

COMMENTARY

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Editorial

PFC is doing well, but it's wrong on OSPIRG decrease

Editors' Note: In the interest of full disclosure, the Emerald has not yet had its PFC hearing. We wanted to review the committee before our own hearing, so we gathered information for this editorial by questioning other student groups about their experiences.

Every winter term, the Programs Finance Committee, the campus group that controls the purse strings of all student groups, holds hearings to determine how to divide nearly \$5 million in student incidental fees among the various programs and services.

Many years, the process has been a circus, with groups complaining about poor communication and capricious budget decisions. Some years have seen repeated appeals and recalls.

This year, however, there seems to be little of past years' problems. Student groups have said that while they weren't always satisfied with the amount of money they received — although most have received increases — they generally found the process fair, efficient and professional.

From all accounts, it seems that this year's PFC is knowledgeable and professional. We were most impressed to hear that members took the budgets home during winter break so that they would be familiar with the numbers. Also, comments indicate that the ASUO Executive has substantially improved communications among all parties, making sure that groups are not left out of the loop.

Our one concern is PFC's treatment of OSPIRG. The story is complicated, but here's how we understand OSPIRG's funding mechanism to work: PFC divides OSPIRG's total costs by the total number of Oregon University System students at participating schools and arrives at a per student cost, then multiplies that by the number of students.

This year, however, OSPIRG created a stir. The group requested a budget increase and was going to pool that money with increases from other OUS schools to pay for a new director position in Corvallis, in the hopes of building support to start a chapter there.

We wholeheartedly oppose such a move. While we recognize there are some complexities involved in running a statewide organization on a campus-by-campus basis, we don't think University student fees should pay for work done on another campus. When students wanted to start the PIRG group here, volunteers collected signatures and put it to a vote, and the students supported it. The same can be done at Oregon State University if OSPIRG volunteers so desire.

Our objections to the proposed increase, however, don't excuse what happened next: At OSPIRG's hearing, PFC members, rightly concerned about sending money off campus, declared that an OSPIRG director's visits to Corvallis — which OSPIRG says was done on his own time — means that OSU suddenly has an OSPIRG chapter. So PFC added the total number of OSU students into the mix, divided it out and reduced OSPIRG's funding by that amount, leaving the group short of what they need for this campus.

This is ridiculous. Surely OSPIRG employees can spend their own time rallying for whatever causes they want. If they rally against the looming war, that does that mean Iraq suddenly has an OSPIRG chapter, and we should add their population into the formula? Hardly. OSPIRG should be funded at last year's per-student cost — which didn't include an increase for any other campus.

So far this year, we're impressed by the PFC's professionalism and the ASUO's involvement in keeping student groups apprised of the process. We hope that OSPIRG's budget can be fixed so that it doesn't reflect punishment for a bad idea that never took flight.



Steve Baggs Emerald

Television wins popular vote

Television has always been the more popular of the various American pastimes. Baseball has slipped in the polls, apple pie isn't what it used to be, and I'll be damned if voting for the presidential elections (not to mention mid-term elections) hasn't taken second-fiddle to the more popular "voting" for reality television. Yes, television, in all its realistic glory, has succeeded in grasping hold of the American tradition and has refused to let go.

Even more than becoming an American tradition, television has been overwhelmingly successful in holding the short attention span of most Americans — so much so that people will take time out of their days to call in or e-mail their votes on a number of subjects. Commercials, pop stars, movies and daytime television shows have all been the subjects of this mass movement of "voters" nationwide.

Most recently, Super Bowl commercials and the reality television show "American Idol" have taken the main stage in public interest. The Web site Superbowl-ads.com proclaims, "It's time to express your opinion, vote now! Pick the best ad in the Super Bowl." Sadly, to Americans, "expressing"

an opinion has come down to picking which multi-billion dollar corporation can feed you the better line. In addition, as viewership of the Super Bowl has increased, the price of commercial "spots" have (logically) increased.

Superbowl-ads.com listed that more than 86 million viewers tuned in to watch 30-second commercials costing almost \$2 million (and maybe to watch a little football too).

In addition to fun facts, Superbowl-ads.com offers an opportunity for frenzied commercial fans to cool their angst and cast their vote. The site had Reebok's "Terry Tate — Office Linebacker" in first place with 12 percent of the vote, followed closely by Anheuser-Busch's "Replay," with 11.5 percent and FedEx's "Marooned" at 7.8 percent. While Superbowl-ads.com did not have the number of voters, USA Today (which set up a similar page on their site) listed, as of Thursday, 60,466 as having voted on their favorite ad and 22,228 for their least favorite. Not a bad turnout.

While Super Bowl commercials draw their own fanbase, its voter turnout is nothing compared to that of the now infamous "American dream" show, "American Idol." In a November 2002 article for Lodging Magazine, it was said that Americans cast more than 100 million votes for their favorite "idol," beating the turnout for the 2000 presidential election (which only yielded 97 million) and trounced the mid-

term elections (only 66 million). Sure, 13-year-olds can vote on "Idol," but does that indicate that as we age we become disinterested in the happenings of our country lest it be combined with Hollywood hype and 15-minute stardom?

Why do Americans "express their opinion" for multi-million-dollar sales pitches or for the better Whitney Houston/Stevie Wonder impersonator, rather than voting in a presidential election? It seems that the logical answer would be to combine politics and glamour while still maintaining integrity.

To the rescue is major cable network FX, with designs to combine glamour and politics for ratings in a show called "American Candidate." Sure to draw out all the far-right and far-left disgruntled radicals, the winner of this intensive debate will get the chance to become a presidential candidate for the 2004 elections. Kevin Reilly, FX's president of entertainment, said that he hoped the show would provide a "power base" for a qualified "civil servant." True, those who are true civil servants wouldn't consider battling it out on network cable a real "service" to the people. But then again, true "talent" doesn't necessarily have a bad bleach job and a navel ring. But hey, speed dialing is easier than punching holes in a ballot.

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Meghann Farnsworth
 Just think about it

CORRECTIONS

The outline for the photo accompanying Monday's story about the University Assembly meeting ("UO Assembly, groups discuss war resolution," ODE, Feb. 3) incorrectly identified Professor Emeritus Thomas Givon.

Monday's editorial ("Awed by their noble cause," ODE, Feb. 3) should have said the Apollo 13 mission returned to Earth on April 17, 1970.

The Emerald regrets the errors.

Online poll

The poll results printed Monday had the incorrect number of votes for each answer to last week's poll. Here are the corrected numbers:

Last week: If found guilty, should ASUO Vice President Ben Buzbee be removed from office?

Results: 417 total votes

Yes, he broke the law — 3.8 percent, or 16 votes

Yes, he is a poor representative of the students — 41

percent, or 171 votes

No, his personal and professional life should remain separate — 34.5 percent, or 144 votes

No, it's not that big a deal — 17.7 percent, or 74 votes

Don't know — 1.7 percent, or 7 votes

Leave me alone! — 1.2 percent, or 5 votes