

Arabic language program deserves more consideration

Despite the obvious benefits of knowing and understanding Arabic, universities across the United States have not done enough to address the knowledge gap in our country

GUEST COMMENTARY

when it comes to Arabic and the Islamic World. Arabic is the liturgical language of one billion Muslims worldwide, and 300 million others speak a dialect of Arabic in their daily lives. In 1968 the number of students who registered for Arabic classes in the United States represented only 0.1 percent of all students who registered for one of the 14 most commonly taught foreign languages. Thirty years later, it had only grown to 0.5 percent (<http://www.adfl.org>).

Here in Eugene, there have been wonderful first steps, such as the much publicized hiring of Dr. Timothy Giannotti in the Religious Studies program. There are also rumors about the creation of a minor in Middle Eastern Studies. However, there has been very little dialogue about starting an Arabic language program. Why?

Portland State University has had an Arabic program for decades. Oregon

State apparently started a program last year. Having a legitimate Arabic program here would boost the school's notoriety by placing it into a small group of schools nationwide that offer Arabic. This would also impact the number of students who want to attend school here.

In the class schedule for this term you can find Danish (eight students), Finnish (two students), Greek (17 students), Norwegian (14 students) and Swedish (seven students). Is Arabic not as important as these languages? Each term, my students ask why Arabic has not become a more prominent language program here. Why not start a program and have the credits count toward a Bachelor's of Arts language requirement? Despite its relative obscurity, the number of students who take the Pass/No Pass self-study course each term has hovered around 20 for the last couple of years. The demand is there, so where's the supply?

If funding is the main issue, can an Arabic class, with sufficient enrollments, not be able to sustain itself? Given the obvious demand for a course that carries no applicable credits and satisfies no requirements, it's logical to predict significantly larger demand if these ad hoc courses were a part of a regular language program.

We are in the midst of a geopolitical reality where understanding Arabic, or not, has serious impacts on what we are doing. For example, insurgents in Iraq will occasionally write warnings on the roads where they've planted bombs to blow up the soldiers up. Unfortunately, they don't write it in English and our troops diligently drive past and encounter a burst of shrapnel traveling around 700 mph. What's worse is that many of the people writing the policies that place people in these scenarios are also ignorant of the languages and cultures of the areas they're meddling with. This has led to a whole variety of things blowing up in our faces.

We need to take a more serious look at establishing a program that will produce people who are aware of what the Middle East is like and who can effectively communicate with the people there who are receiving as skewed a version of our culture as we do of theirs. We need to follow in Frost's footsteps, taking the road less traveled by, and that will make all the difference. Alaysa Kathalik?

Chris Holman, a senior majoring in geography and international studies, teaches Arabic in the Self-Study Language program.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter is a personal attack devoid of clear argument

It astounds me what drivels people will try to pass off as public discourse. The vitriolic letter's ("Protest that which really kills," ODE, Feb. 11) most profound element was its ability to raise more problems in 250 words than I can list. The letter was riddled with fallacies. She simply made fun of Jacqueline (ad hominem), which points only to her lack of creativity, civility and intellectual prowess, or perhaps her promising future as a schoolyard bully.

On abortion, she said Jacqueline should defend people who are actually alive (which begs the question). There were multiple unwarranted logical jumps — Jacqueline must have prayed for them, that must be hypocritical, people who light candles for fetuses haven't made tough choices (including abortions), abstinence programs are lunacy (mere name-calling). Furthermore, her intolerant words show no room for diversity, nor any grasp of the ambiguities inherent in such controversial issues.

How are these platitudes any different than Texas fundamentalism? Also, she ironically fails to realize that embodying such a violent interpersonal stance is clearly hypocritical — her approach is frequently at the root of oppression and war.

To mock a person's deeply held religious conviction is asinine, to provide no argument is ignorant and to make fun of a person's intolerance in a way that is, ironically, so deeply hateful lands somewhere between nauseating, entertaining and embarrassing. As an academic and a conscientious objector I am embarrassed to be associated with such unproductive and mean-spirited words. Consider engaging ideas, not uncleverly bashing people.

Ron Davis
educational leadership

Affirmative action aids universities in diversity-building

Travis Willse's recent column ("Crossing the racial line," ODE, Feb. 20) adds yet another boring critique to a unoriginal drone of commentary on affirmative action. The comparison Willse draws to University of

Michigan's "extinct" affirmative action admission policies makes no sense. Perhaps a re-reading of Gratz v. Bollinger and Grutter v. Bollinger (which, rather than merely allowing "certain biases toward some minority students," allow race to be an important plus in admissions decisions) would be in order. It seems that affirmative action is alive and well in university admissions.

While Willse says diversity-building scholarships "can't fairly make the same claim" as admissions policies geared toward increasing diversity, it seems as though these scholarships serve that exact same function. The Michigan cases in no way made diversity-building scholarships unconstitutional. Willse also says these scholarships "deny opportunities to people ... based on characteristics unrelated to those opportunities." Perhaps he should actually take a look at some of the criteria for many other scholarships. They can include not only

race and ethnicity, but gender, past personal experiences, commitment to public service or any number of "nonacademic," yet important, characteristics. I wonder exactly what characteristics Willse thinks make "qualified" people and university students.

Jackie Prange
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REC PROGRAM INFORMATION

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March 22 - 24, 2004 9:00am-12:00pm
Children in 1st through 5th grades Cost: \$50

Held the first three mornings of Spring Break, this camp will showcase instruction in three popular spring sports: tennis, track, and soccer. For more information contact Flo at 346-2777.

REC FACILITIES

All lockers must be cleared or renewed by Thursday, March 18th

Spring Break hours begin on Thursday, March 18th
10:00 am - 8:00 pm, Monday - Friday

Opening Soon....

The Strength and Conditioning areas of the SRC are expanding. We are adding more cardio equipment to our current fleet including a new line of exercise machines. We are also opening a new area for strength training and abdominal work

CONTACT US
PE & Rec Programs 346-4113
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Check out our website
<http://pars.uoregon.edu>

