



UO students and faculty members gather in the EMU amphitheater for an anti-war rally.



While community activists remain rooted in Eugene, students come and go. Even during the height of the Vietnam War years, when close to one-fourth of the UO student body was involved in protest activities, the activity levels of campus groups waxed and waned. Student leaders rose, energized the student body, and then left.

"A lot of students see themselves as activists for about four years, or whatever time they are students," Howard says.

Other factors play a part in suppressing student activism. For one, Howard says, young people are discouraged by the enormity of the social problems — such as racism, two-party politics and globalized corporate rule — that create war. "Everything is so interconnected," she says. "You tug one end and you're just going to pull so many other strings. We can't push for one thing without the others being attached."

All of these hurdles leave Howard feeling exhausted. "I hope to be hopeful, if that makes any sense," she says. "I don't think that it's going to get better anytime soon, but I have to imagine that things will improve in some capacity. Otherwise there's no reason for me to be doing what I'm doing."

UO student Scott Gibbs, 23, is personally opposed to the Iraq War but chooses not to act against it. He feels that individual consumption choices — what to buy, how to commute — are more effective than organized movements in creating social change. "You can lose your own values in the group mentality," he says. "I think it's more of an individual struggle that people need to take on."

Gibbs acknowledges that he grew up with more material comforts than his parents, and that affluence might have affected his hands-off approach to politics. "The Vietnam War activists probably say that we're a more spoiled generation, and it's easier for us to just sit back and not take an active voice," he says. "But then again, I don't know if that's because we are spoiled or maybe because it's too hard to decide what the right thing is anymore."

For Gibbs, the Vietnam War protests were less of an inspiration than a lesson in futility. "I don't know if the people protesting the Vietnam War had that much of an influence," he says. "It's easy to feel hopeless in the world today, because what can a single person do against so many other people? There's so much damage that's been done. I'm not really angry as much as I am confused and

questioning my own ability to fit into this greater picture of 'What can I do?'"

That's an attitude that Malcolm is working to change. "How do you measure how much worse it would have been without protest?" she asks. "You can have a victory, and the victory can turn very sour. But you have to believe in your heart that it still matters. You have to believe that there's something in the human spirit that cannot be negated by what happened next."

Regardless of their age or political views, every source interviewed for this story agreed on one thing: the draft agitated the youth in the '60s against the Vietnam War, and a renewed draft today would probably galvanize young people against the Iraq War.

"I've basically spent my adult life opposing the draft and draft registration, but I have to wonder, if there were an equitable draft, if there wouldn't be more opposition to the war than we have now," Malcolm says.

The draft is a powerful catalyst for activism because it makes a distant war personal. "People will be pretty comfortable with things as they are until they see a direct connection between the war and themselves," Duff says.

"We're very capable of being active and trying to change the system, but it's going to take personal involvement in the consequences of war in the way that it did in the '60s. We don't live in a bubble, and if we don't act early, we're always going to be too late."

Asked if he would be more active against the war if there were a draft, Duff looks sheepish. "I'm opposed to the war now, but I would be more involved in the antiwar movement" if there were a draft, he admits. "Which is kind of sad."

Local activist Carol Van Houten, 67, views today's college students as more conservative and career-oriented than students in the '60s. The result, she says, is an aging activist population in sore need of youth leadership. "We need young people more committed to learning the skills of organizing," she says. "Us old farts need to get out of the way and let younger people take some roles, because we need that energy and creativity. Otherwise we're stuck with the same-old same-old."

Van Houten is sympathetic to the economic burdens that modern young people carry. She says that today's students are leaving college saddled with more debt, women are

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