

Students protest cut in program funding

By Christopher Blair
Emerald News Editor

Rhetoric and communication students voiced their concerns about their ailing department with a letter and petition to University officials Friday.

A group of 30 rhet/com students crowded the office of speech department head Ronald Sherriffs and presented him with the letter and petition, signed by more than 600 students of various majors.

"Recently...funding has been cut back drastically for many of these schools within the College of Arts and Sciences, in particular, the area of rhetoric and communication," stated the letter, written by student Will Patton. "Without a strong rhetoric department on this campus, the University's claim to providing a solid liberal arts education for today's students will be far from legitimate."

Sherriffs said he shared the students' concerns. But he said recent funding cuts by the Oregon Legislature — which have led to the elimination of three faculty positions and more than 15 courses in the past two years — make solutions for the disci-

pline's problems hard to find. "You know what the bottom line of this seems to be," he said. "That is the dollars throughout the state system (of higher education) haven't followed the students."

Sherriffs later added that the versatility of a degree in communications has increased student interest in the major, more student interest than the department can handle.

After their meeting with Sherriffs, the students walked to Johnson Hall to wait for a scheduled meeting with University President Myles Brand. As the crowd stood quietly on the steps of Johnson Hall, they presented a letter and petition to Provost Norman Wessells, who accepted it as he walked into the building.

The students explained later that they had not been able to get a Friday appointment with the provost's office.

Brand then agreed to see the students early and he accepted the letter petition in his office lobby.

Senior Kirk Ihlenberg, who presented the petition to Brand, said it was proof of the student body's support of the rhet/com students' concerns.



Photo by Martin Thiel

Senior Kirk Ihlenberg presents President Myles Brand with a petition signed by 600 students objecting to cutbacks in the University's rhetoric and communication program.

"We have business majors, leisure studies majors, almost every major on this campus has someone representing it and with their support for our petition," he said.

Brand's response to the students was similar to Sherriffs': The University is all but powerless to alleviate the depart-

ment's problems.

"I appreciate you coming by," Brand said. "There's obviously a lot of support here and a lot of concern. Some of it has been the influx of majors in the department in recent years, and the department hasn't been able to keep up. Some of it is because of academic decisions

that have been made."

Brand promised to relay the students' concerns to his Undergraduate Education Task Force.

Students and officials agreed that the gathering went well, hampered only by the present lack of options for the speech department.



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