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## Oregon Daily Emerald

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Emerald

Peg Morton, standing before the Federal Building in downtown Eugene in January, holds a cross bearing the name of a slain Latin American who protesters claim was killed by soldiers trained at WHISC, formerly called the School of the Americas.

# Eugene activist group travels to Georgia for protest, vigil

Local participants will join a national rally against WHISC, a military training facility

By Anna Seeley  
Oregon Daily Emerald

Armed with community support, self-determination and an orange van, four Oregon residents left on a journey Friday to participate in the national annual rally and vigil to close the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. WHISC, formerly known as School of the Americas, is a Georgia-based Spanish-language training facility for military and law enforcement.

Peg Morton, Nick Routledge, Bonnie Tout and a woman identified only as "Bethany" began their trip, sponsored by the Committee in Solidarity with the Central American People, Eugene Friends Meeting, Oregon Peace Works and others, with a send-off from the First United Methodist Church on Oct. 26.

The group will travel for three weeks across the country on their way to Fort Benning, Ga., to take part in the national rally against WHISC. They will be hosted in 15 cities along their way to the Nov. 17-18 event to educate people about the school and why they

want it closed down.

"It will be an adventure, I'm sure," Bethany said.

WHISC was established in 1946 in Panama to promote stability and combat communism in the region. It moved to Fort Benning in 1984 and then changed its name in 2000. WHISC critics claim the school is the training ground for dictators and other military personnel involved in genocidal policies in Latin America.

"In the 1980s, I found my country was committing a holocaust in Guatemala, and I've been moved ever since," Morton said. "I discovered that the Army School of the Americas was the main training grounds for people involved in these atrocities."

On campus, the Survival Center will be holding its own vigil to raise awareness about WHISC the week preceding the national event, Survival Center co-coordinator Randy Newnham said. The event will take place Nov. 15 in the EMU Amphitheater.

According to a U.S. Department of Defense news release in November of 2000, the institute "fosters mutual respect and confidence" and promotes "democratic values and respect for human rights." It

also states that the school's curriculum includes "offerings in the areas of peace support operations" and "a program of human rights instruction."

But critics claim graduates of the school have been involved in various massacres and murders, including the 1980 murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero. The group compared people involved in the school to terrorists, saying "we must stop the terrorist in our own government."

"Our government commits their own ways of terrorism on people who don't deserve it," said Donna Frazier, director of Oregon Fellowship of Reconciliation.

Morton said the protest in Fort Benning is deeply spiritual, with roots in the nonviolent philosophies of Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Dorothy Day.

"It is spirit-based," she said. "It grows out of the Catholic church because so many sisters and priests were killed while helping in Guatemala."

For more information, students can contact CISCAP at 485-8633 or the Survival Center at 346-4356.

Anna Seeley is a student activities reporter for the Oregon Daily Emerald. She can be reached at [annaseeley@dailyemerald.com](mailto:annaseeley@dailyemerald.com).