

# Free trade sparks debates

Free Trade Area of the Americas leaves students and community members trying to understand the treaty

By Lisa Toth  
Oregon Daily Emerald

In place since 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) could expand to become the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) by 2005. And with concerns that the FTAA is destined to create a hemisphere-wide, corporate-controlled economy, more than 100 students and community members gathered on campus Saturday to learn how the FTAA could affect Oregonians.

The FTAA is a free trade and investment agreement that 34 of the 35 countries in the Western Hemisphere may soon be negotiating. In addition to learning about the potential effects of the FTAA, the participants also discussed ways they can stop it from becoming a reality.

Both participants and organizers said that over the past seven years, NAFTA has caused environmental, fiscal and social devastation.

Scott Miksch, a staff member of the Committee in Solidarity with the Central American People, helped to coordinate the teach-in, hoping to offer people "the tools [it will] take to stop free trade in its tracks."

He said the mainstream media and the government are not revealing information about the FTAA.

"They don't want people to

learn about it. We have to educate ourselves," Miksch said. "We are hoping that the FTAA idea doesn't become a reality."

Mick Garvin, a member of Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment — a group trying to make corporations more accountable for their behavior — said he hoped the workshops Saturday offered the public a chance to understand the issues surrounding NAFTA.

"The only way we can manage to get the power back is to educate the public and fill them with a sense of the loss of the sovereignty of the people," Garvin said.

Mike Miller, a sophomore at Lane Community College, said he came to the teach-in to learn more about issues such as globalization.

"It is important for people to learn as much as they can because it affects every aspect of people's daily lives," Miller said.

He attended the "Privatization and Sovereignty" workshop where speakers addressed the erosion of sovereignty and privatization of education and prisons.

Miller said a downside of the sessions was that the knowledge reached people who were already active.

Lynn Stephen, a University professor of anthropology, spoke about the social and environmental costs of free trade agreements — and about NAFTA's effects on indigenous communities in southern Mexico. After NAFTA,

she said, an increase in poverty and a shortage of jobs caused the indigenous "rural farmers" from Mexico to immigrate to the United States.

Stephen said people need to understand NAFTA's "vicious cycle" that has caused an increase in the number of undocumented indigenous Mexican farmers in Oregon, she said.

"I hope that people can see their personal relation to their consumption and understand implications of free trade agreements for other people in other countries," Stephen said.

On April 21, which is "FTAA Action Day," President George W. Bush, trade advisors and prime ministers will meet in Quebec City, Canada to hold a meeting about the FTAA, Miksch said.

"The free traders believe that this free trade is going to eliminate borders, but they really mean eliminating borders for corporations," he said.

Miksch added that for those people who cannot make it all the way to Quebec City, demonstrations will be taking place at the U.S.-Canadian and the U.S.-Mexican borders.

The protest at the U.S.-Canadian border, or the "March at the Arch," will take place at Peace Arch Park, home of the Peace Arch Monument in Blaine, Wash. The monument symbolizes the cooperation between Canada and the United States, and it has served as a site for previous protests.

## Professors

continued from page 1A

chitlekarn. It is also prevalent in other departments.

Scott Optican, visiting assistant law professor, has literally lived all over the world. Born in New York, he spent the first years of his life in the States before moving on to other countries, such as Austria, where he worked with the United Nations, and England, where he attended graduate school.

Since 1992, he has been teaching law at the University of Auckland in New Zealand, although this year he took a break to teach in Eugene. This is his first time practicing his profession in his home country.

Because the law school runs on a semester system, the academic year ends next week, and Optican said he can look back on the year and all his experiences teaching in the United States.

"It's interesting to see the differences teaching in a U.S. law school," Optican said.

While he said the experience has been more than worthwhile, one difference he had to get used to was the age and education level of his students. In the United States a student must have already earned their undergraduate degree, but in New Zealand, law students can be undergraduates.

"You're actually teaching people right out of high school," he said.

Optican said because students in the States have to earn their undergraduate degrees before going on to study law, they seem to have a better idea of what they want.

"Here, they know what they want out of their law school education," he said. "But students are students no matter what part of the world they're in."

Optican said he also noticed the pace of busy Americans' lifestyles.

"Everyone runs their own show,"

he said.

Optican said at the University of Auckland, the law faculty comes together nearly every morning to drink tea and have a leisurely visit with each other. He said this is something he's missed, so he successfully started the ritual among the University's law faculty as a way for the professors to get to know each other better.

"It hasn't caught on quite as much because people here are pretty busy," he said. "But some of them seem to like it."

While Optican had the experience of growing up in the United States, Sergio Koreisha, a professor of decision sciences in the business department, had the opportunity to live his childhood in South America. He said living in more than one country has enabled him to appreciate each country's differences.

Koreisha was born and raised in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, until his father moved the family to the United States when he was 12. He said at the time, there was talk of nationalizing industries and his father, who was not a native Brazilian, was afraid of losing his job.

"One day it was announced that we were going to move," he said. "We boarded a plane and flew to New York."

The family eventually settled in California, and although Koreisha has lived in the United States ever since, he said he still makes time to visit his hometown.

"My life has been here," he said, "but I think I have the best of both cultures."

Koreisha said he tries to instill an international flavor into his daughters' lives that he had growing up. He said he has taken them to many other countries, such as France.

"I try to instill in them that there's another country's perspective, and we should try to consider them," he said.

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