

Classes held, attendance still required on King's birthday

By Michael Drummond
Emerald Associate Editor

"No matter how small one thinks one's work is, he must realize it has cosmic significance if he is serving humanity and serving the will of God." Martin Luther King Jr.

It's Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, a day commemorating the work of the slain civil rights leader and a time for all of us to reflect upon improving

the human condition.

Most calendars will show that it's an "observed" holiday. But looking at the University, one would be hard pressed to see that today isn't just any other winter Monday in Oregon.

For the most part, it's business as usual here on campus. Classes are being held and faculty and students are obliged to attend. The only thing different about this, the 16th of January, is that Oregon Hall is closed

and the school's classified staff get the day off.

"The University of Oregon is required by the Oregon State Board of Higher Education to hold classes a certain number of days," said Alison Baker, executive assistant to the president.

"The UO doesn't cancel classes for a number of national holidays," she said, such as Veterans Day and Columbus Day. "Thanksgiving and Memorial Day are the only days we cancel classes in the middle of a session."

That's the official line, but there are other reasons.

"It's also been suggested that there was nothing in Martin Luther King's life that warranted students not to go to school," Baker said, but added that she didn't know if she agreed with that.

Baker said that students and faculty have the option of not going to class as a private way to observe Martin Luther King Day.

"We're enthusiastic about people observing the holiday," she said.

It may seem surprising that the University, much touted as the progressive flagship of the Northwest, doesn't observe the holiday in the traditional sense, let alone celebrate it in some official capacity.

In fact, the University is in the minority compared with its Pacific 10 Conference brethren. Oregon State and Washington State universities are the only

other schools in the Pac-10 that don't cancel classes on Martin Luther King Day.

OSU could almost be excused for its ceremonial neglect, being a land-grant university and all. And although WSU didn't cancel classes, it at least is holding a second annual "Candle Light Unity March" and accompanying ceremonies, including a speech by Rev. Calvin Butts, a Baptist minister from New York and president of Africare.

Berkeley is closed today; so is the University of Washington. Stanford is celebrating its third Martin Luther King holiday, and Southern Cal its second. The University of California, Los Angeles also is closed.

Even the two Arizona schools have shut their classroom doors, and these two institutions weathered the bad years under former Arizona Gov. Evan Meecham, who objected to making Martin Luther King Day a national holiday and was forced from office in disgrace for his neanderthal racial stance, among other things.

But should the University honor Martin Luther King Day? The answer is yes, according to Edwin Coleman II, associate English professor and director of Ethnic Studies.

"As you look around, how many departments at the University are taking time to even say anything about it?" Coleman said regarding the school's noticeable lack of sanctioned Martin Luther King Day cere-



monies.

"It certainly would be nice for the University, as a leader in the community, as the flagship of higher education in the state, to show the way," Coleman said.

Coleman said he and his colleagues could have held a rally or some other event in honor of King, but his busy schedule precluded him from doing so. He said the University administration should have promoted some activities for the simple reason it has more resources at its disposal.

Or Coleman said he could have taken Baker's suggestion and skipped classes, but he decided that would have been counterproductive.

"Instead of boycotting classes, I'm going to have a teach-in and talk about Martin Luther King and his work," he said. "At least we can talk about it."

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