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Convocation endures the ages

Nils Hasselmo's speech will urge the University to preserve core values

By Teri Meeuwsen
Oregon Daily Emerald

Educators will continue history by dressing in colorful hooded robes, marching in a procession and listening to a keynote address during convocation — a celebration marking the formal beginning of the academic school year.

University President Dave Frohnmayer, Oregon University System Chancellor Joe Cox and other University officials will welcome the 175 educators, students and Nils Hasselmo, president of the Association of American Universities as the keynote speaker to the formal opening ceremonies, beginning at 2:30 p.m. today in the EMU Ballroom.

"It's the counterpoint of the graduation ceremony," said Barbara Edwards, special counsel to the president and organizer of the event.

During the centuries-old traditional procession, academics will wear the robes and hoods that reflect where they received their degrees and what kind of degrees they have. For example, those with Ph.D.s will wear a specific type of hood representing the degree, Edwards said.

Keith Richard, University archivist emeritus, said Frohnmayer has brought back the tradition of convocation after it had "petered out."

In the early days of the University, convocation was known as Charter Day — the day the Uni-

versity was chartered as a public university on Oct. 19. Charter day brought many notable speeches to the University, Richard said. For example, during O. Meredith Wilson's University presidency in 1954-1960, a Charter Day speech was remembered and requested up through the '80s, describing how "higher education should be."

Another notable speech came from then-governor Tom McCall in 1972. During the anti-war riots on campus, McCall told then-University President Robert Clark to "control his students or he would send the National Guard in." After Clark refused and McCall backed down, McCall spoke during his Charter Day speech and publicly apologized to Clark, Richard said.

After his presidency, however, Charter Day faded out until Paul Olum, University president between 1980-1989, changed the name of Charter Day to convocation. He held a round-table discussion with faculty and then in smaller discussions with students and others interested in the ceremony. This format was considerably different than the original format and brought the age-old tradition back to the University, Richard said.

Frohnmayer has held one convocation since taking office in 1994 as interim president. He became permanent president in 1995.

At this year's convocation, the processional will be followed by musical selections by the University Symphony Orchestra and the University Singers and Hasselmo's speech about how research

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Barbara Edwards
Convocation organizer

universities like this one must change their ways to preserve the values that have made them "international treasures."

Three core values — accountability, responsibility and community spirit — have made America's research universities important and valuable. What these universities, including the University, must change is the way they respond to these core values, he said in a news release.

"Accusations against higher education for being elitist, self-serving, inefficient and out of control have become almost commonplace," Hasselmo said. While these accusations tend to be exaggerated, these "perceptions are far too widespread and far too persistent to be ignored," he said.

Hasselmo is the president of the Association of American Universities — the most prestigious educational organization in the United States, Edwards said. The University is the only northwest institution besides the University of Washington to be nominated by the association's board.

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