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Workshop explores teaching brain links

The UO-sponsored conference focuses on brain imaging and early-childhood education

BY EVA SYLWESTER
NEWS REPORTER

The University's Brain Biology and Machine Initiative is sponsoring a conference today and Saturday on what educators need to know about brain development in order to teach effectively. The Brain and Education Workshop is in 243 Lillis.

Psychology professor emeritus Michael Posner, who organized the conference, said the focus is on brain imaging and early-childhood education.

"People always knew the brain was involved in education but couldn't ask how," Posner said. "Now they have the tools to ask how."

Posner said that through modern brain research, researchers are beginning to understand the mechanisms involved in reading, the brain parts involved in synthesizing letters into words and how children and animals develop concepts of numbers. This knowledge can help teachers develop more effective methods of instruction.

Today at 7 p.m., University psychology professor Helen Neville will give a speech entitled "Experience Shapes Human Brain Development and Function." Neville, who is the Robert and Beverly Lewis Endowed Chair of Psychology and Neuroscience, was one of five scientists from around the world who spoke at a conference on brain plasticity hosted by the Dalai Lama in October.

Brain plasticity refers to the effects of the environment on brain development. Neville said 2-year-old children have twice as many brain connections as adults. The growth of the brain, which continues until 20 years after birth, proceeds in a way similar to a sculptor chiseling a piece of material.

"Experience acts the same way in deciding which of these connections will be maintained and which will be lost," Neville said. Neville said neuroscientists' work is especially important for educators, who provide children with experiences that influence brain development.

"Your teachers are playing a big part in shaping your brain," Neville said.

Neville recently conducted a study with preschool students, 3 to 5 years of age, in the Head Start program. The students were tested before and after eight weeks during which they received one of four interventions: 40 minutes a day of music, language or attention-skills training, or parenting-skills training for their parents. While students in all groups improved in some areas, the group that received attention-skills training showed improvement in all areas tested.

Neville said that while a person can function with only one brain hemisphere, people with poor attention capabilities are at an extreme disadvantage.

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Housing to receive \$34,746 repayment

Compensation for the land comes four decades after student housing money was used to buy it

BY MEGHANN M. CUNIFF
SENIOR NEWS REPORTER

Four decades ago, student housing money purchased three parcels of land now occupied by the Riverfront Research Park. When the research park took over the land two decades later, the planning office drafted a rededication plan that called for University Housing to be compensated

\$223,840 in 2003.

After years of inter-office memos, numerous recalculations to account for earned interest and a legal counsel ruling that changed the way University land rededication was looked at, University Housing will receive \$34,746. An April 19 memo from University Vice President for Administration Dan Williams to Director of University Housing Mike Eyster finalized the

decision, citing the ruling from Melinda Grier, legal counsel to the University.

"In short, the UO's financial obligation is limited to making bond payments on the property from the correct funding source if the use of the property changes while there is outstanding debt," Williams wrote. "While I know my decision does not fully meet your expectations, I believe it is fair."

The old plan of reimbursing housing more than \$200,000 for the land was not only financially

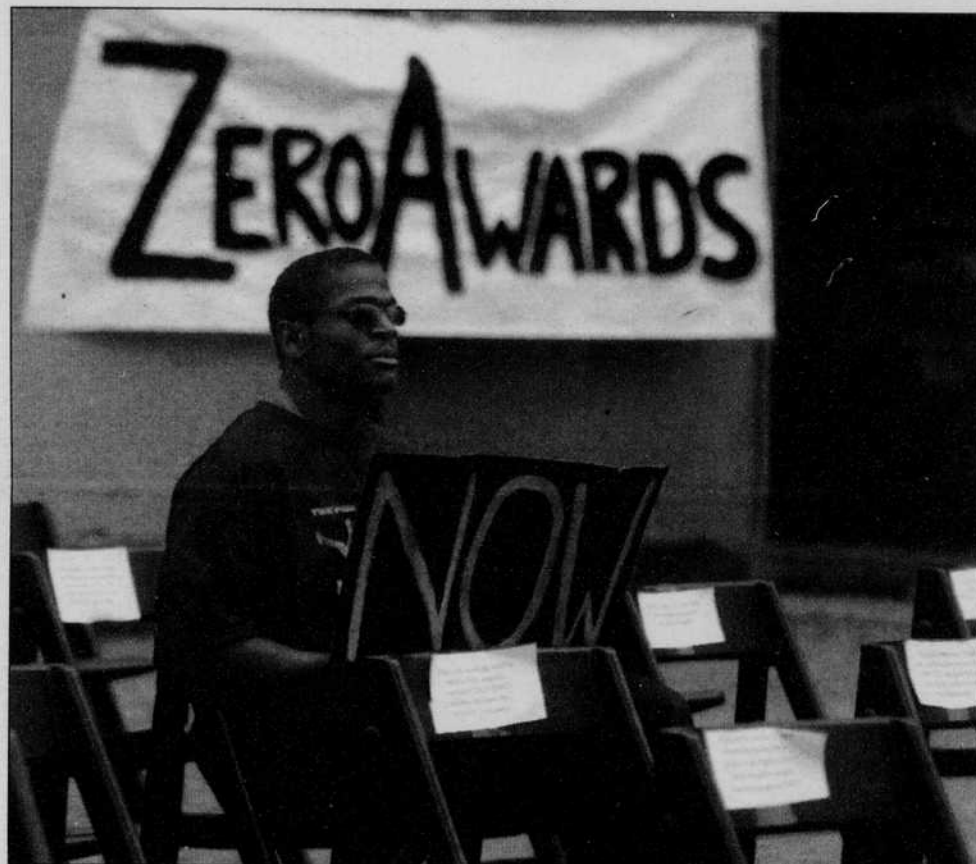
unfeasible, it wasn't required under state law regarding land rededication within the Oregon University System, Williams said.

"We had a certain understanding about what we would do, but it was based on a misunderstanding about the legal requirements for repayment," Williams said.

Though University Housing was scheduled to be paid more than \$200,000 for the research park land, when it came time to make the payment in 2003, Grier examined the legal requirements for

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ZANE RITT | PHOTOGRAPHER

Sophomore Andiel Brown sits among 35 empty chairs during Thursday's Zero Awards to represent the isolation students of color feel in classes in which the vast majority of students are white. Quotes that appeared in the Emerald from those supporting or opposing the Office of Multicultural Academic Support were taped to the chairs.

Awarding NOTHING

The Oregon Students of Color Coalition gave Zero Awards to five University departments for having no tenure-track faculty of color

BY MORIAH BALINGIT
NEWS REPORTER

As University President Dave Frohnmayer delivered distinguished teaching awards Wednesday afternoon, the Oregon Students of Color Coalition gave out its own honors: the Zero Awards.

Zero Awards are granted to departments that have no tenure-track faculty of color. The last Zero Award ceremony was held in 2001.

Sophomore Jael Anker-Lagos, co-chair of OSCC, said the recipients haven't changed much.

"The Zero Awards is to raise awareness ... that even after five years, there's still a lack of faculty of color on campus," she said.

Five departments were given the award: the geological sciences, geography, political science, theatre arts, and planning, public policy and management departments.

OSCC gave the awards based on data it collected and from nominations by faculty and students within the departments.

Roughly 70 people gathered at the EMU

Amphitheater to see the award presentations.

Erin O'Brien, interim director of the ASUO Women's Center, called the state of faculty diversity "embarrassing."

"This is a moment to really challenge the University to look at how many faculty of color we have," she said.

Anker-Lagos said she delivered invitations to all departments that received awards, but no department representatives were present to accept the awards.

Professor Dana Johnston, head of the Geography Department, said he had not heard of the award before the Emerald contacted him.

"Is it meant to be an honor, or is it shameful?" he said. "The award serves the purpose of bringing back to the front burner the distribution of faculty in our department among different ethnic groups."

Jeffrey Mason, head of the Theatre Arts Department, said he only recently heard that his department was an award recipient and could not

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Three UO students to Teach For America

The seniors will join the corps, which helps cater to children in 21 rural and urban communities

BY BRITTNI MCCLLENAN
NEWS REPORTER

While other graduating seniors may spend the upcoming summer vacation relaxing and traveling, three University students will embark on a two-year journey across the country with Teach For America, a national organization dedicated to eliminating educational inequity by enlisting college graduates from all academic majors to teach in rural and urban communities.

Graduating seniors Stephanie Day, Catherine Perez and Matthew Rowan leave for training at the end of June before beginning their teaching endeavors this fall.

Accepting about 2,500 applicants from a pool of about 17,000, Teach For America is a highly selective program that caters to children growing up in low-income communities in the United States who often face tremendous socio-economic challenges, such as minimal access to health care, lack of proper nutrition, limited pre-school opportunities, lack of quality housing, lack of economic opportunity for their families and insufficient social services. Their schools are not generally set up to compensate for these deficiencies, and the result is an enormous achievement gap between children growing up in low-income and high-income areas, according to the Teach For America Web site.

Teach For America, a public-private partnership, places corps members in 21 urban and rural communities across the country.

Day, a sociology major and English and business administration minor, was placed as a special education teacher in Washington, D.C.

"I was looking for a 'dare to be great situation' after finishing up my undergraduate degree," Day said in an e-mail interview. "I applied to graduate school and actually got offered a teaching fellowship at the University of Wisconsin that would cover my tuition and pay me to study there, but I just felt that I needed to be doing something different. Teach For America is an amazing program that allows you to make a direct impact on individuals. My emphasis is in politics and social

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