

## Cluster requirement should be dropped

With any luck, by this time tomorrow, getting a degree from the University will be just a little bit less of a headache.

This afternoon at 3:30 p.m. in Room 150 Columbia, the University Assembly will discuss (and hopefully approve) a proposal from the University Senate to eliminate clusters from the list of requirements for graduation.

In order for a student to fulfill a cluster under the current system, that student has to take all three courses in a year-long sequence, or, in some cases, three interrelated but non-sequential courses in a particular subject. The requirements are outlined, albeit rather cryptically, in each issue of the schedule of classes.

The rationale behind the cluster system is this: In order to gain a satisfactory understanding of a given field, a student must receive at least a year's worth of instruction in that field. This is undoubtedly true in many cases, and it is frequently, if not always, to a student's advantage to complete the entire sequence.

Even if this is the case, however, there are serious doubts about a system that forces students to fulfill such a requirement. Whatever advantages that may have been gained by the cluster requirement have been nullified by the confusion and inequities that the system has created.

When the cluster requirement was implemented in 1981, the number of sequences that qualified as clusters was considerably less. That system, while admittedly rather inflexible, was at least easier to understand.

In the years that have followed, numerous clusters have been added, and now nearly every department on campus offers at least one, while some of the larger departments support half a dozen or more.

Most clusters consist of three courses of three credit hours each, totaling nine credits, although there are some clusters with only two courses of four credits each, totaling eight, and others that consist of three courses of four credits each, totaling 12.

Students who have completed a cluster at another school sometimes are unable to apply that cluster here, for reasons that few can satisfactorily explain, much less justify.

All this adds up to a nightmare of confusion for students and advisers, and misunderstandings have in some cases led to delayed graduations. Each term, about 50 students petition for exemption from the policy.

Arguments in favor of continuing the cluster system all hinge on one fundamental belief: without the system, students will not voluntarily choose to take year-long sequences, and the quality of their education will be compromised.

This misconception doesn't give the students very much credit. Most students have a few favorite subjects and will take several courses in those subjects without being required to.

If the cluster requirement was ever worthwhile, it has outlived its usefulness. The University Assembly has the opportunity to put the last nails in the cluster requirement's coffin. Let's hope it has enough sense to pick up the hammer.



## OPINION

# Economics balkanizing force in U.S.



MARIUS MELAND

A fire is spreading throughout the world. It's burning in India, in Russia, in the former Yugoslavia, in Germany and in South Africa.

And now it has spread to Canada as well.

At last, nationalism has become a force to reckon with on the North American continent. After Canada's parliamentary elections last week, the second-largest party in Canada is more than "Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition." Bloc Quebecois isn't only opposed to the government; it is, in fact, opposed to the very idea of Canada.

The second-largest party in Canada wants to destroy the country.

Imagine, if you will, a situation in which the minority party in Congress, the Republicans, were against the United States of America. Imagine if Bob Dole went on television and said, "I don't give a damn about health care, abortion, foreign policy or gays in the military. I couldn't care less about the size of our national debt and the increasing crime rate in our inner cities. But as for the U.S., I'm definitely against it."

The last time the United States experienced a situation such as that was during the Civil War. It took about five years, more than a million casualties, and an estimated \$15 billion in property damage to get over it. Those who survived it promised themselves that the United States would never again experience a division so deep and so destructive.

And Americans taught their children to pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States and

to "... one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

For more than a century, the United States has been a haven in a world torn apart by racism, nationalism and separatism. While nations with fewer inhabitants than Oregon have been ripped apart, the United States, with more than 260 million inhabitants, has remained unified and indivisible.

Why is the United States so different from other countries? Part of the answer is found in the ingredients of the glue that keeps this country together. Most countries are cultural entities; the United States is a political entity.

Germany stays together because Germans speak the same language, eat the same food and dress in the same clothes. Americans, on the other hand, stay together because they share ideas. They believe in democracy, liberty, justice and civil rights. Admittedly, these are buzzwords that could be construed to signify anything and may be more impressive than substantive. But it doesn't change the fact that, ultimately, there's still a broad consensus about the values upon which this country was founded.

Meanwhile, the rest of the world continues to think that nations should be founded upon cultural identity. If some people in the nation don't conform to this cultural identity, there must be something wrong with them; therefore, the reasoning goes, they should be eliminated.

In Germany, neo-Nazis are killing immigrants, and in the former Yugoslavia, various governments are practicing "ethnic cleansing" to create an ethnically monolithic state. Of course, this kind of reasoning knows no end: There will never be a monolithic state because individuals will always be different.

In the United States, hitherto spared from the nationalism and separatism destroying nations throughout the world, Americans look at the ethnic conflicts with shock and disbelief. To many

Americans, the fighting between Bosnians and Serbs is no more than a big-scale version of the fighting between kindergarten kids who can't stand each other because they're wearing different overalls.

But the problems that gave rise to the term "balkanization" are closer to home than many Americans want to acknowledge. With nationalism on our doorsteps after the Canadian election, some people have begun to question whether the fabric of our society is as strong as we may have believed.

The fact is, the United States is already a divided nation. Not politically, ethnically or religiously. But economically.

Decades after economists split Americans into the "haves" and the "have-nots," this grim economic reality persists. In the past 20 years, the rich Americans got richer, the middle class shrank considerably and the poor retained their portion of the aggregate income. According to the Bureau of Census, the richest 20 percent now receive 47 percent of the aggregate income, as opposed to 43 percent in 1970.

And the gap continues to widen. Last year, a Washington, D.C., study documented an increase in child poverty in 33 states during the 1980s. Earlier this year, a Tufts University study concluded that child poverty in the United States will soar to a record 28 percent by 2010.

The poor are the "other Americans." They live on the streets, commit crimes, use drugs and join gangs. They can't read, don't go to college, don't work and don't have health insurance. Chances are they'll end their lives with a syringe in their forearms or a bullet in their heads. That is, if the legal system doesn't save their lives by locking them up for good.

The "other Americans" are not prominent in our culture. You won't find a sitcom about their lives on television. And because

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## Oregon Daily Emerald

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