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Perspectives

Oregon Daily
Emerald

We can do it

What an uproar one measly article can make. OK, it was more like three huge articles in a series entitled "Majoring in Mediocrity" in The Oregonian, but still. The series, presented last week in the state's largest newspaper, analyzed what the paper saw as mediocre higher education in Oregon.

Specifically, The Oregonian series lambasted the lack of funding for higher education, the lack of lucrative technology partnerships and the sub-par salaries of faculty.

While many at the University and at the other universities in the Oregon University System have voiced their heated opposition to many of the comments in the series, the Emerald would tend to agree on a few areas.

Faculty morale is something being touched on in a seemingly unrelated series this week in the Emerald. A series of stories on diversity have told us that something isn't quite right here, that faculty of color aren't getting the support they need for them to want to stay. And earlier Emerald articles on faculty salaries have shown that virtually all faculty members are concerned that they haven't had a cost-of-living increase in four years. The more we pay our faculty — whether through higher actual salaries or University encouragement of grants, outside research and business participation — the better faculty we will attract.

The funding issue is, of course, apparent in every area of higher education. We pay more in tuition than other peer universities but often don't have the same perks. Why are there only four phone lines on which we can reach the University Internet server? Come on, this is the 21st century. Let's get hooked up. Let's find out where our money really goes and change things that aren't efficient.

It's funny that people can hear about so many issues that affect Oregon and not make the connection between them. This election year, Bill Sizemore, perennial measure-maker and head of Oregon Taxpayers United, wants Oregonians to pass a tax measure that could reduce the whole state budget by 14 percent. Meanwhile, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a liberal think tank, shows the average income — \$97,589 — of the richest 20 percent of Oregon families with children is 10 times that of the poorest 20 percent. And now The Oregonian makes news that higher education is in trouble.

Well folks, wake up and smell the connections. If the state budget is decreased, chances are worth betting on that higher education funding would go down too. And what happens when a state doesn't place a big enough emphasis on education? More people are apt to live in poverty, and the economy doesn't blossom with the same self-sustaining energy.

What The Oregonian series did was highlight this relationship between quality higher education and a healthy economy. A bigger push toward engineering degrees might mean more



patents, which might mean more tech companies forming straight from universities, which means new businesses that need to employ people at a high standard of living. The systems of education and business feed into each other.

We do seem to have the seeds growing for technology tie-ins — the Riverfront Research Park and even the new "The UO Experience" CD-ROM that debuted last week. But how many students at the University feel certain that their degrees are useful in Eugene or Oregon? How many students feel that companies around here need them and want them?

Partnerships with business and technology sectors often create issues regarding who controls whom. Nike is a good example of a company that heavily funds the University — not only in grants but in putting grads to work — and students seem to revile Nike even while visiting the law school

or the library. But the complicated ethics involved with these partnerships can be and should be evaluated without withdrawing completely from big business.

The bottom line is that now is a terrific time to examine higher education. Students have been calling for changes for years with regards to tuition and funding. Faculty are now calling for salary compensation. Businesses around Oregon are calling for well-trained graduates to fill their growing technology field. It seems as if everyone is calling for reform. And if the change of the calendar date to 2000 offers even more symbolism for a new era in higher education, than let's include that reason too.

Because hurting higher education hurts all Oregonians.

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

QUOTED

"I would say that there's also a different mentality here. [The University of Washington] considers itself the best university north of Berkeley and west of the University of Chicago. Who do you think they're skipping there?"

— **Quintard Taylor**, a history professor and a leading scholar of African-Americans in the West, who left the University last summer for the University of Washington. Oregonlive, Jan. 31.

"It won't be long before we lose most of our talented faculty, and the bright students who haven't already left will decide Oregon higher education is a poor investment."

— **Marc R. Feldesman**, professor and chairman in the anthropology department at Portland State University. Oregonlive, Jan. 31.

"As a student in the Oregon State University Honors College, I, too, have been observing through statistics the demise of academic standards at OSU with dismay. It is a serious threat to our economy as well as our democracy. I nevertheless remain optimistic that OSU will properly prepare itself for the future. My suggestion as a first step is for OSU to publicly admit that your critical analysis published Jan. 23 was accurate. Only when [administrators] admit that mediocrity exists in higher education can they start to create a better tomorrow."

— **Alexander Lavidge Johnson**, Corvallis. Oregonlive, Jan. 31.

Letters to the editor

ODE promotes free speech

I'm writing to provide an alternative viewpoint to the rebuttal that is sure to appear concerning your guest commentary against abortion (ODE, Jan. 21). I am impressed that the Emerald would actually publish such a commentary, with views that are neither popular nor "politically correct" and with which most of us might disagree.

You're bound to get a lot of flak for it, but congratulations on promoting free speech.

Don Titus

undergraduate architecture major

'Ethnic' remark wrong

The Emerald's editorial about Bobby Lee's exit from the Eugene City Council (ODE, Jan. 28) was basic info except for one astonishing statement: "Lee is the youngest member of the Eugene City Council and the only ethnic member."

The only ethnic member? No doubt the other members of the Eugene City Council will be very surprised to learn that the Emerald editorial staff believes they have no ethnic background — or at least not an ethnic background that counts for anything.

Do you believe if someone's ancestors came from Europe, then it means that person has no ethnic culture, no ethnic heritage and no ethnic back-

ground?

My European immigrant ancestors would strongly disagree with you. Europe is an extremely diverse geographic region made up of more than 30 different countries and populated by more than 200 distinctly different and extremely varied cultures.

It is also totally inaccurate to suggest that Americans who have been a part of the American melting pot for several generations have "no ethnicity." Do Americans possess as much inherent ethnicity as a native-born citizen of China, France, Mexico or Nigeria? Of course we do. Our culture is different from those countries, but it is also just as "ethnic" and just as valid.

Respecting cultural differences is a

good thing, but it shouldn't be done at the expense of denying the existence, importance and validity of our own culture.

Mark Chastain
future graduate student

CORRECTION

In the story "Groups get chance to appeal to PFC" (ODE, Feb. 1), Jennifer Greenough, an Athletic Department Finance Committee representative, was misidentified.

The Emerald regrets the error.