

Birth parents and adoptees differ over Measure 58

The measure would abolish a law passed in 1957 sealing adoptees' birth certificates

By Jaime Vasconcelos
for the Emerald

Birth parents and adult adoptees have clashed over a ballot measure that would abolish an Oregon law passed in the late 1950s that closed adoption records.

State Ballot Measure 58 would allow adoptees 21 years and older to access their original birth certificates. Since 1957, adoptees' original birth certificates have been sealed and replaced with new certificates showing the names of their adoptive parents.

The law was intended to protect unwed mothers from the shame of having a baby and their children from the stigma associated with

adoption. But attitudes toward illegitimacy and adoption have changed during the last four decades. More birth parents and adoptees are making themselves available should the other party wish to contact them, said Margaret Godfrey, regional director for Open Adoption and Family Services. Godfrey said she believes the bill is righting a wrong that took away the rights of adult adoptees born before 1957.

The assurance of confidentiality, however, is still important to birth parents who have given their children up for adoption.

"Some of these women have built their lives around this promise," said Warren Deras of Concerned Adoption Professionals, a group of adoption social-service workers.

"These are now 60- or 70-year-old women who never told their children or spouses," Deras said.

"Relations would be seriously disrupted by this revelation."

Helen Hill, a 43-year-old adoptee who grew up in the closed-record system, is the chief petitioner for Measure 58.

"I know first hand the shame of secrecy that closed records engender," she said.

Hill said adult adoptees suffer from a lack of information. Many adoptees between the ages of 30 and 60 have no way to uncover important medical information about their genetic background.

"There is absolutely no medical information available to these people," Hill said.

But Deras said there are some situations when disclosure would be

inappropriate and harmful to both parties. When a woman has been sexually assaulted, Deras said, the child would be better off not knowing the details of conception.

Deras, whose adopted daughter is a freshman at the University, said Measure 58 is unbalanced and favors the adoptee. He also said Measure 58 is unnecessary because state law revisions in the last decade have given adoptees new ways of getting the information.

An Oregon statute requires adoption agencies to keep voluntary registers of both birth parents and adoptees should they wish to establish contact. Agencies must also conduct searches for both parties upon request.

But Hill said these searches are insufficient for two reasons. First, the adoption search is expensive (\$450). And second, the parties have no way of knowing how thoroughly the search was conducted.

The statute also requires that non-identifying medical information be available to the adoptee upon request. However, because agencies have only been collecting medical information from mothers for the last decade, only adopted children 10 years and younger can have this information.

Hill said 6 percent of Oregon residents do not have access to their original birth certificate, a right the rest of the population takes for granted. She said this is a violation of the 14th Amendment and the Oregon Bill of Rights, which states, "no law shall be passed which excludes a group of citizens from the same privileges all others are granted."

"Above and beyond all of this is a constitutional right that has been violated in the case of adult adoptees who have a fundamental document withheld by the state of Oregon," Hill said.



Assistant dean of student life looks to 'be there' for students

By Laura Baker
Oregon Daily Emerald

There's a new face in the student union hall of the EMU. Troy Franklin isn't a student, yet he can be found there late at night organizing events or attending meetings. His job is to be with the students as the new assistant dean of student life.

Franklin is starting from scratch. His position for multiethnic student programs is new to this University. Franklin said the job was created because of the Race Task Force's request for a staff member to facilitate communication between the administration and ethnic student organizations.

Franklin spends his mornings in the Student Life office and his afternoons and often his evenings in the student unions. He said the hardest part of his job right now is

educating the campus about what he does.

"I've had several students come up to me and ask, 'Troy, what is it that you do?'" Franklin said. "For me the first order of business is letting people know what I do."

Spending time in the student unions mentoring, giving advice and "being there as someone who cares" is a big part of Franklin's job description.

While getting his undergraduate degree from Central State University in Ohio, Franklin said he realized what he wanted to do was work on a university campus with students.

Franklin received his Ph.D. in 1995 from Iowa State in higher education administration with a concentration in student affairs. After working in public relations for several years he went to Weber State University in

Ogden, Utah, and worked as a counselor for African-American students for a year.

Franklin said one of the first things he noticed coming to Oregon is the activism on campus.

"Students are very proactive; they take charge," he said. "They have strong advocate perspectives."

Franklin sees his job at the University as an opportunity to advocate for ethnic students and encourage diversity on campus.

Franklin said his job is to make the administration and community aware of the needs of these diverse groups and work on recruitment and retention.

"If we tend to keep neglecting cultural groups and their contributions to this campus they're not going to come here, and enrollment problems are going to get worse,"

Franklin said.

Franklin's job is to help students build relationships with the administration and faculty so "they can create a better environment here," he said.

Franklin said a trust relationship with students is key to his success.

"If I support the students, I can't go wrong," he said. "The trust factor and building relationships with students, spending time and being resourceful to them is important."

Franklin said his first year here is about educating people about his job and figuring out what works on this campus. He said that it isn't easy but that he is already looking forward to next year.

"Students can succeed," he said. "That's what student development is all about."

Undergraduate business program gets restructured

By Sarah Skidmore
Oregon Daily Emerald

The undergraduate business program has quietly waited its turn.

After going unevaluated for many years, the Charles H. Lundquist College of Business undergraduate program is finally being restructured.

"While we felt fairly good about it, we knew that there were a lot of things we should do to make it a lot better," said Wendy Mitchell, associate dean of academic programs and director of undergraduate programs.

The primary objective of the restructuring is to raise the overall quality of the undergraduate program. Although the program is recognized as one of the top 50 in the United States, it has not been treated accordingly, said Roger Best, marketing professor on the development task force.

"No one was really stepping forward and saying, 'I want to make our undergraduate program one of the best,'" Best said. "We want to step up and move quicker, faster, better and bolder."

The restructuring has two focuses: curriculum and student support. The goals and focuses of the plan were developed by a task force comprised of student, faculty and business community representatives. The task force created focus groups to determine the needs of the school from the student, faculty and the business community points of view. The plans were determined from the results of the focus groups.

Some changes are already underway, although the entire plan

will be completed by the end of next year.

The curriculum restructuring plans have many facets. Redesigning and replacing some of the current classes, adding additional classes, adding a qualifying entrance exam and restricting admission into classes are some of the steps in changing the curriculum.

By changing the curriculum, particularly by requiring an entrance exam and restricting entrance to upper-division classes, the number of business majors is expected to drop, Mitchell said.

The business school would like to see these students participate in the minor programs, Mitchell said.

The goal is to better meet the needs of all the undergraduate business school students, according to the business school. To facilitate this, the student development portion of the plans were developed.

Student support expands programs for students and adds more services to help students succeed at the business school. Adding an honors program, expanding the options for business minors, and helping with career planning are some examples of how the school plans to implement the changes.

As a result of these changes, the business school would like to have students walking out their door that are well-educated, professional, and prepared for the business world, said Mitchell.

"I think both the employer and the student will feel much better when that match is made after they walk out the door," Mitchell said.

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