

Graduation parties aren't like old times

Along with homecoming weekend, graduation is one of the biggies of the University year. The EMU Cultural Forum, the Alumni Association and the Hilton must all be hosting parties. Right?

No, they're not.

Well, maybe some of the smaller establishments, such as the Oregon Electric Station and the Valley River Inn are hosting dances.

Wrong again.

The truth is, parties are private these days. If you're looking for a party for graduation weekend, you'll have to host it, be invited, or hire it.

So either plan your hors d'oeuvres, reserve a table, or start networking among your friends. One lucky person or group reserved the entire Treehouse Restaurant.

Graduation weekend didn't used to be so private. The senior class once to sponsor a senior ball in McArthur Court, open to all the classes. The senior ball came complete with a full orchestra, chaperone, dress suits, and dance cards a man had to sign in order to reserve a dance with a woman.

"They used to hire Duke Ellington and other types," said University Archivist Keith Richard.

Commencement, which used to be held on Saturday at 8 p.m. in Mac Court, was also celebrated with a luncheon banquet in Straub Hall, which used to have a huge dining hall. Sponsored by the Alumni Association for a small fee, the luncheon included seniors, alumni, parents, friends, faculty, and the University president, who would give a statement of well wishes.

Faculty were expected to attend both, (commencement and the luncheon) including cap and gown," Richard said. "They used to take roll. Other than having an appendectomy, it was very difficult to get out of.

"At one point in the 1920s, rather than taking roll, they handed out paychecks, but that tradition didn't last long."

The senior ball and the commencement luncheons have disappeared not from a lack of interest but because of economics and the changing nature of university life.

There are a lot more students now, thousands as opposed to hundreds. Up until the 1970s, there were class officers, who could sponsor parties and events for the entire student body.

Now, with students enrolling during any term and graduating after as few as three or as many as seven-plus years, it's difficult to define each class.

Moreover, money doesn't go as far as it used to and there are more students to spend it on.

"The last balls, held in the 1960s, were too expensive," Richard said. "Now, if you were to invite a rock band the equal of Duke Ellington, it would be impossible. Big bands died in the 1950s and 1960s because it was too expensive for them (to operate)."

Some colleges and schools, such as the School of Journalism, held social events in past years, but even those were dropped.



Graduation parties, like this "Kid Ball" for the senior class of 1926, were once very popular. Today this is no longer the tradition. Courtesy photo

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