

Oregon Daily Emerald

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UO chemist designs new electrical tool

By Carl Yeh
 Freelance Editor

Thanks to University chemistry Professor Mark Lonergan, electrical engineers will have a new tool to help them design electronic circuitry.

In the Dec. 19 issue of Science Magazine, Lonergan reported the creation of a "tunable diode." A conventional diode is a device that allows electricity to pass in only one direction. Lonergan's diode remains a "one-way street" for electricity, but offers much greater flexibility in regulating the flow of electricity, much like a faucet regulates the flow of water.

Lonergan's invention relies on the special properties of a relatively new class of materials known as conducting polymers, or plastics that conduct electricity.

Plastics are generally used as insulating materials in electronics and in the fabrication of electronic devices, but not to conduct electricity, Lonergan said.

Lonergan admits that chemists are not usually in the habit of creating electronic components. "I work a little bit out of the realm of a typical chemist," he said. "I'm a chemist who has wandered off

into the area of applied physics."

Conventional diodes are used in electronic circuits such as radio and television receivers. If the tunable diode can hold up in a practical environment, Lonergan speculates his device could be used for new sensors and "multiple-state memory." Conventional memory in modern electronics are based on two states: on and off. The tunable diode may enable the design of memory architectures based on a greater number of states, thereby enhancing storage capacity.

Lonergan, who has received a provisional patent for his tunable diode, said his research team and the University will ultimately benefit from the invention of the device.

Although Lonergan was able to create the tunable diode in the lab, more research will be needed to determine how the device works.

"There are still a lot of barriers that remain to its practical implementation," Lonergan said. "If the concept of the tunable diode can be successfully transferred into a practical device, it may one day join the transistor, resistor and capacitor as a common component found in a myriad of new electronic devices."

CAMPUS BRIEFS

Oregon Health Plan available to students

Oregon reinstated undergraduate students to the Oregon Health Plan on Jan. 1.

The Legislature had cut students from the plan, which provides health care coverage to some Oregonians, in 1995. The action removed between 5,000 and 7,000 students, according to the Oregon Student Association.

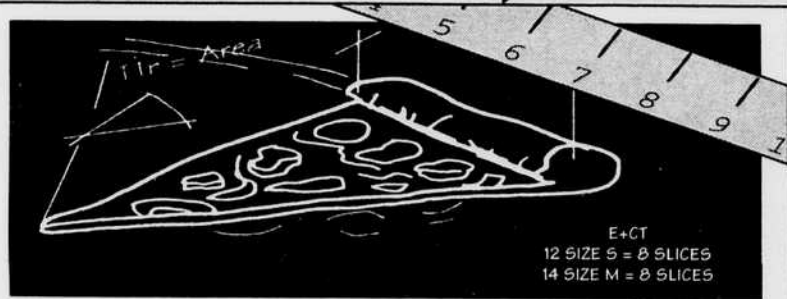
Students are now eligible for the plan if they qualify for a

Pell Grant, are uninsured and meet a set of resource requirements. Pregnant students and some other students are also covered if they meet the resource requirements.

The University's Student Health Center accepts payment from the Oregon Health Plan, unlike other Oregon campus health centers. The OSA will now push for other health centers to accept the plan.

Students can call 1-800-359-9517 for more information or for an application.

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