

Media critic proposes cures for education

By Justin Brown
Emerald Contributor

Today's universities need to both depoliticize and deprofessionalize themselves while becoming defenders of the literate tradition, a media and education critic said Monday night.

Neil Postman delivered his speech, "The Role of the University in American Education," to a room full of students and faculty at the University's School of Music. Postman is a professor of communication arts and sciences at New York University.

"The Universities in America made a very bad mistake by developing more and more vocational training," Postman said.

Postman said he believes universities have specialized education in order to respond to the technological development that has occurred over the last 60 years. He cited business administration as one example of a program that has tended to professionalize universities.

Postman said he believes students need to learn more than just a profession.

"We need to be able to read and write lucidly and read with understanding," Postman said, adding that he would like to see a return to a curriculum of more liberal arts, including history, religion, and philosophy.

Postman also said to be weary of the trend of multiculturalism and the political forces behind them. He strongly believes that different minority and ethnic groups should be included in curriculum only if their works are excellent.

While wanting Universities to return to more liberal traditions, Postman also said that universities should "become the last bastion of defense for the literate tradition. We

should include or make up a definition of intelligence to deal with the written word," Postman said.

Postman has been a long-time advocate of oral tradition and print media. He believes print to be much more beneficial to society than visual mediums such as television.

In fact, Postman believes that visual technology has hurt the American educational system.

"We have two curriculums in competition — school and television — and right now television is beating the bejesus out of school," Postman said.

Postman said students in grades 1 through 12 spend almost 13,000 hours in school, compared with watching 19,000 hours of television.

"By the age of 21, the average American will have seen 1 million television commercials," he said. "Television is a visual for immediate gratification, while school is a delayed gratification."

Postman said that in school students are taught that solving complex problems take a long, often challenging thought process. Postman believes that television is too simple and easy for this type of thinking to happen.

Postman, author of 16 books, including *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. He is currently working on two new books, *Technopoly* and *How to Watch a Television News Show*. His speech, sponsored by the School of Music, the School of Journalism, and the College of Education, concluded his first visit to Oregon.

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