

Is Saferide's women-only policy discrimination?

■ The University's free shuttle service, intended to reduce risk of sexual assault, is still under scrutiny for prohibiting men

By Kara Cogswell
Oregon Daily Emerald

Charges of gender discrimination filed against Project Saferide last year with the Office of Civil Rights are still "open and under investigation," according to U.S. Department of Education OCR spokesman Rodger Murphey.

OCR received the complaint Jan. 31, Murphey said. Under the Privacy Act of 1972, the name of the person or persons who filed the complaint will never be released.

Saferide, a free shuttle service, is intended to provide transportation to female University students as an alternative to walking alone at night and risking sexual assault. Saferide is recognized by the ASUO and receives funding from student incidental fees.

In March, the University received a letter written by Nicholas Rock, the OCR investigator in charge of the case. The letter said a complaint alleging gender discrimination had been

filed against Saferide because only women can use the service and drive vehicles.

University General Counsel Melinda Grier, who handles complaints made against the University, did not return the Emerald's calls by press time.

Saferide was created in 1986 by a male and a female student who wanted to offer a service that would allow women to get around campus without fear of walking at night, Saferide co-director Nikki Fancher said.

The complaint was filed under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits sex discrimination in programs and activities receiving federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education.

But there are several reasons why the service is open only to women, Fancher said.

One reason is that statistics show that the majority of sexual assault victims are women, while a majority of attackers are men, she said.

"Women are disproportionately the victims of violent crimes here on and around campus," she said. "We're not saying all men

are rapists. But 90 percent of rapists are men."

The women-only policy is intended to create a "safe space" for riders, many of whom use the service because they feel threatened by men when they walk, she said.

If Saferide gave rides to men, she said, women using Saferide might perceive the service as being unsafe.

When men call Saferide because they feel unsafe walking, Fancher said dispatchers refer them to the Designated Driver Shuttle or the Department of Public Safety, both of which can give rides to men and women.

Not all students who use Saferide agree that men should be barred from the service. Graduate student Manami Imaoka said she called Saferide once to get a ride for herself and a male friend, who had a broken leg. Because they were denied the service, she had to walk him home, she said.

Imaoka said she is not against the idea of Saferide, but because the program is funded with school funds, she believes it should be open to all students. If Saferide coordinators feel allowing men to use the service would compromise

the safety of female riders, they should offer a similar service to men, she said.

She added that men, as well as women, need protection from sexual assault.

"Rape is not about sex, it's about power," she said. "I don't think gender itself matters."

But other students say they would not be comfortable using the service if men were allowed to drive or ride in the vans.

Senior Niki Wilkins said opening Saferide to men would go

against the mission of the program.

"I think that (letting men use the service) defeats the purpose," she said. "I mean, you don't usually protect women from women, right?"

If investigators find that Saferide's policy is discriminatory, OCR will work with the University to reach an agreement with the parties involved, Murphey said.

Kara Cogswell is a student activities reporter for the Oregon Daily Emerald. She can be reached at karacogswell@dailyemerald.com.

News briefs

ASUO Student Senate allocates incidental fee

The ASUO Student Senate decided at Wednesday's meeting what to do with incidental fee money left over from last year. The \$137,548 will be allocated to campus student groups over the course of the year. The suggested budget allocates \$26,510 for fall term, \$39,764 for winter term and \$66,274 for spring term, leaving \$5,000 for summer term.

Treasurer Kate Kranzush said she suggested that more money be allocated to spring term because student groups generally hold more activities in the spring.

In other news, Oregon Student Association Director Kent Smith presented to the senate the OSA's Fall 2001 Field Campaign, which is directed towards strengthening the voice of student governments in Salem. The OSA is a statewide coalition of student governments and organizations that includes the ASUO.

Smith said the campaign's mission is specifically to halt budget cuts, gain control over fees such as the energy fee and make voting more accessible to students at the University. He said the high voter participation by University students last year was a surprise to the state government and increased students' voice in government, and he wants to see an even higher voter turnout in the next election.

— Diane Huber

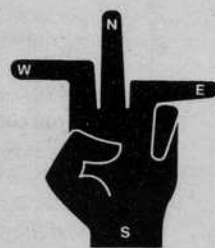
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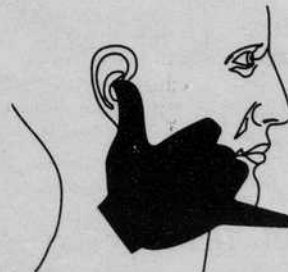
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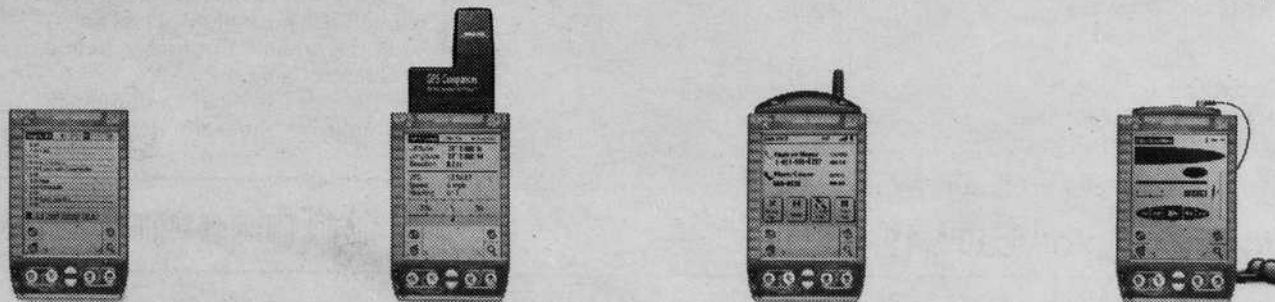
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