

# Oregon Daily Emerald



Ducks earn NCAA bids Page 7

Tuesday, June 1, 2004

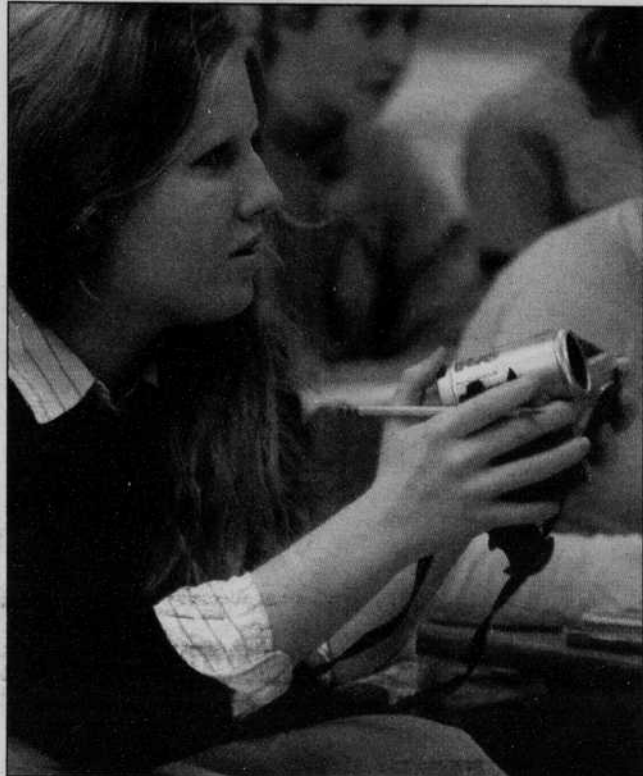
SINCE 1900 UNIVERSITY OF OREGON EUGENE, OREGON

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## ENABLED LEARNING

### With sights set high

Communication and technology help freshman Meghan Briggs overcome her visual impairment



Danielle Hickey Photo Editor

Freshman Meghan Briggs, who was born without pigment in her eyes and is legally blind, uses a video camera in calculus class to give her an enlarged view of the chalkboard in Deady Hall Friday afternoon.

#### PART 1 OF 4

**Today:** Freshman biology major Meghan Briggs, who is studying to be a genetic counselor, uses various tools to accommodate her blindness.

**Wednesday:** Living with spina bifida doesn't keep freshman Eli Ettinger from competing in wheelchair racing.

**Thursday:** Psychology major Rick King, 47, is legally deaf but returned to college last year after more than 20 years.

**Friday:** Jessica Wyant, a student with attention-deficit disorder, dyslexia and auditory discrimination, receives tutoring from other University students.

By Parker Howell  
News Reporter

Imagine trying to take a test without being able to see the answer sheet. Or trying to follow a calculus lecture without the ability to see functions written on the chalkboard.

This is a daily reality for freshman biology major Meghan Briggs, one of about 10 legally blind students at the University, Disability Services Counselor Molly Sirois said.

Briggs was born without pigment in her eyes — called partial albinism — and the nerves at the back of her eyes do not perceive light normally, affecting her vision. Although Briggs has some sight, her visual acuity is 20/200 with contacts, meaning she can see at a distance of 20 feet, while a person with perfect vision can see at 200 feet.

"The difference between (my vision) and most people's is that most people's can be corrected ... but mine, because it's in the back of the eye, they're not able to fix it enough," she said.

Yet Briggs said many people don't realize her vision is impaired because she wears contacts.

"Most people can't even tell that I have a vision problem, which sometimes causes problems," she said.

Briggs' condition has caused her to face obstacles many students do not encounter. Because 20/40 or better vision is required to drive without restrictions, she has to rely on others to get around.

"Transportation is a big issue," she said. "I can ride bikes, but I don't really when there's a lot of people."

Briggs said she also needs to interact with professors more than other students, which can be challenging.

"Communication with professors is really important," she said. "A lot of students can get through a 200-person lecture class without talking to the professor at all ... but I usually have to go to their office hours and be like, 'This is what I have,'" she said.

Briggs said she also often needs larger test forms and larger versions of texts.

Like many students, Briggs said she experienced a big transition when she came to college, although she's found that University students are more timid about her condition than high school students.

"It's been quite a dynamic change in the chemistry of the students," she said. "When I was in high school, my high school was reasonably large and people didn't always know me, but people were always very blunt about, 'Oh, what's wrong with you?' and sometimes a little bit rude."

"I'd much rather talk about it than have people be like, 'Hmm, I wonder what's wrong with that girl.'"

Turn to **ENABLED**, page 6



Jared Paben Senior News Reporter

University freshman Ashlie Bernhisel (right) combs through the grass of a wildland area in eastern Corvallis Saturday, looking for missing 19-year-old Veneta native Brooke Wilberger.

## Hunt continues for abducted BYU student

About 1,200 volunteers have joined the search for Brooke Wilberger, missing since May 24

By Jared Paben  
Senior News Reporter

CORVALLIS — With broom handles, hockey sticks, tree limbs, ski poles and golf clubs in hand, the 13 members of Team Romeo stand at attention just after 3 p.m. on Saturday, shoulder to shoulder like a line of soldiers ready to charge into battle.

Team leader Scott Geiszler, a 275-pound logger from Albany who volunteered for the job, moves up and down the team's ranks, surveying the members. He orders them to spread out one arm's length apart, then points behind him to a boggy mass of shoulder-high grass and head-high tree limbs. In this patch of western Corvallis wild land, the team will search for Brooke Wilberger, a 19-year-old Brigham Young University student who police say fell victim to a brazen daytime abduction in a south Corvallis neighborhood on May 24.

Ashlie Bernhisel, a blue-eyed, freckled University of Oregon freshman wearing a spotless American Eagle sweatshirt and white tennis shoes, is one of those staring down a difficult mass of grass,

Turn to **SEARCH**, page 5



Tim Kupsick Photographer

Career Center Director Larry Smith (left) greets journalism majors Corinne Dorzweiler (center) and Katherine Stover at his retirement party at the Gerlinger Lounge May 26. Smith has been at the center for 24 years.

## Career Center leader says goodbye

Larry Smith retires after 24 years of helping students find jobs

By Chelsea Duncan  
Senior News Reporter

Larry Smith has been called "forward thinking," a friend and a mentor. And if he doesn't like your handshake, he'll let you know, and then he'll show you how to do it right.

As the University Career Center director, Smith has been instrumental in helping students choose their future paths for the past 24 years, but now he is bidding farewell.

"I believe I'm leaving the Career Center with a very strong foundation and a high level of regard to developing more opportunities," he said, adding that he decided to retire to spend more time with family, to travel and to pursue other opportunities.

University friends and colleagues gathered to say goodbye to Smith at his retirement party Wednesday evening. The event was full of toasts and cheers as staff, faculty, students and administrators shared their memories of the Career Center's leader.

University Vice President for Student

Affairs Anne Leavitt said she felt fortunate to have worked with Smith.

"He's taught me a lot about how to work with students, how to build resources and how to work with a team," she said.

Smith received a standing ovation as he took the podium, and tears welled up in his eyes as he recalled his time working with students.

"It's been a wonderful ride," he told the crowd.

As he sat in his office stacked with manila folders after the emotional night, Smith said

Turn to **RETIREE**, page 4

### WEATHER

LOW  
48



HIGH  
68

### INSIDE

Campus buzz.....4	Crossword.....11
Classifieds.....10	Nation & World.....10
Commentary.....2	Sports.....7

### NEXT ISSUE



Is it hot in here, or is it just Chuck Slothower?