

COMMENTARY

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EDITORIAL

Conscientious consumerism couldn't hurt

After Oregon's Legislature mucked around for months with "shortfalls" in what was surely one of the sorriest examples of fiscal prudence in the state's history, and as most of the student population rolls back into town — the Board sees this week as an apt time for a discussion about economics and conservation.

According to a Cato Institute brief published this year, the Legislature hiked per capita spending by 45 percent between 1990 and 2001 — the fourth largest such increase in the nation.

But now, thanks largely to economic problems, the state's revenue has shrunk, and citizens — the University community certainly included — are feeling the pinch: The long-overdue budget allocated 10.8 percent less money for higher education than the last biennium, and recent legislation geared to relaxing the financial crunch by restructuring the Public Employee Retirement System prompted at least a few University professors to retire early.

But what do the state's fiscal (mis)adventures have to do with buying laundry hampers and microchenille throws for the just-occupied dorm room or apartment or upgrading your utilitarian Nokia 3390 cell phone to the high-end Samsung SGH-V205? Well, there are at least a couple of lessons here.

The new school year offers a wealth of new opportunities — especially for freshmen — from the academic to the social to the financial. But, as students run out to Fred Meyer or Target to pick up floor mats and filing cabinets, they should practice some fiscal prudence of their own, and for good reason, too.

For the first time, typical resident University students are paying more than \$5,000 in tuition and fees. That figure means those students are paying an unprecedented 62 percent of their tuition, according to the Oregon Students Association. And tuition costs are set to increase significantly during the next few years.

But ballooning tuition is by no means the only monetary bear that students wrestle with: By 2002, the average student owes \$16,928 of college loan debt after graduation — double the figure from eight years earlier — according to a CNN/Money report. And by 2000, nearly one in ten students had racked up more than \$7,000 in credit card debt, according to the National Foundation for Credit Counseling.

Of course, all of this doesn't mean that students shouldn't spend anything on improving their living spaces' ergonomics: Some consumerism is healthy, even necessary; wild excess is not. The Organize-It Wire Storage 6-Cube Unit (\$19.99) will help an incoming freshman make the most of a shared (and therefore cramped) 9-foot-10-by-15-foot-4.5 Walton Complex residence hall room. But if you're looking for playing with lighting, a brushed chrome lava lamp (\$64.95) is probably neither the most functional nor the most economical choice. And the Legislature left Oregonians with a painful reminder about the results of a lack of foresight.

Another more subtle — but probably more important — piece of the puzzle connects microeconomic concerns with resource management: conservation. Too often, the appeal of the newer, the faster and the shinier persuades consumers to discard a perfectly sufficient cell phone or backpack or sunglasses. If an incoming freshman only uses their computer for word processing, Internet access and music, there's probably little reason for them to shove their old computer in the closet and have the 'rents buy them a 3-gigahertz Pentium 4 system.

The point of all this, of course, is that the freedom of college brings all kinds of budgetary opportunities — and responsibilities. And the Legislature's poor planning this year can teach the state's collegiate a valuable lesson: Spend wisely.

Who says Oregon's politicians didn't do anything for college students this year?

EDITORIAL POLICY

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words.

Five years and counting

Hi. I'm Peter. And I'm a fifth-year senior. I know! I know I shouldn't admit it. It's like admitting you have herpes on the first date, or that you secretly like the banana-and-cheese crepes at Cafe Siena. But it's true. I love those crepes.

And I wear that scarlet number — a big "5" — around my neck.

But it's not so bad being a fifth-year. There are more of us than you think. When the revolution begins, we will be right at the front of the pack, throwing bottles and rocks. Ha ha. Just kidding.

There aren't any statistics yet for my entering class, but in the entering class of 1996, more than 600 students continued into a fifth year (and that means fall of the fifth year, not summer). That's 24.9 percent of the class.

Of that 600, 175 students entered Van Wilder-land and continued into a sixth year. Eesh.

So, we have strength in numbers. Plus we're, like, really, umm, experienced in the ways of the world and stuff. And we're wise beyond your years. And we don't need directions to Deady Hall any more.

We'd prefer if you didn't call us "super" seniors, because it reminds us too much of Comedy Central's "Special" Ed.

I wanna stay in school into my 30s. Yaaaaaay!

But we don't mind if you call us "scintillating" seniors. Or "spectacular" seniors. Or "all-powerful, all-knowing, all-sexy" seniors. Any of those would work.

So I guess there are one or two drawbacks to being a sensational senior. I only list these to present both sides of the story, in the name of journalistic ethics (note to journalism professors: This should earn me an automatic "A" in all journalism classes this year!).

Certain situations make us fifth-years



Eric Layton Illustration

feel older than Hugh Hefner. Only with fewer hot women. Like when we're forced to take entry-level astronomy classes for the science credit we never got freshman year. Or when we go to parties at the Commons, and somebody screams "The cops are coming!" and everybody clears out except the fifth-years. And we sit around, sipping beer and nodding at each other.

Then there're the questions.

"What are you still doing here?"

"Haven't you graduated yet?"

"Do you really have herpes?"

Just kidding

about the last one. But the questions need to stop. I'm like Jim Carrey in Dumb and Dumber. I don't caaaaare. I should just wear a T-shirt that says "Fifth year. Don't ask." I think they should sell

those at the bookstore.

Who wants to leave school anyway? The world is a scary place. Just ask any graduate trying to find work in this occupational wasteland we call Oregon. George W. Bush couldn't find work in this state.

So you've been president for what, four years? Sorry, we're looking for somebody with a little more experience. Jenny, show Mr. Clinton in.

The real world includes mortgages and marriage and tricycles. I'll just spend most of this year in a tent outside Allen Hall, in protest of the fact that I'll have to someday leave the University.

So, everybody, welcome to another school year. I promise you won't read a column next year glorifying the plight of sixth-year seniors.

And remember, we're not super.

We're scintillating.

Contact the columnist at peterhockaday@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.



Peter Hockaday
 Today is Hockaday

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Iraq war budget doesn't add up

Our president has just asked for \$87 billion for the next installment of his war, \$66 billion of which is "for the military action in Iraq." That comes to exactly \$4.4 million of our tax dollars for EACH of our 150,000 soldiers stationed there. That will buy a lot of bullets; where does the rest go? The funny math hasn't stopped since Big Oil took the White House. The thing is, it isn't funny.

David Singelyn
 Warner Springs, Calif.

University, Halliburton exhibit spooky parallels

What do the proposed new University of Oregon basketball arena and the Iraq war have in common? No-bid contracts: Halliburton and Nike/University of Oregon (The Register-Guard, Aug. 1). Both situations deserve immense scrutiny as a shadowy parallel emerges between the arms race in sports spending and the arms race for endless war. Any hidden financial interests must be studied to see that the University's ethical future isn't ambiguous. It was only recently that we had to rename a campus building because the University's fundraising had scooped up money that had to be repossessed by the government. Students

should be allowed time to debate whether the stadium is built at all due to library cuts and tuition spiking. The "New Partnership" (including the "smart clothes" research and development "hot team") will seek to expedite development of new shadow campuses for University of Oregon-Nike, Providence Peace Health and the military-industrial complex. Watch for development, "streamlining" of permit processes, demolition and evictions of 100 low-income families in a potentially historic neighborhood near you.

Zachary Vishanoff
 Eugene

Eugene is America's friendliest city

Several weeks ago, while I was on vacation with my partner, we made a stop in Eugene on our way to Portland. We grabbed a bite to eat and headed to a park for a picnic lunch that we shared with our cats. Despite being on a harness and leash, one of our cats became frightened and escaped from us. We searched the mountain he ran to for hours to no avail. People that we met at the park told us about the Greenhill Humane Society, and we went there to ask for suggestions. The staff members there were helpful and sympathetic. After more than 30 hours of being missing on the mountain, our cat, Rascal, was recovered. We were pleasantly sur-

prised at how friendly and helpful everyone we encountered was when we explained our predicament. Many thanks to the Greenhill Humane Society, Mark Henrikson, Jody and the many others who assisted us. We felt encouraged and supported by the community. As a result, we are considering moving to Eugene! Eugene has our vote for friendliest city in the U.S. Thank you all again.

Kristen Roosa
 San Diego

Oregon crowd respectful during Michigan game

As a Michigan alumnus, I heard stories about the Autzen Stadium crowd and Oregon fans. Let me be the next in line in saying that stadium is one of the loudest sustained roars I've ever heard.

In Ann Arbor, Mich., controversy recently erupted about the treatment of Notre Dame fans by the Wolverine faithful. Having packed nothing but Michigan gear, I wondered how the Eugene and University of Oregon community would react.

About the worst I encountered was constant "Go Ducks" cheers. Your fans and students are very respectful and gracious to the opposition.

I enjoyed Eugene even though my team didn't win. See you in a Rose Bowl rematch.

David Taub
 Michigan alumnus, class of 2000
 Pismo Beach, Calif.