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Jessica Waters for the Emerald

Junior Cory Portnuff (left) and junior Dan Parsons spread new bark dust in the flower beds near Johnson Hall at University Day.

# University Day roots students to community

At the 13th annual University Day, students and teachers helped beautify campus and dedicated The Moon Tree

**Neota Genske**  
Freelance Reporter

More than 800 students, teachers and faculty volunteered to spruce up the campus by picking up litter, painting trash can lids, planting flowers and spreading bark dust in honor of the 13th annual University Day, organized by the University's Facilities Services.

"I think it's amazing that students and faculty can come and help out the campus that they walk on every day," junior Jennifer Ames said.

According to the Facility Services Web site, University Day started in the 1880s as a "Class Rush" intended to unify students and beautify the campus. It became competitive and even caused some violence among

the undergraduate classes. The University's first president, John Wesley Johnson, then turned the event into a campus beautification day instead of a competition.

University Day became a school tradition until the 1920s when Parents' Weekend became the prominent event each spring term. University Day was not celebrated again until May 17, 1990, when it became an official campus event. It is now usually observed on the Thursday before Spring Family Weekend each year.

"It's a great tradition," junior Cory Portnuff said. "We've done it for many years ... for me, it's a chance to give back to the community."

Senior Josh Mann said the event allowed students to do something for the campus they wouldn't normally do.

"I like to feel rooted to where I am," Mann said. "If you get to plant flowers, uproot ivy — it helps me feel more connected to campus."

Every year, one specific part of

campus is dedicated to University Day. This year, The Moon Tree, located south of the EMU on 13th Avenue, was the center of attention. The tree is from a group of Douglas fir seeds that were taken to space in the Apollo 14 Mission. The seeds orbited the moon 34 times before they came back to earth. In 1976, the seed was planted in the area where Willamette Hall now stands. The tree was uprooted and moved to its current location when construction on Willamette Hall began.

Ames said University Day brings the campus community together for one purpose.

"There's only a few events (on campus) that do that," Ames said. "When you walk down the street and see the project you did yesterday, planted flowers or painted trash lids, you see the difference you've made," Ames said.

Neota Genske is a freelance writer for the Emerald.

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## Education

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hopes of increasing access to higher education and nurturing the minds of an informed, capable citizenry.

But what does that mean to the average bill-paying student? A helping hand, courtesy of the U.S. government, in paying off hefty tuition bills.

Abbie McClain, a fifth-year senior at the University, remembers how difficult life was before she started receiving money from the Higher Education Act in the form of a Pell Grant. During her junior year at the University, McClain said she was feeling crushed by the burden of paying for her education while trying to retain the teachings that cost her so much. Killer 70-hour work weeks on top of classes and participating in theater productions caused McClain's grades to take a nosedive.

"Not having that money makes everything harder," McClain said. "I think that the stress definitely hindered my ability to take more classes and get my degree done with."

Now McClain works six hours a week instead of 70, and she is able to provide for herself and go to school with the help of a Pell Grant that covers roughly 80 percent of her tuition.

Thousands of students at the University depend on aid just like McClain — which is why people who are involved in higher education,

such as teachers, administrators, students, parents, taxpayers and politicians, are all in a tizzy about the upcoming re-authorization of the Higher Education Act and how the government might alter the vital piece of legislation.

Congressional Republicans have set their sights on reforming the Higher Education Act, and their primary target is increasing accountability. Members of the House Committee on Education and Workforce held a hearing Tuesday, questioning whether all the money that is invested in institutions of higher education produces a worthwhile return. Some education experts have been saying the quality of education in American universities isn't worth the sheer amount of money being pumped into the system by state and federal sources, tuition increases and private donations.

"I am most interested in learning more about what institutions can and should be doing to assure the American people that the investment in higher education as a student, parent or taxpayer is one that will produce results and assist with lifelong career pursuits," committee Chairman John Boehner said at Tuesday's hearing.

University Director of Federal Affairs Betsy Boyd said financial aid is definitely the most important feature of the act to the average student, and comes in many different

forms, including work study, Pell Grants and borrower benefits from loan programs like Stafford and Perkins loans. In fact, more than 60 percent of University students receive some form of financial aid.

Through the Higher Education Act, the federal government invests millions of dollars to specifically help students at this University. In 2001-02, for example, the government invested more than \$9 million in Pell Grants for needy students at the University.

Boyd said from the University's perspective, the most important change needed in the Higher Education Act is an increase in need-based student aid like the Pell Grants. One of the problems with the current act is that it makes students rely more on loans and borrowed money. As a result, world-weary undergraduates enter the workforce with a diploma weighed down by thousands of dollars of debt.

However, issues revolving around the re-authorization of the act are still in the early stages of development. Boyd said Tuesday's hearing really only set up markers and themes for discussing the act and so it's very hard to react to any of the things that were brought up without a proposal for Congress to vote on.

Contact the senior news reporter at [jenniferbear@dailyemerald.com](mailto:jenniferbear@dailyemerald.com).