students who have already overcome the odds and enrolled, rather than accommodating their enrollment in the first place.

The University's general admissions policy merely examines grade point average and test scores and has no sensitivity to

analysis

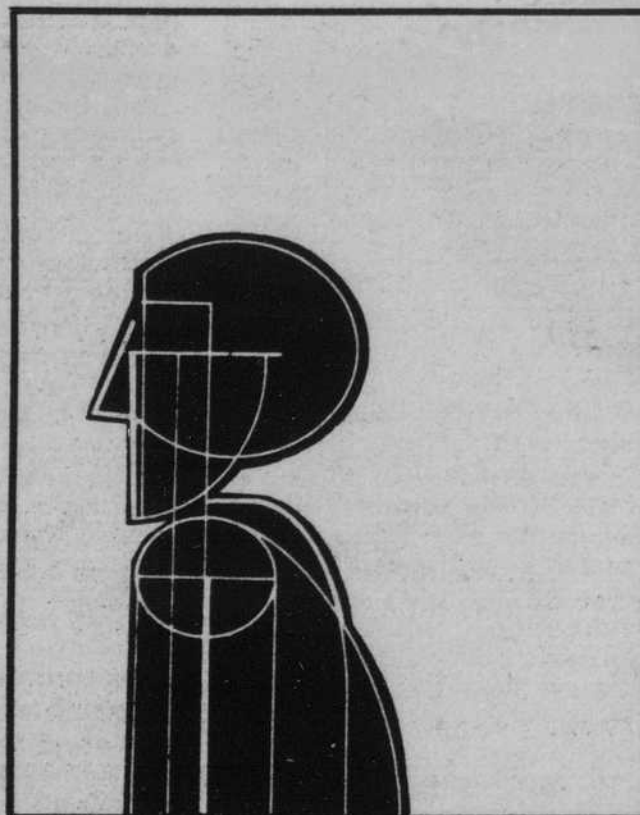
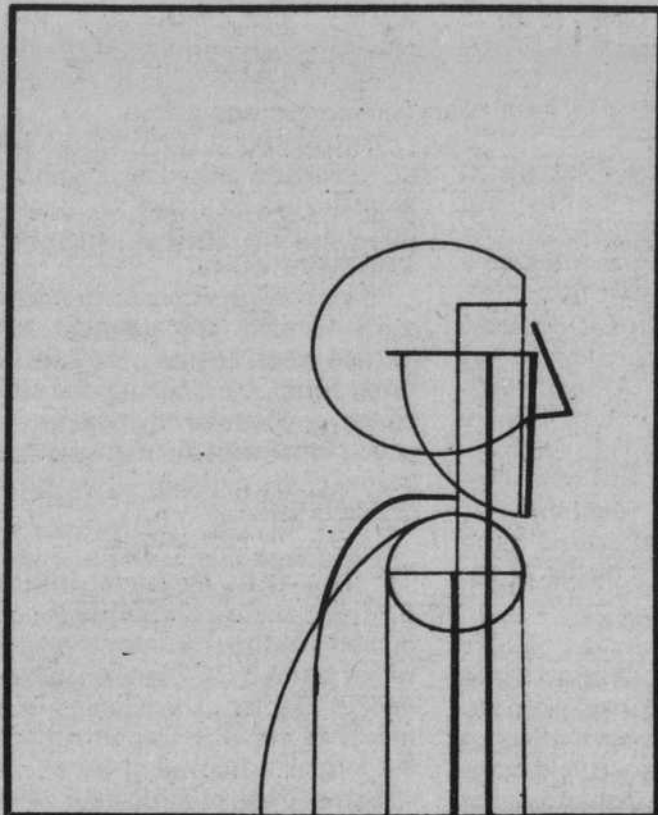
race or cultural background.

Though the University has had at least a mild affirmative action commitment for several years, it's had a hard time agreeing on how to institutionalize that commitment amid criticism from all sides until last year's formation of a Council for Minority Education. Students, faculty and minority community representatives sit on the council and decide when and how to sponsor minority projects.

While it's too early to measure the success of the council, the support it has received from minority students and communities indicates a sensitivity lacking in previous programs.

The University law school takes a different approach.

The admissions people there look at LSAT scores and undergraduate grade point average as the main criteria for admission and then include a subjective rating considering the background, race and sex of the applicant. Marilyn Bradetich, law school admissions officer, says the process probably constitutes an affirmative program



Emerald graphic

since the subjective rating examines the strengths and potential of ethnic minority students as demonstrated in their own backgrounds.

Both the law school admissions criteria and the Council for Minority Education seem to have favorable effects, since the University enrolls about a four percent greater proportion of ethnic minorities than is found in the Oregon population.

But the enrollment figure is below the national percentage of ethnic minorities in the general population. That disparity is the effect of past discrimination in the Eugene area, an injustice probably no affirmative action program now acceptable to the Supreme Court could overturn.

In 1978 Eugene is fond of billing itself as a model of progress—the epitome of small-town America made good. In part, that reputation glosses over Eugene's sordid history of racial discrimination, espe-

cially against blacks.

Legal subordination of blacks in the United States may have begun in the Deep South, but when those southerners moved to Oregon they brought with them attitudes and practices that kept blacks out of Lane County until after World War II. Even today only a few hundred black families make their home in Eugene, a city of 100,000 people.

Sundown laws in Eugene, Roseburg, Cottage Grove, Albany, Corvallis, Salem, Brownsville and Medford prohibited blacks from entering any of those communities during the 1800s.

Sundown laws were later struck down by the Supreme Court—but the attitudes behind them ruled just as effectively for several more decades.

As arguments arose over whether Oregon should enter the union as a slave or free state, Joseph Lane, a local civic leader,

opposed any status, saying blacks needed no protection as long as they were prohibited from Oregon. Lane later became the state's first governor.

Seven votes in the Legislature kept Oregon from becoming a slave state, but it was almost another 100 years before a black family braved settling in Joseph Lane County.

The keep-'em-out attitude was especially strong during the 1920s when Eugene's Ku Klux Klan membership was reported at between 400 and 450 members, including several University faculty and students.

The Klan usually met at Skinner's Butte Park and occasionally paraded through the city clad in white robes and hoods. There were still no blacks living in or near the city, and Eugene's Klan stuck to peaceful demonstrations.

Other Klans in the state participated in at least two hanging.

Oregon Gov. Ben Olcott condemned that practice and Klan membership eroded away.

Then, in 1940, Leo and Bertha Washington became the first black family to live in Eugene. Since the Washingtons and the several families joining them in the next several years weren't permitted in public places, they lived in tent camps without plumbing or electricity near the Ferry Street Bridge and later, near Glenwood.

Several years later, the Eugene Human Rights Commission investigated discrimination in Eugene and found "a proportionately large number of racial discrimination cases in Eugene."

In its Report to the Community in 1966 the commission wrote that "Deep, subtle, sometimes subconscious, fears and attitudes no doubt form the substance of our problem in Eugene...As long as this persists, all of our good intentions, our surveys, our programs, our action groups, will not be enough to diminish the impression communicated to the Negro that he is a second-class citizen."

It is against this backdrop that Oregon higher education now invites ethnic minority students into its fold. It is against a similar backdrop that the Supreme Court narrowly interprets how serious a University can be about making a place for cultural diversity among its ivory towers.

"It takes a lot of encouragement, says Chris Munoz, a former recruiter for the University. "A lot of the work is just convincing high school counselors, principals and the students themselves that they have a place in higher education."

Editor's note: Much of the information used in this article came from Lewis Peters' master's thesis submitted to the urban planning department in 1973: *Critical Perspective of Minorities in Lane County, Oregon, Their Hardships and Difficulties Towards Self Determination.*

emu Food Service

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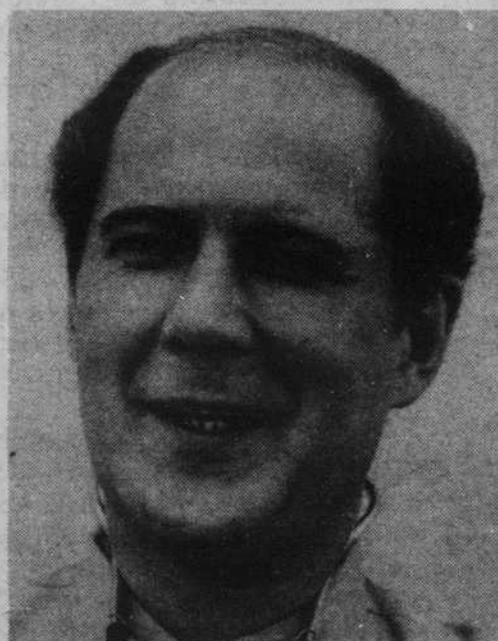
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