

Increased credits help few students

A year ago, as the University announced it would be expanding the credit value of certain classes from three credits to four, it was promised that students would receive an extra hour's instruction — if not more lecture time, then at least an hour of computer lab time or GTF-led discussion sections each week — to account for the extra credit.

Although that undoubtedly has happened in some cases, most of the time the credit value of classes was inflated with no appreciable return.

Some classes were supposedly harder than others already, so they would get a four-credit value while others stayed at three credits. That policy abandoned the rule-of-thumb that one credit equals one hour of time, since the extra hour of class, in most cases, never materialized.

The idea to bump credits up to four from three was inspired as the University grappled with the problem of too many students taking more than four years to graduate. Upping the credit value of classes reduced the total number of classes needed to obtain a degree, and as such was seen as a simple way to speed up students' progression through school.

In that objective, the change appears to have been successful. The University's graduation rate for freshmen has improved in this regard — more students are graduating in four years than previously — but University students must remain aware of problems still lingering a year after the change.

Some students have actually had more difficulty graduating on time under the new credit scheme, because at four credits each, a student can only take four large classes per term without paying more tuition (and getting an administrative OK). Students who were counting on taking five or six classes in a term — easily attempted under the old scheme — have been kept here longer than they wanted.

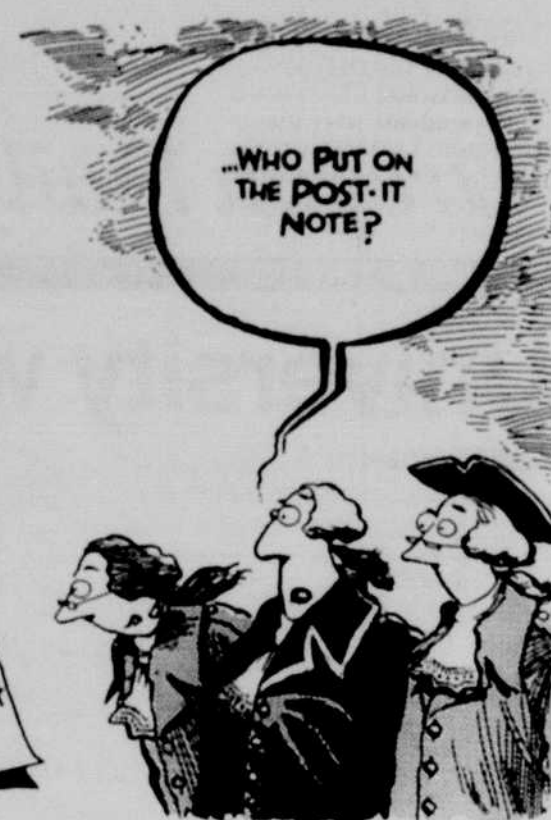
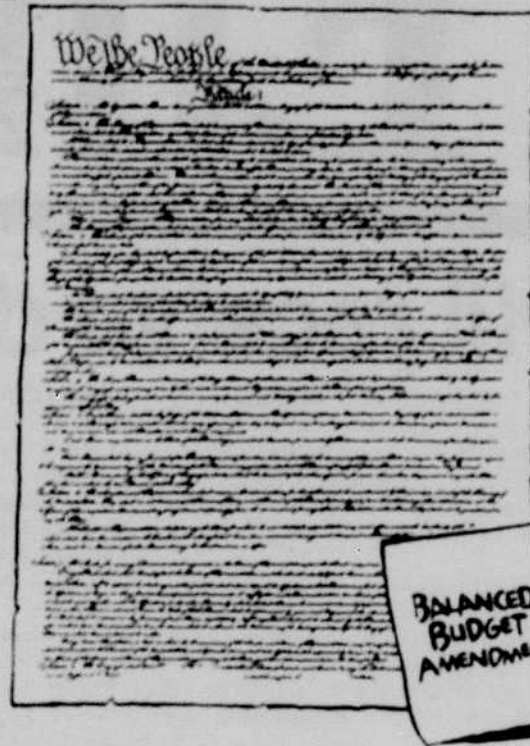
But more important is the risk, significant to all students, that this paper change from three credits to four has watered down the degrees offered at this University.

If the quest is to get everyone in and out of these halls of learning in four years, at any cost, then students must remain vigilant in protecting the meaning of their degrees. The University could make it so one 180-credit class could fulfill all requirements, and thus give us all a degree after a single term. But we wouldn't have gotten an education and our future employers would pass us by.

Increasing "productivity" is a necessary goal for the University, if it is to succeed in serving the needs of an increasing number of students in the years to come. But care should be taken to prevent any lessening of our educations, or in the meaning of our degrees.

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OPINION



■ OPINION

Student parents often misunderstood



ANNE MOSER-KORNFELD

If I had a dollar for every time someone says that there's no way they could go to school and raise a child, my tuition problems would be solved.

I can't help but believe that the appropriate response is to crumble and fall apart with grief. What was I thinking? Going to school while raising a family is not only ludicrous, it shouldn't even be considered.

I'd like to turn the question on its head. How can traditional students handle university life, newly established independence or money problems and still find time to do well at anything?

Life for them must be overwhelming.

Student parents share a common value. Our children are the reason we're in school. Our children come first. We want life to be better for them and we're going to make it happen. Our goals are clear, reachable and well-defined.

Most traditional students are generally unsure of what lies ahead for them. At a basic level they don't own housewares, a car, or much more than kid's stuff. Making it on their own terrifies them.

Older students have it made. Student parents know how to face our worst fears. Our worst fear is the safety of our children, not a final or a term paper. That's nothing in the big picture. With any adversity, this too shall pass, but our children, they are golden.

Admittedly, student parents do have problems.

One problem that seems kind of odd is how easily a student who has been away from academia gets tripped up by freshmen

and sophomore requirements.

Classes initially seem harder because university course work is not the real world. It takes awhile to get used to how things are done, more than it does at a new job or staying home being a parent.

But once a student parent catches on, watch out. Often we're better students than our classmates because of age and experience.

The things that traditional students believe about student parents may be what truly doesn't make any sense to me. Rarely do students explain why they couldn't be a parent too, only that their lives are very hard so obviously life must be even harder for someone with a child.

Obviously not. Student parents weren't on drugs when they applied for college admission. Children are a part of the picture, not apart from it. We know what we're getting into and what we hope, expect and need from our families — the families we created.

Traditional students face much bigger issues than non-traditional students. The level of parental control equated with the thought of having to call home to ask for money or fearing mom and dad's wrath over a bad grade makes me terribly uncomfortable. Stuff like that is ancient history and thank goodness for it.

Those of us who have long since been out on our own have much more interesting things to consider. For instance, student parents should have an honor ceremony during graduation for parents who survived colds, ear infections and the chicken pox all in one term but still pulled a B average. An award should be given to the parent who juggles reading to small children, analyzes textbook summaries and then finds a way to intertwine two completely polar worlds into one.

This is where student parents are most apparently misunderstood. We're accomplishing in one day more than traditional students can even dream of

doing in a month. Our interactions with others are deeper. Our awareness is greater and we're generally more fun to be around because of our children.

We appear extremely responsible because its in our blood. We have our children to care for and to teach how they can become better people.

Our children make us who and what we are. Why is it that traditional students assume that other students don't have children? What if the assumption was the reverse and that student parents believed everyone had children living in their dorm rooms?

Children are a normal, couldn't-live-without-them facet of a student parent's life. It seems odd to think of life without children. Most student parents wouldn't know the person they were before they had children.

The flip side of this is the number of traditional students who admire student parents, putting our accomplishments up on a pedestal. We're so great and so amazing for doing all that we do.

Maybe, maybe not. We're only human. One way to look at the differences between traditional students and student parents is this. We drink coffee everyday like everyone else. The only thing that makes us different is that student parents are smart enough to get the coffee past library employees because we don't blatantly advertise our indiscretions. After all, we've been up since 2 a.m. with a cranky child.

Student parents wouldn't change anything for the world if given the chance. Oh sure, better clothes, better food and better toys for the children. But give up the life and joy children bring into the daily grind, particularly when people can be so rotten — no way. A child's hug and smile makes even the most insurmountable problems seem manageable — including tuition.

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Oregon Daily Emerald

P.O. BOX 3159, EUGENE, OREGON 97403

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year and Tuesday and Thursday during the summer by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co., Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.

The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices at Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union and is a member of the Associated Press.

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