

# When the student is a mom: a humorous peep at a common challenge

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Have you ever sat up all night, perfecting the last few lines of a massive term paper, only to locate it the next morning under the sofa with smears of peanut butter over 14 of its 15 meticulously-typed pages? Have any of said peanut butter smears looked suspiciously like Morphin Power Rangers in varying degrees of "morph"?

Have you ever had to hide your textbook on human sexuality, because after the last time you left it out, a small voice screeched at you in line at Safeway that the produce you selected looks "...an awful lot like that naked man who was in that book on the dinner table last night"?

Have you ever had to turn in a class assignment in crayon because every last pen or pencil in your house mysteriously disappeared? Have you ever found yourself on the telephone with an instructor, discussing the most urgent matters of the universe -- ot at least your upcoming final -- and had to excuse yourself to wipe something off of someone?

If you answered 'yes' to any of the above questions, the chances are great that you are both: A) a parent and B) a student.

For those of us in this secret and quite popular club, we know

how hard it is to find a place to study. (For me, McDonalds was the study hall of choice, because even though it was noisy there, the noise was seldom directed at me.)

We know the anguish of trying to read the same line in our textbook over and over only to be continually interrupted by a small voice asking us what would happen if our heads were all made of cement. We know how hard it is to keep any midnight studying treats around the house for long. We have experienced the difference of keeping plain white paper plain and white for any length of time.

My children and my studies actually blended together rather nicely when I was in the middle of studying Early Childhood Education. My home became an instant laboratory. I was able to study basic development and growth patterns of a four and seven-year-old without renting them from neighbors or harassing my friends into borrowing their kids.

It was wonderful. I was pleased to note on my final that I had discovered that my boys are the most brilliant, most charming, most well-behaved youngsters in this state, if not the world. As I handed in my report, the instructor nodded and said, "Great, another mom reporting on her own kids."

But most of the time, it's pretty difficult to combine the role of student with the role as mother. Fortunately, in order to keep my sanity intact, I made a decision long ago that my family wouldn't suffer as a result of my studies.

I remember a sunny spring day last year, when I was earlobes-deep in studying for a final in statistics (yech-h-h). Now, some people can submerge themselves in stats and come out grinning. I come out wheezing and grunting. Some brilliant statisticians take great pleasure in the little graphs and numbers that, to me, look like some sort of disease reproducing

itself on the page. I am not a brilliant statistician, and, quite frankly, am a little unnerved by those who are. How do these brains DO that?

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At any rate, I was determined to do well in that class if it killed me, but at this point, the killing part was looking quite possible as my studies were not going so well. I sat, crunching numbers and hallucinating about formulae and yapping instructors as my three-year-old crawled up on my lap and said... "Hey Mom. Can we go get some Gummi Worms and make some dirt cake?"

My first response was nothing less than a gag reflex. Then I

looked in his eyes. About this time his brother came in. "Yeah, Mom... if you buy a box of Jell-O, they give you a bucket and a shovel, and you can make the cake right in it... but you gotta have the worms." Who can resist an invitation like that? After all, I'd have to be out of my mind to reject the notion of throwing my homework out the door for a date with two handsome young men offering a bucket of cake with worms in it.

The stats book hit the floor as we loaded up our Super-Soaker squirt guns and went on our hunt for the elusive Gummi Worm. We had a great time, shooting each other and laughing at the sourpuss drivers whizzing past. Springtime was all around us as we made our trek to the store.

We sang the theme from "Mission Impossible" and cap-

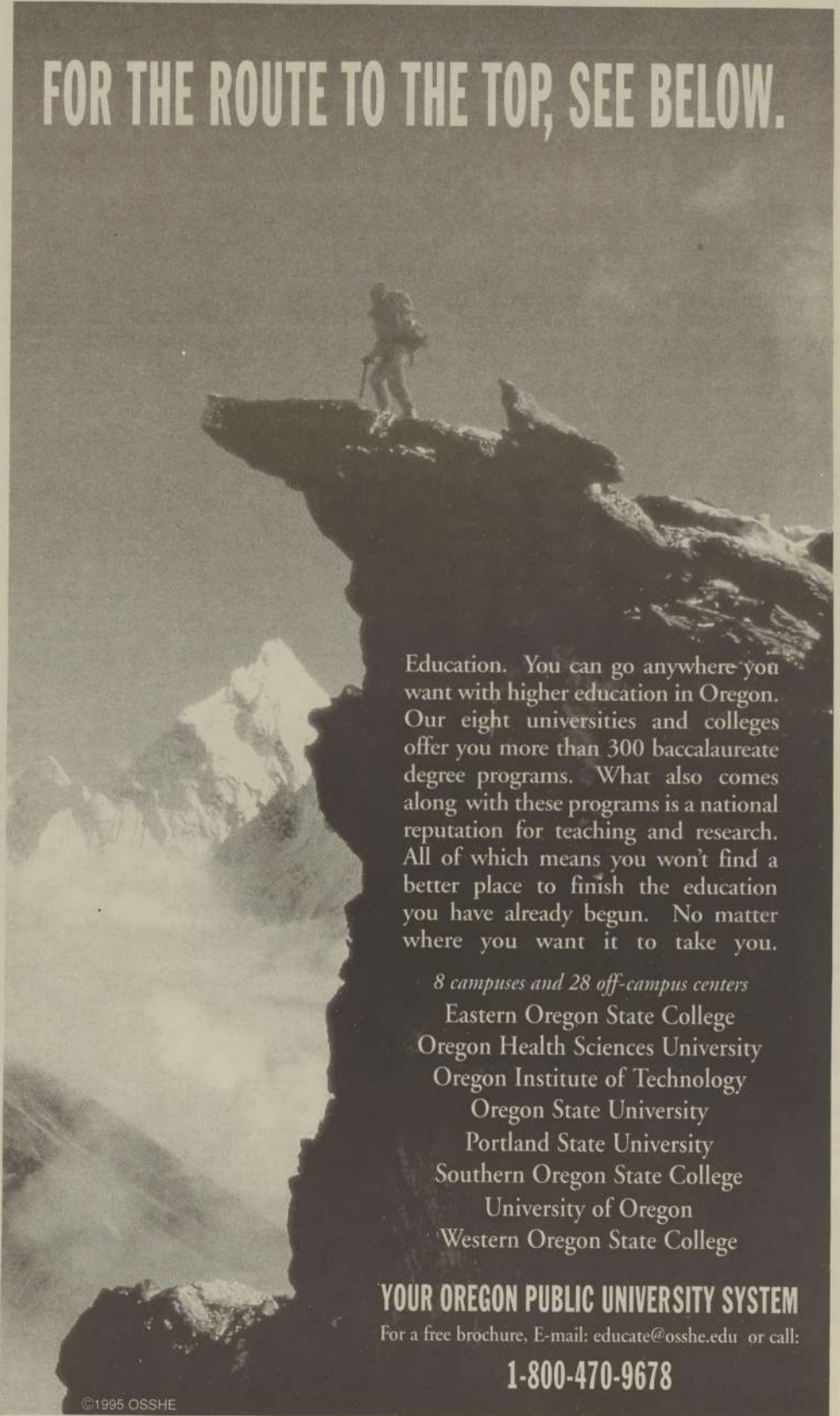
tured our Gummi Worm suspects, buckets and all, and made our way back to our home where we mixed up the chocolate pudding, tossed in the crunched-up Oreos, tossed in the Gummi Worms and whipped cream and ate it with the little plastic shovels. I didn't learn a great deal about statistics that day, and if you could forget how much it looked like fresh chicken manure, the cake was a culinary delight.

But even though I made little progress on the statistics final, I learned a thing or two on that springtime afternoon.

Thing number 1 is that an occasional adventure in the midst of studying something that is about as enjoyable as battery acid in the eyes is a good thing. After all, even after all of the numeric misery, I somehow managed to get an 'A' in the class.

Thing number 2 is that Gummi Worm dirt cake goes down great with Fava beans and a nice Chianti.

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