

THIS WEEK
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OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

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Student Growth

A tight rope to walk

OUR OPINION:

With 2,000 new students on the way before the millennium, the University is ill-prepared to maintain quality education

“We're not going to turn this place into an assembly line.” That's what

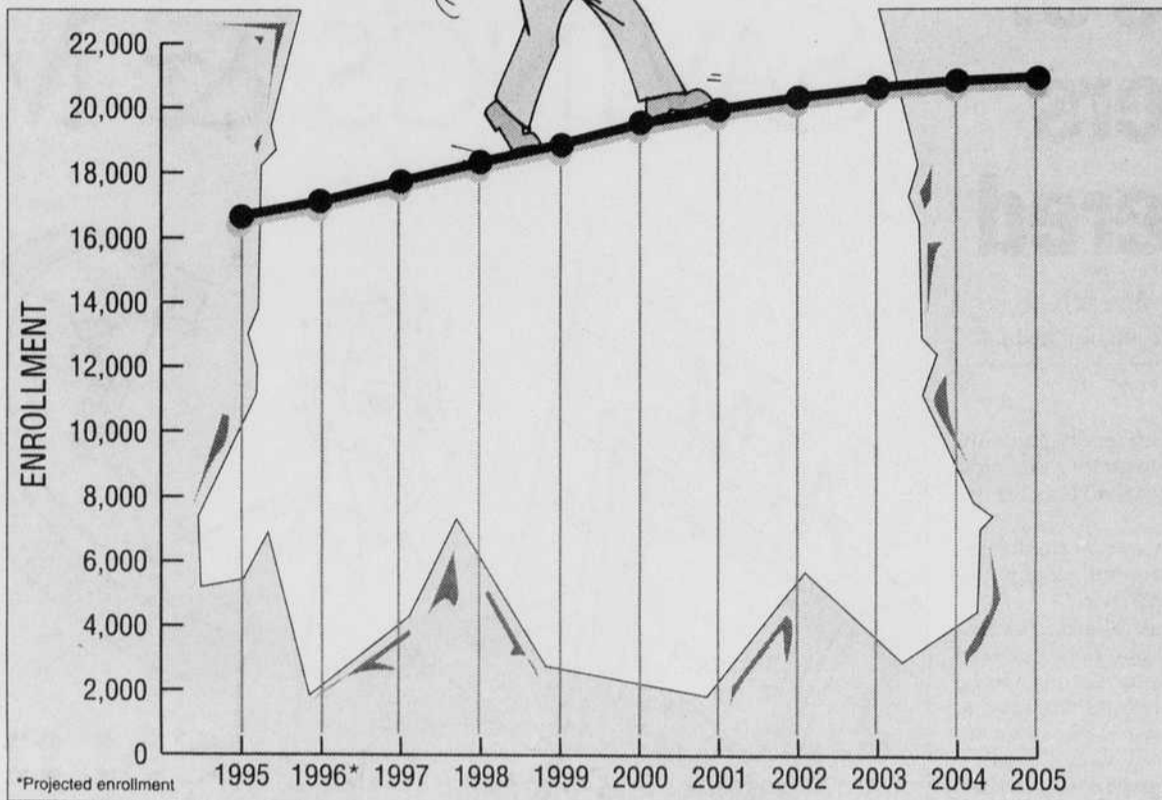
President Frohnmayer said and most likely what he believes about the University of the future. And if anybody should have a vision or an idea of where this place is going, it's him. But the problem is, this idea of students on conveyor belts may not be too far off.

It's unfortunate or almost unbelievable to believe this cookie-cutter process could happen here when one looks at all the documentation, figures and graphs the Johnson Hall gang has put together over the last few years. Innumerable think tanks, meetings, conferences and examination went into the idea that, in short, this University is going to be just fine.

Unfortunately, the Oregon State System of Higher Education has decided the University will welcome 12 percent more students, mostly from in-state, by the year 2000. That's more than 2,000 additional people roaming this campus and city, demanding housing, parking, classrooms and professors. Not to mention opportunities, space, comfort, accessibility and quality — all basic needs any college student has a right to — granted he or she pay \$11,000 for the privilege.

To say life around the University community will be congested, even more so than now, is an understatement. To say life will be harder and the quality of our education lower because of this growth is a prediction the University administration is trying hard not to realize. They know it won't be easy, but they feel they can avoid it — with one thing.

All the hopes and dreams for a quality University lie in something called the



*Projected enrollment
 SOURCE: OSSHE Institutional Research Services

CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

“Academic Productivity Plan,” a complex and lengthy resolution based upon goals formed during the University's Progress Report at the end of 1993. The March 1994 document, part of a statewide movement to reform higher education at all levels, is composed of three primary goals: provide university educations to more Oregonians, capitalize and build on existing strengths and create financial stability.

Any possibility that the graduates of the year 2002 will have more knowledge and be more prepared for the working world, the ultimate bottom line in higher education, rests mostly in the hands of the second goal: building on existing strengths. This includes the creation of something called “learning communities”: attempts to get students involved in the learning process early — freshman seminars, freshman interest groups, honors college and honors track.

Other tricks up the administration's sleeve include “new and refurbished classrooms,” “new marvels of communication technologies” and

effective teaching methods, as stated by Frohnmayer in his State of the University address last week. But what isn't talked about so proudly in this grand plan of productivity is that it also budgets the University for the same amount of faculty as today or even six years ago, for that matter.

The administration's answer to this is that six years ago, before the carnage of Measure 5, student enrollment was more than today, 18,141, and won't be reached again until 1998. This, in Johnson Hall logic, leaves a bit of a comfort zone for the school to grow back into since they dealt with these student numbers before with the same resources at their disposal.

But just because the University handled something before doesn't mean it's good for the school's future to “handle” it again. No students around here seem to be talking about a comfort zone. Stepping unwittingly into “distance education” classes transmitted over a TV screen or having classes taught and papers graded increasingly by inexperienced and overconfident GTFs or being locked out of necessary classes, students are feeling the pinch, not relishing the space.

President Frohnmayer says it is the University's duty to welcome all qualified Oregonians. For if we don't, he continued, we aren't preparing our own with a college degree so sorely needed in today's job market. But by allowing so many students at such low standards, we aren't helping Oregonians, we're hurting them. A degree is not just a degree. Practical skills are needed with direct feedback by experienced professors — qualities conspicuously missing from the administration's vision of the future.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.

THE PLAN

In 1993, the state legislature required all institutions in the Oregon State System of Higher Education to develop long-term plans to increase efficiency, productivity and capacity to serve an increasing amount of students. This mandate resulted in the University's 80-page “Academic Productivity Plan” in March 1994, with the following outline:

GOAL: To provide university educations to more Oregonians
INCLUDES: More graduates, better programs, larger enrollment, strong relationships with other schools

GOAL: To build upon existing strengths as research university, while enhancing “traditional college” environment
INCLUDES: More learning communities, student engagement in learning process, link between undergraduate and graduate programs

GOAL: To establish financial stability
INCLUDES: Recruitment and retention, more state support, private gifts, stable programs

READER VOICES

How will the University be affected by a dramatic increase in student population?



“I think [the University] is going to be way too crowded. Classes are already full as it is ... It's going to be impossible for people to graduate in four years now.”

Robyn Giacchi
 Junior journalism



“Parking is going to be horrible. I already have trouble finding parking as it is. They'll need to build a parking structure or something.”

Sky Duarte
 Freshmen undeclared



“Student housing is at its limit already. They'll have to make some changes. [The University] will have to build more buildings and student housing.”

Mark English
 Senior history



“It's good because if you have more money in the school you can do more things, but there is a limit to how big the school can be. I don't know how you decide what that limit is, but I think they [the University] need to think about it before they assume more money means better.”

Triscia Tighe
 Junior chemistry

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