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The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co., Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Ore. The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices in Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union. The Emerald is private property. Unlawful removal or use of papers is prosecutable by law.

■ In my opinion

## Fighting for the humanities

"At present we know only that the imagination, like certain wild animals, will not breed in captivity."  
— George Orwell

Professors of philosophy, literature and other humanities disciplines wield almost no influence on the general public, which treats their work with contempt.

Humanities departments exhibit stifling intellectual conformity that drives away bright students and retards the advance of scholarship.

Doctoral students in humanities programs take an average of 8.9 years to achieve their degree. Half of them do not get jobs the year they graduate.

Such was the picture Louis Menand painted Tuesday night at a well-attended lecture in the Lillis Business Complex. Menand, a Harvard professor of English and American literature and language and a staff writer for The New Yorker, brought stark warnings about "The Humanities and the University of the 21st Century" to an audience composed mostly of faculty.

Menand noted several threats to contemporary humanities scholarship, not least of which is the absurd time spent toward earning degrees that humanities programs force doctoral students to endure. Menand rightly pointed out that such an ordeal encourages "embarrassing" labor practices — essentially the indentured servitude of doctoral students — as well as self-censorship among students who don't feel they can risk original thinking.

If the humanities' internal problems weren't enough, Menand also outlined the friction between the humanities and the rest of society that borders on a state of warfare. While in the past society recognized the value of humanities scholarship for its own sake,



**CHUCK SLOTHOWER**  
TAKING ISSUE

humanists now must continually justify themselves, Menand said.

Humanists express understandable frustration that while even the most radical scientific theories are regarded with respect and reverence, society expects humanists to do no more than reaffirm society's constructs.

Humanities classes face declining enrollment, and universities more and more grow to resemble trade schools. Students vote with their feet for practical studies such as business, education and, I must admit, journalism.

Who can blame them? Graduates who hold humanities degrees have a notoriously difficult time getting jobs after college, thus the birth of "Would you like fries with that?" jokes. I remember a man with whom I fought wildfires a few summers ago. He had a University degree in anthropology, good enough to breathe ash and hack at dirt for 14 hours a day.

I can think of no great solution to the employability problem, and neither could Menand. His best idea was that the humanities should cross-pollinate other fields. As he said, "Any professional field can be made liberal" — in the broad, nonpolitical sense, I regret having to clarify — "by teaching it historically and theoretically."

For instance, law students should take a little history for perspective, and physics students could learn from

philosophy. This is an excellent idea that frees students' imaginations from the captivity of any particular field.

The School of Journalism and Communication, to its credit, already does this to some extent. The school requires 16 credits of literature, eight credits of history, eight credits of economics and eight credits in each of three other fields in the College of Arts and Sciences. Additionally, the school's Communication Theory and Criticism class examines media from a variety of philosophic perspectives, including those of Karl Marx and Michel Foucault.

These efforts recognize that journalists who know a lot about inverted pyramids and predicate nominatives but nothing about the world around them do a disservice to their readers.

As I was told at the lecture by Jack Powers, a University professor emeritus of romance languages, the primary duty of a university is to "teach people to think critically."

Unfortunately, part of the problem is that many people don't want students to think critically. This is why we have things such as Campus Watch, an organization that singles out academic departments and professors who disagree with its staunchly pro-Israel agenda, or the spectacle of the Kansas Board of Education deciding how to best inject creationism into public schools.

Lurking behind this — or, more accurately, standing in plain view — is a reactionary agenda. At the beginning of this 21st century, economic, political and in some cases religious forces have conspired in a thus far successful attempt to marginalize the humanities. We must fight this development.

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■ Out loud

"This is a pretty big thing for U of O Chess because we're trying to break into the bigger chess scene." — UO Chess President and tournament coordinator **Sara Hamilton** on Sunday. Eight players in the Oregon Class Championships were rated as master-expert.

"Chess is a sport." — **Hamilton** on how to classify chess tournaments.

"I absolutely place it as a top priority, and I am very concerned about the warnings that you give based on these numbers. But let's not get a message out that there's some simple solution if the administration would just get off its rear end." — Senior Vice President and Provost **John Moseley** at the University Senate meeting, responding to suggestions that a portion of the University's \$600 million fundraising campaign be dedicated to faculty compensation.

"For a sophomore math class, I shouldn't have to wait just because I'm white." — Senior **Stephanie Ramey** about a University policy that reserves spots in classes for minority students.

"I am a student of color in a class where my professors always validate white students' ideas, statements and opinions, but never mine." — A sign displayed during a Wednesday protest against alleged discrimination against minority students within the College of Education.

"If he had written a novel of his life, it would have been one of the most interesting books you'd have ever read." — **Bob Miller**, the younger brother of community activist Bruce Miller, who died April 26.

"All of us are in danger if we don't win the war on terrorism." — Middle East expert **Elan Carr**, speaking Monday to students and community members about his experience in Iraq.

"We're here, we're high. Get used to it!" — A chant heard during Saturday's marijuana legalization march in downtown Eugene.

"We feel like the ASUO, while their intentions may be good, we don't know that they're going to get the job done. It's gotten to the point where it's just outrageous." — Portland Student Action Council Interim President **Gary Blackwell** on the need to compensate students at the University's Portland satellite campus, who pay incidental fees but do not receive benefits such as free bus transportation.

"I'm not even particularly anxious about it really. I'm just kind of curious as to what life will be like when there's less structure." — **Dan Williams**, who will retire from his position as University vice president for administration this summer.

"To win a race here in an Oregon uniform, there's nothing like it." — Freshman distance runner **Galen Rupp**, after his record-breaking race during the Oregon Twilight at Hayward Field on Saturday.

"This was an important year for the Court in term of the decisions that it made and precedents that were set." — **Courtney Warner**, former associate justice of the ASUO Constitution Court, who resigned because of her upcoming University graduation.

— From Daily Emerald news reports

■ Guest commentary

## OMAS critics hinder progress in classroom

I was disgusted to read the article headlining Thursday's paper regarding the class enrollment restrictions of the Office of Multicultural Academic Support classes ("Officials defend class enrollment restrictions").

First off, the whole story was written in a way that makes Stephanie Ramey the victim of discrimination. What she needs to do, along with the writer of this story and whoever else believes the OMAS classes are discriminating, is open her eyes. If you want to know what discrimination is, everyone should read the article that was juxtaposed right along with this article on the front page regarding the discrimination that is instilled within the College of Education.

Students of color are being subjected to race discrimination every day in our classrooms. I hear from them the harassment they face from peers regarding their entire ethnic makeup — their names, their skin color, their cultures.

Students of color are picked on not only by teachers but also by fellow peers simply because they stand out from the majority. I experience this as well. The race discrimination we face extends well beyond the University campus; our world is instilled with race discrimination.

Stephanie Ramey, along with the writer of the article, doesn't have to ever experience what students of color go through because she is the majority; she doesn't ever have to think, feel or experience the things people of color experience.

Students of color need an environment where they feel they can be addressed and feel comfortable. Jared Paben, Stephanie Ramey and the rest of you who believe OMAS classes are discriminating are trying to cut down the foundation we are trying to build for students of color to progress in school and life.

Jeffrey Boyce lives in Eugene

## Diversity involves ideas, not skin color

What is Gregory J. Vincent, the vice provost for institutional equity and diversity, doing to the University? Does diversity really mean segregating students of color into classes where they can be with other students of color and share their "student of color" experiences with minimal non-color students present ("Officials defend class enrollment restrictions," ODE, May 12)?

Where does that leave white students on your list? This is segregation; it is just labeled something different.

Vincent is acting in a racist manner. He is judging people based on their skin color, not by the content of their character. Diversity is more than skin color; diversity is of the mind.

Try being white, conservative and heterosexual on this campus. I am devalued more and more every day when my feelings and experiences are ignored because of my skin color. Self-identified conservative students are still afraid to speak because of what may happen to their education, careers and physical safety.

I have a dream that one day, I can say something and not be taunted as a middle-class white girl. I have a dream that one day, I will be able to talk to people without being blamed for their problems. I have a dream that one day, my experiences will be recognized as equal to others and that classes at the University will be truly diverse in thought, not just in skin color.

I am white. I am a woman. I am conservative. There is no reason I should feel bad about that or face barriers because of my skin color. My rights to register for a class are equal. My rights to speak my mind are important. Stop segregating this campus into colored and white, Greg Vincent, and start being colorblind.

Melissa Hanks lives in Eugene

**CORRECTION**

In "Officials defend class enrollment restrictions" published Thursday, the Emerald reported that the American English Institute has a Writing 121E class for students whose first language is not English. That class is offered by the University's Composition Program, a division of the English Department. The Emerald regrets the error.