

# EDITORIAL

## Environmental major good for University

University students lost many vital programs in the wake of 1990 Ballot Measure 5 cuts. The quality of education has suffered as choices have become limited.

Now it's time for some good news. Finally, the University is considering adding to, instead of taking away from, our curriculum.

Last week, the University Assembly unanimously passed a 1994-95 proposed curriculum report that includes a new environmental studies major. The report will be presented for approval at the Oregon State Board of Higher Education meeting on Feb. 18.

Dick Gale, environmental studies director, has lobbied for a major in the field for 15 years.

"This program is a quarter of the century overdue," he told the *Emerald*. "People are surprised we don't have a major already."

It's time for Gale's dream to be realized. What better place than Eugene to offer a program that focuses specifically on the environment. Imagine the possibilities.

An environmental studies major will be well received by students. The University already offers an environmental studies minor and those classes are popular with students. With the addition of the major, four new classes will be added to the University's environmental studies program. Expect a high demand for those classes.

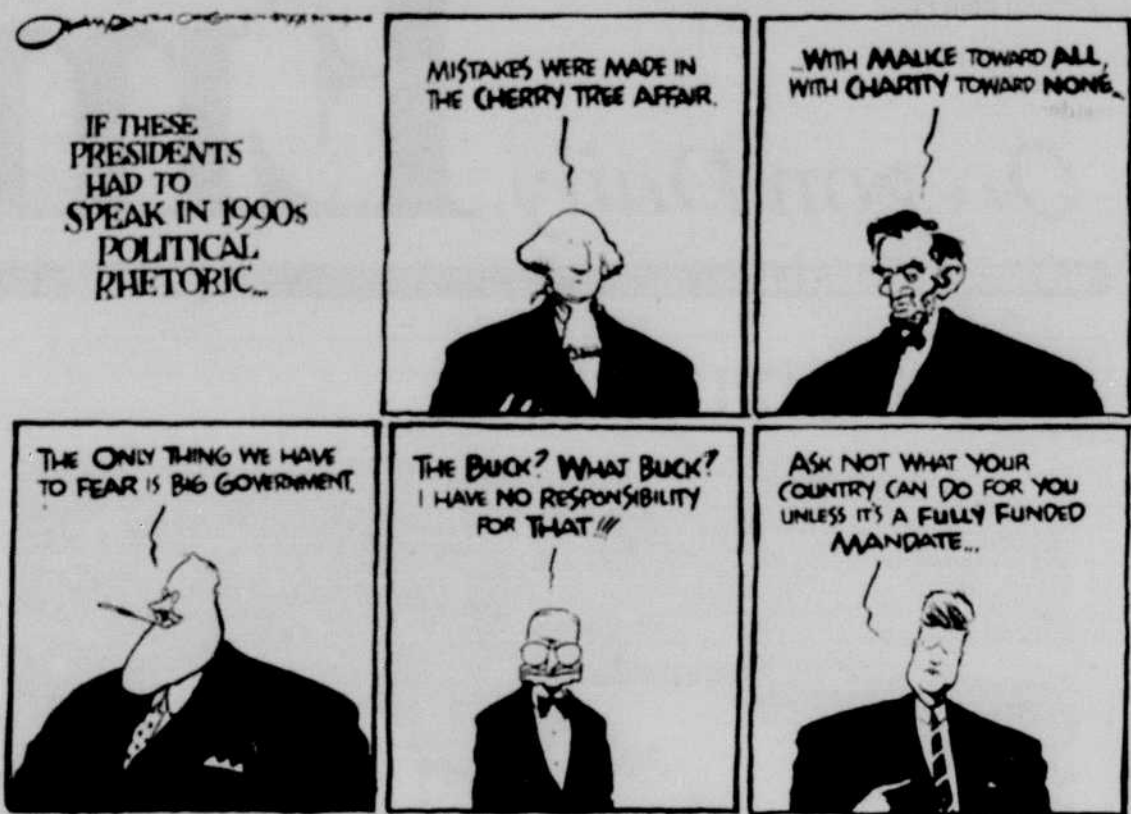
It's no secret that this University attracts students who are committed to the environment. The University needs to recognize the needs of a large percentage of the student body. Look at the many students in OSPIRG and other groups that lobby for the environment. Students come to Oregon because they like the outdoors and they want to preserve it.

Too many students at the University are forced to get degrees in programs they're not interested in. An environmental studies major will give many students the opportunity to study something they like and will keep some students from transferring to other schools. Oregon State University already has an environmental studies major that has a greater emphasis on natural science. The University's program will be more of a broad-based liberal arts education.

The proposed major is cost effective. The University will not have to hire new professors to teach the courses.

Although the proposed environmental studies major doesn't appeal to all students, it sends an important message at a crucial time. Students need to know they are getting the most for their tuition dollars. The proposal of a new major is a sign that University officials are trying to make up for what's been lost through Ballot Measure 5.

Although you still can't minor in English, the environmental studies major is putting the University back on track.



### ■ OPINION

## Amazon not historic, but 'outdated'



PRIMO A. J. FONTANA

One issue has dominated all discussions about housing here on campus this past year, the fate of Amazon Family Housing.

It has been an intense and emotional battle, and as could be expected here in Eugene, one outside the bounds of conventional logic.

The rather faulty arguments in favor of keeping the complex intact are built upon what I have discerned to be three main dogmatic principles.

The first tenet of the Amazonian Faith is that the issue is low-cost public housing. This is absolutely untrue.

This is not housing for the community as a whole, it is only for students of our college. The campus population, which makes up approximately 14 percent of Eugene, is the only group that benefits from its use.

Of that 14 percent, the complex is only available to those who are eligible for family housing. This is a tiny sliver of the people of Eugene, certainly not enough to validate an argument for the housing situation of the entire city.

This complex does not benefit the homeless whom we see on 13th Avenue, those who depend upon the charity of others for their existence, or the non-University working poor of our community. It is only for students.

Even though the demolition of the complex will affect Eugene's housing market as a whole, the relatively small population in question will not have a large enough effect to justify keeping Amazon in operation.

The second Article of Faith in the Church of Amazon is that the site is of historical value. This argument has been the main method that the Amazoni-

ans have used to lengthen the debate, mainly through appeals to the Eugene Historic Review Board.

Finally, on Jan. 26 the board, in a stunning move of common sense, decided by a vote of 3-2 that this was not a valid proposition.

I will spare you all the gory details of this argument, but when I asked one Amazon resident if his home had any historical value, he answered, "Yes, my toilet is 50 years old."

For a quick and easy layman's guide to what is historical, I have gathered the following: Deady Hall, historic. Plymouth Rock, historic. The Liberty Bell, historic. Amazon...well, I think some are confusing the term "historic" with "outdated."

Amazon is and always has been a housing complex. It has certainly been important and useful, but let's be honest. It's time has come.

The final element of the Amazonian Trinity is that it can be repaired. This is perhaps the most flawed element of the debate, for many who have inspected it have disagreed.

When I asked the previously mentioned resident to describe any general problems that he had noticed in his home, he told me, "age, decrepitude, and an understandable systematic lack of repair."

Stories of asbestos, weak foundations, bad piping, and many other large-scale structural problems have been widespread and validated repeatedly. The structure has outlived its planned time of use by almost 40 years, and these problems are unavoidable consequences of this irresponsibility.

Rebuilding the complex is necessary, although Amazon supporters have estimated that fixing it will be less expensive than a complete rebuilding. We must consider the risk involved

with keeping it running.

If, as is quite possible, someone is hurt due to the numerous structural deficiencies of Amazon, the University will be held accountable for the damage. The maximum possible precaution must be taken to keep this from happening and a complete rebuilding is the only viable solution in order to truly do so.

There will be an increase in costs, which unfortunately is inevitable. Currently it is \$185 per month for a two bedroom unit in the current Amazon, which will be increased to \$400 at the proposed future structure.

This must be considered with equanimity. The benefits of a rebuilt Amazon, a firmer structure, and basically a building for the future, far outweigh the extra rent.

Also, even considering the increase, have any of you shopped for a two bedroom apartment lately?

In the *Emerald* classifieds on Feb. 6, there were five listed with prices given. The average price for these units was \$524 per month. This means that even with the proposed increase, rent at the new complex will be \$124 less than the current open-market prices.

Low-cost housing for students with families is important. However, the consequences of all available options must be weighed carefully and there is no longer any logical rationale for keeping Amazon in use.

We cannot escape the future. It is something for which we must prepare with caution and logic. The Amazon debate has only hindered such progress in consideration to the housing of our students, and if we do not move forward now the cost to University students will be even greater in the future.

Primo A. J. Fontana is a columnist for the *Emerald*.

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### ■ CORRECTION

The editorial in Monday's *Emerald* incorrectly stated that the minimum wage was last changed in 1990. It was actually raised in both 1990 and 1991. The *Emerald* regrets the error.