

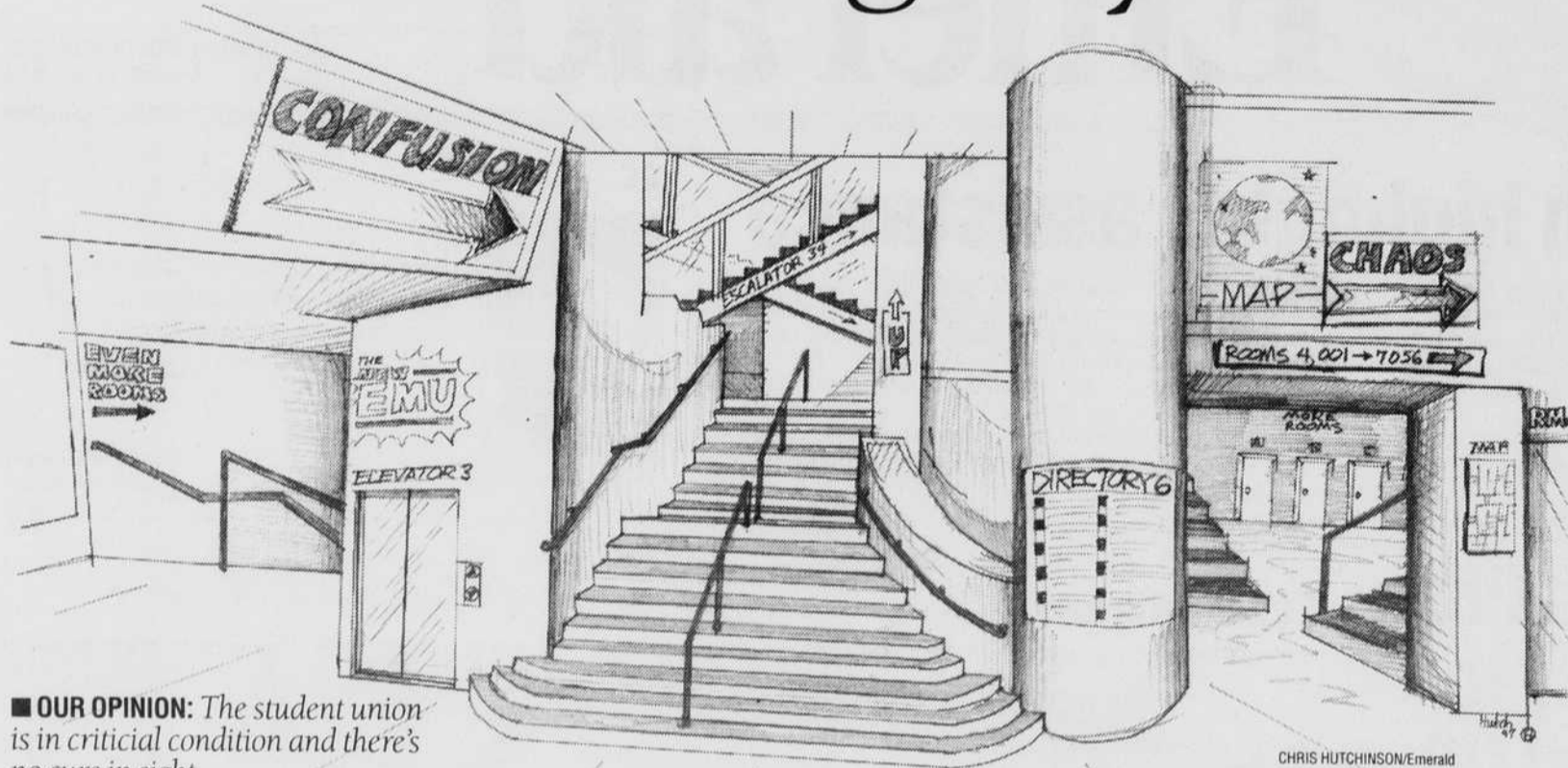
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OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

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An EMU Emergency



OUR OPINION: The student union is in critical condition and there's no cure in sight

For 47 years, the Erb Memorial Union has served as the center of student activity. Towering over campus, the mammoth building holds more than 50 ASUO Programs, a food service, almost 20 meeting rooms and plenty of room for students to study, work or just hang out.

For all its dominance, however, the EMU is one inherently screwed up building. It always has been, and unfortunately, it always will be.

First off, let us take the case of an incoming freshman, eager to explore the new campus before him or her. The new student walks into the EMU, the building he or she sees first and recognizes as the obvious center of campus. This is where it gets confusing.

The ASUO Executive, for instance, is on the EMU Ground Floor, according to the building directory. But what ground floor, north or south? And why are there two ground floors? Not surprisingly, our freshman gets lost quickly — no matter what location he or she was trying to find.

After original construction in 1950, the EMU endured two major additions in 1962 and 1972, as well as periodic minor remodels. While adding space, these renovations also added more mayhem to an already chaotically designed structure.

Because of this, freshmen aren't alone in their struggle. With at least six different levels by name and even more that aren't identified, the EMU is hard to navigate even for the most experienced student. The exact location of the Mezzanine Level, for example, is still highly classified information, save for the occasional campus radio employee.

The 1972 addition of the EMU's northeast wing, which includes the Skylight Cafe, Fir Room and ASUO offices, was a major player in establishing the separation and clutter between the floors that plagues students today.

Because the new wing was only connected to the original structure by a main floor skybridge, the other levels — especially the ground floor —

essentially became two separate areas. The breezeway, where students can walk through the middle of the EMU while never stepping inside, separates the two wings now.

And navigation difficulties are hardly the EMU's only problem. Even if one can find a way to walk through the building without regularly stopping to gather his or her senses, the trip surely won't be pretty. The EMU is a montage of different architectural styles and interior design that hardly molds together.

Nicely furnished areas like the piano room near the Fishbowl or the Ballroom and art gallery soon pave way to the hideous orange carpet of the Skylight and the Communist Bloc drabness of the Ground Floor South.

There are no EMU design patterns except for the repetition of no pattern. Besides furnishings, such interior anomalies exist like the dentist chairs near the Skylight Cafe or that strange cloth rainbow structure hanging above the northeast wing. These are things that must be noticed not just for their obvious novelty value, but also for their inability to fit into any kind of design standard.

And lastly, the EMU, from the outside, is just plain ugly. Gigantic balconies on all levels jut out, seemingly ready for huge outdoor parties that rarely happen. Half of the monolithic concrete stairways never get used. And most importantly, there's brick — a lot of it. And it's not pretty.

After listing all these deficiencies, it should be noted the University also noticed the EMU's many faults. On Jan. 23, construction crews began a one-and-a-half year building remodel that won't really kick in until June.

Among changes approved by the Campus Planning Committee in December are a new diverse "marketplace" food service, more entrances (that's what we really need), and wider corridors. But the most promising addition on the docket is the improved "Duck Crossing" — the nickname for the main lobby hub of the EMU.

By tearing out walls and maybe adding a new stairway, the new lobby area could go far in improving the vast circulation problem already described. Unfortunately, many of the proposed changes that involve "opening up" the EMU are part of the "alternate" plan. This means they will only be executed if funds are available.

With questions like these, it's hard to be excited about the new EMU renovations. We don't have much confidence that the problems described in this article will be improved sufficiently. And frankly, it really isn't fair to expect much improvement.

The EMU's problems began when its original designs were approved 50 years ago. The original building was confusing, and the ensuing changes to its structure never adequately addressed its many deficiencies. Instead, the remodels made the EMU worse.

One of the goals the University (and all involved in the project) laid out in its new renovations was to "work carefully and thoroughly toward this important step in reinforcing the EMU as the hub, crossroads, and heart of the University of Oregon campus and community."

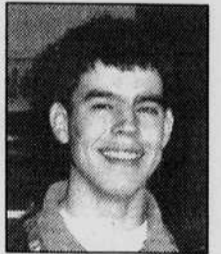
Well, the EMU, no matter how bad it is, will always be the center of campus. That isn't the issue. The building's sheer bulk and housing of so many people ensures it will always be the center of attention.

And since tearing the whole thing down just isn't practical, we all must instead live with the EMU for what it is — moments of brilliance and comfort mixed with architectural and design incompetence, a combination that never really combines — and whether we like it or not, the busiest site on campus.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.

READER VOICES

If you could, how would you improve the EMU?



"I would install a speaker system that runs through the whole EMU that would play funk and hip-hop 24 hours a day."
Geoff Mohr
Sophomore
Business



"I think it would be good to have more benches under covers outside for people to sit at."
Michele Snead
Senior
Biology



"They need a better food selection, plus the food they have is really expensive."
Gwen Gassman
Sophomore
Biology



"I'd allocate a specific area for games like dodge ball to promote student participation and bring the student body together."
Robert Fraley
Sophomore

LETTERS

Discrimination unacceptable

As individual members of the Career Center staff, we would like to express our position regarding military recruitment at the Career and Internship Fair on Jan. 28 and 29.

It is our understanding that under federal law, the military

has the legal right to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. However, we believe that our mission as a student services office is to serve and provide opportunities for all students regardless of race, color, sex disability, national origin and sexual orientation.

We would like for all University of Oregon students, faculty

and staff to know that although the military is present, we do not condone such discriminatory recruiting practices. Yet, it must also be made very clear that our intention is not to harass the recruiters.

As you can imagine, this situation puts those of us who believe in equal rights in a position of compromise that is not

acceptable. We encourage each member of the campus community to help create a world where people will be hired for the quality of their work rather than the gender of the person they love.

Debora Landforce
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& 11 co-signers
Career Center

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