

Editorial

Plan would damage educational quality

If the State Board of Higher Education continues with plans to expand the "Centers of Excellence" program, the caliber of education at Oregon's institutions could be severely damaged.

Alvin Batiste, the board's president, said the plan is an attempt to identify areas of excellence at the state's institutions, and then reward those areas with additional funding. Institution presidents are expected to specify areas of excellence at their respective institutions at the next board meeting Dec. 20. The board will identify the final areas.

At first glance, it seems to be a good idea. One might conclude the plan will help the state's most promising fields realize their full potential.

But upon closer inspection, an alarming picture unfolds. Publicly labeling some programs as "excellent" necessarily publicly identifies others as "second class." Departments branded "second class" could become self-fulfilling prophecies. A "second class" label would damage the morale of students and faculty in the department, and the department would have difficulty attracting new students. The same would hold true for a particular field recognized as "excellent" at one institution and not another.

Also, the total number of "Centers of Excellence" and the number at each institution must be limited. But if each institution is able to emphasize only a certain number of programs, how many institutions will push programs that do not turn out many graduates, such as foreign languages, philosophy and history?

Also, Batiste said duplicate programs will not be simultaneously recognized as "Centers of Excellence." He said the board would encourage "complementary" programs, but it is not clear whether the board will define complementary in narrow or broad terms. In the broadest of definitions, no two programs are exactly alike. In the narrowest, more than one program in the same field is excessive.

If a particular field receives recognition and superior funding at only one institution, students interested in the field may feel compelled to attend that institution. But not every student has the flexibility to alter their geographic location. It would be unfortunate if the board recognized only one quality program in each field. And along these lines, students interested in double majors or minors may also feel they are not able to obtain quality instruction in both fields at one institution.

Another frightening repercussion is that a "Center of Excellence" could be established outside of the institution that genuinely offers the superior program.

Batiste asserted funds would not be taken from unrecognized programs to finance the recognized programs; that funds would be requested in addition to the base budget. But it is not clear whether or not the state Legislature is willing to substantially increase the funds allocated to higher education.

In addition, programs, particularly those at the University of Oregon, are already tragically underfunded. Simply maintaining a base budget will fail to rectify the embarrassing inadequacy of funds.

Another objection involves control. Funds and emphasis clearly are not distributed equally now. But under the current system, the institutions decide how to allocate funds, not the State Board of Higher Education. Under the new system, the board would identify the centers, and the board would determine how to allocate funds.

Those intimately involved with the programs, particularly at the University of Oregon where administrators and faculty have proven they can build and maintain a first-rate institution, should decide which programs should be emphasized. The institution's administrators can make informed decisions without publicly labeling some programs superior to others.

Further, decisions of this magnitude and importance should be decided carefully and should be based on extensive research. Thus we come to another flaw. Institution presidents had less than 30 day's warning that they would be expected to make cases for their institution's departments at the Dec. 20 board meeting. And at the meeting, each president will be limited to a 15-minute presentation.

How can University of Oregon President Paul Olum be expected to choose between the University's programs when nearly all of them are among the nation's best, especially in less than one month? How can he appropriately present a case in 15 minutes?

To put it plainly, we are horrified. We strongly urge the State Board of Higher Education to drop the idea — and bury it.

SKELLY
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COUNTY NEWS SERVICE



"I was never in doubt of the verdict..."
—Gen. Fabian C. Ver

Letters

Good work

As a youngster, a respected scholar (my uncle Joe) once told me, "If it doesn't fit in my Chevy pickup, it doesn't fit in my life..."

Taking those words, old Joe's passion for Cheez Whiz and George Kennedy movies into account, I read Chuck Thompson's article on why he hates the Oregon State Beavers.

In the aftermath, I realized it met all Chevy-size requirements and I'm sure my uncle would have loved it.

I know good taste runs in our family, but seriously folks, the article had to be one of the most creative and entertaining pieces to grace the Emerald sports pages in my four years of readership.

Speaking from experience, sports writing should be more than a gray haze of names, numbers and dull quotes. Mr. Thompson has, with his OSU article and his previous epic on Eugene ratball, provided sports stories of this nature.

As for this Lori Hamilton character, a none too just punishment would be having her write 500 times: I believe in

my heart that Bert Convey is a fine actor. (No, no, just kidding.)

But I do find Ms. Hamilton's criticism of Mr. Thompson's article a bit like my Uncle Joe's passion for Cheez Whiz: unfortunate.

Ms. Hamilton claims that the article could only "generate a negative and unhealthy attitude toward competition" and "provoke such disgraceful stereotypes."

Unlikely, unless read by six-year-olds, John Hinckley Jr. or humorless "ex"-OSU fans.

So, a toast to Mr. Thompson. Keep up the good work. Hunter S. would be proud.

B. Edward Thompson
(no relation I know of)
Journalism

Reject project

As for the so-called "Superconducting Super Collider \$6 billion project" on the front page of the Register-Guard Sunday, I say, "hah!" to the inference it may "shed light on the secrets of matter and the nature of the universe." The only matter or nature the proponents, most of them, are interested in is the matter and nature of profits.

What pollutants will be its products and byproducts? What new tax will pay for it? What new tool of war will be born from it? What percentage of us, the people, would vote for it? Instead, bring back the health of Earth to good balance.

Tommy Walen Laughing Deer
Eugene

Letters Policy

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Letters to the editor must be limited to 250 words, typed, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is turned in. The Emerald reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style. Letters to the editor should be turned into the Emerald office, Suite 300, EMU.

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