

University plays host to gifted kids

Young students get chance to meet intellectual peers

By Hasan Jafri
Emerald Contributor

The auditorium was packed with more than 200 students, parents and faculty. As each group of 10 to 18 students received their certificates, the auditorium boomed with cheers and claps. As the students were presented their certificates, some shed tears of joy while others danced and celebrated.

This sight is not uncommon around schools this time of year, but what made this graduation ceremony on the University campus different was that the graduates were 150 sixth-to-ninth graders from 113 Oregon communities and seven other states.

The ceremony marked the end of two weeks of fun and studying for the students at the 1991 Summer Enrichment Program for Talented and Gifted students.

The TAG program was created by Dr. George Shepard 10 years ago for the top three percent of Oregon's students. The two week program costs \$545, which includes tuition, room and board. During the two weeks, the students follow a rigorous program. They attend six classes five days a week and take part in a variety of physical and mental activities like playing sports and creative writing. Along the way the students are guided by teachers and counselors in the program.

The most important aspect of the program is to give freedom of choice and provide more of a challenge to the students than public schools do.

"These students have been subjected to public schools that are based upon false chronological age beliefs about children," Shepard said. "Everything is linked up K to 12 grades. They never had any freedom of choice in educational programs."

Because of the rigidity of the educational system, these bright students are vulnerable to many problems, including becoming bored with school. "Boredom in school is number one," Shepard said, "not having true peers around. True peers are people who think like you and are interested in what you do."

The students in the program share Shepard's opinion.

"(Public schools are) too structured. You do the same thing over and over and over," said Carly Smolak, an 11-year-old from Lake Oswego. "It gets real boring after a while."

During the two weeks, the students choose their studies from the 44 courses offered. The offerings range from foreign languages, cultures and animation, to "A Cloning Primer," a course that deals with hands-on experience in basic genetics and molecular biology.

After the classes, the students sign up for vari-

ous activities. Some practice their musical skills, some write poetry and others choose to "buy weird cards from Jaberwocky."

"These are kids with self motivation, charming creativity and a willingness to learn," said Dan Clark, an independent filmmaker who taught the popular filmmaking, drama and animation courses.

Lesley Sario, an 11-year-old sixth grader from Klamath Falls who aspires to be a stage director, was thrilled when the drama instructor gave her books on stage direction techniques to improve her skills.

Being in the program also helps these students make friends that they otherwise would not. Making friends, said Steve Moore, a counselor and education student at Lane Community College, helps these kids realize that there are "other kids like them and they actually meet those kids."

"I made a lot of new friends," said Amber Wampler, a 12-year-old from Florence. "I have a new best friend. You get along better with kids who think the same way as you do."

For admission in the program, students are judged on intelligence, academic performance, above average intellectual abilities, creativity, leadership skills and skills in visual and performance arts.

Even though most of the students are straight A students, some are not. Brock Railey, a 13-year-old 8th grader from Eugene, had a 2.7 GPA, but he scored above average in the mathematics section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test and was also a leader of his group in the Invention Convention.

As part of the program, the students also learn to deal with peer pressure and being stereotyped as book worms or "nerds."

"They are at the age now where peer pressure is the highest," Moore said. "It's this age when they have to make a conscious decision to either really excel in their academics or follow their peers."

"People think that I am a nerd because I do my homework on time," said Scott Iseri, a 12-year-old 7th grader from Ontario. "I do my own stuff. I am a skateboarder, I play drums. I don't go home and do my homework (immediately), play computer chess and listen to classical music — I don't do that."

The experience of the two-week program is, perhaps, best expressed by Smolak.

"We stayed here for two weeks and not for a second was I homesick. You get to know a lot of people. After two weeks, when it's time to go home, I don't want to go. I don't want to go home, I love it here."

MEDIA

Continued from Page 1

Public media networks were just as biased in favor of the government, Solomon said. He criticized National Public Radio's donation requests to defray war-coverage costs as "fundraisers for cheerleading the war."

On Public Broadcasting Service's *McNeil-Lehr News Hour* more than two-thirds of recent guests were present or former government officials, Solomon said.

"We've been conditioned to believe it's a balanced news source," Solomon said, when in fact the show is biased toward the government's point of view.

Many of these same govern-

ment officials also have a revolving-door employment history, working for the 23 corporations controlling most of the media, he said.

This situation is the result of an "incestuous" cooperation between huge corporations and the government since the start of the Cold War in the late 1940s, evolving into the military-industrial complex President Dwight Eisenhower warned the public against, he said.

A common language and set of interests also evolved between those controlling the government and corporations, thereby reducing visible dif-

ferences between the two, Solomon said.

"At the same time, the problems are institutional and don't depend on conspiracies of individuals," he said. "You could remove any 100 people from power and solve nothing."

The complex is stronger than ever, because of corporate consolidation over media ownership, Solomon said.

Solomon blamed the Reagan administration in part for cutting funding to public programming, making it increasingly dependent on corporate underwriters, and selling airwaves to private bidders.

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