

UO professor urges City Club to prioritize higher education

English Professor James Earl told the Eugene club that a disproportionate amount of funding supports athletics

By Katie Ellis
Oregon Daily Emerald

As the expansion of Autzen Stadium continued across the Willamette River, University English Professor James Earl on Friday criticized the increasing influence of athletics in higher education.

Earl, last year's University Senate President, urged an audience of 60 people attending the Eugene City Club meeting at the Hilton to examine the relationship between athletics and academics. As president, Earl led a nationwide campaign of University faculty members urging reform in intercollegiate athletics.

"I had no trouble gaining support from other senate faculty presidents" at other Pacific-10 schools, Earl said. "Faculties have not had much of a voice in the discussion of athletics and academics, but they want to have a voice."

Earl called college sports a commercial enterprise that has invaded universities and derailed the pursuit of higher education, and he described the University as an active participant in this growing business. While more money and attention is directed toward improving the athletic program, the University continues to suffer from budget cuts, he said.

"Why should I have to watch

Oregonians dip into their pockets for money for the athletic program while the art museum is boarded up because of lack of funding?" Earl said. "It's a reversal of priorities, and the logic is preposterous."

Although not speaking on behalf of other University faculty members, Earl said that faculties have had the minority voice on this issue. Earl began the nationwide

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campaign with the intention of providing faculty members with the opportunity to voice their opinions.

In response to growing concerns about intercollegiate athletics, University President Dave Frohnmayer and University Senate President Nathan Tublitz organized in December the University Athletics Task Force. The task force, consisting of 11 faculty, staff and student members was established to advise Frohnmayer on national issues relating to intercollegiate athletics.

After Earl's speech, City Club

members discussed the issue during a question-and-answer session, which produced differing opinions among the members as to which position the University should assume on the issue.

The Eugene City Club provides a forum for community members to discuss different community-related issues. City Club President Don Kahle said the club's mission is to build communication among members of the community through open inquiry.

While discussing the issue with other city council members, Arnold Ismach, former dean of the School of Journalism and Communication, said increased interest in universities as a result of athletic programs is a national reality.

"My feeling is that the interest that athletics gains may not fit our value system but it's reality," Ismach said.

Earl stressed that he does not want to eliminate the athletic program and is a self-proclaimed faithful Duck football fan who watches the games on television. Although he supports the existence of the athletic program, Earl argues that if the athletic program continues to grow, it will impede the University's ability to remain an institution of higher education.

"Help the University where it needs help. Give to University academics. I think the Ducks can take care of themselves," he said.

E-mail reporter Katie Ellis at katieellis@dailymerald.com.

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