

# EDITORIAL

## University should try to respect all faiths

The University will be more hospitable to religious minorities in the future, if the Jewish Student Union can persuade the University to adopt a new policy dealing with non-Christian religious holidays.

The JSU has made a proposal to the University, which, if enacted, would allow members of religious minorities to be excluded from certain academic responsibilities that conflict with the observance of their more important religious holidays.

Jewish students in particular have had difficulty working their faith around the University's calendar. Fall term final exams often occur during Hanukkah, forcing Jewish students to cut short their celebrations or do without them altogether. When the first week of classes in a semester conflicts with a holiday, more strictly religious students may be dropped from class rolls for not showing up — even though their faith forbids them from going to class.

Very few University activities are scheduled for Sunday, to accommodate those Christian students who celebrate that day as the sabbath. For Jews, however, the sabbath, or Shabbat, takes place every week from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday — a common time for the University to schedule activities.

Although Jewish students are responsible for initiating this proposal, they are not the only ones who stand to gain from it. Even Christians who may follow a slightly different calendar, such as the Seventh Day Adventists, would be helped by a University policy which allows them to reschedule their academic responsibilities to make room for religious ones.

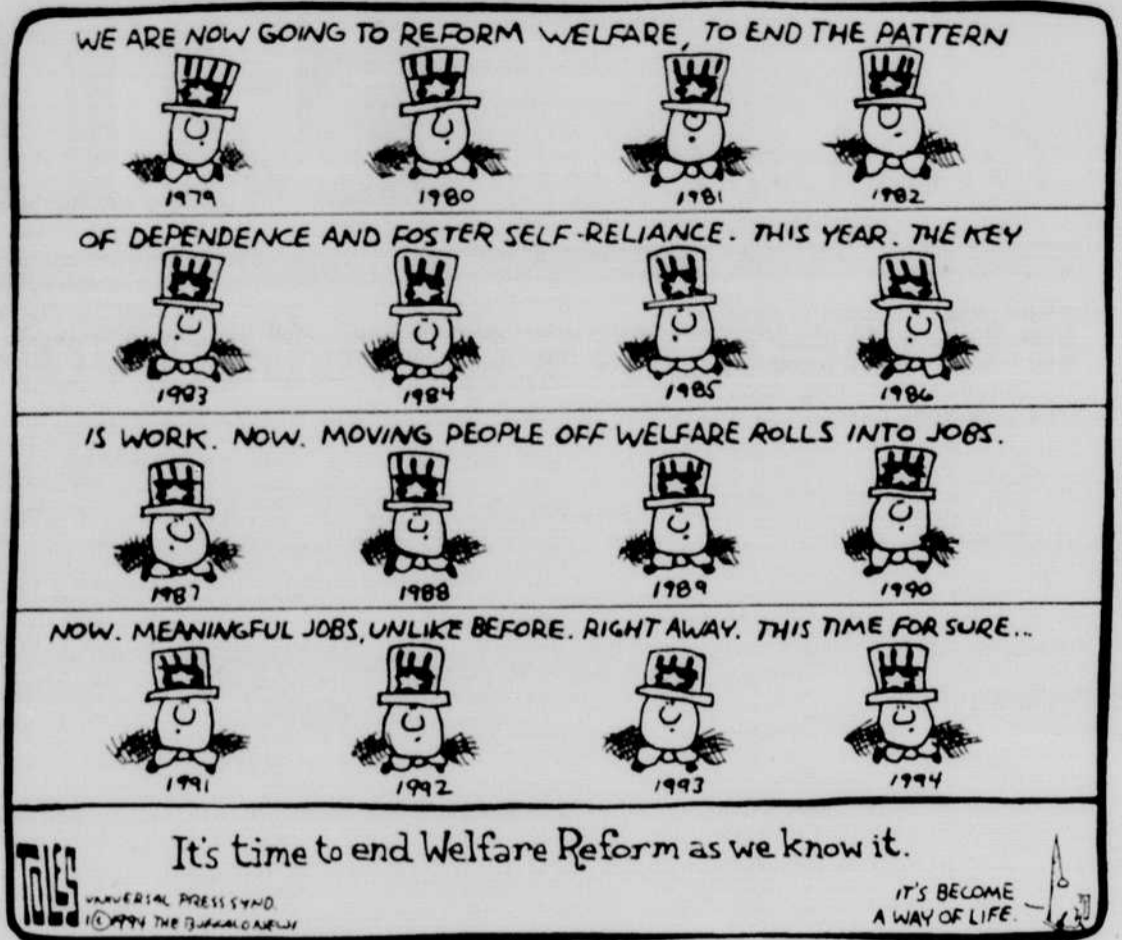
It's no accident that the University never schedules a final exam on Christmas Day, and it isn't luck that keeps Sunday relatively free of required activities. The academic calendar is a product of Christian tradition, even though it has since been secularized. (There's no such thing as Christmas Break anymore, but, wouldn't you know it, Christmas always seems to fall during the winter vacation. Go figure.)

The main objection the University has voiced about the proposal is that it might be abused. Certainly, this is possible. Some particularly unscrupulous student might take unfair advantage of the new policy by falsely claiming to be Jewish, or worse yet, by inventing some screwball religion (maybe the Church of the Extended Ski Weekend). But there are steps the University could take to minimize this risk.

First of all, the University could enforce a deadline for students to ask for exemptions or schedule changes, perhaps by the third week of the term. This will prevent any last-minute abuses and give professors plenty of time to deal with the request.

Additionally, independent religious leaders from the community should be consulted to determine which holidays are really important and what the proper observance of each holiday might entail.

With these precautions in place, it should be possible for the University to respect the rights of students to practice their disparate faiths. Since students are paying to attend, it's the least the University can do.



## OPINION

# USSA needs to take responsibility



ROBBIE REEVES

Hang up the phone, and cancel the arrangements for the conventions.

It's time for the University branch of the United States Student Association to be more accountable for its spending.

According to a recent article in the *Oregon Commentator*, the USSA has been given almost \$16,000 in incidental fees for the 1993-94 school year. (Actually, it originally received \$10,000, but the Incidental Fee Committee gave it another \$5,800 in a special request in October.) But what has the USSA done with this money? According to financial records, it has spent all but about \$3,000 of it, just more than halfway through the year.

It's true that the money was appropriated to be spent, but the expenditures tell an interesting story.

USSA has managed to spend \$700 on long-distance phone calls, about \$500 more than it should have.

Among this total are several five-hour phone calls made by former ASUO Vice President Diana Collins Puente. While no one is really sure whether these calls were of a business nature (they were made to Michigan, where she allegedly has a boyfriend, but don't assume anything), Collins Puente should be congratulated for her stamina. After all, not everyone can talk on the phone that long. It must have been an interesting conversation.

I don't want to pick on Collins Puente. She is not the only person responsible for the large phone bill. Another USSA member has already reimbursed the

ASUO for long distance personal calls made on his USSA long-distance account.

I know, communication with others is an important part of running a group on campus, and the telephone is one way to do it. However, may I suggest an alternative?

The U.S. Postal Service has this thing called a stamp, which can be put on a letter, and they will deliver it anywhere in the nation. The best part is that it costs only 29 cents per letter!

If only all of life could be this simple.

The USSA has apparently also spent thousands of dollars on conventions. I would imagine that it would be a pretty groundbreaking convention to have justified spending a good chunk of the budget on it. Maybe it could be worse. We could all be paying to send USSA members to a monthlong convention in Tahiti this summer, I suppose.

Maybe I am misunderstanding the concept of a student organization. I've always believed that an organization that is funded by student fees should somehow contribute something back to the student body. Maybe a speaker here, a program there, but something from the group that could possibly justify the expenditure of scarce funds.

Instead, the USSA is spending (or, more specifically, overspending) its budget by talking on the phone and going to conventions.

This might be a group that I'd like to join. Imagine — your phone bill covered by student fees (as long as you hush up the fact that the calls are personal) and being able to go to a few conventions. I wonder why the University branch of USSA doesn't have thousands of members.

The USSA seems to have lost grasp of a fairly fundamental economic concept. It's called a budget.

If a group is appropriated \$200 for long distance calls, it shouldn't spend \$700, or even

\$201 for the phone bill. The group should spend no more than \$200. If, however, more money needs to be spent (and granted, we can all probably relate to a time when our phone bill was \$500 more than usual), why can't the members of the group chip in a little something to cover the cost of the difference (or, for those of us without connections, what would normally be called "overdrawing an account")?

Better the people that make the calls pay rather than the entire student body.

The remaining \$3,000 of money that the USSA has was frozen by the ASUO finance coordinator last week, in a long overdue move.

If anything good comes out of this, it would hopefully be that student groups should be more aware of the fact that they are not just spending money given to them by the University, but money given to them by the students of the University. And while I am cognizant of the fact that student fees pay for many good things here on campus (and that funding I have no quarrel with), I have better things to spend my money on than five-hour phone calls from a group that goes to conventions but doesn't do a lot around campus.

I'm singling out the USSA now, but I'm sure that there are other examples of misuse of student funds around campus. It might be even worse than this.

The point of this column isn't to put down the USSA. I'm sure that there are many people who belong to the organization because they truly believe in what the USSA stands for. My point is that the financial organization of the USSA is shoddy at best, and there definitely needs to be changes if the USSA even wants to be considered in getting funding again next year.

After all, it is our money.

Robbie Reeves is a columnist for the Emerald.

# Oregon Daily Emerald

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