Diversity is focus of retreat

■ Students from Oregon universities participate in an Oregon State University-sponsored trip with plans to strengthen ties

By Beata Mostafavi
Oregon Daily Emerald

The University isn't the only institution that has made diversity objectives a top priority in recent years.

Oregon State University has started sponsoring diversity development retreats, which offer students the opportunity to explore different cultures as well as their own. This weekend, for the first time, University of Oregon students will also participate in this journey.

About 50 students from both universities will depart at 3 p.m. today from Corvallis and Eugene to stay at Camp Lutherwood in Cheshire, Ore., until Sunday.

Facilitators and group leaders will conduct small discussions, large discussions and activities that focus on issues involving class differences, racism, sexism, power and privilege.

Cessa Heard-Johnson, coordinator of the Oregon State University student involvement office, said the main idea of the retreat is for people to explore their own cultural identities and develop ways to appreciate other cultures.

"The retreat will help all students to build bridges across their differences and figure out ways to build allies between groups," she said.

At the campground, students will partake in experiential exercises that aim to broaden their perspectives on diversity topics.

Heard-Johnson mentioned one activity that will demonstrate class differences. Facilitators will host a dinner and give 10 percent of the group a full-course meal, 30 percent of the group a "middle-class" meal on paper plates and the rest of the students rice and water. She said these exercises are meant to give students better insight on other groups' viewpoints and teach them how people's differences influence relationships.

Linda Liu, advising coordinator at the Office of Multicultural Affairs and a retreat facilitator, said she and some of the retreat leaders have practiced a few of these activities in the last week.

"They have made me see how people perceive me and how differently I perceive myself," she said. "You have privileges you don't know you have."

Oregon State's first retreat was in January. Heard-Johnson said Oregon State plans to have at least two diversity retreats a year, with plans to organize another in April. She emphasized that the retreat is open to all students regardless of ethnicity, class or sexual orientation.

Heard-Johnson added that the first retreat was successful and many students came back and continued to be involved in diversity efforts. She said almost 75 percent of the participants from the first retreat are returning as facilitators for the second one.

Mark Tracy, assistant dean for diversity programs, said students who go on the retreat have a high potential to return home and apply what they learned to the world they live in.

"The retreat will attempt to empower students to come back and make changes around issues around diversity on their respective campuses," he said.

History

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With votes dribbling in from across the country, Gore's lead in the popular vote was shrinking to about 200,000 votes out of 100 million. With a few precincts still unreported (as of 8 p.m. EST):

—Gore had 49,113,600 votes.

—Bush had 48,906,647 votes.

Though it has no bearing on who is the next president, the total-vote lead gives Gore added psychological standing in his fight to overturn Florida's results.

Eight lawsuits have been filed in state and federal courts to challenge the Florida results, including six in Palm Beach County and two in Tallahassee. One federal case was withdrawn by the voter who filed. Democratic Party-backed lawsuits won't be filed until next week, party officials said.

The Tallahassee cases alleged race discrimination, and Palm Beach County voters sought a new election because they said the ballot was too confusing.

Daley said the Bush campaign was willing to "blithely dismiss the disenfranchisement of thousands of Floridians as being the usual mistakes" that afflict elections.

Both candidates were working simultaneously to prepare their transitions to power and fight the ballot dispute. Democrats were trying to raise $3 million to finance Gore's challenge, while Republicans geared up their own fundraising drive.

Bush officials were scrutinizing close-vote states besides Florida and pondering whether to press for recounts. High on the list were Iowa and Wisconsin, with a combined 18 electoral votes. A re-count was underway in New Mexico's most populous county, and Oregon law requires a re-count in close races as well.

Nader

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Green Party have received is a success in itself.

Robinowitz argued that the close national race proves neither candidate had a message strong enough to energize the electorate.

"What I think is that the real sad thing is millions of people voted for someone they did not believe in," he said.

Linda Lee Charles, a Springfield Nader Green Party spokeswoman, said local Nader supporters are as dumbfounded by the national election as the rest of the country.

"All of us are all sitting around discussing this," she said. "It's the strangest election we've ever experienced."

She said Nader supporters are not disappointed by the election, but are instead optimistic about what they can do in the future. She said the Lane County headquarters will be moving to a new location downtown and will host its first meeting Nov. 18.

"We are hoping to create, from the bottom up, awareness about what is happening in this country," she said.

Charles said that, before the election, the local Nader campaign headquarters received several threats from people fearing a Gore defeat as a result of Democrats and Greens voting for Nader. While Charles wasn't certain, she said this may have convinced other Nader supporters to hold onto their ballots until they could see how Gore fared on the East Coast. If Gore did poorly, they would vote for him, not Nader.

She said this could explain why Nader did better in polling than in actual results.

"I'm assuming that the percentage points lost was because people held their ballots and waited," she said.

Hope Marston, a member of the steering committee for Lane County Nader supporters, said the election may have helped the Nader organization discover who its true believers are. Now that the group knows who stuck with Nader, it has a new corps of supporters it can depend on in the future.

She said the election has only given more energy to a Green Party that is looking to maintain the level of national recognition it earned in this campaign.

"We are going to be a force to be reckoned with for years and years to come," she said.

While the election results mean a complete loss for Nader, Marston said this doesn't convey what has actually happened for the party.

"Ralph has already won, because he has gotten us to work so hard," she said, adding that the Green Party will continue to promote its interests at both the state and federal level.

"We're all really glad about what we did," she said. "Even if there isn't a win it gets people excited and interested."

Responses

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in the Constitution that support it, but added that some past presidents won elections without actually gaining more than 50 percent of the popular vote.

Mohr also said the full impact of the 2000 election won't be known until the outcome is declared.

"It's much too early to tell," he said. "It depends a lot on how they resolve it."

Southwell said the last time the people and the electorate differed was 1888, when Benjamin Harrison won the electoral vote and the presidency against Grover Cleveland, who won the popular vote.

Mohr said the 1876 presidential election also caused controversy, and it has parallels to this year's election. In 1876 ballots were disputed in Florida, Louisiana and South Carolina. The presidential race was between Republican Rutherford B. Hayes and Democrat Samuel J. Tilden, then governor of New York.

"For months the country didn't know who would be president," Mohr said. "Congress set up a [15-member] electoral commission to determine who would be declared the winner."

University history professor Daniel Pope said the commission consisted of five members each from the House of Representatives, the Senate and the Supreme Court.

The commission eventually sided with Hayes, who became the nineteenth president of the United States.

Southwell said the winner in 2000 will have a difficult time governing the United States because his victory will be by such a narrow margin, and because both houses of Congress are narrowly divided between the two parties.

"I wish this was over. It's a disaster," Southwell said. "If this kind of situation had happened in Russia, Yugoslavia or Chile, I do believe the U.S. would be rolling its eyes and saying this isn't any way to run an election. I think the whole experience is quite embarrassing all around."

Southwell said people 100 years from now will also remember this election for its premature media reports and voting irregularities.

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