

# University's budget outlook is less bleak

By Harry Esteve  
Of the Emerald

## Lawmakers need enlightenment

As a movie documentary, it might be titled "The Story of U" — with the U standing for the University.

It would open with a wide-angle shot of "new student week" on the University campus, summer, 1982.



'Everything proposed is good for us,' Olum says of state board's budget request.

The camera roams over small groups of high school graduates being led around campus by cheery volunteers. It focuses on a large green and yellow banner sagging over the north entrance to the EMU. The banner is faded, tattered and soiled. It reads: "Welcome to the University of Oregon."

The sign is an ominous relic from some

of the worst years in history for the University and for the state's seven other higher education institutions.

Time for flashbacks: The 1981-82 academic year, perhaps the worst of the worst.

State revenue projections come up short twice, and both times the State System of Higher Education is hammered with funding cuts. Meanwhile, the State Board of Higher Education looks for a new chancellor to replace veteran Roy Lieuallen. Their first choice declines because the board can't afford to pay him what he thinks he's worth.

Presidents at three Oregon colleges abandon ship. The first two give somewhat vague reasons for leaving. But the third, Eastern Oregon State's Rodney Briggs, blasts the state Legislature for over-funding elementary and secondary education — as well as community colleges — at the expense of higher education.

Here at the University, Pres. Paul Olum struggles to keep up with the onslaught of mandated budget cuts.

Olum pares away at faculty salary increases, reducing salaries to nationally uncompetitive levels. Some faculty leave, snatching up offers that in some cases nearly double their University wages. Most stay, however, in an almost touching display of loyalty — if not for the University then for Eugene.

Money for services and supplies disappears. The library's books and periodicals treasury is raided. Olum tells legislators and state board members that the University is "at the end of its rope." More cuts are announced.

The University's natural history museum loses its funding. Olum liquidates the school of Community Service and

Public Affairs, dispersing its vital organs among several other schools. Employees at the art museum — including the director — are laid off for the three summer months and the museum is shut down until fall.

In late spring, the state comes up short again, and the University is forced to come up with about another \$1 million in cuts. Olum sends academic shock waves across the state when he immediately proposes cutting off funds for the Labor Education and Research Center, the Bureau of Governmental Research and Services, the Oregon Institute of Marine Biology, and KWAX radio station, all "outreach" programs that directly benefit the community outside the University.

These programs are spared by a letter from the new state system chancellor Bud Davis, who asks Olum to wait until fall enrollment figures are in before making final decisions on cuts.

The flashbacks end with the University finding itself teetering at the edge of a financial cliff — a rocky abyss of bankruptcy and academic mediocrity yawning below.

This is no "worst case scenario" — this is history — and there are some strong forces working to push the University over that edge. Consider a few of the worst:

- **Declining enrollment.** Because of the way Oregon funds higher education, any significant dips in the number of students attending college can bring the University to the brink of a financial crisis. This happened in the early 1970s and is happening again. Last year enrollment dropped to 16,645 for fall 1981, a 4 percent drop from 1980, according to Registrar Wanda Johnson.

Projected enrollment figures for this year indicate another drop of about 6 percent to nearly 15,600 students.

- **Oregon's withered economy.** Even if the state legislators were as generous as higher education officials would like them to be, the state's coffers aren't bottomless. Hundreds of other state agencies and programs vie for what funds are



Charlene Curry jokingly refers to herself as an 'Evangelist... spreading the word.'

there.

- **Faculty salaries.** Unless something can be done to raise them, University officials are worried that the best teachers will leave, as some already have.

- **Public attitudes and "misconceptions."** According to several administrators.

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