

Newsroom: (541) 346-5511
 Suite 300, Erb Memorial Union
 P.O. Box 3159, Eugene, OR 97403
 E-mail: editor@dailyemerald.com
 Online: www.dailyemerald.com

COMMENTARY

Editor in Chief:
 Brad Schmidt
 Managing Editor:
 Jan Tobias Montry
 Editorial Editor:
 Travis Willse

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Focus must shift toward academics, not athletics

College sport is at a turn in the road, a junction that either could make it an acceptable part of the campus or push it further along the road to self-destruction. Because it has become an unwieldy big business, it faces an important choice:

Follow the current trend at the University of Oregon, where multiple millions are spent on varsity athletics in a system where educational programs go hungry. Or move away from out-of-balance spending by following the revolutionary action of Vanderbilt University, where the office of athletics administration has been closed.

There's another option. It has its roots, ironically — maybe understandably — also at the University of Oregon. Here, in 2002, a new idea was pushed by the Faculty Senate President James Earl and some of his colleagues. Borrowing from the global nuclear competition, they feel the campus arms race threatens "mutually assured destruction" of college football and basketball. Within months, other Pac-10

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universities passed similar faculty resolutions. The concept moved eastward, where early backing came from schools in the Big Ten Conference.

My correspondence with the Vanderbilt chancellor helps me better understand Vandy's experiment — an attempt to defuse the time bomb of that excessive spending.

Vanderbilt offers no magic potion, just a simple mixture of vision and courage offered by Chancellor Gordon Gee to cleanse big time sports of their terminal illness. His decision to disband the traditional department of athletics for varsity sports caught the college world by surprise. Shock is a better word at many schools where athletic programs soar out of control while academia, to which they belong, finds itself increasingly in serious financial trouble.

The game on the field has not gotten beyond Vanderbilt. It stays competitive against richer programs of state institutions. Staying close off the field is something else. It comes at the embarrassing cost of expensive promotions and excessive spending on facilities and coaches. The exploding payscale for football head coaches finds many earning more than the university presidents to whom they report.

Oregon signaled it was in the football arms race when it paid a quarter million dollars for a billboard in downtown New York to promote star quarterback Joey Harrington. Soon after came the addition of 12,000 seats to Autzen Stadium at a cost of \$90 million.

Long-established football stadiums today know Oregon is making a serious move to join them on the field and in the cash box. Eyebrows went up with word of the Ducks' new \$3.2 million football locker room.

Oregon's step up into the stratosphere of sports spending seemed assured when its plans were announced for the most expensive basketball facility in the nation. But when cost for replacement of McArthur Court jumped to \$190 million, the project was put on hold.

The Register-Guard Sports Editor Ron Bellamy noted the \$130 million pledged by donors for the new gym, lamenting the change would result in "a loss for the credibility" of the Oregon

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Eric Layton Illustration

Dealing with death

Please forgive the poor timing — writing about death is hardly an apt way to close the first week of the year that feels like spring. But death, and what it means to people, has been on my mind lately. You see, my Aunt Inga passed away in February. I'd only met her maybe a half-dozen times, but I still felt a tug of sadness when my brother told me. I'd never dealt with the death of a family member or friend as an adult, and I realized I didn't know how to respond to the situation. Sadness? Sure, but sadness is hardly a complete emotional response to such a complicated situation.

But I'm not alone in my uncertainty: America has forgotten how to deal with death. We watch the news and hear about dead celebrities, deaths at war and even genocide, and we digest it all like any other news item, queued between moot presidential primary results and the basketball scores, unsure just what to make of it.

Though we're uncomfortable with sex — after all, a single exposed nipple spun the mass media into a frenzy and the Federal Communications Commission into a sequence of paternalistic threats of unduly harsh punishment aimed at discouraging indecency — we're perfunctorily, even bizarrely, comfortable with death.

Moral conservatives and anti-corporate leftists would likely form an odd alliance on this point, arguing that images of

death presented in the media trivialize human life either as less than spiritual or commodified. And there's probably some truth to that: Though elementary school-age children see few, if any, sexual acts on television, by the end of elementary school they'll watch some 8,000



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murders on the small screen, according to research cited by the University of Michigan Health System. Whether sex and violence on television instigate sex and violence in real life is debatable; however, it's not such a leap to assume that television significantly influences how we perceive our culture.

While media influence seems to be a likely factor in America's thanatological ambivalence, it certainly can't fully account for the individual's, or even the culture's, awkwardness with the subject.

Regardless, for all this ambiguity, America recognizes the dead as something sacred, even in the realm of the secular. As construction crews geared up to bore the MAX light rail tunnel under Sylvan in the 1990s, the easiest route cut through part of the Finley-Sunset Hills Mortuary. Despite protesters' complaints, officials decided to lay track along the embattled path, and 14 buried bodies were relocated.

Last Saturday, police arrested Henry Reid, director of the UCLA Willed Body Program, on allegations of "illegal activities involving the commercialization of human remains" — a sort of modern grave-robbing.

We recognize that these situations run deeper than transportation planning and allegations of selling property that one doesn't own.

Whether changing views of and reactions to death constitute a moral failure probably depends on your point of view. But, how we relate to death necessarily intertwines with how we relate to life. And if consideration of the former helps illuminate the latter, a little introspection on matters mortal could do us all some good.

Contact the editorial editor at traviswillse@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Flyer's attack shifts focus from important issues

First off, we would like to say that we are sure that the Emerald was just as disappointed as us to learn that your distribution was used to spread around the flyer which made allegations against

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March 9) and are confident that your newspaper staff knew as little about this as we did. That said, let us turn to the incident itself.

We are taking it very seriously. Until the aforementioned flyer was released, the incident had no

ties to our fraternity: The incident did not take place on our property, it did not occur at a function that we in any way sponsored and the alleged perpetrator was not associated with our house. Although a group of members, myself included, were in attendance at the event in question, we attended it as outsiders. I became personally involved in the incident when a close friend of mine alerted me to the situation, whereupon I and a fellow member (Tim Forden) assisted the victim to the hospital. Again, Tim and I did not act as representatives of Sigma Nu, but rather only in accordance with our own moral codes.

The unfortunate truth of this situation is

that the flyer released takes the form of an attack which in turn provokes our fraternity into a defensive mode. The important issues, which involve the safety and well-being of the young woman, the punishment (if necessary) of the alleged perpetrator and the materialization of the actual facts, are at risk of being ignored. In spite of the urge to focus on defending ourselves from an attack, we will continue instead to do the best we can to assist in the investigation — not as good members, but as good people. Members that were present at the site of the crime will come forward and file reports of what they have seen and we urge the other witnesses present to follow that

example. Above all, we hope that the young woman involved can find the courage to do the right thing.

As for the specifics of the crime, we feel it inappropriate to describe in this forum what we believe happened that evening, both out of courtesy to the young woman and with respect to the rights of the accused. What our membership witnessed will be reported in full to Student Life, where it can be used for its correct purposes: serving justice and ensuring the safety of students at the University of Oregon.

Andy Newsom, an undeclared sophomore, is the president of Sigma Nu.