

ASUO student groups offer something for everyone

■ Student-run organizations offer community support, cultural education and activism for many on campus

By Anna Seeley
Oregon Daily Emerald

There is a hallway on the bottom floor of the EMU that many students may not know about. The long hallway is lined with open doors that lead into rooms full of smiling, laughing students with whom anyone can talk and share ideas and experiences. These are the offices of some ASUO student organizations.

Student groups have been an important presence on campus since the University's early years. They provide a means for students to express their viewpoints and ideas with others. For some, not being involved in a student group isn't an option.

"As a student of color, you can never not be a member of a student group," senior public relations major Brandy Alexander said. "It is up to me to get involved, but indirectly I am still involved in issues affect-

ing students of color."

Student groups are an important part of campus life for three reasons, according to ASUO Vice President Joy Nair. ASUO groups provide an open platform for students to discuss ideas, they allow students to participate in a democratic process by requiring group leaders to create a budget, and they go along with the mission of the University, which is to promote the physical and cultural diversity of students, she said.

There are a range of different student groups open to everyone on campus. Whether people are students of color, are interested in women's issues or political issues, or just want to get involved in bringing events to campus, a group exists to fit their interests.

One such group is the Native American Student Union. NASU, which is open to people of any ethnicity, works to provide resources for Native Americans on campus, co-director Annelia Norris said. The group sponsors many different cultural activities and creates a support system for students, she said.

"NASU is like our family here on

campus," Norris said. "Our people are really family-oriented, so it's really important to keep the family aspect."

The group also provides cultural sharing among its members, and offers cultural events for the whole community to educate people about Native American culture, she said.

"This is where you come to be educated on native issues," Norris said.

Like NASU, the Vietnamese Student Association is here to educate students about Vietnamese culture with "fun Vietnamese culture stuff," VSA secretary Yen Nguyen said. The group welcomes students of all backgrounds to visit its office, she said.

"We try to get diverse students so people have a chance to mingle with people of all cultures," she said.

The Asian Pacific American Student Union also strives to serve as a reference and provide support for students interested in learning more about Asian/Pacific culture and issues, as its mission statement says. However, when the group got started in the 1970s, it had a different focus, APASU member Noelle Miller said.

"We used to be more political, but we changed to a more social and

community group," she said.

MEChA also began with a political aim, but unlike APASU, it has kept that focus. MEChA was founded in the late 1960s in response to growing inequalities in the Chicano community, member Mario Sifuentes said.

"We are not a student organization, but a student movement with major emphasis on uplifting cultures," he said.

The Black Student Union also has a political aspect to it. The group is politically active with civil rights, and its members also put on a lot of events and have outreach programs, BSU member Jason Floyd said.

The Multicultural Center, which formed just a few years ago, is here to act as a hub where students of color can gather, former MCC member Huy Ong said. The MCC gives students an opportunity to address still-existing institutionalized racism, he said.

"The MCC is one of the University's focuses for student activism," he said. "It does great things — great programming."

Another hub for activist groups on campus is the Survival Center. The Survival Center works for social and

environmental justice, as well as fighting for the end of oppression, coordinator Randy Newnham said.

"We think the awareness of society needs to be raised to recognize the rights of all people, all works, all life," he said.

Students don't need to have a political interest or be a student of color to find a group that fits their interests. The Cultural Forum is a program that provides for the campus and community by bringing art and music presentations to campus, Cultural Forum Program Director Linda Dievendorf said.

"There is so much going on, on campus, but I think we are the heart of the campus," she said. "The campus benefits by the programs, and the students themselves benefit from the exposure and opportunities to go to concerts and lectures outside of class."

There are many more student groups for people to get involved in. From the Women's Center to the YWCA, from LGTBA to OSPIRG, there is something for everyone.

Anna Seeley is a student activities reporter for the Oregon Daily Emerald.

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Greek history

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a whiskey still in their house. Fearing a raid, they sold the still to members of Sigma Nu, who were caught with it.

In 1960, The Register-Guard reported a strong Greek system at the University, with 16 sororities and 22 fraternities. Greek housing was in demand, but property near campus was scarce and very expensive.

But during the later years of the decade through the 1970s, many chapters, faced with declining membership and high mortgages, were forced to close.

University Greek Life coordinator Shelley Sutherland said fewer students joined fraternities and sororities during the 1960s and 1970s because of the Vietnam War and the overall social climate.

"Students rebelled against authority and being organized," she said.

Four sororities and 12 fraternities closed between 1965 and 1971.

The 1978 release of "National Lampoon's Animal House," with scenes filmed inside the Sigma Nu house, brought notoriety to the chapter.

Since then, however, Greek organizations nationwide have tried to distance themselves from the picture of Greek culture shown in the movie, with binge drinking and riotous behavior by toga-clad members of a fictional fraternity.

At the University, several fraternities and all sororities have joined Select 2000, which bans drinking in chapter houses and promotes leadership and academic values.

And while the numbers of students in the Greek system have never again reached the levels of the 1950s, Greek membership began rising again in the 1980s and '90s.

Several houses that closed during the late 1960s, such as Delta Upsilon and Lambda Chi Alpha, have returned to campus.

And over the past several years, fraternity and sorority membership has remained consistent, although Sutherland said fraternity membership is declining slightly.

Lee's sorority, Zeta Tau Alpha, which closed in 1971, has not reopened a chapter on campus. But she still attends sorority reunions every year, she said. She said the friends she made in the sorority are "friends for life."

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