

Drop-out rate isn't just the UO's responsibility

OUR OPINION: A lack of student focus and passion is part of the problem

Whose fault is it?

According to statistics from the University, one out of four first-year students here will not return next fall. Five years from now, only half the freshman class will have a University diploma hanging on their walls.

Some will drop out and pursue careers, others will transfer to smaller schools, or schools with better weather, and still others will just disappear into that nebulous mass we call the real world.

While that may sound disturbing to some, that 77 percent-retention rate is higher than it was 12 years ago and is 5 percent higher than the national average. Certainly, the University should continue to find ways to make the campus a more freshman-friendly environment. But in the end, student drop-out rates say more about the students than about the University.

Most young people decide to attend college because it is something they are "supposed to do." They earned good grades in high school, and their parents just assumed that their child would continue on to higher education. Few freshmen, it seems, have a focused reason to be in college other than "I don't want to spend my life working at Burger King."

This is a valid reason for attending college, but it doesn't help motivation much when the mid-terms are piling up, 300 pages of *Beowulf* are waiting to be read, and there's a party at the coolest fraternity house

on campus. Under these conditions, and with no real passion for their majors, it's no wonder these students head for home when things become difficult.

To that end, that level of apathy for one's major doesn't seem to change much even when the students do stick around. Walk into any class on this campus and ask the students why they are there. Most of them will say they need the class to graduate, or it fulfills a major or minor requirement. Few, it seems, would claim an intellectual curiosity on the subject or a desire to become an expert in a given field.

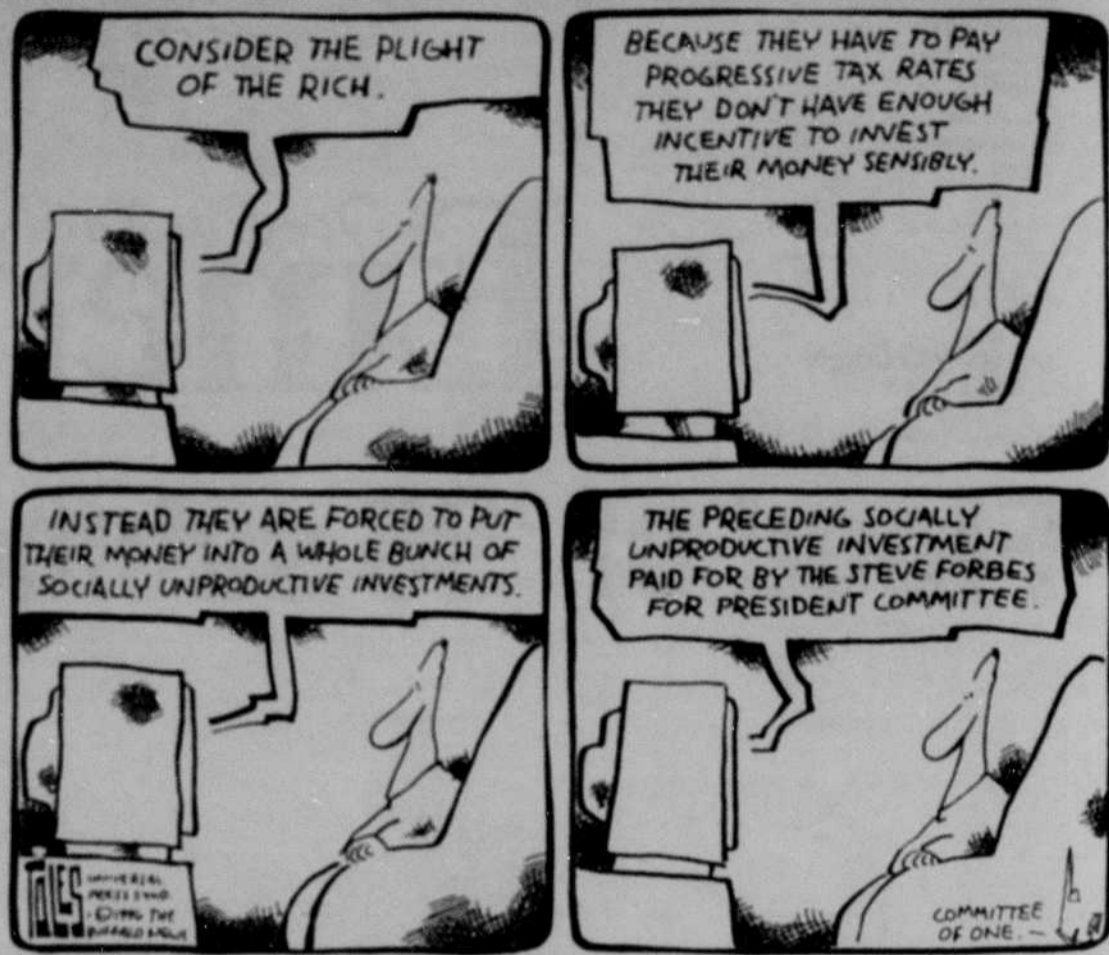
Even fewer students will be able to explain how they expect their major to lead them into a career. With all that shoulder-shrugging going on, it's a wonder the drop-out rate isn't higher.

This speaks more to the nature of youth than it does to the nature of higher education.

College has become a time for bright teenagers to figure out who they are among a lot of other bright teenagers. It's fun and enlightening, but it doesn't form a strong foundation for the financial and personal storms that batter at students' windows.

This may explain why more freshmen drop out than more senior classes and why older returning students tend to stay, get higher grades and graduate. High school graduates who attend college without a clear sense of who they are and what they want to do will be more prone to leave under a cloud of stress.

We shouldn't worry too much about it. They'll make it back if and when they figure it out.



LETTERS

Ad Club important

Monday evening I attended the ASUO Programs Finance Committee budget hearing for the University Advertising Club, a student chapter of the American Advertising Federation.

I do not want to debate the committee's decision for the Ad Club to rewrite its goal statement. I do want to address one committee member's inquisition of whether pre-professional societies should receive student fee money. This person questioned whether a pre-professional society, such as the Ad Club, promotes cultural and/or physical development at the University.

Students may nobly say they're here to "broaden their horizons" or to become "more responsible citizens," but it's common knowledge that most students attend college in order to get decent jobs after graduation.

In the University's journalism school, it is also common knowledge that journalism students, in advertising or any other journalism sequence, must participate in pre-professional activities in order to find employment after graduation. Any journalism professor will tell you that just doing your classwork won't land you a job. Employers want to see that students went out of their way to gain work experience.

Without the Advertising Club, which presents internships to its members; funds the University Advertising Team; provides student advertising opportunities for nonprofit organizations; and facilitates connections between students and advertising professionals, I would be lacking the pre-professional experience I need to get a job next year. I am thankful for all the opportunities the Ad Club afforded me that my classes do not.

The Ad Club facilitates students' move from the School of Journalism and Communication into the field of journalism. It enables students to procure jobs

in their chosen fields. I think that is the most important physical development the University provides to students, don't you?

Ruth Bartmess
Journalism

New car degree

As a new student to the University, I'm amazed at the things I learn each day. I'm not talking about what is learned in the classroom or in textbooks, but rather what I learn about my fellow students.

Many students tell stories of financial need and what a pain it is to eat Top Ramen noodles all the time. However, I wonder how many people are attending this school without any financial help from their parents.

Some people are lucky enough to be born into families that are able to support their children through college or after graduation. Maybe that doesn't include paying for everything the student would like, but many students do get at least some form of help.

I was shocked the other day when I heard a couple of students talking of their ensuing graduation presents — cars! Graduation presents? Shouldn't a degree from a university be rewarding enough?

Do they really need to be materially reinforced for their efforts? Shouldn't receiving an education be an intrinsic value?

Michael Brost
Psychology

River threatened

Lane County Commissioner Jerry Rust was correct to observe that "We've got some of the worst environmental destruction on the planet right here. . . the great public lands of the Northwest are up for grabs" (ODE, Jan. 25).

Certainly these are bad times for the few remaining parcels of ancient forests. But, as tragic as this is, we shouldn't overlook the environmental destruction

occurring right here in Eugene along the south bank of the Willamette River — and we should not forget the crucial role Rust continues to play in advancing this destruction.

In 1988, Rust's support for the Riverfront Research Complex was pivotal in undermining the efforts of University student activists and Eugene citizens who fought to stop this ill-conceived project. Opponents to the project, including the ASUO president and members of the University Survival Center, succeeded in getting the issue before Eugene voters. But, they lost the election, largely due to Rust's overt support for the complex.

Rust's role in advancing the destruction of the Willamette River and in undermining efforts of local activists didn't stop in 1988, however. As recently as last month, Rust, along with his political associates (including a few muddle-headed faculty members from the University's School of Architecture), managed to get the Eugene City Council to rubber stamp another ill-conceived plan.

If implemented, this plan would lead to the overdevelopment of the river in the vicinity of the Ferry Street Bridge as well as seriously degrade the organization of Eugene's public realm.

These plans to urbanize Eugene's magnificent Willamette River scenic corridor are part of a far-reaching development objective that will define Rust's legacy more than anything else.

Rust, like every "successful" politician, has learned that staying in office means not crossing certain lines — especially the lines drawn by the local economic development power brokers.

Student activists must help stop the bulldozers from pushing toward the river and keep Jerry Rust from advancing urban sprawl over Eugene's most valued natural resource.

Thomas Lenter
Eugene

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