

A feminist view
of the Scriptures
See Page 8

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Hiring practices will receive scrutiny

By Jolayne Houtz

Of the Emerald

The University's Office of Affirmative Action is investigating the hiring practices of the law school that resulted in the resignation of Dean Derrick Bell two weeks ago, University President Paul Olum said at a press conference Wednesday.

The investigation resulted in part from requests Olum received from the Student Bar Association and other interested individuals to look into the events surrounding the rejection of an Asian woman who applied for a law school assistant professorship.

The woman was one of three candidates the law school faculty looked at for the position. The other two, both white men, declined the position but the woman was still rejected. Some people felt she should have been offered the professorship because she was the one remaining candidate.

"We will proceed by doing two things," Olum said. "The first part is being sure we know the facts about what happened... the second is the question of affirmative action and the policies of the University."

Olum said he hopes to receive the results of a study into the matter by Monday. The investigation will be conducted by Al Okahara of the Office of Affirmative Action, he said.

"The University has a strong and powerful commitment to the principles of affirmative action," Olum said. "Our basic policies are sound, but we may have to make some local changes in how these rules are used."



Photo by Michael Clapp

University President Paul Olum met the press Wednesday to reaffirm the University's commitment to affirmative action and anti-discrimination activities.

The purpose of the investigation is not to turn over the existing departmental hiring policies, Olum said, but to look at how these hiring practices affect the University's affirmative action stance.

One of the major questions raised as a result of Bell's resignation has been about the "substantial objection" process, allowing an unspecified number of faculty members to raise objections to the hiring of an applicant.

In the law school case, three faculty

members out of the approximately 16 present at the faculty meeting ultimately objected to hiring the Asian woman, based on her lack of qualifications.

"The relevance of such a rule and the impact it has on affirmative action considerations may be an important one," Olum said.

While Olum said he wanted the University to do everything in its power to recruit and train minority faculty members, he said he wouldn't be willing

to require that a position be filled by a minority.

"That would be setting them up as a token minority... they would be doomed to defeat," Olum said.

"The events of the Penk case and the events of the law school call for a restatement of our commitments (to affirmative action)," Olum said.

The Penk case was a class-action suit brought by faculty women at a number of public colleges and universities against the State Board of Higher Education.

Despite a ruling that no systematic discrimination exists in Oregon's higher education system, Olum said faculty women should not be discouraged at the results. "I welcome the Penk case result because I don't think there is systematic discrimination," he said. "Nonetheless, I am aware as everyone should be that, historically, discrimination has indeed existed against women in our society," he said.

"What is crucial now is that we not relax these concerns and that we recognize the importance of a continued commitment to be on guard against any possible inequality in the treatment of women and of minorities or other protected classes," Olum said.

Olum also expressed his personal feelings about the ASUO's plan to appeal the South African stock divestiture decision. "I believe in divestiture, and I'm glad the ASUO is pursuing it," he said.

He said the argument that businesses should remain in South Africa because they could help eliminate the apartheid situation was a valid one 30 years ago but no longer holds true today.

Penk 'puzzled' by ruling

By Michael Hosmar

Of the Emerald

One of the plaintiffs in a sex-discrimination lawsuit against the State Board of Higher Education says she's "puzzled" with the judge's decision released last Friday.

Anna Penk said she doesn't know why U.S. District Judge Helen Frye allowed herself and two other faculty women, all from Western Oregon State College, to prevail on individual claims of sex-discrimination in the class-action suit.

"There were other plaintiffs that had claims that were just as good as ours," Penk said.

Although 19 of the 22 plaintiffs lost their claims, Penk said the trial "is just one step in the

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— Anna Penk

right direction."

The 22 plaintiffs in the lawsuit, Penk vs. State Board of Higher Education, argued they were discriminated against because of their sex in terms of salary and promotion. Frye ruled there was no pattern of sex discrimination in the State System of Higher Education, although she did rule in favor of the plaintiffs on three of 58 sex-discrimination claims. The nine-month trial ended in November.

The administration at WOSC is just as puzzled with the decision, said Peter Courtney, affirmative action officer and assistant to the president at WOSC.

"We're not saying it's a bad decision for Western — we're with the verdict. We're just trying to right any wrongs that have occurred," he said.

Courtney said WOSC President, Richard Meyers, has always tried to treat women with equity. "He (Meyers) came here in February '83, and he's worked hard to treat women equally in terms of cabinet appointments... and athletic programs."

Meyers was unavailable for comment.

Frye's decision in favor of the three WOSC faculty women could slightly damage the institution's reputation, Courtney said. "Western has had the greatest enrollment increases in the state, but we don't know how much it (Frye's decision) may or may not hurt us."

"The situation at Western has not been exactly rosy," Penk said, "but I don't think you can blame it on one particular president." She said that sex-discrimination has been part of the general social structure of a society that has encouraged discrimination.

"It took a long time for Galileo to convince people that the earth is round, Penk said, "maybe it will take a long time for people to believe that men are not the center of the earth."

At a meeting Tuesday in Salem, the plaintiffs decided to begin preparing for their presentation of an appeal to the decision, Penk said. The plaintiffs will decide on what grounds to appeal after they have thoroughly studied Frye's opinion, she said.



Petura says adieu: Next stop Pullman

Barbara Petura, director of the University News and Information Service, spent her last day on the job Wednesday conducting University President Paul Olum's monthly press conference.

Petura, who has been at the University six years, will go to Washington State University to accept a similar position. "It's bittersweet to leave. The job is definitely a great career opportunity, and it was very, very hard to turn it down," Petura said.

Olum credited Petura with "keeping me out of trouble, telling me what to do... and getting me to my appointments on time."

Every once in awhile, you have a person so good that their loss is devastating, and Barbara is one of those," Olum said.

Photo by Michael Clapp