

NEWS

UO DIVERSITY OFFICE DEBACLE

A recent *Register-Guard* article about restructuring the University of Oregon's Office of Equity and Inclusion set off a firestorm among students, many of whom were gone for break when they heard the restructuring involved ending the contracts of three popular administrators.

The blog *UO Matters*, which often takes the school to task for its administrative issues, said that while the *R-G*'s story focused on "complaints from local minority leaders about lack of consultation. My view is very different. This office has been horribly mismanaged for years."

There was a rally on campus in support of the administrators on the first day of winter classes led by UO Native American student body representative Ada Ball. Ball writes

in a statement that "Native American students were dismayed to learn that Vice President Dr. Tom Ball at the UO was told his contract would not be continued on account of restructuring of the Office of Equity and Inclusion." She wrote that the Native American students "had to learn about this through their community without any announcement from the UO."

The contracts of Emilio Hernandez and Carla Gary will also be discontinued. Black Student Union Co-director Olivia Manwarren said of Gary, "She has been a strong and tireless advocate for African-American students in and outside of the Black Student Union. Dr. Gary makes the UO feel safer for us as students, and makes us feel welcome here on campus."

UO Matters has taken the UO to task for what it calls "administrative bloat" and cites a recent *Wall Street Journal* article that put the school as the "fourth highest of 72 public 'high research category' universities in the percentage of total spending that goes to administration."

Yvette Alex-Assensoh, vice president of the Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI), responded to questions from *EW* via email. She writes that "since I arrived on campus in August 2012, I have been carrying out my work that has been cut out for me, yet I have also been on a virtual listening tour, whereby I have actively engaged in active discussions with all of my staff at OEI, numerous people on campus, in the com-

munity and around the state (or out of town)." She continues, "Fortunately or unfortunately, the current misunderstandings have created a heightened focus on the office and issues of equity and inclusion."

When asked if Gary, Ball or Hernandez might be retained under the new structure, Alex-Assensoh writes that "I cannot discuss the status of the administrators because it involves personnel issues. Employment law and decency toward my colleagues prevent me from offering any comment at this time."

Alex-Assensoh scheduled a student town hall meeting for 3 pm Jan. 11 in the Ben Linder Room of the EMU and she writes, "We are also looking forwarding to hosting a series of community-related forums to invite input on the next phase of the strategic planning for inclusion and equity. Any updates

to the meeting places will be noted on 'Around the O.'" "Around the O" is the UO's newly launched internal news service, operated by the Strategic Communications Office.

Earlier this month Provost Jim Bean posted on the "Around the O" blog that the *R-G* story "claims

that the UO has decided to 'gut' the former Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity. Nothing could be further from the truth."

About 50 students attended the rally and march organized by Ball on Jan. 7 and delivered letters for UO President Michael Gottfredson. They are recommending that the UO "create an Office of Native American Affairs with a director position at the assistant vice president level that reports directly to the president, with the responsibility of budgetary authority of the Many Nations Longhouse and the position of leadership for the UO Native Strategies initiative." — *Camilla Mortensen*

'Fortunately or unfortunately, the current misunderstandings have created a heightened focus on issues of equity and inclusion.'

— YVETTE ALEX-ASSENSOH, OEI

CAPSTONE AND CONTE SETTLE FOR \$260,000

That's not rain outside; it's the 1,200-resident Capstone student housing development moving full steam ahead now that the company has settled with neighborhood advocate Paul Conte for \$260,000 in exchange for Conte dropping land-use and planning-related legal appeals. Conte and two other fund managers will use much of the money

for improvements to the areas around the student housing project.

Conte says that he'll keep \$50,000 to reimburse himself for legal fees, a professional transportation analysis and filing fees, but \$210,000 will be deposited into an escrow account for community benefits managed by Conte, City Councilor George Brown and Carolyn Jacobs of the South University Neighborhood Association. Conte says that he turned down an offer to take money directly and never intended to benefit financially from his appeals. "I spent somewhere at about \$55,000 on this thing plus or minus a thousand or two," Conte says. "At the end of all this, I will be out a few thousand bucks."

With the money, Conte says that the escrow managers will try to accomplish the recommendations that Eugene Community Advisory Team wanted written into Capstone's Multiple-Unit Property Tax Exemption (MUPT) when the Eugene City Council passed it in May 2012. He says that helping Olive Plaza residents who will need air filtration during the summer construction is at the top of his list. "One of my first priorities is to work with residents there to do what we can to mitigate the kinds of impacts that may arise from dust and noise during construction," he says.

Conte also wants to help make nearby Charnel Muligan City Park (at 16th and Charnelton) better. "There's been a lot of abuse of the park through people spending time there and urinating, defecating, breaking things, exchanging drugs, using drugs and leaving drug paraphernalia — serious stuff." He says that the city is working on getting grants to improve the design and layout of the park, and the escrow account might be used to get the community, including the nearby students, engaged in activities at the park, deterring drug-related usage.

The third purpose of the funding is to look at bicycle and pedestrian safety and any changes the Capstone project might necessitate, he says.

Conte says that the city manager, mayor and city staff rushed the MUPT process, which unfairly tilted it in favor of developers at the expense of the community. He says that other communities dealing with Capstone got more community benefits than Eugene did, and the city should have slowed down and negotiated. "I can't say this for certain, but from early discussions I had with Capstone's principal and learning what they've done for other communities, I think they would have gladly done that as part of doing business," Conte says.

The city manager did not reply to a request for comment by press time.

lighten up
BY RAFAEL ALDAVE

Good news for a change. Scorecard on Duck football post season:
Oregon 35 — Kansas State 17, Oregon 1 — NFL 0.

IT'S ABOUT TIME BY DAVID WAGNER

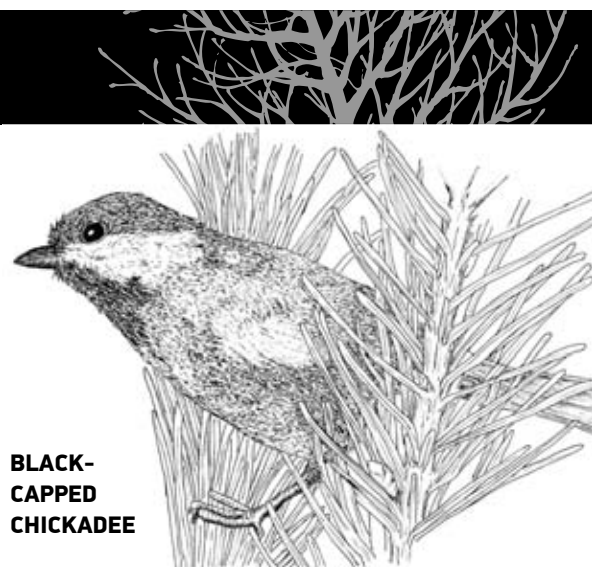
Migration is the word for this month. The ponds and reservoirs in the valley are teeming with winter residents. Nothing makes having nice binoculars pay off more than feasting the eyes on the intricate patterns of a male green winged teal, shovelhead or bufflehead. I never get over the flash of amazement at how quickly a bufflehead can spin over and disappear under the water on a dive. Similarly startling is a cormorant suddenly coming up like a submarine periscope breaking a glassy surface.

Out at the coast another migration is under way. Gray whales are passing southbound at rates reaching 30 per hour in early January. Promontories like Yaquina Head are excellent viewing spots. Many coastal overlooks will have volunteer naturalists providing information about the whales. The next big wave of migration will be in May when the cows and calves pass northward.

Keeping the suet cages and seed feeders well stocked invites regular visitation of little birds. The bushtits tend to stick together in large, coherent groups. It is hilarious to watch a dozen or so trying to crowd onto one suet feeder. The backyard feeders are tended by mixed feeding flocks that also may include juncos, nuthatches, pine siskins and, my favorite, the chickadees. I think I like the chickadees best of all because they keep up with cheery calls even in gloomy weather.

People who miss my *Willamette Valley Nature Calendar* can download calendar pages for 2013 from the link provided on my website, listed below.

David Wagner is a botanist who has worked in Eugene for more than 30 years. He teaches nature drawing and moss identification classes. Visit his website: fernenmosses.com



BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE