

Bookstore braves bad times

By Carrie Dennett
Emerald Associate Editor

A drop in University enrollment combined with tough economic times have caused the University Bookstore to cut one satellite store and some full-time job positions.

Bookstore General Manager James Williams said the proper adjustments have been made given the changing economic climate and that he expects the 9 percent student book discount to remain secure.

"The bookstore's doing fine," he said.

The bookstore is not subsidized by the University, so any revenue problems have to be dealt with in-house.

"We're freestanding and independent, and we need to keep operations under control," Williams said. "We're making sure that we keep the operating expenses in line with our business."

A sales report dated Jan. 14 showed a 1.24 percent drop in sales over the holidays, much less than Williams expected given the dire economic forecast for merchants.

Williams said 10 to 12 full-time positions have been cut, some through layoffs and some by leaving vacant positions empty. He said student jobs have not been affected.

Another cut was the bookstore's satellite store in the EMU basement, closed because its overhead costs were too much for its dropping sales.

Williams said the Ducks' poor football record this season also contributed to a drop in sales. Sales of bowl paraphernalia had increased overall sales the last two years, a perk that was absent this season.

The bookstore's satellite store in Portland experienced a 26 percent drop in sales from this point last year, he said.

"The success of the football team directly affects sales there," he said.

Williams said his line of thinking at the beginning of fall 1991 was "the economy is not too bad, the football team will probably do OK, and the enrollment drop won't be too large."

"Then everything was thrown upside down," he said.

Panel: News bias has many sources

Panelists say deadline pressure, space constraints cause slanted news

By Sarah Clark
Emerald Contributor

Though the media isn't conspiring to lie to the public, bias in the news is inevitable, a panel of three local journalists and a University professor said Wednesday night at the Newman Center.

Deadline pressure is one source of bias, said Alan Siporin, who hosts a radio talk show on KLCC and reports for National Public Radio. Given a limited amount of time to finish a story, reporters can't do as thorough a job as they would like, he said. The result: a thin story that lacks proper perspective on issues.

Space constraints also bias the news. Wire services deliver thousands of stories each day to a newspaper, said Don Bishoff, a columnist for the Eugene Register-Guard. Only a few stories can fit into the newspaper, and editors must decide which articles are worth printing, Bishoff said.

Some stories get higher priority because of timing, said Jean Powell, a reporter for KEZI-TV. For example, the problem of the homeless, which is an issue year-round, receives far more coverage during the holiday season, she said.

But Carl Bybee, University assistant professor in telecommunication and film and speech, said there is more to the media's bias.

"Although I believe journalists on the whole are interested in conveying the truth and have concern about their community," Bybee said, "there is a systematic bias built into the media structure because of its commercial nature."

Bybee cited one recent Register-Guard headline that announced a corporation was planning job cuts.

"If that headline had been from the point of view of the people who were going to lose their jobs, it would have been very different," he said.

The media are corporately owned and tend to perpetuate the ideas of other corporations, Bybee said. Many of those ideas come from slick public relations brochures that are so



Photo by John Stoops
Professor Carl Bybee (left), columnist Don Bishoff, KEZI-TV reporter Jean Powell and KLCC radio talk show host Alan Siporin discussed the causes of media bias Wednesday.

tempting for reporters to use when limited in time. A Wall Street Journal study reported that half of all front-page articles in the paper originated from public relations reports, rather than from reporter initiative.

One audience member suggested that the corporate media also sensationalize headlines and stories in order to increase newspaper sales or television ratings. Bishoff hotly denied this.

"I know of no instance in the 31 years I've worked at the Register-Guard where someone has blown something out of proportion or sensationalized it to sell more newspapers," Bishoff said.

"A reporter may distort the issue because he didn't understand it, but not to sell papers."

Journalists need to recognize their personal biases when covering a story, Powell said. One way to minimize these biases is to keep from becoming personally involved in organizations, she said.

"As soon as you affiliate with anything, it affects your judgment of the issue," Powell said.

Siporin said reporters need to be close enough to an issue to get information, but they can't be so close that they have a conflict of interest.

An arm's length is an appropriate distance for reporters to be in order to avoid bias, Bishoff said.

Bybee disagreed.

"I don't think it's possible to be an arm's length from anything," he said. "Bias is a misused word because it implies that there's no bias."

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