

PERSPECTIVES

A CURE FOR THE COMMENCEMENT BLUES

With tongue in cheek, Emerald grads long for a prominent commencement speaker

Seniors have hit the commencement speaker jackpot. After years of pretending not to care that other Oregon public universities were receiving their end-of-college pearls of wisdom from the likes of presidents and noted civil-rights activists, the University will welcome Robert Smith to campus.

That's right, the lead singer of the world famous band the Cure will address the class of 1999 on June 12.

Oh, a grand time will be had by all. Here is graduation as the Emerald editorial board envisions it.

First, after the prerequisite prattle by University President Dave Frohnmayer, the ASUO president and assorted others, Smith will take the stage.

Maybe he'll be wearing the hockey jersey he sported during the 1996 tour. Or maybe he'll show up in something a bit more goth. Not that it matters, as long as the hair is sufficiently tousled and the eyeliner is appropriately smudged.

And then he'll speak — that droll British accent soothing our fears about what to do with the rest of our lives.

Finally, we'll all stand up, linking hands as Smith leads us in an inspiring rendition of "Just Like Heaven."

Now that's a graduation. Make sure you have your lighters and hankies ready, folks.

And you know what the best part of this Robert Smith thing is? He's someone the graduating class of 1999 can relate to or, at the very least, recognize.

Let's be frank, some of the University's past commencement speakers haven't really cashed in on the prestige factor. And oh, we know it's wrong to covet, but we can't help but feel a tinge of envy when we see the inspirational, idealistic and yes, we'll say it, famous addressing other Oregon university graduates.

But at last we get ours. This commencement may not be the most sentimental or inspirational ceremony in history, but it will damn sure be the coolest.

In case you haven't figured it out, this editorial has thus far been an exercise in hyperbole, sarcasm and fantasy.

Alas, neither Smith nor any other members of the Cure will make an appearance at this year's commencement ceremony. The keynote address will ac-

tually be delivered by Robert Ellis Smith, who to the best of our knowledge has never been in a band. We'll try not to hold that against him, though.

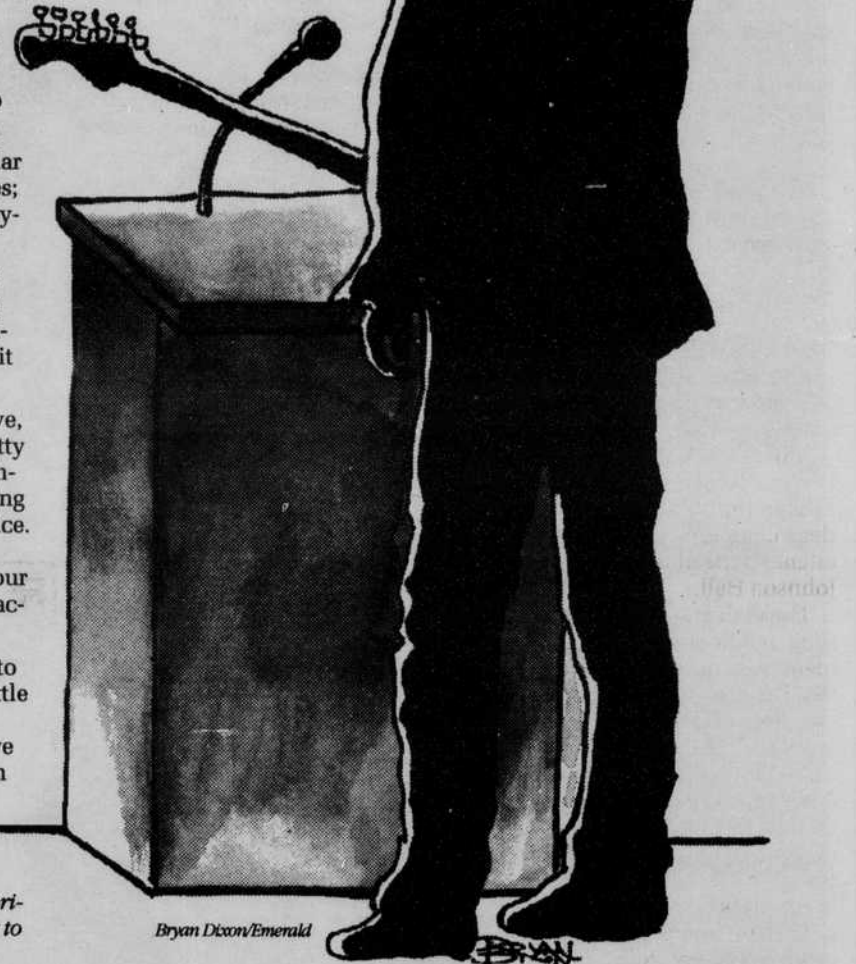
Smith is a journalist, a scholar and an expert on privacy issues; not to mention, he is Frohnmayer's pal.

That's all fine and great, but we can't help wishing that the last graduating class of the millennium could go out with a bit more of a bang.

Putting this all in perspective, we are probably just being bratty college students. After all, commencement is about recognizing several years of toil and sacrifice. We should feel honored and proud just to sit outside with our fellow students and have our accomplishments recognized.

Logically, we know all this to be true. But there's still that little nagging voice inside us, the voice that would like to receive that last hit of inspiration from someone we might actually have heard of.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.



Bryan Dixon/Emerald

President to discuss state of UO with emphasis on diversity

Two weeks ago, I was stunned and disgusted to read transcripts of e-mails exchanged in one of our classes that contained language of extraordinary hostility and disrespect.

So were many others.

The e-mails triggered student cries for action on issues of diversity and safety. They brought scores of concerned students to my door. I spoke with them for hours about personal experiences, hopes and fears.

Mostly, I tried to listen. And I was touched and impressed by what I heard.

Since then, I have continued listening, to students, faculty members and staff talking about the very real isolation they feel as people from different backgrounds, talking about the mistreatment they have endured because of differences in race or gender or belief.

It has become clear to me that these e-mails were not an isolated incident but were symptomatic of much broader, tragically common instances of intolerance. I suspect that most of us are oblivious to the expressions of bias I have heard about — ranging from unthinking, insensitive comments and "jokes" to insults and threats — because we have not lived life as a member of a minority, have not felt the sting of exclusion the same way.

The stories I have heard have taught me again how far we must go to live up to our own self-concept of a welcoming and accepting learning community.

Many of the students who came to Johnson Hall on the afternoon of May 18 underlined the strength of their beliefs by choosing to stay after the building closed, committing themselves to an act of peaceful civil disobedience. After hours of talk and deliberation, after hearing in detail about the consequences of their action and thinking about their options, those who chose to be arrested were removed from the building, cited and released.

While I did not agree with their choice of action, I appreciate their willingness to put themselves on the line to emphasize their beliefs.

Let me tell you about some things we have done and plan to do to address their concerns.

Luckily, we are not starting from zero. During the past five years, the University has been devoting ever-greater resources toward building campus diversity:

- We have strongly supported and recently increased scholarships and other support moneys for ethnic students. Our Student Academic Affairs Office estimates that scholarship dollars targeted specifically toward building diversity at the University will total in excess of \$1 million during

the coming academic year. The fund for Diversity Building Scholarships alone is scheduled to double from this year's \$280,000 level to more than \$500,000 next year.

- We have dedicated more than \$300,000 per year to special efforts devoted to attracting faculty of color. During the four academic years between 1995-96 and 1998-99, more than one in five of the new tenured and tenure-track faculty hires made at the University were faculty of color — 26 new hires out of 121 total over that period.

- In the past week, spontaneous efforts have begun throughout our University's schools and departments to address a basic question: Are the ways we are teaching sufficient to embody the values and beliefs of all of our students?

The events of the past two weeks have accelerated an existing trajectory, providing new energy and new commitment to making our campus as welcoming and safe as possible.

But much more needs to be done. I am heartened by the level of intensity shown by students who have initiated — and are working with me, staff and faculty members to implement — a number of new

initiatives, ranging from campus policies to public statements, that go to the heart of these problems. These projects are on a fast track.

To keep the momentum going, I encourage the entire campus to attend the regularly scheduled University Assembly Meeting Wednesday at 3 p.m. in 150 Columbia.

At that meeting, I plan to forego my usual state of the University address and devote that time to an open discussion of diversity issues. I invite all of our campus members, faculty, staff and students alike to attend and express themselves. At the specific suggestion of our students and faculty of color, I particularly encourage the participation of those who might disagree with what they see as our present course of action.

We must, as always, work together to build a campus that is equally accepting, equally safe for everyone. It is not a job I can do alone.

But I do pledge my personal efforts to move this important work — important at every campus across the nation, and important here in Eugene — forward as quickly as possible.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the Assembly Meeting on Wednesday.

Dave Frohnmayer is the University president.