

Environmental Studies buys 250 billboards for publicity

Alumni pony up millions of dollars in donations to help pump the image of Oregon's top-tier environmental program

By Abe Vibrone
Oregon Daily Emerald

In an attempt to draw better students and higher academic rankings, the University's Environmental Studies program announced plans to blanket the United States with billboards advertising the program.

The new public relations campaign began earlier this year, and program members claim they are already seeing much-needed national exposure.

"This whole concept has been created to bring attention to the importance of the environment, our environmental studies program and the University as a whole," University spokesman Kyle Lundgrass said "And it seems to be working. We've gotten a lot of feedback."

The public relations plan calls for placing more than 250 large billboards throughout Oregon's highway system and major metropolitan areas across the country, such as Times Square in New York City and Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles. The department also unveiled a giant billboard — 100 feet by 80 feet — on the side of Prince Lucien Campbell Hall.

"Academic writers and journalists from the East Coast — like the Chronicle of Higher Education — constantly overlook our program because we do not have adequate public relations," said Glenn Farr, interim director of the program. "They see us as another 'Left Coast' environmental studies department."

One of the billboards shows a photo of Farr standing in a white background with the words "Tree Hugger" painted over his name. Another shows a happy gay couple in an American-Eagle-catalog-style setting. Other billboards show different faculty members conversing with noted environmentalists such as John Muir, William Clay Ford, Jr. and Eugene Mayor Jim Torrey.

While Farr would not put a price tag on the billboards, he admitted they cost between \$100,000 and \$250,000 to place. The publicity is already starting to pay off, he said.

Lundgrass said the timing of the new billboards was just right because national magazines such as U.S. News and World Report and the Chronicle of Higher Education are beginning to rank academic programs for the 2002-03 academic year. While the University's environmental studies program is constantly ranked high, Farr said he would like to see a ranking in the top five.

"These billboards are a reflection of the quality of the program," he said. "I'm just tickled proud by all of this."

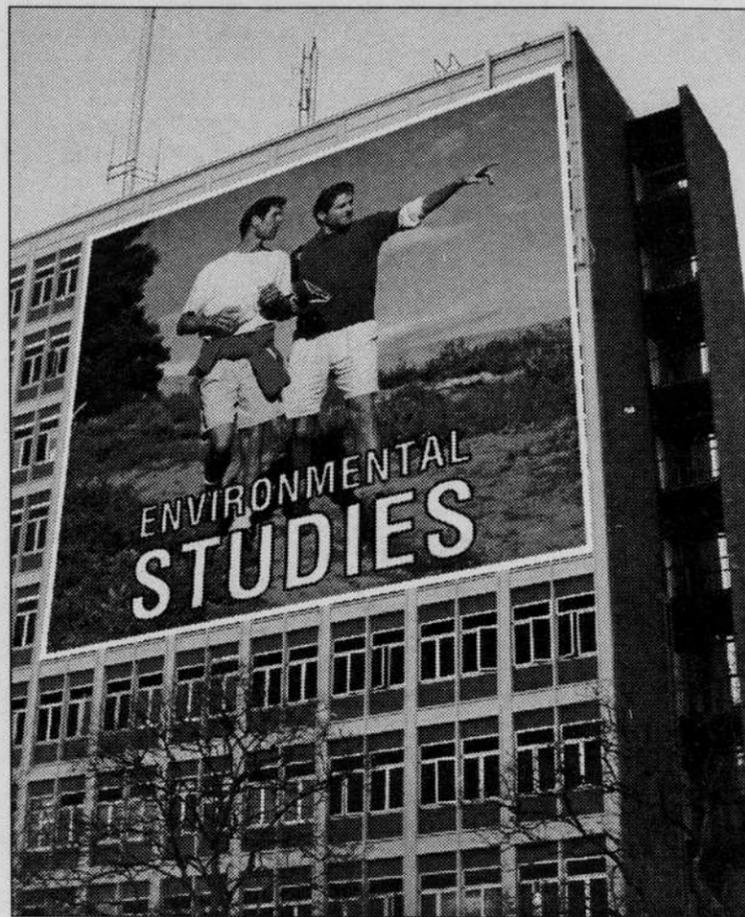
Members of the department said that although the cost of the billboards is high, none of the money came from University funds; a group of alumni from the program donated the money for the billboards.

"I am happy to help create something that truly says 'University of Oregon Environmental Studies,'" said Kendall Gilman, a 1994 graduate with a minor in environmental studies who is somehow remarkably successful.

However, some New Yorkers, both inside and outside the environmental world, questioned the program's need for a billboard in Times Square.

"This cost the University of Oregon a lot of money and trees," said Sierra Club member Beth Richards. "And it still looks cheap."

Pointing to the billboard in Times Square, hot dog dealer Salem Wash-



Cappi Farquar Emerald

The University of Oregon Environmental Studies department hopes that the new billboard advertising campaign will increase student enrollment in classes. So far students are just excited that the billboards cover up dilapidated old buildings like PLC.

ington asked, "What the hell is that? Don't they have any decency?"

But Farr was not deterred.

"They may not like it, but they are talking about our environmental stud-

ies program," he said. "This is benefiting the entire school by bringing national attention to the University."

The Emerald hopes you enjoyed this April Fools Day story.

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