

# Credit cards can 'debt-o-nate' student wallets

■ OSPIRG has begun a new campaign to keep students informed of credit dangers

By Kara Cogswell  
Oregon Daily Emerald

When Shannon Warren signed up for her first credit card two years ago, she never thought she would have a problem paying it off.

"I'm a person who hates debt," Warren said. "It gives me so much stress."

And until this year, the junior French major was careful to pay off her balance in full every month. But then she used her card to pay for a trip to Brazil, and since then, she has only been able to make the minimum payment each month. By the time she can pay off the entire bill, interest rates will have made the total payment much higher.

Warren is not alone in her credit card woes. Through letters, phone calls and other promotional campaigns, credit card companies spend a lot of time directing marketing efforts at college students. And for many, the temptation of what seems to be "easy money" can

be too much to resist.

But OSPIRG warns that fine print can hide behind the free T-shirts and gifts offered to students when they apply for a card — and high interest rates can send students into a spiral of debt that can be hard to escape.

And that's why the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group, in conjunction with the national PIRG campaign, is working to raise students' awareness about credit card debt.

Credit card companies aggressively market credit cards to college students, said Melissa Unger, state board chair for OSPIRG.

"They target students because they know they're more likely to go into debt," she said.

Unger added that many students sign up for a credit card without fully understanding the terms of the agreement. Companies make the credit card's terms seem more favorable than they actually are, she said, by advertising an introductory annual percentage rate or APR, which generally lasts only a few months.

After this brief introductory peri-

od, the rates can increase dramatically, Unger said. And because APRs can vary widely, it is important to read the fine print on any credit card application.

According to a report OSPIRG released earlier this year, regular APRs can range from 7.99 percent to 30.25 percent — and OSPIRG has recommended students look for an APR near or below 15.04 percent.

Students should be wary of any credit card offer they have not fully researched, Unger said. In addition to knowing the regular APR, it is important to know what the penalty APR is — the higher interest rate a person is charged when a payment is missing or late.

"Know the APR, know what the late fees are, read the fine print," Unger said.

Citibank spokeswoman Maria Mendler said her company has been marketing credit cards to college students for the past 20 years. The Internet has opened up more marketing avenues for companies to reach students. But Citibank's credit card promotions aimed at college students are not deceptive,

she said.

"We want our customers to understand the terms and conditions," Mendler said. "We do believe credit education is important."

Consumer information about credit card debt is available on the company's Web site, she said. In addition, the company makes available pamphlets on debt, along with card information at campus sign-up tables.

Credit cards are safer than cash because they offer protection from theft and fraud, Mendler said. But students need to remember that they are as responsible for a credit card payment as they would be in a cash transaction.

"Credit cards should be used as a form of payment, not as an extension of income," Mendler said.

Unger said she doubts credit education efforts by card companies have been sincere.

"If they were sincere, they would encourage students to read the fine print," she said.

Instead, Unger said, credit card companies would prefer to leave students in the dark. At many campus promotions, there are no edu-

cational materials on credit debt available, she said, adding that she and other OSPIRG members would like to prohibit credit card companies from distributing promotional materials on campus without also handing out information on debt.

Unger said she does not want to discourage students from using credit cards. She simply wants to make them aware of deceptive tactics being used against them.

"I'm not saying that credit cards are bad or not helpful," she said. "I'm just saying that credit card companies are trying to take us for all that we're worth."

For Warren, the consequences of her credit card use have been a mixed bag.

Having a credit card has allowed her to travel and take advantage of opportunities she might not otherwise have been able to afford, she said. But her credit card debt is also a constant source of worry — one she is anxious to erase.

"My number one priority after I finish school is to pay off my credit card debt," Warren said. "In the future, I'm going to be much more careful."

## Bend

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Central Oregon a full range of courses offered by both universities.

He said the University will continue to offer full bachelor's degrees in the humanities in Bend and also provide an administrative licensure program that could lead to a master's in education.

OSU Provost and Vice President

Tim White said there had been "innumerable interactions" between the two universities in forming the implementation plans for the Bend campus and that he was quite pleased with the level of collaboration.

He said part of OSU's plans has been the formation of an implementation counsel that White said he has invited several provosts from other universities to join.

"I feel very good about our willingness to cooperate and collaborate," he said.

OSU has already compiled a detailed implementation plan that outlines both the curriculum and administration of the branch campus that will be named Oregon State University — Central Oregon.

Several schools in the Oregon University System already offer courses at the Central Oregon Com-

munity College campus where the branch campus will be located, and White said OSU will work to retain those academic programs.

"We wish to be as cooperative and collaborative as possible," he said.

OUS Chancellor Joe Cox said the implementation plan is well on its way and that he expects the board to be pleased with the discussion on Friday.

He said there has been some tension in the planning stages, but that could be expected.

"Is everyone going to be a happy camper?" Cox said. "Probably not."

While Cox would not directly comment on the cooperation between the University and OSU, he did say that there will be a strong level of cooperation between the academic programs that are already in place on the COCC campus.

## 20/30

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"It's nice to be around people who understand our issues," West-erick said. "I have plenty of friends who are straight, but it's not the same."

Because of the age demographic of the club, many University students can take part in the social events. Jarvis said half of those attending the first meeting were University students.

Chicora Martin, director of the University Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Educational and

Support Services, said the social group is a healthy alternative to the bar scene.

"I've received a lot of positive comments from my staff about the group," Martin said. "There are not a lot of opportunities outside of the bar scene, and this group provides events that don't revolve

around alcohol."

Martin said despite positive efforts, youth at the University are still targeted because of their orientation. She said this group provides a trust not found elsewhere.

"It provides a safe space where like people can have conversations about issues concerning

them," Martin said.

Jarvis stresses this is not specifically a support group, but a more laid-back social atmosphere. West-erick agrees this is a good focus for the group.

"The events provide more of a social arena rather than a support system," West-erick said.

## Awards

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years ago, Frank said.

But, Frank added, he and other faculty members of the Honors College are actively working to improve diversity within the program.

“Diversity affects everyone, no matter our race, our culture, our beliefs...”

Bola Majekobaje  
coordinator

event's coordinators, reminded students that diversity is not an issue concerning one particular group.

"Diversity affects everyone, no matter our race, our culture, our beliefs," Majekobaje said.

Dr. Edwin Coleman Conference events continue tonight at 7 p.m. with a debate on affirmative action, which will be held in the William W. Knight Law Center.

Friday, the MCC will host a benefit dinner to raise AIDS awareness, which will take place at 6 p.m. in the EMU Fir Room. Then at 7 p.m., activists Amiri Baraka and Elaine Brown will present the conference's keynote address in Columbia 150.

### 2000-2001 Zero Awards

Honors College  
Political Science  
Economics  
Theatre Arts  
Geography  
Planning, Public Policy and Management  
Arts and Administration  
Landscape Architecture  
Germanic Languages  
School of Music  
School of Dance

SOURCE: The Multicultural Center

The MCC Presents

## The Dr. Edwin Coleman Conference:

"Reawakening: Remembrance and the Radical Reality"

April 18-22, 2001

Wednesday, April 18

"Speak Out" and "ZERO" Awards  
Johnson Hall &  
EMU Amphitheater/11-3pm  
Holocaust Readings by JSU  
EMU Amphitheater/ All Night

Thursday, April 19

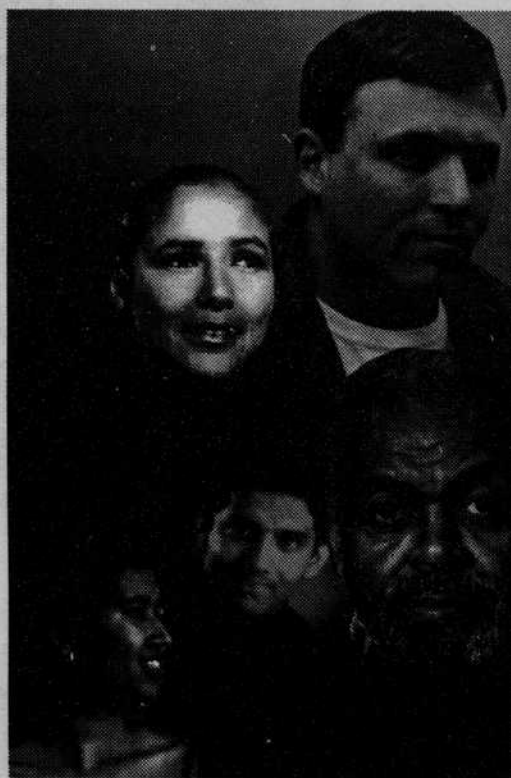
Holocaust Readings Continued  
EMU Amphitheater/ All Day  
Affirmative Action Debate  
Tim Wise & Dinesh D'Souza-  
William W. Knight Law Center/7pm

Friday, April 20

MCC AIDS Awareness Reception  
EMU Fir Room • 6pm

Keynote Speakers

• Amiri Baraka:  
Poet, Writer and Activist  
• Elaine Brown:  
Author and Activist  
Columbia 150 • 7pm



Saturday, April 21

"Reach for Success:  
Higher Education Orientation  
for Oregon Middle School  
Students of Color"  
Campus/3pm

Workshops on Saturday:

- "Internal Racism"
- "Activism and other Creative Processes" with Aya de Leon
- "What Does White Have to do with Diversity?" with Tim McMahon

Colsing Performance:

- Aya de Leon: Poet and Activist
- Cristina: International Musician
- Other Artists  
EMU Ball Room/8pm

Sunday, April 22  
Earth Day

For More Information:  
Multicultural Center  
346-4207 or 346-4321  
eaf@darkwing.uoregon.edu  
suite 33 Erb Memorial Union  
University of Oregon

Sponsored by: Career Center, Counseling Center, Housing Office, Women in Society, English Department, SARO, Journalism School, EMU Student Activities, President's Fund, Student Life, Romance Languages, MEChA, APASU, KP