

Candidate demands action on higher education issues

By Paul Holbo

I am an optimist. I think that the Duck football team will have one of its best seasons in its history this fall. The quiet confidence of the coaches I've talked to is one reason for my views. Another winning season will lift spirits in this state — and help finance men's and women's sports at the University. Go Ducks! Good luck to the Beavers also.

Commentary

I also believe that the University and Oregon State University will continue to be members of the Pacific-10 Conference. This membership is important for academic reasons as well as for athletic connections, and leaving the conference would only worsen the financial deficit of the Athletic Department.

College athletics are vital to schools such as ours.

Financing big-time college athletics will be an increasing problem, however, and not just at the University and OSU. A recent study by the Forum for College Financing, titled "Fiscal Fitness? The Peculiar Economics of Intercollegiate Athletics," questions whether the most successful athletic programs can continue as they have done. The University of Michigan, with its huge football crowds, projects deficits of \$5.2 million by 1993. Educational leaders and the NCAA will have to address these issues more effectively than in the recent past.

Addressing the current deficit is the immediate issue in Oregon. The Oregon State Board of Higher Education has directed Oregon's public universities to address this problem by admitting more students in order to cover the costs of grants-in-aid to athletes and other expenses of athletic programs.

This directive will make the rest of the University finance the athletic program, which now gets no state funding. Some higher-education officials have attempted to argue that there will be little impact. Budget officer Davis Quenzer hopes that marginal-cost economics will allow the University and OSU to handle the students with no extra costs, that classes can be made bigger. Vice Chancellor Bill Lemman says that the 200 to 600 extra students will be "almost imperceptible," tucked into classes here and there on campus.

Such arguments are a convincing case for making administrators talk to students and faculty more often. There already is tremendous overcrowding and unmet student demand for courses at the University — because it has been chronically underfunded, because Gov. Neil Goldschmidt ordered a programmatic budget reduction in 1989 that cut deeply, and because the 1989 Legislative Assembly failed to provide the money for students already enrolled.

As a result of the chronic underfunding, the College of Business Administration has restricted enrollments for several years, and the Department of Economics followed suit when it was overrun with students who could not get into business

courses. The Department of Physical Education took the same action more recently. (I refer to PE teaching courses; following an earlier budget cut, PE activity classes must support themselves by special fees charged to participants.)

Last year, rhetoric and communications students waited in the halls all night in order to sign up for classes. As a result of the 1989 budget cut, rhetcomm and leisure studies — each of which have had large enrollments — will cut the number of their students next year. Among smaller programs affected by the 1989 cut are the graduate program in counseling psychology and classes in American Sign Language.

Anticipated budget stringency caused the acting dean of arts and sciences this spring to suspend the popular American studies program. Faculty and students have asked that this suspension be reviewed next fall, but no new majors will be admitted in 1990-91.

Some have argued that students who want American studies can take sociology or English courses. The painful facts are that this past winter term, every seat in every class in sociology was filled. Every seat in every upper-division English class was filled by the morning of the first day of registration. Every seat in every class in psychology also was filled, and the same was true of other departments.

It is not possible to add a few more students to each class when students are already sitting in the aisles and when there are long waiting lists for openings.

Seniors have priority in registration, but numerous seniors are unable to take the classes they want. One senior told me recently that this spring he got only three of his five selected classes. A parent of a senior said that his daughter dropped out because she could not enroll in the classes she needed. Virtually every week a student tells me of his or her problems — most recently a student in political science. The situation is especially severe for sophomores and juniors.

It is going to get worse. The psychology department, a world-class program, has 1,200 majors and understandably proposes to admit no more. The mathematics department is considering teaching calculus in sections of 250 or even 450.

University Vice President Dan Williams, who is responsible for athletics, is rightly concerned that some other unit on campus will have to pay for the costs of athletic programs.

Given competition for scarce resources, I come down firmly on the side of academic priorities, despite my respect for the fine athletic program developed at this university. One of the reasons I became a legislative candidate was my growing concern that our undergraduate students are being neglected. I have discussed the shortage of courses with Chancellor Thomas Bartlett and with Dave Frohnmayer, both of whom appreciate the situation.

President Myles Brand, who did not create either the academic or the athletic problem, deserves praise for stating that

he will not shift funds from academics to athletics. But the situation handed him — accepting several hundred or more new students — presents a difficult challenge, given the backlog of existing student demand for courses.

An opportunity must be made of the crisis. The financial deficit in athletics should be used to make the public aware of the larger financial problem of higher education in Oregon. If this issue is understood and acted upon, both athletics and academics could benefit. They both deserve help.

This will require the state's leaders to face fundamental issues involving higher education. They have not been willing to do so for a decade, except during the 1985-87 biennium, although former President Paul Olum and others tried repeatedly to get the attention of legislators.

The Legislature should be ashamed of itself for refusing to provide for the academically qualified and motivated students who need and want to attend Oregon's institutions of higher education. We have the best students at the University in its history. We also have the best faculty members — but we do not have enough of them to teach the students who are here now. We are also relying far too heavily on graduate teaching fellows and on temporary or adjunct faculty. PSU is under enrollment pressure, and OSU isn't far behind.

Recent legislatures have not faced their responsibilities to provide the education needed for Oregon's future. There has been little recognition of the need to deal with the present overcrowded classrooms, even less with a larger problem ahead.

This year, 1990, marks the low point in the number of high-school graduates in Oregon. By 1994, there will be 3,000 more high-school graduates in Oregon each year. Forty to 50 percent of them will want to go on to higher education. By 2000, there will be 10,000 more high school graduates each year than there are today. Where are they to go? Unless preparations begin soon, there'll be no room at Oregon's inn of higher education.

What to do? The first step is to elect officials who are concerned about these issues, who promise to make the Legislature deal with issues of education and higher education at

the beginning of each session. The second step is to insist they translate talk into action. Thousands of Beaver and Duck fans could help mightily to provide the needed political pressure — serving athletics and

the larger university at the same time. Go Beavers! Go Ducks!

Paul Holbo is University vice provost for academic affairs, and a Republican candidate for State Senate, District 22.

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