

UNDOING NICENESS

The Oregon chapter of The National Association for Multicultural Education is holding its Undoing “Niceness” Conference at the UO School of Law on Saturday, April 30.

“As Oregon becomes more diverse and less white, we have to be more aware of our racisms,” says conference planning committee member Sonja Ljungdahl.

Subjects focused on throughout the conference will include the impacts of “niceness” on people of color, moving past politeness to break down barriers, community activism and issues of local equity. Keynote speaker Gary R. Howard, author of *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools* and founder of the REACH Center for Multicultural Education, will be speaking on the topic of “Growing Good White Folks,” an idea based upon the critical assessment of white privilege in our culture. Mark Harris, a Eugene-based maroon griot, will also be speaking, addressing the history of multicultural activism.

Chinese American filmmaker, author, and executive director of diversity training company Stirfry Seminars & Consulting, Lee Mun Wah, will be the conference closing session speaker; his lecture is entitled “Getting Real About Racism.”

— Dante Zuñiga-West



PHOTO BY SARAH DECKER

CHOMSKY: COLLAPSE IS COMING

“The first thing we should do is recognize reality,” Noam Chomsky told the packed house during his April 20 appearance at UO’s Columbia Hall. “We do not live under capitalism. We do not have free markets.” His message echoed outside as well, as a crowd huddled in the cold evening air listening to Chomsky’s proclamations simulcast through a giant speaker.

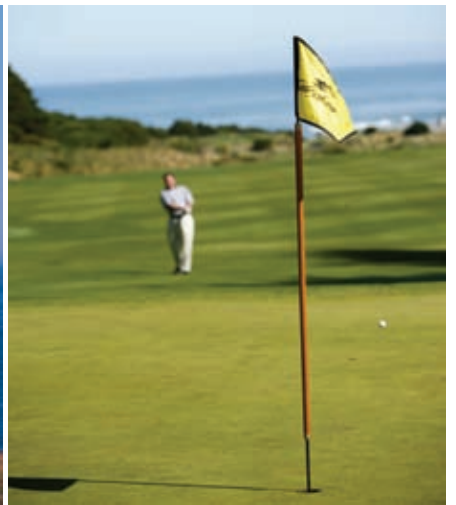
At 82, Chomsky, a linguist by training, has become the patron saint of American political discontent, and his resume is daunting: Professor emeritus at MIT, he changed the landscape of linguistics with his theory of generative grammar, and since the Vietnam War he has been an outspoken critic of U.S. foreign and domestic policy. The man has more than 150 books to his name, and he’s even had a study primate, Nim Chimpsky, named in his honor.

Though he carries the confident, patient attitude of an elder statesman, Chomsky’s engaged political action

— judging from his UO appearance — shows no signs of letting up. The scope of his political interests are as broad as his knowledge is deep, and he covered a series of current topics without missing a beat, touching on such things the responsibility of journalism, recent developments in the Middle East and past and future financial crises.

Chomsky compared the recent civic protests in Egypt to the labor union crisis in Wisconsin, setting both situations in historical and social context. He pointed out that, compared to Egypt with its “major popular struggle going on to gain rights,” the Wisconsin workers were fighting to retain rights and watching them be taken away. Chomsky called this “a microcosm of what’s happened since the 18th century,” adding that it is only when nations such as the U.S. gain independence that they are “able to totally disregard laws of economics.”

Chomsky argued that of course there is going to be another financial crisis in the U.S., but added that “it’s just pointless to sit around and speculate when the next collapse is going to be.” He said the important thing is to prevent a crisis through action. “Carry out activities from civil disobedience to electoral politics,” Chomsky told the crowd. “There aren’t any magic keys. It’s a matter of getting down to work and doing it. It’s just hard work.” — Rick Levin



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