

COMMENTARY

Wednesday, February 4, 2004

EDITORIAL

PFC shouldn't OK funding of USSA dues

The University's Programs Finance Committee doles out some \$5 million annually to various facilities (for example, the Student Recreation Center); subsidies (Lane Transit District and child care); and, largely, student groups. Some allocations fall into another category: off-campus associations.

Student fees are collected and disseminated under the assumption of materially benefiting those who pay them. Accordingly, because it is often more difficult to identify benefits imbued on students by a remote organization than it is for on-campus groups, these allocations deserve (and usually receive) additional scrutiny.

Indeed, PFC Chairman Adrian Gilmore observed: "When you go off-campus and you go to a federal level, we as a board really need to make sure that the incidental fee is going to benefit students at the University of Oregon."

During a January PFC meeting, committee members took some issue with the ASUO Executive's request to fund the United States Student Association, a national political group that lobbies on behalf of students. The USSA originally requested \$20,000 in student fees but agreed to let funding increase "gradually." The final executive recommendation was \$7,435, which could cover dues and student travel to conferences.

According to USSA's Web site, "The organization tracks and lobbies federal legislation and policy, and organizes students from across the country to participate in the political process, through testifying in official Congressional hearings, letter-writing campaigns, and face-to-face lobby visits between students and their elected officials."

Commendably, the PFC was originally wary of the proposal, which called for a several hundred percent increase over the previous year's allocation.

"What makes this not a partisan group? Why should we fund this?" PFC Sen. Colin Andries asked.

ASUO President Maddy Melton defended the proposal, saying the organization doesn't campaign for particular candidates. Moreover, USSA's lobbying invariably benefits at least some students: Melton said USSA's efforts have helped protect the Pell Grant and reauthorize the Higher Education Act.

Funding was tabled until PFC's Jan. 29 meeting, when PFC passed a \$9,640 budget for the organization, a whopping 776.5 percent increase.

That students are evidently compelled to fund an explicitly partisan group that lobbies specific legislation should irk fee-paying students, regardless of their political slant and whether they materially benefit from the USSA subsidy.

Some students might argue that diverting funds to a hypothetical (and implicitly political) national lobby promoting, for instance, abstinence-only education and the banning of contraceptives in public universities' student health centers would materially benefit students, but many students — those on the Emerald's Editorial Board included — would disagree. Some of those would resent, too, their incidental fees being used for such a purpose.

Simply put, mandatory student fees shouldn't be diverted to any partisan, lobbying end, regardless of how much students benefit from them.

EDITORIAL POLICY

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Population panic

In three of my five classes, the lectures and readings have recently turned to the issue of our ever-increasing human population and its impact on the environment in which we live.

I've listened to arguments from all sides of the equation, from advocates of sustainability who say that the number of humans is not as relevant as how we all live, to people who say that it doesn't matter how we live — if the number of people on earth exceeds the earth's carrying capacity, then we're doomed.

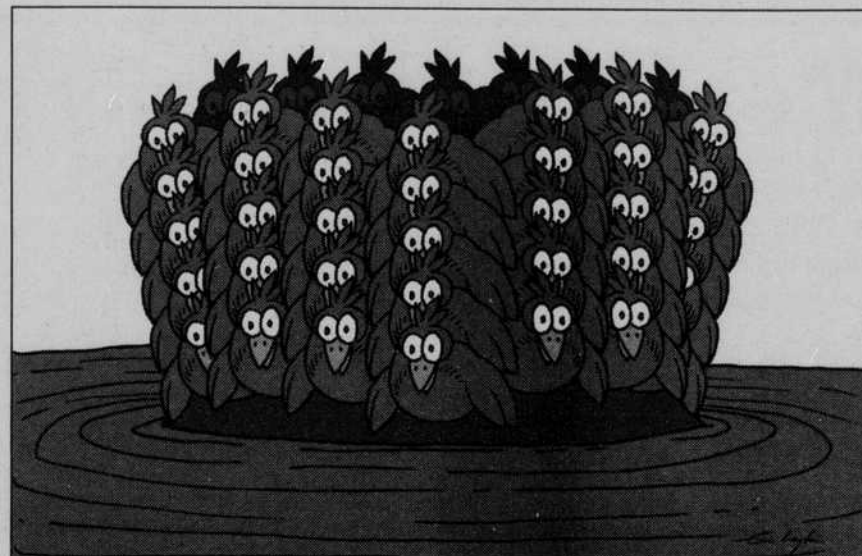
Science has proven that our population is growing exponentially, and the mathematical diagrams derived by science show that this growth will continue until it peaks. Then the population will crash in a manner reminiscent of Wile E. Coyote hitting the ground after being tricked off the cliff by that silly Road Runner.

Now, I believe that human choice is the second most wonderful thing in the world, behind love, but I don't believe that it is possible that all humans would choose together to live in a sustainable manner. We, as individuals, are just too self-centered, too focused on our own well-being rather than the health of our neighbors, to make a choice that would benefit everyone instead of just ourselves. It's hard to admit we're killing ourselves, so let's try something else.

Let's imagine that there's this beautiful pristine pond, and in the middle of it is this perfect little island with emerald green grass, flowering plants, nitrogen-rich soil and a population of flightless birds that, much like Canadian geese, mate for life, but like penguins have only one or two eggs. The birds have no predators on the island, and they outcompete all the other organisms living there for resources.

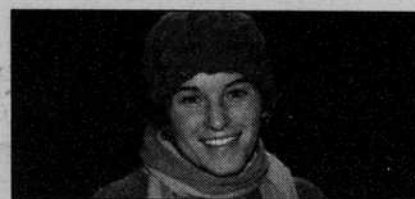
These birds are weight conscious, so they only eat what they need to survive. Their chicks, which have a very low hatching mortality rate, are kind of a pain in the butt, so the birds don't usually have more than one or two.

Life is so good on this island that the birds usually live a long time, and often four generations are alive on the island at once. Because of this, with each new birth the island gets a little more crowded.



Eric Layton Illustration

Soon, one family of birds is living right next to another, and before long they are trying to figure out how to stack their nests vertically to make room for the next generation. And even though each bird is eating only as much as it needs to survive, there is less grass to go around simply because there are more beaks to feed and the nests are taking up areas where the plants used to grow.



Aimee Rudin
Five feet of fury

The birds, who are now living on top of each other and stealing food from the beaks of the neighbor chicks, were taught, as hatchlings, not to defecate in their own nests, and since where they used to go has been converted into nesting for the less fortunate birds, they are forced to start using the water bank as a bathroom.

Before they know it, their water is contaminated with excrement, so that when

they try to drink it they get giardiasis, which causes them to poop even more, which in turn makes the water situation worse.

Next, the rainy season comes. The rains used to be an asset, but now the plants are gone so the soil along the bank has no anchor, and all the high ground away from the water's edge has been taken over by the healthiest birds leaving no place left for anyone else to go. The rains cause a landslide that takes with it 78 percent of the nesting grounds, and all the chicks that were still in those nests — they all die.

Because most of the island just washed away into the dirty pond, when the rain finally lets up there is even less growing area for food, and the birds who were squatting up on the high ground now have no homes, no chicks and no food. Most of them just give up and die.

The few remaining birds are forced to spend their days scavenging the barren island for single blades of grass while trying not to step in the droppings of their deceased neighbors. It's not pretty, but neither is the direction we're heading as a population.

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

DPS should adopt hanging permits

I am a member of the staff here at the University of Oregon and my husband is a law student. I recently got a ticket for not having my University parking permit permanently attached to the bumper of my car. When I broached the Department of Public Safety about the possibility of getting a rearview mirror hanging parking permit, or sticking the permit on my back window, the parking and transportation manager gave me the brush-off, and implied that he saw no reason to change the current system. How much harder is it to look at the back windshield than the back bumper?

Here are some of my reasons for not wanting bumper sticker parking permits:

(1) They are very, very difficult to get off, so after a few years you either have a thick collection from putting the permits on top of one another or a patchwork quilt of permits next to each other. Plus, older permits start to fade and crack and look ugly, but getting them off is such a pain that most people don't bother.

(2) If your car is in the shop, you have to go to Public Safety and get a special permit. If the repairs will take longer than a week, you have to get a note from the repair shop

(and presumably your mommy).

(3) If your permit is on a car used by more than one person, and you borrow your friend's car, sans permit, you have to buy a day pass when you already paid once for the right to park on campus.

(4) When selling a car, having old stickers on the bumper decreases the car's value, even more so if the bumper is scratched from trying to remove the stickers.

GUEST COMMENTARY

If the permits were rearview mirror hanging tags then all of these problems could be avoided. Plus, there would be the added benefits of:

(1) The permits being usable in more than one car.

(2) The tags could be reusable for more than one year. Instead of attaching a big sticker to the bumper, DPS could have tiny colored stickers with the years on them to attach to the hanging tags. It seems like tiny stickers would be much cheaper than the big stickers currently used, which obviously have to be specially printed for the University.

Reasons that DPS might be opposed include:

(1) Less revenue because they lose the revenue from day passes, and the revenue from students having to buy second car permits.

(2) Parking officers would have to patrol at the front of cars rather than the back.

(3) In theory, hanging tags could get stolen more (but only if people don't lock their cars).

I refuse to believe I'm the only staff member or student who hates those bumper sticker permits and the hassle they represent. Imagine if you had a brand new BMW 5 Series or a Lincoln Navigator. Wouldn't it be awful to stick a tacky University parking permit on it? Can't DPS even consider an alternative? I've been at a couple other Universities with window stickers (which, although not transferable, are easy to remove) or hanging tags which are all-around super. Either of these types of parking permit tags would be much more user-friendly, especially the rearview mirror hanging kind.

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