

Program is divided by gender

By Tonnie Dakin
Of the Emerald

A program that teaches high school juniors about state government is separated by gender. Oregon Beaver's Girls' State and Oregon Beaver's Boys' State have been held the same week only once and that was because of a scheduling error.

Participants in the annual programs create mock governments and play the roles of officials and citizens to better understand state government. About 520 boys participated in Boys' State on campus about two weeks ago, and about 350 girls are on campus this week for Girls' State.

Both programs are sponsored by the American Legion — Girls' State by the American Legion Auxiliary.

Girls' State was founded 46 years ago and used to take place at Willamette University in Salem, said Director Elaine Stevens. The program was moved to the University three years ago for financial reasons, she said.

Boys' State and Girls' State were held the same week in 1984. The programs were kept separate, but some activities such as guest lectures were combined.

There are no plans to combine them again, Stevens said, adding that the programs should stay separate.

Boys' State is run by former Boys' State members and junior counselors. Girls' State is run by the American Legion Auxiliary, which results in slight differences in the two programs, Stevens said.

"We have a more scheduled program," she said.

And she said holding the programs together would not save money. "You pay for who you have here, not how many you have at once," she said.

Michelle Haywood, a sophomore journalism major at the University, participated in Girls' State in 1984, when the two programs were held together.

She said the combined program went well, although many of the girls thought Girls' State leaders were too strict.

"There was an underlying struggle there between the girls and the Auxiliary ladies," Haywood said. "Some girls thought there was a hypocrisy there. We were being called



Photo by Shu-Shing Chen

High school girls on campus for Oregon Beaver's Girls' State take a break from mock government activities for a picnic.

ladies, but we weren't being treated like ones."

Andrea Spuck, a junior counselor at Girls' State, defended the strictness.

"There is a safety factor involved," she said. "Many of these girls come from small towns and have not been exposed to a larger population area."

Bitsy Paulson was elected governor of Girls' State last year and returned this year as a liaison between the citizens and the Auxiliary. She said most of the girls do not mind having Girls' State separate from Boys' State.

"I think it's a bit more beneficial," she said. "There's not as many distractions."

"A lot of women come here from small towns...they are more liable to let males make decisions for them," Spuck said. "Even being as capable as they are, a male's opinion may override their own."

"Being at Girls' State with other women really lets everyone explore their own individuality without a male's viewpoint," Paulson said.

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