

Editor in chief: Jack Clifford
Associate Editors: Rebecca Newell, Jeff Smith
Newsroom: (541) 346-5511
Room 300, Erb Memorial Union
P.O. Box 3159, Eugene, OR 97403
E-mail: ode@oregon.uoregon.edu

Perspectives

Where'd you get your diploma, a box of Cracker Jacks?

"Obtain a prosperous future, money earning power and the admiration of all."

So begins the e-mail I receive at least once a week, sent under the subject line "University Diplomas." How, you ask, can a person attain all of the above, basically a short list of those qualities each student likely strives for by attending the University? (OK, the "admiration of all" part is a bit of a stretch.)

Simple.
One quick phone call to a business in south Florida — at least that's what the number's area code reflects — and you can receive a diploma from "prestigious non-accredited universities based on your present knowledge and life experience." The e-mail goes on to state that there are "no required tests, classes, books or interviews" for bachelor's, master's, MBA and doctorate diplomas, available in the field of your choice.

COMMENTARY

Jack Clifford

No one is turned down, confidentiality is assured and lines are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, including Sundays and holidays.

Whoa, the joy of instant gratification.

With summer commencement exercises scheduled for Saturday, maybe now is the time to assess exactly what students are getting out of their college experiences. Although I will not be receiving my diploma this weekend — as a fourth-year junior, the once-ridiculed phrase "six-year plan" is suddenly sounding more realistic — 1,129 degree candidates are eligible to participate in the ceremonies. The awards include 719 bachelor's degrees, 289 master's degrees, 61 doctoral degrees, 57 certificate recipients and three doctor of jurisprudence degrees.

So, are these people stupid? With the push of a few buttons, they could have had a diploma in their hand by now and be well on their way to that "prosperous future." Uh, yeah, right.

"College is a tremendous experience you keep drawing on for the rest of your life," said Karen Sprague, biology professor and vice provost for undergraduate studies, in between laughter after hearing about the offer from "University

Diplomas."

As a University administrator, Sprague, of course, is required to toe the company line. But, she makes good arguments for taking the stay-in-school path, instead of trying the wing-it approach.

There's the opportunity to debate important issues in a classroom setting, she said, and interacting with people who can lay out the logic of certain points of view. Your stance on issues gets shaken up in the process, which only adds to the learning process.

"For a great many people something special happens during the pursuit of a college education," Sprague said.

That pursuit of happiness comes at a rather daunting cost, of course, and the price is escalating.

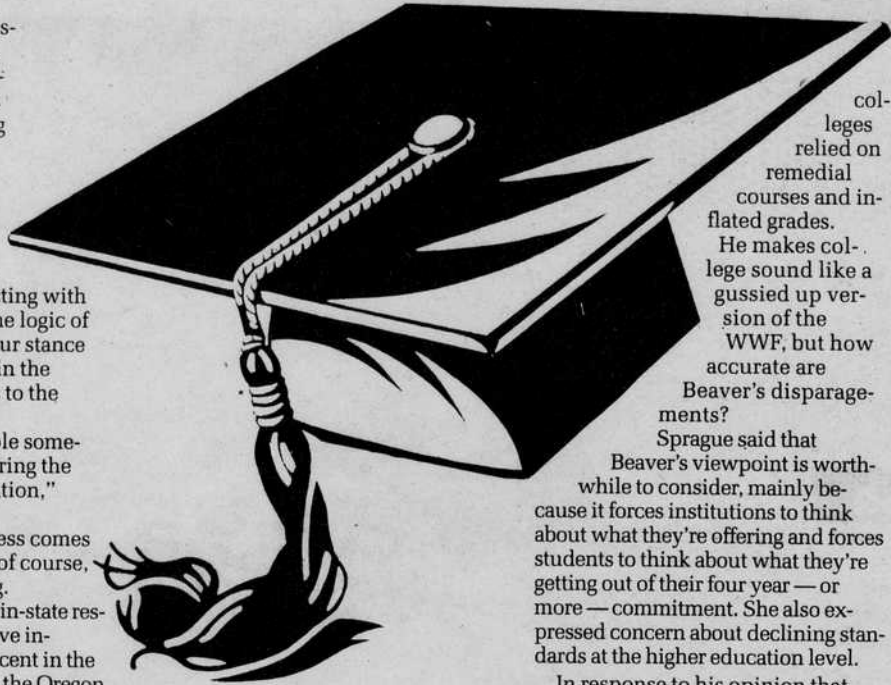
Tuition and fee rates for in-state residents at the University have increased more than 225 percent in the past 10 years, according to the Oregon University System. The difference in annual costs between the 1988-89 and 1998-99 school years rose from \$1,649 to \$3,771 for undergraduates. For non-residents the financial burden jumped from \$4,517 to \$12,555 during the same time period.

That's a lot of special somethings. It should be noted, however, that the U.S. Department of Education reports the average college costs for undergraduates at the nation's public institutions run about \$8,000, including room and board expenses.

So, what are we getting for our Grover Cleavelands and our Ben Franklins?

According to information on the National Center for Education Statistics Web site, the median annual income in 1998 of year-round, full-time workers aged 25 years and older, with a bachelor's degree, was \$51,405 for men and \$36,559 for women. Those workers with just a high school degree skimped by on \$31,477 and \$22,780, respectively.

Beyond the higher influx of dead



colleges relied on remedial courses and inflated grades. He makes college sound like a gussied up version of the WWF, but how accurate are Beaver's disparagements?

Sprague said that Beaver's viewpoint is worthwhile to consider, mainly because it forces institutions to think about what they're offering and forces students to think about what they're getting out of their four year — or more — commitment. She also expressed concern about declining standards at the higher education level.

In response to his opinion that parents and high-school counselors emphasize getting a college education too much, and overlook the possible fact that a student might find higher pay scales as skilled, industrial workers, Sprague agreed.

"I know my plumber makes more than I do," she said. "If simply making money is your sole concern, then maybe you should go that way."

Sprague did get in a plug for the higher education system, lest you think she is falling down on the job. She related a story about her friend who went to school, received his college degree, but in the end found that barn-building was his true passion. Without that intermediate step of the university experience, however, she doubts her friend would have the same perspective on life.

In a very long and circuitous manner, the point of this commentary is to prompt you, as a student, to think about what you are doing on this campus. Whether you are graduating this weekend or whether you are ready to scrap it all and become a carpenter, you have choices.

A college degree is certainly to be valued, but it isn't necessarily all that and a bag of chips.

Especially if it is just a phone call away.

Jack Clifford is the Oregon Daily Emerald's editor in chief.

presidents, what are students really getting for their investment, though? Not much, if you believe William Beaver, who is a professor of social science at Robert Morris College in Pennsylvania. The good professor took time out of his busy teaching schedule to attack everything that is higher education in the summer issue of American Outlook, a quarterly magazine published by the Hudson

Institute, a public policy research organization in Indianapolis.

Beaver wrote that higher education has become "less of a haven for the elite and the academically qualified and more of an expected destination for everyone." Institutions, facing a possible decline in enrollment when the last of the baby boomers entered college in the 1980s,

responded with publicity campaigns, lower standards and scholarships, all to attract what he called less-qualified students. When the courseload became too difficult for those students, he continued,

“College is a tremendous experience you keep drawing on for the rest of your life... For a great many people something special happens during the pursuit of a college education.”

Karen Sprague
vice provost for undergraduate studies

QUOTED

"The guy just came out of the crowd and grabbed it. I guess I just had time to think, 'What's going on?'"
— Linda Colcott, who was carrying the Olympic torch through Frankston in southeast Melbourne when a man jumped out of the crowd and grabbed it. USA Today, Aug 7.

"Sometimes you don't need to be told if you're right or wrong, you don't need anything fixed, you just want to be heard."

— Scott Lubbock, a trained drug and alcohol counselor who recently opened "All Ears." Located above Eugene's L&L Market, Scott will listen to whatever a person wants to talk about. The service is \$5. The Register-Guard, Aug 7.

"I don't think anyone can calculate the effect of having a Jew on the ticket. If Joe Lieberman were Episcopalian it would be a slam dunk."

— Ed Rendell, Democratic Party chairman, said last week, in response to the possible selection of Lieberman as Gore's running mate. Gore announced Monday that Lieberman is his choice. USA Today, Aug 7.

Word On the Street.

If you could choose anyone as president of the United States, who would it be and why?



"[Green Party candidate] Ralph Nader because I think he'd be a good president. I like what he stands for and his honesty. I think he'd really care about the people of this country."

— Junior Tova Moore
journalism



"I would choose [George W.] Bush. I think that he captures and articulates a political movement greater than any other politician today."

— John Adams
political science



"Ralph Nader because he represents all the values I stand for: human rights, civil rights, anti-corporation and the environment. I'd also vote for him because I want the Green Party to get 5 percent of the vote so at the next election they get funding."

— Rachele Hancock
undeclared



"Tom Green because he's a funny guy and I'd think he'd have a great platform. He'd make the news interesting. He's my hero, I'd vote for him any day."

— Junior Gabe Silverman
multi-media



"Larry Flynt because out of everyone in the U.S., he probably upholds the constitution the most. He fights for free speech whether people like what he's saying or not."

— Senior Christy Lardy
art history