

PERSPECTIVES

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Would you like to super-size your diploma?



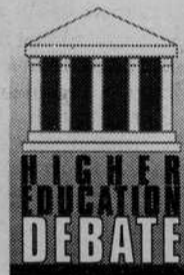
Bryan Dixon Emerald



SCRIBBLES OF SANITY

JAYNA BERGERSON

Higher education is like ordering fast food. "Hi! Welcome to University of Oregon," says the cherry-cheeked girl behind the counter. "What can I get for you today?" "I would like ... um, a number three." "OK," she responds, her face painted into a perma-smile. "One business degree. Would you like some music or journalism to go with that?" "Nah. But I think I will take some law." "A business degree with a side of law," she says as her fingers dance over the computer keys. "That will be \$22,456." "Does that include books?" "No, but they can help you at the next window if you would like to buy them now." She hands you a piece of paper. You shake your head and try to make sense of the jumble of numbers screaming up at you from the page. The people behind you are fidgeting and moving closer to you, as if willing you to move faster. Must make a quick decision. You sign your name. She snatches the paper back and quickly files it in the gray file cabinet behind her. Then she shouts, "NEXT!"



At the next window you get your books, which cleans out your savings account at the same time. You sit down in an uncomfortable plastic chair and study. You wade through the material, and when you finally finish the last chapter of the last book, you go and stand by the counter waiting for your order. A man in thick bifocal glasses pops up behind the counter, shakes your hand and hands you a red plastic tray with a piece of paper on it. That's it. You have what you ordered. Now what? A cheery blond sits behind the counter. She is with another customer so you have to wait for 15 minutes. Finally she glances in your direction. You ask, "What I am supposed to do with this?" "Hang it on your wall." She smiles, showing off a dimple in her left cheek as she turns to her next customer.

The explanation is simple. Universities take way too much credit. They argue with each other over which school is better and spend a fortune on goofy ads to attract "customers," when the truth is, one college is pretty much the same as any other college. Just as McDonald's is basically like Burger King. Some people like McDonald's better. They think there's a difference, when really, it's all a matter of personal preference. You create the difference between the two competitors.

It's the same for college. College takes care of the paper and the administration to get you that degree with your name on it. You just tell them what you want to study and they provide the products to help you educate yourself. The college is good or bad according to you, not them. They have nothing to do with it, other than acting as a supplier. A college doesn't get you experience. You must find your internships and careers. It doesn't provide friends. You have to find them, too.

You do all the hard work, and you pay for it. And you get what you pay for. If it's a bargain, expect trade-offs such as overcrowding (because everyone likes a bargain) and less staff to assist you.

College does differ from McDonald's in one very important respect: McDonald's is cheaper.

Jayna Bergerson is a columnist for the Oregon Daily Emerald. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald. She can be reached at bjay@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

Fee debate ignores tyrannical minority

GUEST COMMENTARY

William Beutler

I applaud the Emerald for sponsoring a debate on the legitimacy of the student incidental fee, especially on the eve of another election season in which OSPIRG is asking for another outrageous sum of money. However, there are many faults of the pro-fee argument that anti-fee Lisa Marie Catto didn't have the space to explain in her excellent Feb. 7 commentary ("Money down the drain").

In the counterpoint Feb. 9 column ("Free speech is for everyone"), pro-fee Jessica Blanchard cites Alexis de Tocqueville's fear of the "tyranny of the majority" in justifying incidental fees — if the majority doesn't want to pay for it, those voices will be silent, she argues. However, she misses an obvious point: A majority isn't necessary for students to participate in programs,

just enough support that individual students will contribute their own time and money. The majority need not be disturbed.

Secondly, Blanchard should consider another tyranny: "of the minority," about which James Madison warned in the Federalist 10. (Of course, he was in favor of a limited government, a virtue all but lost in today's society.) Just as Madison feared that a numerically insignificant faction could wrest political control from the masses, the ASUO is controlled by a small faction of

liberal resumé-padding policy wonks play-acting at small government — and not a few of us find this offensive.

Why should you subsidize their extracurricular activities? Do they subsidize your Friday afternoons at Ren-

nie's? When student leaders extol the virtues of "student control over student fees," what they are really celebrating is their right to control your money.

ASUO leaders are well known for complaining about rising tuition, but rarely will they admit that it is their bureaucratic microcosm that makes it so much more expensive to attend the University. Students here pay \$500 per year in incidental fees — no trivial matter when you consider that students at Lane Community College pay one-twentieth of that per annum.

Students should be able to attend this university without a tyrannical minority confiscating their money and being told it's in their best interest. How do they know what your best interest is?

James Madison believed that a government was legitimate so long as it had the "consent of the governed." Do they have your consent?

William Beutler is the editor-in-chief of the Oregon Commentator.

