

**OPINION**

**In search of the elusive financial aid**



**E**ntering the wilds of higher education at the beginning of each year is always a frightening proposition.

The dense foliage of paperwork and computer printouts it takes to run a 16,000-student university is immense.

One studious creature, one speck in the grand scale of the wilderness, can be lost like a Birkenstock in Brian Hoop's closet without Marlon Perkins to save the day.

And so it happened to me. The safari started earlier this summer. Knowing how crowded and confused the outback of Oregon Hall gets once the natives return, I headed for the Office of Financial Aid to make sure my life-sustaining funds were in place and ready to be delivered.

The news the financial aid workers gave me walloped me on the head like a falling coconut. I screwed up. I had failed to return the proper forms, and my aid was in jeopardy.

But hope remained. I successfully petitioned to have a hold removed from my aid, gathered all the proper information and forms, turned them in and was told my aid would be ready by Sept. 24.

My trek through the financial aid office was smooth sailing.

But knowing that infamously-abrasive Oregon Hall has this funny thing about withholding financial aid from people who still owe money, I got a draw from work, took out an emergency loan and paid off my accounts receivable.

Now I could sit back and enjoy the expedition.

But when my Duck Call bill arrived from the University, there was no sign of my financial aid. Search parties were sent out looking and were assured that everything would be accounted for when time came to pay up in the ballroom.

**One speck in the grand scale of the wilderness can be lost like a Birkenstock in Brian Hoop's closet.**

It was just a hoax to lull me into a sense of security while the insidious bureaucratic cannibals set their trap.

**Day One:** Thinking I was simply taking a leisurely stroll through the formality of payment, I went to the ballroom to have my financial aid adjusted onto my bill. Ha, ha, ha, ha.

"I'm sorry, we have no record of any financial aid for you," I was told. "Try back this afternoon when they send another shipment up."

I bought it. And on my second trip, I was told there were still no checks, computer credits or any acknowledgement of my aid.

**Day Two:** I thought I was making progress on my third try at the ballroom. "Your Pell Grant and other aid will be put directly onto your account at the cashier's office," I was told.

**Day Three:** When I went to Accounts Receivable and checked what I owed, there was still no indication of financial aid. The statement said I was in debt for all of my tuition, and, of course, the \$206 I owed for the emergency loan I took out earlier.

Next, I went to the financial aid office to see if it was the source of the problem. Nope. They had paid my financial aid to Oregon Hall on Sept. 16.

"It's at the cashier's office. Check with the people there, and they can tell you what's been done with your aid," the woman said with a smile, actually taking time to give me directions to the proper desk.

Hey, I'm pretty easy going, so I bought it again. Maybe I didn't hold my tongue right

when I asked the last time.

The fellow behind the counter was all smiles and cheer for the attractive woman ahead of me. But his attitude changed when I got to the front of the line. (Must've been the tongue again.)

"That'll be up at the ballroom," he scowled, like my question was a personal affront to his previous aura of cheer.

Why not? What could it hurt? I'm going near the ballroom again anyway.

"We don't have any record of your financial aid here. Have you checked at the cashier's office?" the woman, who had no idea of the history of this expedition, said with a straight face.

I explained that I realized it wasn't her fault, but this safari had lost its charm. The supervisor she called over didn't help. Telling her the people at Accounts Receivable had no idea what was going on — and she was my last hope — didn't help at all. It seemed that to her, it was my fault the aid was lost.

I can't explain what happened next. Maybe it was the fact that for the past three days I had survived on seven packets of assorted Ramens and one bowl of macaroni (minus the cheese because I didn't have the milk and butter necessary to complete the cycle), but my middle finger developed a mind of its own.

Check this!

When I got paid Thursday, I had \$29.04 after paying rent because I took the big draw to pay off my account so my aid wouldn't be held. I've already used the emergency loan option for the same reason.

I still haven't bought my books. I don't dare go back to Oregon Hall and insult them again by asking what's happened to my grants. And they wonder why people storm buildings with assault rifles.

Of course, that option isn't open to me because I don't have any money to buy a gun.

*Pat Malach is editor of the Emerald.*

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