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LTD to repay University for strike

Members of the ASUO will meet today to discuss how to allocate the \$38,276 that Lane Transit District has offered to reimburse

BY MEGHANN M. CUNIFF
SENIOR NEWS REPORTER

The University will be reimbursed \$38,276 from Lane Transit District to make up for the week-long driver strike that halted bus service across the county and the one week of free bus service that followed. The money will be deducted from the amount the University has to pay for spring term service.

Student money finances the free bus

service University students receive from LTD. Andy Vobora, LTD service planning and marketing manager, said the district felt it was necessary to compensate students for the strike and give them the same week of free service given to everyone else in the county.

"We feel like it's the appropriate thing to do based on past relationships," Vobora said, stressing the need to preserve the positive,

working relationship that exists between LTD and the University.

Because the money will be deducted from this term's billing cycle, it will likely end up in the ASUO Student Senate surplus, ASUO Community and Housing Coordinator Scott Lu said.

The surplus is in place to meet the unexpected needs of programs funded by incidental fees, "as well as other minor emergencies," according to the ASUO rule book, the Green Tape Notebook.

Lu said he will be meeting with ASUO

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Graduates could face increasing loan rates

With rates set to increase as much as 64 percent, early debt consolidation may help students

BY SHELDON TRAVER
NEWS REPORTER

For most seniors, the final disbursement of financial aid arrived March 25 to fulfill their tuition and fee obligations for the term. If the seniors are lucky, they may receive a little extra cash to help them make it through the next 12 weeks.

But after they graduate June 11, these future employees will be handed more than a diploma: They will also be handed a bill for the financial aid they received that could reach higher than \$250 per month.

With interest rates possibly set to rise July 1, graduating seniors may want to consider consolidating their loans now to save money.

Loans in repayment are currently set at 3.337 percent. New loan rates are set every July 1 based on 13-week Treasury Bill Rates. These rates have been climbing steadily during the past nine months and, according to Jonathan Rudy, director of customer service at www.studentloanconsolidator.com, this could mean a 52 to 64 percent increase to make loan rates as high as 5.5 percent.

"For students with an average of \$30,000 on loans, the rate increase will translate into an extra \$1,018 in interest paid every year," Rudy said.

Students with federal subsidized and unsubsidized loans have a six-month grace period to begin repayment; Federal Perkins loans have a nine-month grace period. Rudy said that students who consolidate prior to July 1 might lose these grace periods, depending on whom they choose to consolidate through.

Direct Loans is the source of funding for students receiving financial aid at the University. According to its Web site, www.loanconsolidation.ed.gov, students who consolidate prior to graduation may be able to keep their grace periods. However, students need to shop around for the consolidator that will best suit their needs.

One consideration when shopping for a loan agent is to look at minimum loan amounts. Some consolidators will not take loans with a balance of less than \$7,500. Another problem could be the chance of losing

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Parking, paying, SAVING

The University's new "smart" parking meters offer an easy-to-use solution for coin-toting drivers

BY EMILY SMITH
NEWS REPORTER

Starting today, University parking moves into the future. Seven "Pay and Display" parking meters — which are solar powered and accept various forms of payment, including credit cards — have been installed at several locations on campus. There are five along East 15th Avenue, one in a portion of the EMU parking lot and one in front of Oregon Hall.

They will cost the same 75 cents per hour as the old meters, and with the exception of the one outside Oregon Hall, there is no limit to the amount of time a student can purchase. There is, however, a minimum purchase of one hour, and if students don't use all of their time, it won't carry over.

The machines distribute a slip of paper to be placed on a car's dashboard. Twenty to thirty spaces are designated to each machine.

At around \$10,000 per unit, the new machines cost much more than traditional meters, which run about \$350 excluding the post and installation expenses. However, each new meter has the potential to cover 1,000 spaces.

Department of Public Safety Parking and Transportation Manager Rand Stamm said the new meters will require little maintenance, and because parking is

self-supporting, they will eventually pay for themselves.

"Pay and Display" meters at the University will accept cash, any denomination of coins, Visa and Mastercard; if this test period proves successful, they could be programmed to accept tokens and Smartcards as well. Smartcards work similarly to prepaid phone cards, keeping track of the cash value remaining each time the card is used.

DPS has been working on the parking project since last summer. "Pay and Display" meters communicate wirelessly and are secured with bullet-proof steel, drill resistant locks and anti-crowbar door protection.

Stamm, who initially proposed and spearheaded the program after seeing its success in downtown Portland, said the change was made primarily for convenience and easier maintenance, not to make more money.

According to the City of Portland's Office of Transportation Web site, the city switched to the Smartmeter system because each of the city's 7,000 street meters "must be visited frequently for cash collections, repairs, battery replacements, etc." It also notes that the new meters improve reliability and reduce costs.

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Environmentally friendly parking kiosks powered by attached solar panels, such as those now available in the EMU parking lot and in front of Oregon Hall, make parking easier by allowing drivers to use different payment methods.

DANIELLE HICKEY | PHOTO EDITOR

Programs Finance Committee

Stipend model still a hot-button topic in new budget

The proposed \$5.23 million budget is a 6.88 percent funding increase from last year, but international students raise concerns about pay cuts

BY PARKER HOWELL
SENIOR NEWS REPORTER

Despite 11th-hour apprehension from some student groups that pay cuts approved for student leaders next year will be unfair, the committee that allocates student funding finalized a budget March 17 that includes a reduction in the number of paid positions some groups will receive.

Although members of the Programs

Finance Committee discussed amending the stipend model used in the budget, which includes cuts of up to three-fourths of some student leaders' pay, the committee didn't create an amendment during the break. The PFC will instead include a budget note addressing next year's ASUO Student Senate to address individual groups' concerns about pay cuts, perhaps funding some of the cut money with surplus funds.

If the Senate approves the budget on Wednesday, groups will receive about \$5.23 million, a 6.88 percent increase from last year. The PFC reopened its budget March 16 to adjust a discrepancy between the numbers it originally approved March 4 and final numbers calculated by committee members.

The budget falls just below the 7 percent cap on growth allowed by Green Tape Notebook rules.

Representatives of several multicultural groups voiced concerns to the PFC at a March 16 meeting that the pay cuts unfairly affect international students and students of color.

Multicultural Center Co-Director Maria

Hwang called the cuts a "major structural change," adding that they would lead to the "gentrification of the (student) unions." She said some student leaders depend on stipends for essentials like rent and food.

Hwang said the cut also "disproportionately affects disadvantaged students."

"In times when the administration is working on diversity, (the cuts are) contrary to general hopes to be a more diverse university," she said.

Hwang presented a summary of several

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