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UO students see little diversity

CAMPUS: The small number of students of color can make it hard for minorities to gain access to their own culture

By Tom Potter
Student Activities Reporter

Imagine the feelings of nervousness and excitement that come with being at a new school with new classes for the first time. Imagine sitting in one of those classes for the first time and not knowing anyone yet. Then, imagine what it would feel like to do all of that and be surrounded by a culture that wasn't familiar to you.

For some minorities on campus this is not imagination at work — it is reality.

"It's hard to come from a place where you see your own people, people of your own race on a daily basis, and then have to come to Eugene and not have too many people that you can turn to," said Lakeysha Washington, an African-American graduate student at the University.

For students of color at the University, the lack of diversity can cause problems with classes and with not being able to connect with their culture on a primarily white campus.

"Most of the time I've been here, in the lecture classes, I've been the only black in the class,"

said Washington. "I just accepted it and realized that this is Eugene. What can I expect?"

Students of color have to face being stereotyped, suffering from a lack of social connection with their culture and going to classes that lack faculty of color, she said.

"Everyone that comes to the University brings different perspectives, different experiences, and it's always beneficial to come in contact with people who live differently than you do," Washington said. "You learn that what you have experienced isn't the only experience there is. You have to be more open-minded and more tolerant."

But a lack of understanding of students of color isn't the only problem that results from a lack of diversity on campus. Students of color also have to deal with the stereotypes other students have of them. Multicultural Center Program Coordinator Jay Breslow said.

"People need to take some risks and step out of their comfort zones and just branch out to people," he said. "Where racism

comes from is people not knowing and people who trust stereotypes."

Trusting in stereotypes creates problems for students of color because other students don't realize that in small ways what they say and do affects students of color.

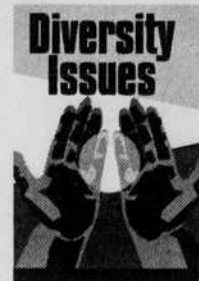
"As a graduate student, I don't see direct discrimination, but [I see] people being surprised that I'm a graduate student, and looking at me, wondering why I'm here," Washington said.

The problem isn't just with the way other students act. It is also that African-American students themselves don't know about their own culture, she said.

"I feel like being an African-American, we need to educate ourselves first, before we can educate people of other races," Washington said. "Because some of us don't ever know who we are, and if you don't know who you are, how can you ever teach someone else about who you are?"

Washington said she would also like to see the University bring more faculty of color to teach general courses such as the sciences and math. She said she hasn't had a lot of black professors.

"Coming to college is not all about learning in the classroom, it's about learning how to live with others," Breslow said. "I think the more diverse you get, the better education you get."



Discrimination: The Race Task Force provides report forms for ethnic students

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hidden in the changing face of white supremacy.

"What they're doing is taking a lot of the paraphernalia off that identifies the white supremacist people," she said. "You don't see the leather jackets and the tattoos and the skinheads anymore. They've taken off what would be off-putting to a lot of students on campus, and coming across as 'You know, there are a lot of people out there that are taking your jobs.' We're trying to get out to the student they target — white students — so if they get recruited they know what they're getting into."

Last winter, members of the Aryan Nation posted hateful flyers on cars and on campus. Other white supremacist literature has been found sporadically throughout the past few months. A racist flier was found posted near the EMU Fish Bowl in October.

"We need to be prepared for white supremacy,"

said Jack Orozco, a student activist of the Race Task Force. "They're organized, and we need to be organized as well. It's a different mentality with these people. I think the natural response is to have a dialogue, but you can't do that sometimes."

Orozco said various workshops and training sessions are meant to help the task force build strategies, such as creating alliances and organizing proactive action.

In response to student concerns about discrimination, the Race Task Force developed an unofficial report form. The information is used to understand the depth of the problems on campus and also to provide support for victims of ethnic discrimination.

So far this year, three unofficial reports have been filed. A total of six were submitted last year.

The next task force meeting will be Thursday, Nov. 14 at 1 p.m. in the ASUO Multicultural Center.

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