

# Increased Pell Grants survive first test

Students hoping to see an increase in individual grants saw proposals survive the budget's preliminary test

By Serena Markstrom  
Oregon Daily Emerald

Student organizers are pushing for a \$400 increase in the maximum federal Pell Grant, and they got a glimpse at what legislators have in mind for the program when the House and Senate's budget proposals for education hit the floor in subcommittee.

Proposed House and Senate budgets totaling almost \$100 billion each, which could include increases in federal Pell Grants of up to \$350 per Oregon college student, Wednesday passed through the subcommittees on Labor, Health, Human Services and Education.

OSPIRG joined the ASUO and other Public Interest Research Group organizations across the country to put pressure on legislators for an increase in the Pell Grant.

Merriah Fairchild, the state board chair for OSPIRG, said since 1980 the value of the Pell Grant has gone down because it has not grown with the rising cost of tuition.

"The idea is to make the Pell Grant more relevant to the cost of tuition," Fairchild said.

The campaign has included phone-in days to legislators, hundreds of letters to representatives and student senate resolutions across the nation.

The ASUO Student Senate passed a resolution May 3 to encourage representatives to vote

for allocating additional surplus funds to higher education, particularly the Pell Grant.

The \$95.9 billion House budget proposal includes a \$200 increase in the maximum Pell Grant per student, of which a proposed \$4.5 million in grant money would go to Oregon students.

The Senate Appropriations committee is expected on May 24 to take up its \$100 billion version of the budget, which suggests a

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OSPIRG

\$350 increase in the maximum Pell Grant. The Senate bill approaches the \$400 increase that public interest research groups nationally have been pushing for in the last 18 months.

Robin Miller, ASUO federal affairs coordinator, said the ASUO has been working with the United States Student Association to get the Oregon Congressional Delegation to support legislation that would increase funding for federal financial aid, such as the Pell and the Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership grants.

The LEAP grant is part of a state-based grant system, and the House bill proposes to eliminate this program. The Senate budget requests \$70 million for it, a \$30 million increase over 2000 funding.

Ivan Frishberg, director of the USPIRG higher education project,

said he is optimistic that bills that include higher education increases will eventually pass. The Senate went into full session May 11.

PIRGs across the country adopted the Pell Grant as a campaign because higher education is becoming less affordable to many students. Fairchild said students are dropping out of school because they cannot afford it and "that seems like a huge tragedy."

Miller echoed Fairchild's concerns.

"The ASUO believes that education is a right," Miller said. "All students deserve access to higher education."

Frishberg said students across the country are "going deeper and deeper into debt," though the effects are not as deep for Oregon residents because of the 1998 tuition freeze. That freeze, however, is only guaranteed through 2000.

It is a good sign that budgets including Pell Grant increases passed without recommended amendments, Frishberg said, calling the move a good start. The budgets need more work, however, before they are at a satisfactory level for students lobbying for better higher education budgets, he added.

Fairchild said public pressure helps shape results, and the coalition of student leaders across the country has affected the senators and representatives who are supporting higher education budgets.

"I think any increase is somewhat of a victory for students," Fairchild said.

Students who want more information on how to get involved can go to either the OSPIRG or ASUO office, EMU Suites 1 and 4, respectively.

## May 10 subcommittee budgets

### House \$95.9 billion budget

**Pell Grant**  
proposed \$200 increase in maximum grant per student

**LEAP**  
proposed eliminating state grant program entirely

### Senate \$100 billion budget

**Pell Grant**  
proposed \$350 increase in maximum per student

**LEAP**  
proposed \$30 million increase over 2000 budget

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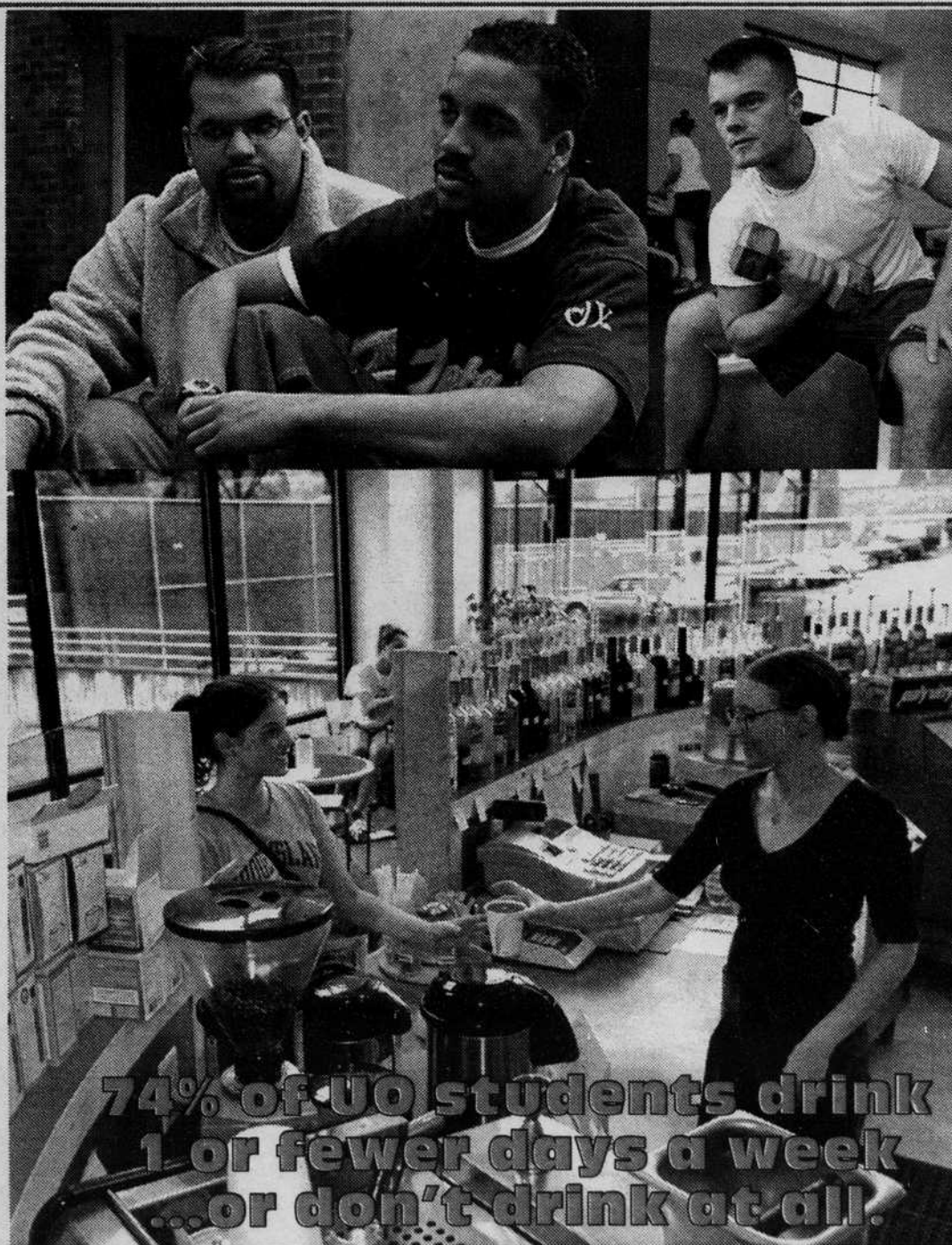
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