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Making higher education a necessary good

Editor's note: As this year's legislative session kicks into high gear, education is on the minds of many people. Teaching standards, testing, performance and funding will be debated through the summer, as a final state budget for education is prepared. To get ourselves (and our readers) in the mood, the editorial page is embarking on a two-week discussion of higher education. The Emerald's columnists and editorial board members will examine the theory, practice and purpose of providing students a college experience, writing on topics from tenure to the incidental fee to out-of-state tuition.

This is the editorial page, so critique will be our primary tool. In keeping with our desire to stimulate campus discussion, we strongly encourage readers to submit their own thoughts about higher education, whether critical or supportive. As always, letters to the editor are limited to 250 words. Please contact the editorial editor, at opededitor@journalist.com, to discuss writing a longer guest commentary.

The Emerald editorial board was originally inspired to write about higher education when we examined the complex process of funding education in Oregon. With a tight overall state budget, elected officials will have to choose carefully to fund public safety, entitlements and pet programs while still ensuring a minimum level of education funding. Part of the discussion involves how much money K-12 schooling should receive compared to higher education. It is shameful that the state funding model requires a choice between primary and secondary education. In order to have intelligent, productive citizens, clearly both levels of learning need ample funding. If the state scrimps on K-12, students aren't prepared for the adult world. If higher education funds are reduced, then the state suffers because the brightest students will look elsewhere for an education. Oregon should be trying to keep its most intelligent citizens here in the state, to ensure its future success.

Oregon's current funding model, implemented partially in response to the passage of Measure 5 in 1990, allows each college to keep its own tuition money. Previ-



GIOVANNI SALIMENA Emerald

ously, tuition dollars were spread among the state campuses and supplemented with state money to provide an adequate level of funding. With less state dollars to rely on, tuition is a big deal. In response, campuses are eagerly in-

creasing enrollment. This reliance on tuition has had a negative effect on entry requirements, class sizes and the quality of teaching.

Once students are enrolled, colleges need to keep them — those

tuition dollars are critical. This has led to lowered standards and grade inflation. Professors seem all too willing to make exceptions for students (who, in some cases, haven't paid attention or done the work) with a good story to tell. Pa-

pers can be late and grading can be easy; after all, if it's too hard, students will drop out and the college loses money.

College education isn't only lacking in Oregon, however. Nationally, the college experience has shifted from one of higher learning — where students traditionally have expanded their understanding of themselves and the world around them and become civic-minded citizens — into little more than a job-training industry, employing millions in the service of providing businesses with properly functioning drones.

Certainly, the above paragraph is a generalization. There are good professors out there, intent on imparting wisdom and knowledge to their students. But the job has become increasingly difficult. American society has shifted toward demanding, rather than encouraging, higher education. Increased numbers of students enrolling in college means increased costs. But taxpayers, while certain that their children should go to college, don't seem to be willing to foot the bill for a quality education. Instead, tuition has skyrocketed.

As a society, we need to reinvigorate and reinvest with meaning the college educational experience. Smaller class sizes, especially in 300- and 400-level courses, a higher level of discourse and higher standards are necessary to ensure that receiving a college degree actually means something. The government needs to increase funding (and this means taxpayers must agree that higher taxes for education is a necessary good) to universities so that they are not so beholden to private interests and businesses, which demand ready-for-work employees and job-applicable curriculum.

It used to be that people went to an employer and apprenticed or job-shadowed to learn the ropes, and they went to a university to become more educated and enriched. While those roles need not be mutually exclusive, the current industry of education devalues both job-training and personal exploration. We hope steps can be taken to restore colleges and universities to their previous role as institutions that produce well-rounded citizens.

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

Poll of the Week

Every week, the Emerald prints the results of our online poll and the poll question for next week. The poll can be accessed from the main page of our Web site, <http://daily-emerald.com>. We encourage you to send us feedback regarding the poll questions and results.

Last week's poll question: What does "PFC" stand for?

Results: 70 total votes
 Personal Fun Center — 20 votes, or 28.6 percent
 Progressives For Change — 4 votes, or 5.7 percent
 Programs Finance Committee — 37 votes, or 52.9 percent
 Personal Finance Club — 9 votes, or 12.9 percent
 The correct answer is "Programs Finance Committee."

This week's poll question:
 How many hours a day do you spend on the Internet?

The choices:
 1-3 hours
 4-7 hours
 8-12 hours
 More than 12 hours

Letters to the editor

Spreading the message

When I picked up the Emerald this morning, the Human Life Alliance insert surprised me. Strong anti-abortion messages are not a common feature of the Emerald.

As a paper that advocates tolerance and community dialogue, the Emerald scored a perfect ten toward that goal today! In general, pro-life views are not esteemed or are ignored on the U of O campus.

Thank you for stepping out and publishing information that will widen campus discussion of abortion.

Jason Spies
 junior
 history

CLARIFICATION

Ty Baker was pictured on the front page photo on Friday, Feb. 2, without being identified. The photo was taken by Azle Malinao-Alvarez.