

Multicultural Center would further diversity on campus

By Frank Geltner

Several individuals have put a great amount of energy into the idea of a multicultural center on the University campus. Had the *Emerald* done its research, it would have found that the intentions of the students and other friends of a multicultural center in working for such a center were quite different than implied in the *Emerald's* editorial April 13.

In another issue (April 9) of the *Emerald*, a story about the center said, "The center would serve as a central location for minority students to come together." The story also quoted ASUO multicultural advocate Diana Collins Puente as saying "With the changes in the demographics of the world, it's important to create an environment where students of color have a place where they feel comfortable." If, on the other hand, the reporter had simply printed the wording of the ballot measure, another story would have surfaced.

The wording of the measure is as follows: "Shall the students pay a one-time fee of \$2.45 per student per term (\$3.67 per semester for law students) for one year, generating approximately \$109,025 for remodeling and start-up costs to establish a multicultural center for the University Community that would bring together students, administrators, faculty, staff, graduate teaching fellows and community members to enhance the academic, cultural and residential experiences of students while incorporating the educational vision of exploring the complexities of cultural and ethnic diversity."

As first articulated in Eric Ward's abstract, the Multicultural Center would be "a space that contributes substantially to the

overall well-being of students of color at the University of Oregon.

"Secondly, this space should encompass the educational vision of exploring complexities of cultural and ethnic diversity in the United States. ... The Multicultural Center is a clear opportunity to expand the discussion of race, culture, ethnicity and multiculturalism and further the academic success for students of color."

Had the *Emerald* inquired, it would have been given a copy of Ward's four-page abstract outlining his original vision of a multicultural center.

The *Emerald's* editorial noted that "there are already a number of places, both in the EMU and throughout the campus, where students of any ethnicity can congregate." It is for that reason that the Multicultural Center proposed does not purport to serve as a "student bunker."

Regarding the references to "another isolated room in the dungeons of the EMU," had the *Emerald* done some homework, it would have discovered that a part of the cost associated with this ballot measure includes structural changes that would bring more daylight into the space, including a new entrance sharing the lobby with Footnotes and interior wall remodeling with glass blocks to bring daylight from Footnotes into the Multicultural Center.

Contrary to the impression that the Multicultural Center would "serve only to further isolate students from each other," as conceived, the center would have to be a very inviting place for all members of the University academic community. It would have library space, classroom space, audio-visual capacities and a lounge. As conceived, it would have a staff that

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was committed to embracing multiculturalism with all of its existing contradictions.

Using a discussion prepared by LeNorman J. Strong, director of the Marvin Center at George Washington University, here is a discussion of a multicultural organization:

A multicultural organization is one that is genuinely committed to diverse representation of its membership; is sensitive to maintaining an open, supportive and responsive environment; is working toward and purposefully including elements of diverse cultures in its ongoing operations; and ... is authentic in its response to issues confronting it.

The key words and phrases in this definition are "genuinely," "purposefully" and "authentic in its response to issues confronting it." "Genuinely" means in its actions as well as its words. "Purposefully" means that institutional policies and practices are carefully and judiciously monitored in relation to the goals of multiculturalism. And to be "authentic in its responses to issues confronting it," an institution must be committed to changing policies and practices that limit or prevent multiculturalism.

As in the case of the current debate on campus regarding the motion to revise the race, gender and non-European requirement, understanding contemporary race relations in the United States and how gender, race, ethnicity and/or color shape experiences is very important.

In part, a multicultural center on the University campus would begin to help this institution change its policies and practices. As stated in Ward's abstract, the Multicultural Center is a clear opportunity to expand the discussion on race, culture, ethnicity and multiculturalism and further the academic success for students of color.

One of the insidious aspects of the *Emerald's* editorial is its harmful but enticing notion that the student unions should "find a way to use (their incidental fee) money to make their cultures accessible to students in general." Why does the *Emerald* believe this? Because it just doesn't get it.

To have its way, the *Emerald* would place the entire responsibility on the shoulder of those (who have experienced the general intolerance in our general society) who would take (in the words of the *Emerald* editorial) "a little initiative"; those who would have "a genuine desire to foster true multiculturalism." As if those who don't have a genuine desire would just line up to be convinced. Isn't the discovery of multiculturalism a two-way responsibility? In a multicultural society, or a society aspiring to become multicultural, shouldn't the "majority" be responsible for active learning about minority cultures? It must not always be the minority cultures that must reach out to teach the majority.

That the leading student newspaper at the University

would buy into the ridiculous argument that minority students are responsible for promoting multiculturalism is unforgivable and reflects the misunderstanding that permeates the entire debate.

We should expect the *Emerald* to accept some responsibility for finding its place in this multicultural equation. It is not by believing, as it does, that the responsibility for creating a multicultural center rests with the ethnic student unions. In a truly multicultural society, there would be no need for a multicultural center. However, we are not a multicultural society when daily examples of our differences weigh like clubs on our heads.

To expand its hyperbole even further, the *Emerald* would have a handful of minority students, "instead of spending money on catered parties, karaoke sing-alongs or renting ballrooms at the Eugene Hilton," spend their student fees "here on campus and create a true multicultural center that would encompass the entire University." We should reject this argument because it is base in its premise and spurious in its focus.

University students should reject the *Emerald's* argument and fully support the Multicultural Center proposed. Help to shape and give meaning to the society you are creating for your children.

Frank Geltner is the associate director of the EMU.

THIS WEEK

MAY 10-16

Board positions are still open:
2 EMU Program Reps • 1 ASUO Program Rep
Applications available in Suite 4, EMU.
Deadline for application is May 10

Students selected for UO Orientation Staff
The Dean of Students Office has selected 15 University of Oregon students to lead and serve on the 1993 Students Orientation Staff. The students are:

Jim Combs	Christopher Labunetz
Lisa Griggs	April Brinkmann
Vida Tolich	Todd Farris
Michael Rose	Tiffany Wheeler
Stephanie Budge	Robert Tatum
Josh Jensen	Ryan Hury
Jamie Abele	Kurt Barber
	Douglas Alrecht

EMU

346-4362

Popcorn

.40 & .65

Payment agency for US West, EWEB & NWNG. SAVE POSTAGE

Ticket outlet for Mill Camp Annex, WOW Hall and Hult.

Send UPS packages. Regular charge plus \$1

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