

■ UNIVERSITY

# Director's goals emphasize interaction, mutual support

Pete Schneider

For the Oregon Daily Emerald

As Director of the University's Black Student Union, Zeenab Johnson-Fowlk's job is not easy this time of year.

As the huge banner that University students walk under each day proclaims, February is Black History Month: the veritable rush hour for Johnson-Fowlk.

"When I became director here, my goal was to provide different events and activities on campus that embrace the African-American culture," Johnson-Fowlk said. "Black History Month is an opportunity to bring people to this campus to help educate students on the history of African people and our arrival on this continent through slavery."

Johnson-Fowlk sees education as the primary function of the BSU. She said BSU is not just on this campus to work with and educate black people, but to interact with all University students.

To avoid becoming an "inclusive organization," the BSU continually keeps a contact base with all the other student unions on campus. Also, it advertises all of its functions to ensure that anyone on campus can know what the BSU is doing.

"We don't expect to see every black person on campus at our functions, [but] we expect to see all students," Johnson-Fowlk said. "We're not just here to educate ourselves, but to educate the whole campus as well as the surrounding community. What we try to do is promote events that are inclusive to everyone."

Johnson-Fowlk said she is dedicated to eliminating the "isms" (racism, sexism, ageism, etc.) she sees at this University. Her personal goal is to rid the community of these isms while emphasizing knowledge over hatred.

"To look at the front page of the Register-Guard," Johnson-Fowlk said, "and see that there is a rise of the Aryan Nation in Grants Pass is so wrong. Those are the things that we are trying to counteract by doing the positive things we do on campus. Having banquets, discussions and forums is what we do to contribute to society."

Johnson-Fowlk said she sees the BSU as an outlet for black students to come together to provide

each other with mutual support. Also, the organization enables students to participate in activities that would not normally be available to them. For her, the BSU is also a symbol of black pride toward African culture and heritage.

"What we are trying to do is make sure that we have an identity, we do know who we are," she said. "I know that my ancestors were slaves, and I know that they suffered to make us all a mixture of people. So when we say black, as in Black Student Union, we mean that we cater to every person who considers himself black."

"It's not necessarily what you are on the outside, it's what you believe to be on the inside that counts," she said.

Johnson-Fowlk has been involved with the BSU for each of her five years at the University, and she has been involved with black organizations and the promotion of diversity for as long as she can remember. Although there was no Black Student Union at her high school in south Eugene, Johnson-Fowlk was active in several organizations, including the National Black United Front and Students Against Apartheid. She became especially active with African-American affairs during a trip to Havana, Cuba, which was sponsored by the Youth Chapter of the Black United Front. During the trip, Johnson-Fowlk met people from as far away as London and Ethiopia to discuss diversity and black pride on a global level.

"When I was growing up," Johnson-Fowlk said, "we were trying to change a lot of things that we felt were hurting our community. In this country, we are only 35 years away from segregation, so we must remember that we as black people have come a long way but we have a long way to go."

For Johnson-Fowlk, graduation is just around the corner and the time has come to start thinking about the future. She does know that she wants to continue to fight for racial equality and awareness, perhaps one day becoming a lawyer.

"This time of year, I do have to think about graduating," Johnson-Fowlk said. "But when it comes to the Black Student Union, I really do love what I do. Any organization that I've joined or am involved with I try to do my best."

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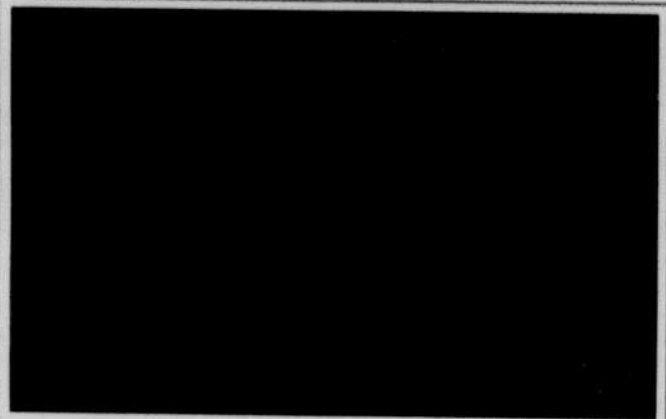
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