

# PERSPECTIVES

Wednesday

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## Paying into your college experience

Three weeks ago, when the Emerald editorial board sat down and discussed the series concerning higher education we've been providing on the Perspectives page, I chose to play the role of Disillusioned Student. My opinions on the subject were harsh, ranging from the notion that university attendance was nothing more than 13th through 16th grades, to the complaint that a four-year degree today isn't much more prestigious than a high school degree was 20 to 25 years ago.



While the froth at my mouth has dried a bit, especially after reading Carol Rink's commentary extolling the virtues of higher education in Monday's Emerald — part of being an educated person is understanding that your opinions aren't always set in stone and can be complemented by a convincing argument, right? — I'd still like to throw in my two cents.

Wait, make that my \$20,000 worth. Of course, that's where any beef with higher education begins: the cost.

Ten years ago, the average undergraduate resident paid \$1,965 in tuition and fees to attend the University, according to the Oregon University System Budget and Fiscal Policies Division. This year, the tuition is \$3,819, a 194 percent increase. Sure, University of Oregon students were lucky to see a tuition freeze for several years, but state legislators in Salem are getting ready to jack it up again.

And if Mom and Dad aren't paying for your college, then you are, or will be eventually.

In an Oct. 27, 2000 article in The Chronicle of Higher Education, it was pointed out that loans are continuing to displace grants as the primary source of student aid. Borrowed money now represents 59 percent of all aid,



Giovanni Salimena Emerald

compared with 41 percent in 1980, according to the story. Terry Hartle, senior vice president for government and public affairs at the American Council on Education, said that "it is not uncommon for a student to graduate with a bachelor's degree and \$20,000 worth of debt."

That's a lot of pennies for just a few thoughts.

Which brings me to my next gripe about college: grade inflation and the dumbing down of education.

I'm far from the smartest apple in the barrel, yet somehow my cumulative grade point average for nearly four years of schooling hovers well above pi. (That's 3.14159265 for you freshmen; don't worry, you'll learn all about it again in one of your college algebra classes.) How I have attained such a GPA is a mystery to me; "slack" doesn't even begin to describe my study habits.

Grade inflation is nothing new, though. The topic has been controversial for decades, with its genesis dating back to the Vietnam War. Professors dished out higher grades then to keep their male students from falling below a magic line that would eliminate their deferment and likely send them off to war.

Nowadays, the whole point of a generous grading system is that "education must make students feel good about themselves," Harvard University professor Harvey C. Mansfield recently told The Associated Press.

Mansfield has taken it upon himself to straighten out the curve and hand out a few C's and D's, but he still has a heart. Mansfield is using a two-grade system in one of his current philosophy courses, with an official grade to go on students' transcripts and also an unofficial mark the professor thinks they really deserve. Hmm, I'd hate to see my "unofficial" transcript.

So, should I be complaining about grade inflation, or should the 4.0 student who busts his or her butt every night to keep that perfect score be trumpeting this theme? Both of us can moan a little, I guess.

The straight-A students should be pissed off that students who put in less effort are staying right behind them on the track. And the slackers should feel a bit shortchanged by a system that cares more about herding them through classes — and racking up their precious tuition dollars in the process — than actually motivating them with tougher curricula and a stricter grading structure.

This doesn't mean that my experiences with professors at the University have been a total waste. I've passed through several entertaining and challenging classes, taught by Cheyney Ryan, Eleen Baumann, Clyde Bentley and Marion Goldman, among others. For every respected professor, however, it seems as if I've had to put up with my share of blowhards.

Insufferable are the days when you should be learning about the development of sociology, but have to instead endure stories about personal protest actions during the Vietnam War, the Kosovo crisis and beekeeping. All admirable subjects, yes, but mostly irrelevant to the class syllabus.

Apparently I'm not the only dissatisfied student on campus. As of 6 p.m. Tuesday, the Emerald online poll shows that 62 percent of 149 respondents believe "There is no satisfying aspect" to their education at the University. That highly unscientific sample could be an aberration or a prank, or maybe they've all had to endure lectures on beekeeping.

All in all, I can't say that there has been no satisfying aspect to my time at the University. I did, however, enter college with great expectations and feel as though I'm walking away with just a tad more awareness than I had four years ago, a decent GPA that somehow materialized and a degree that is allegedly worth more than your standard high school diploma.

Oh yeah, and \$20,000 in debt. Oh well, live and learn.

Jack Clifford is the Emerald's editor in chief. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

## Party hardy—with caution

Happy 21st birthday! It's a day that most, if not all young people eagerly anticipate. Plans are made to get drunk, enjoy the newfound adult right in the company of friends and try not to remember any of it the next day.

Celebrating one's passage into full adulthood is great. At the Emerald, we've had five staff members turn 21 in the last month, and each of them has partaken of some tasty libation. One or two got fully ripped. Good for them, and good for everyone crossing the great divide.

The editorial board was horrified, however, to learn of the "21er" books recently seen on campus. These scrapbooks commemorate the big night with pages describing each drink consumed, where it was drunk and who purchased it, coupled with photos of the fun time. But the books count up to drink No. 21. Twenty-one drinks? This is ridiculous. Apparently, some people think it's both fun and friendly to endanger a friend's life and encourage grotesque immoderation. For shame.

Don't get us wrong; drinking is fine. We're no Oregon Commentator, but we can enjoy a swanky 40 oz. bottle of Olde English or a ghetto Jameson sour with fresh-squeezed lime juice. The

point is, these scrapbooks endanger lives.

Consuming 21 drinks over the course of a few hours is not healthy. Vomiting, dehydration, organ damage and death are likely results. And here we thought the point of celebrating a 21st birthday was to have fun.

Older students who take their friends out on a 21st birthday should know better. Rites of passage are one thing. Getting nice and drunk will have the desired effect — nausea, vomiting, hangover. There's no need to try to kill a friend in order to make him or her feel crappy in the morning.

So for everyone's safety (not to mention legal liability), we hope that people will stop using books that encourage friends to consume 21 drinks in order to "prove" something about their adult status.

Your 21st birthday should be spent having fun with friends. You could even drink a lot. Your friends should be watching out for you. But if the people you're with demand a drink count that reaches 21, they're not your friends, and you probably won't end up having fun.

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

## Letters to the editor

### Conference price tag too high

I am completely disgusted at the price tag on Eugene's "Eliminating Bias" Hate Crime conference. \$295 per person excludes the majority of us.

Chief of Eugene Police Jim Hill stated in a report to KMTR on Jan. 19, 2001, "Understanding the dynamics, working to prevent hate crime, creating a no tolerance for hate crime in a community is absolutely vital; it's important that the entire community be involved in dealing with this issue."

I absolutely agree that the entire community must be involved and educated on hate crimes. To stop hate, we must educate. The price tag for this event excluded the greater community. The community has already paid to attend with the \$10,000 that helped underwrite this conference, and the city (us) has also volunteered two employees to help coordinate the event.

Perhaps a hate crime conference that would be affordable to the majority of us in Eugene would be more beneficial, informative and would get much more community involvement. At such a high price, it is hard to help prevent hate crimes. This creates tolerance of hate groups due to lack of knowledge, and the entire community is not involved in dealing with this issue. The rest of us have been left out.

I am sure that I could have been sponsored to go to this event; however, if it is closed to the general public (because of the cost), I do not want to attend. Perhaps a conference that is affordable is our next response.

Scott Britt  
student

### Opportunity missed

I saw a number of University journalism students at the Monday evening talk at the Central Presbyterian Church by Jeff Cohen, founder of FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting). It would have been of benefit to most Allen Hall enrollees to have heard Cohen's evaluation of U.S. journalism and its failure to "cover the story."

This was not a trashing of the profession as much as it was an alert to undergrads to avoid the pitfalls of "easy" (handout) reporting, and to dig for the full story. Among us, my two sons and I have had 13 years of college journalism education, and never has one of us heard a classroom presentation as valuable as Cohen's talk.

Class schedules are important and not to be changed without reason. But cancellation of Monday afternoon classes for a convocation exposing all students to his insights (he was available) would have been of greater value than a week of classes. Actually, it would not have had to involve all students. Those majoring in advertising and public relations could have been excused. This talk had no relevance for them.

George Beres  
graduate student  
community education program

### CORRECTION

The photo with the story "Little Big Man" (ODE, Feb. 13) should have featured Oregon wrestler Eric Webb. The Emerald regrets the error.