

Bryan Dixon Emerald

Education reform at a crawl



LONE VOICE IN THE WOODS

BRET JACOBSON

The problems are clear, but the solutions are difficult to get a handle on when it comes to higher education these days. The frenzied pace of change in the exterior world often makes lessons inside the walls of the academy obsolete just as they are being typeset in texts, leaving a lot to be desired in a tremendously expensive education. Only by modernizing institutional capital — including instructors — can higher education be reformed enough to be relevant and fulfilling to its primary customers, students.

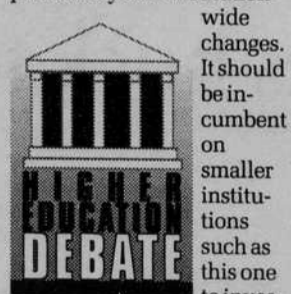
The evidence is overwhelming and scarcely needs much support given that the education system isn't all it can or should be. But for quick reference, an article in last Wednesday's Emerald ("High schools' lesson plans scrutinized," ODE, Jan. 31) focused on the effort to better educate incoming high school students to be ready for collegiate academic demands. According to the article, a disturbing 40 percent of all students have to take remedial classes during their tenure here, which means they are behind in some form or another in their greater education effort.

But not all problems can be laid at the feet of lower-level public schools. Once students arrive at the University, they are forced into ridiculously rigid regions of study without being taught the basics of logic and ethics classically associated with a good liberal arts degree.

One of the main problems facing students is that there is no longer the expectation that people should be knowledgeable in logic and ethics. The ability to reason out the best and most appropriate decision befitting a given situation is surely appropriate for a generation that will have to face questions ranging from human genetic engineering and cloning to modernized warfare and our role as a superpower.

But it is not even so much a problem that students aren't taught these fundamental skills as it is worrisome that the bureaucracy in place is entrenched and unwilling to change.

While this University will never be able to compete with Ivy League schools such as Harvard and Princeton, there is no excuse to not proactively seek institution-



wide changes. It should be incumbent on smaller institutions such as this one to investigate new methods of instruction that help students retain more information while at the same time teaching them how to understand issues in a complex and dynamic environment.

The rigidity of study is a problem that stems from a bureaucracy's inability to nimbly meet the needs of today's demanding and dynamic world that changes as fast as the technology that drives it. If one has ever witnessed the process for change within a large institution, especially one with tenure safety for much of its human capital, it is obvious that there is a terrifying re-

sistance to much-needed change.

A lack of change causes several problems that prevent University students from attaining the highest quality education possible. As education expands to the Web and other schools experiment with varying methods of study, the University fights any change that doesn't include worker rights in foreign nations. That means our students are less competitive and less able to handle the demands of a changing world.

One of the main resisting forces to changing the educational process is the tenured nature of many professors. Guaranteed jobs allow professors to sit in an ivory tower and snipe at the school administration, governmental initiatives and social movements that don't quite match their tastes, all without having to worry about developing any new ideas of their own. And of course, there is almost no chance of removing the tenure model anytime soon, because the people who help decide matters like that thrive on — that's right, tenure.

But self-interested motives such as the tenure mentality and overall bureaucratic inability to change only dooms this school to ever-increasing mediocrity. Sure, there's an innovation in computer science one year or the naming of a new worm species another year, but students will continue to come to the University and receive a decent but uninspired education that would leave classical educators shaking their heads in despair.

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Pro-life ad propaganda skewed scientific truth

GUEST COMMENTARY

Heather Mitchell

With the inauguration of unabashedly anti-choice President George W. Bush and the recent appointment of U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft, a woman's right to choose is in serious jeopardy. Last Wednesday's insert in the Emerald, funded by the pro-life group "Human Life Alliance," is just the beginning of a stream of anti-choice propaganda which will be financially supplemented by this new administration.

The insert was not only emotionally manipulative, but it also cited many "facts" which are extremely questionable. The greatest misrepresentation was the claim that a link exists between abortion and breast cancer. An article in the insert by Dr. Joel Brind, deceptively accompanied by a photo of a friendly-looking female physician, asserted an increased breast cancer risk of 50 percent if an abortion is performed before the first live birth and claimed that, if multiple abortions are performed, the risk can increase up to 100 percent. The findings are backed up with a long medical explanation permeated with very impressive medical jargon.

What is omitted is the size of the sample set or any information regarding the scientific validity of the study. Many studies have been done surrounding this controversial hypothesis, but the most comprehensive was published by the New England Journal of Medicine in January 1997. A group of scientists in Denmark analyzed the medical histories of more than 1.5 million women and concluded that there is no increased risk of breast cancer for women who have had abortions. In addition, the January 2000 issue of Epidemiology also cites a recent study de-

nouncing the claim. The Human Life Alliance's presentation of one small and scientifically questionable study as fact is an attempt to exploit women's fears in order to further their oppressive pro-life agenda.

This was the mildest form of manipulation incorporated within the article. The most atrocious was the emotional attacks aimed at rape survivors. Targeting women who have survived rape in order to advance an agenda which restricts all women's sexual freedom trivializes the experiences of these survivors.

The pro-life movement's attempt to control and regulate the reproductive behaviors of women is a reflection of the same patriarchal forces which perpetuate sexual assault and rape. Both are attempts to regain control over women, and it is insulting to suggest that relinquishing control over her body is the most appropriate avenue for a woman to cope with such a disempowering experience. Above are but two examples of the sensationalistic tactics used by the Human Life Alliance in their seven-page anti-choice paid advertisement.

Unfortunately, I am only a student and could not possibly afford such a pretentious advertisement, so I am limited to 550 words. It is ridiculous to suggest that an editorial of this size could adequately express the unethical nature of this expensive propaganda, but it is all that one who is not subsidized by the religious right can do. I do not have space to comprehensively address the lack of integrity behind the tabloid-style rhetoric of such headlines as "Baby Parts for Sale."

Without such dollar power, all I can do is place confidence in students' abilities to see through such insidious tactics and work to create an environment in which the student voice may actually be heard.

Heather Mitchell is the education & outreach coordinator for the ASUO Women's Center.

PFC duties include judgment

GUEST COMMENTARY

Aaron Weck

I am writing on my own behalf — not for the Programs Finance Committee — and for the students who don't realize that you've misled them in your editorial ("PFC the Cowardly Lion," ODE, Jan. 26). If you will please do your reading, you will find that the PFC not only has the ability and power to judge the compliance of a program to policy and law, it is our primary responsibility.

Read our bylaws, find a green tape notebook and then go to the Oregon State online legal archives and find all the pertinent laws for spending and funding compliance. After familiarizing yourselves with these rules, then figure out what our mandate is.

The "Cultural and Physical development" clause is for basing the broader decision of a program's purpose and has nothing to do with the actual details of spending compliance. The editorial seems to be an attack on the very group who decided that the Emerald reduce its dependence on the student fee as stated in its mission and goals statement (unfulfilled for 10 years).

I do not resent your comments, and I hope you know this will not affect your budget process in any way. I do find, however, that the content is more than a little inaccurate. If you would like me to walk you through every step of the entire process in detail, PFC is available in office hours right up the hall from the Emerald. I can also make the time for appointments.

The PFC is not simple, and understanding its depth is not easy. The PFC is a branch of the Student Senate as are all the finance committees. All associated powers of PFC are granted through the ASUO Constitution and the ASUO Student Senate. The bylaws are very precise as to the limitations and breadth of judgment. There are many judgments where PFC has to take into account conformity to rules and laws governing use of funds in ASUO Programs. This is my job.

The Insurgent was no different for me. The discussion of the Insurgent, for me, was not one of censorship, as I see no problem with them printing it. However, there was the opinion that it could have broken state or federal laws. I felt it was best to allow the allocation and then give our elected officials the chance to work this out without threat of missing deadlines for funding. This was the best compromise reachable.

This solution also allows the ASUO Student Senate and ASUO Executive the opportunity to come to resolution between the professors and students to some satisfaction and the release of money. Understand this; the Senate, Jay and Holly now have the ball. They will decide what happens to the Insurgents' funds and no others.

I am confident in the ability of the Senate and Executive to resolve this issue to everyone's satisfaction. If you have another idea, feel free to do my job for me (I certainly don't do it for the relaxation or the money). All suggestions are welcome, but don't criticize simply because you don't understand.

Aaron Weck is an at-large member of the ASUO Programs Finance Committee.