

The University is here to question 'Why'

Why are you here?

Why have you come from Portland and Paisley, Langlois and Lake Oswego, Sacramento and Singapore to the University?

Are you here to meet people? You shall.

Are you here to enhance your employability? You may.

Are you here to seek factual knowledge? There is plenty available.

These are all worthwhile goals, but are any of you here, in these days of quantification, because you wonder? How many of you wonder at the presence of stars, of starfish? The late American writer-anthropologist Loren Eiseley once stood on a beach at dawn, hurling moribund starfish into the sea, rescuing a few

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living things from their airy grave.

This was his way of raging against the dying of the light, of giving something back to the world that had nurtured him. He wrote of the "inner galaxy," that part of each of us that defines our humanity, that allows our minds to reach in a moment's abstraction clear across the breadth of human knowledge.

The scope of human minds — your minds — released to imagine, perceive, speculate and conclude is more than galactic, it is universal.

At the heart of the university experience is the need and opportunity to

question. Former University Pres. William Boyd asked us to hold all truth tentative, and suggested that the occasional incivility of those who question was an acceptable price to pay for the freedoms our society provides.

If you question no one during your time here and merely accept what you hear, your B.A. will signify little but Bachelor of Absorption. You will have fallen into the pattern about which the late Chilean Nobel laureate Pablo Neruda warned with the words "now I question no one, but I know less every day."

I invite you to instead shun the bland crowd and live, like Neruda, "so much that they will have to forget me forcibly." Pursue your learning with vigor and enthusiasm, and do not fear to wander where no one has lighted the way. The University has provided an adequate set of signposts and guidelines, but the learning process and its results are largely up to you.

This university offers a splendid panorama of human experience, a panoply of things to learn and see, do and be, from which only the greatest dullard could emerge untouched. Your college years can set the tone for the rest of your life.

Will you be an automaton who always says "yes" and never "why," or will you dare to take the road less traveled, the long winding trail under the sky; to make the "commitment to a tough, embattled life," as E.L. Doctrow described the fate of modern individualists?

For many of you, the answer is moot,

the question unasked. Instinctive drones, you will do what is expected of you and be happy in your own way. For those who remain, as you arrive at this great university you may already suspect that the simple pleasures of your peers will be denied you.

You have already started on the long trail; your minds register the branches that others do not see, your hearts the choices others need not make.

For you who will understand, then, here are the words of Richard Hersh, University vice president for research. In an article in "Inquiry," the University's research periodical, he reminded us that especially in this age of expanding technology there is a need for people with a "sense of the major human questions of value," and that technology can never "duplicate the process of imagination."

He called also for an awareness that we as humans have an "infinite capacity for creativity," and that "technology must serve this human spirit." Whether to turn your creative energy to causes external to your formal studies, to raise "less corn and more hell," as American Populist leader Mary Elizabeth Lease advised farmers, or to spend your imaginative capital in your studies is not critical.

What you must do is live your college years, these unique years, as fully as possible in your own special way.

Whether you study stars or starfish, remember not only the "what" but the "why." If the answer is that we do not

know why, then perhaps you have found a small corner of the puzzle of creation in which to contribute to the pool of human knowledge, or over which to speculate by a campfire.

Perhaps as a professor 40 years from now you will stand like Eiseley on a far shoreline with a student and say to her "we do not know why," knowing that she will carry on that quintessential human quest: the search for knowledge, for beginnings and endings, for love and satisfaction, for a future better than the past not only in tangible accomplishment and technological advances but in humanistic attributes.

The long trail is not easy, up so close to the sky. You'll be alone much of the time, and when you turn to share your wonder, you may address only the wind. When those times come, look back, far along the trail, and it will be there, Oregon, the Emerald City in the rain, to lend you strength as you remember: "we do not know why." Your time here is not the beginning, for you have already begun.

Enjoy your years at Oregon, and in your mind, as you stay up with a friend to watch the sunrise, let the words of Jacques Brel dance:

If we only had love, then tomorrow will dawn,

And the days of our years will rise on that morn,

Then with nothing at all but the little we are

We'll have conquered all time, all space, the sun and the stars.

By Alan Contreras

State universities, colleges provide varied curricula

By Mike Sims
Of the Emerald

If anyone needs proof that things change with time, they need look no further than to examine the changes within the Oregon state system of higher education.

The University was established by the Legislature in 1872 as the state University and center of studies in the liberal arts.

Four years earlier, the Legislature accepted a federal land grant for agricultural

education and designated a Corvallis private school as Oregon Agricultural College.

Today, the University and Oregon State University anchor the state's eight-school system of higher education. Like the University and OSU, most of the system schools were founded for specific academic purposes.

Those original purposes have remained as major parts of each school's academic life. But Oregon's state colleges and

universities have expanded from their original key fields of study to meet changing times and needs in Oregon.

The University remains Oregon's premier liberal arts-centered institution, with several nationally acclaimed professional schools added since it opened for instruction in 1876. The state's law school is located on the Eugene campus. Schools of architecture and allied arts, journalism, and music are also located at the

University.

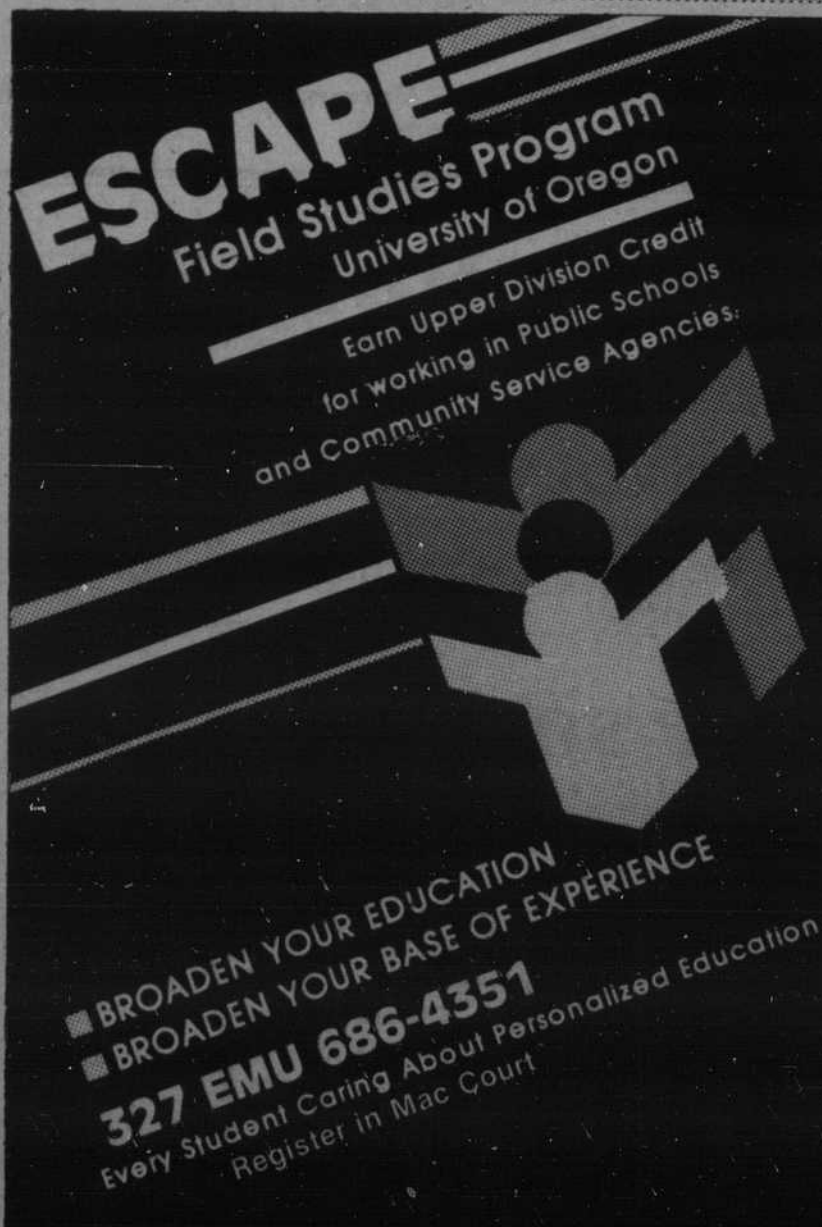
In 1973, the University schools of medicine, dentistry and nursing (all located in Portland) were consolidated into one autonomous unit: the University of Oregon Health Sciences Center. The 1981 Legislature re-named the institution the Oregon Health Sciences University, thus further asserting the institution's autonomy.

OSU is still known in many circles as Oregon's "farm" col-

lege. However, OSU's mission goes beyond farming to embrace many of the natural sciences. OSU offers programs in engineering, forestry, geology, pharmacy and home economics. Teacher training in the sciences is a key part of OSU's school of education.

Both OSU and the University offer teacher training, but in the early years of the state higher education system the two

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