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VOTER TURNOUT

Why don’t we vote? And how did that change in 2012?

PG. 16
“The petroleum industry conducts itself in an immoral manner and is willing to permanently displace First Nations peoples, permanently pollute ground waters used for drinking and food production, and permanently pollute natural wonders all for the sake of higher profits for their quarterly reports. They already make record profits and seem to know no boundaries.”

— Kevin Thomas, Student Sustainability Leadership Council representative for United Indian Students in Higher Education and the Coalition for Asian Pacific American Studies
It’s been an intense, eventful year.

A tuition freeze. A tense period of collective bargaining, which almost resulted in a faculty strike. The shutdown of Food For Thought Cafe. And, of course, PSU’s brand new Board of Trustees.

It’s been challenging to cover such craziness. It’s also been fun, really fun, and an incredible learning experience. I’ve got to hand it to all my colleagues—Colin Staub, Lulu Martinez, Yumi Takeda, Kate Jensen, Forrest Grenfell, and everyone else who has helped Portland Spectrum become this beautiful and polished platform, boasting all manner of voices and opinions, which you’ve read each month.

(Because I know you’ve dutifully read us each and every month, right?)

We can sincerely be proud of what we’ve done at this magazine, at this school. And that extends to all students who’ve invested their time in decisive, important issues—all of us who have gathered together, rallied, made a difference. For all those who put their views on the table, who strived for change, who gave the community their two cents, you should be proud, and we thank you. To all those who have done so in the pages of this publication, those who have mustered the courage to investigate this school and city, we thank you big time. And I hope you’ve challenged yourself and grown as much as I have in the process.

Unfortunately—or fortunately, depending on how you look at it—I’m graduating this month, as is most of my staff. As a matter of fact, most of the actively involved students I’ve come to know and admire are just about out of here. It’s funny how that happens. You start college wallowing in freshmanism (read: stupid romances and the onset of alcoholism), you take a year or two to figure out the mechanisms of a university—how to establish good relationships, healthy life choices, and success in the classroom—and by the time you’re a senior and actually have the motivation/working knowledge of your school to try and make a difference, graduation is right around the corner.

Time to get going with your life, right?

Actually, it’s not funny. It’s pretty depressing. This is how I see it: the university benefits tremendously from active and motivated student leaders moving on with their lives, because we are the students that try to hold the university accountable. Think about it. These days, thanks to less and less state funding, universities must be run like businesses. But healthy capitalism relies on the ability of the customer to hold the corporation accountable, right? If your MacBook sucks, you go buy a Toshiba. If enough people do that, Apple makes a big change, or goes out of business. Most corporations want you to be a life-long customer and will do what is necessary, to an extent, to keep you as a customer.

But in the world of higher education, we’re only customers (students) for as long as it takes to get a degree, usually about four years. By the time we realize how to hold our university accountable, by the time we even realize we should, it’s our duty as customers in this $@%#cked-up system, we’re already moving on, thinking about the future, getting the hell out of Dodge. Our administration doesn’t have to worry about keeping us as customers for life. In fact, for some of us annoyingly inquisitive students, I bet they’ll be more than happy to see us off. I’m sure this is the case with myself and some of my staff. (Love you too!)

So here’s some parting advice. The sooner you express your thoughts to this community, the sooner you join others in action, the better. No matter what your class status is, but especially if you’re a Freshman or a Sophomore, I highly encourage you to get involved. Affect the craziness, because if this year has taught me anything, it’s that the craziness will almost certainly affect you.

What are you waiting for? Trust me, you’ll learn a thing or two—you might even figure out what you want to do with your life.

At the February 27th walkout to support faculty, there were less than 1,000 students in attendance. Similarly, aside from the 2012 ASPSU election (read it on pg. 16), we’ve had a history of abysmally low voter turnout for our student government. If we’re saying anything with this low involvement, it’s that we could care less. Trample all over us. Make our decisions for us.

Quit the apathy, people. PSU can do better.
#DIVEST PORTLAND STATE

A nationwide movement to divest from fossil fuels now counts a number of Oregon campuses among its participants. On Earth Day Portland State students officially launched their own campaign. Will PSU be the next to divest?

Sequestered in the leafy, affluent Eastmoreland neighborhood of southeast Portland, Reed College feels like a world away from Portland State University. Yet a recent prank at the private school’s commencement ceremonies underlined something significant that Reed and PSU students now share: the mutual desire to see their institutions’ endowment funds removed from petrochemical industries.

With Reed trustees in the midst of deliberating a proposed divestment measure, Reed alumnus Igor Vamos of “The Yes Men” comedy duo decided to give the student-led campaign a little extra publicity. On stage to deliver the commencement address, Vamos pulled off one of his characteristically flawless performances of political satire.

“I was very pleased to learn that the board of trustees of Reed College has just now decided to divest the school’s $500 million endowment from fossil fuels!” announced Vamos. He continued amidst a standing ovation, “But what they’re doing with the money is what’s most interesting: They’re pulling the money from those industries, and they’re re-investing it in community-owned, renewable energy projects.”

The prank’s claims were denied shortly thereafter by Reed’s president. Nevertheless the video went viral on social media, and was featured in the daily headlines of the national news program Democracy Now. Reed’s trustees may not have released their final decision yet, but one thing is crystal clear: when it comes to fossil fuels divestment, Portland is now officially on the map.

National movement

The national fossil fuels divestment movement has taken campuses by storm over the past two years, thanks to climate justice activist Bill McKibben. Dubbed “one of the 100 most important global thinkers” by Foreign Policy; and “the world’s best green journalist” by Time reviewer Bryan Walsh, McKibben quickly rose to notoriety following his 2008 founding of the international anti-carbon organization “350.” According to the 350.org website, “To preserve a livable planet, scientists tell us we must reduce the amount of CO2 in the atmosphere from its current level of 400 parts per million to below 350 ppm.”

Campuses across the South and the Midwest started campaigning to remove coal-fired power plants from their grounds nearly fifteen years ago, and more recently McKibben’s 2012 “Do the Math” lecture tour has really got students fired up. The tour came hot on the heels of his top-trending July 2012 article in Rolling Stone, “Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math,” speculated to be the magazine’s most-read article in the history of its publication.

“Do The Math’ refers to the simple and terrifying new reality of the climate crisis,” explained McKibben. “The fossil fuel industry currently has 2,795 gigatons of carbon in their reserves, five times more than the maximum 565 gigatons the world can emit and keep warming below 2 degrees Celsius, a goal agreed to by nearly every nation on earth, including the United States.”

McKibben’s tour was in such high demand that PSU hosted a live-broadcast for those who couldn’t get tickets in Portland. The university’s Institute for Sustainable Solutions’ blog features a student piece lauding the importance of the event.

Becca Rast, 350’s campus divestment organizer for the West Coast, summarized the effect of McKibben’s words: “After 550 did its ‘Do the Math’ tour, hundreds of campus campaigns started up within months. Now we have 400 campaigns nationwide. It just took off like wildfire.”

The most recent divestment successes have been on the West Coast. Rast pointed out that ongoing community resistance to an oil refinery in the Bay Area set the stage for determined campaigns in California. Both Pitzer College and Stanford University announced their decisions to divest this past
month, with Pitzer planning to sell $4.4 million in fossil fuels investments by the end of this year and Stanford pledging to purge all holdings in companies conducting coal extraction.

Rast thinks the Northwest could be the next divestment hot spot. “While the [Pacific Northwest] is not nearly as dominated by the fossil fuels industry [as some other parts of the country], there is a lot of oil coal coming through on trains, and there are proposed terminals that could be built in the next couple of years,” she warned, echoing a common sentiment that our region is at a critical juncture. With China clamoring for American coal and Canadian oil sands, the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia will be increasingly covered with fossil fuels transport infrastructure designed to carry the goods westwards to the coast.

PSU divestment
Like many others, Danielle Forest, a general science major in the interdisciplinary degree program who will graduate this spring, got her first introduction to the divestment conversation through 350.org.

“Lenny [Dec] from 350 PDX visited one of my classes and gave a rundown of the history of divestment, and talked about some other campuses that have been using that strategy,” Forest recalled. “I thought it was a really smart idea, and one that was worth volunteering what little free time I have.”

Mother to a three-year-old, Forest’s free time is a particularly valuable commodity. Still, she emphasized that climate change is “the one issue that I would give whatever time and resources I have.

“At the Portland climate change conference last week, one of the speakers said that temperatures could increase by up to 15 degrees Fahrenheit in the Northwest by the end of this century,” said Forest. “Whenever I am listening to NPR and I hear reports about rising levels of water and predicted temperatures for 2050, for 2050, I calculate how old my son will be, and I wonder what kind of situation he’ll face, and if he will physically survive…

“I switched to Blue Sky [Renewable Energy program with Pacific Power]…I write letters to our senators—other than that, I don’t feel like I have much power standing up to corporations,” Forest lamented. “Divestment feels like something we can do that gives more power back to the people. We have to reduce the power of fossil fuel corporations if we are actually going to make progress with renewables.”

Forest is not alone in this logic. Cindi Joy Staller, the Environmental Club representative with the Student Sustainability Leadership Council (SSLC)—the campus organization that recently initiated the campaign—suggested that the divestment mentality naturally grew out of a much bigger shift in framing. “After Occupy, we talk about money a lot more—and who controls money,” she said.

Staller links the fossil fuels industry to broader dynamics of structural inequality. “The more I’ve learned about climate change, the more I am seeing just how disproportionately it is affecting poor communities, communities of color, the global south… I stick with it because it intersects with all the issues that I care about.”

Alfredo Gonzalez, a junior majoring in Environmental Science, is another student with the SSLC and arguably the main engine behind the campaign. Born in Peru, he says that his ongoing ties to his motherland played an important role in driving his commitment to climate justice. In the last decade Peru has become known as one of the places most affected by the “climate refugee” phenomenon: villagers from the mountains have had to leave their ancestral lands as glacial melt floods the water systems and erodes their land.

Gonzalez also pointed out the resulting endangerment of the 15th century mountaintop Inca city Machu Picchu. “Machu Picchu is one of the Seven Wonders of the World and it is on the verge of collapse if erosion levels continue to increase,” he explained. “The destruction of Machu Picchu would have a huge impact—social, environmental, and economic—on the country.”

It was Gonzalez’s commitment to global sustainability that drove him to apply to PSU, transferring from a community college in Rocklin, California.

“Everybody was saying that PSU is a sustainable campus—a friend of mine even said that Portland was one of the cities that most resembled his impressions of German sustainability,” says Gonzalez. “I was impressed by what I heard about PSU, by its reputation.”

One thing led to the next, and eventually Gonzalez ended up on the SSLC, a program for student group leaders hosted by the Sustainability Leadership Center of the Institute for Sustainable Solutions. The SSLC solicits representatives from all the clubs doing sustainability-related work on campus, and then funds them to take up a collective project.
On Feb. 14, the SSLC unanimously voted to take up fossil fuels divestment as their project. Gonzalez explained that it was an easy decision because so many campaign resources are already in place.

Yet despite Gonzalez’s unmatched enthusiasm for the campaign, he was not actually the one to initially pitch it to the group. Another group member from the Women’s Resource Center suggested the idea. Staller says that this is indicative of the campaign’s broad appeal. According to her account, a number of separate campus conversations about fossil fuels divestment have been happening simultaneously for over a year now. It was just a matter of time before they inevitably coalesced into a concrete campaign.

**Regional campaigns**

Despite its emphasis on sustainability, PSU is a relative latecomer to the campus fossil fuels divestment movement in Oregon. Southern Oregon University, the University of Oregon, and Oregon State University all have longstanding divestment campaigns that have garnered significant attention from local media, while Reed College is in the final stages of securing a trustee verdict.

Reed recently welcomed the students of Fossil Free Reed to make a presentation to its foundation trustees. Maya Jarrad, one of the five campaigners who presented with the support of 50 other attending students, reported that instead of limiting their audit to the top 200 offending companies on the Go Fossil Free list, the trustees decided to identify every company with any amount of CO2 reserves for potential elimination from the investment portfolio.

The results were eye-opening. Going off just the top 200 list, most universities claim that they have only one to two percent of their investments in fossil fuels. By choosing to dig deeper, Reed’s results unearthed the entrenched ubiquity of carbon reserve holdings.

“They estimated that 40 percent of our 70 money managers have holdings in these companies, and that these managers hold two-thirds of our entire endowment,” Jarrad reported over email. The term “money manager” refers to the operator of a mutual fund—an investment vehicle made up of a pool of funds collected from many different investors and then invested in a range of financial instruments including stocks, bonds, and other types of assets.

Despite the tall order that divestment would entail, Jarrad was optimistic that the conversation is moving in the right direction. “There were some really provocative questions and responses both from the trustees and from the group of students that showed up. Big concerns were raised about whether the structure of our investments is appropriate.”

The Reed Board is now in a period of referral. Jarrad voiced her impression that the Board has possibly voted down the resolution but dissent within the group of trustees is delaying the formulation of their response. The Board has committed to report their decision to the student body before the end of the school year.

**So what about PSU’s endowment?**

When asked about our endowment, the relevance of fossil fuels divestment, and socially responsible investment in general, Portland State’s Office of Communications directed me to speak with the PSU Foundation (the separate nonprofit which manages the university’s endowment) and to the university’s Institute of Sustainable Solutions (ISS). At the time of writing, the President’s office had not responded to a request for comment.

ISS Director Jennifer Allen demonstrated her awareness and support of the campaign over email: “My understanding is that the students are gathering information about how divestment works in general as well as what that might look like for PSU. This is a national conversation across many campuses, and I’m glad our students are paying attention to this issue and seeking to understand the various ways that universities can play a role in addressing climate change.”

The Foundation’s Chief Financial Officer Becky Hein confirmed that PSU’s $67 million endowment does indeed include fossil fuels holdings. Hein explained over email that the endowment’s investments frequently turn over as manager JP Morgan is constantly buying and selling positions. She wrote, “A significant majority of investments are in broadly diversified mutual funds as opposed to concentrated positions in individual stock holdings.” In layman’s speak: it’s hard to say exactly what we are invested in because it’s all mixed together, managed by someone else, and constantly changing without our consent.

Next, in a pleasantly unexpected plot twist, Hein indicated that the Foundation has already audited its own fossil fuels holdings voluntarily:

“In May of 2013 the Foundation asked JP Morgan to review the account for investment in the 200 companies on the gofossilfree.org list. They reviewed the top 10 holdings of each of the mutual funds and exchange traded funds in the portfolio (about 80 percent of the total) and identified four positions that are on the fossil fuels list. In aggregate, there was only 0.25 percent exposure to these companies among the mutual funds and exchange traded funds held.”

A quarter of a percent out of eighty percent sounds good in theory, but these numbers most certainly do not tell the whole story of PSU’s endowment. First of all, it is not clear whether “eighty percent of the total” refers to just the mutual funds and exchange traded funds or the entirety of the endowment’s investments, including corporate bonds. In addition, if we are to derive any lessons from Reed College’s approach to divestment, we may wish to identify all companies with any amount of carbon reserves and see what that yields.

Finally, Hein reported that although the university takes part in the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (STARS), the Foundation does not currently have a Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) policy. In fact, Hein’s statement that the Foundation “participates” in STARS is somewhat misleading, considering that PSU declined to fill out all five info fields relating to the university’s investments.
“It’s like moving chairs on the Titanic. The economic system is what led us to be so dependent on oil and gas, and it makes us dependent on those that sell it to us... to think that we can use an economic trick to win at their own game is dangerous.

Apparently the Investment Committee “reviewed the SRI environment” as recently as January of this year, and “will continue to collect information and insights and study the alternatives”

What does divestment actually do?
Randal Bluffstone, professor of economics at PSU, offered some thoughts on the causal links between divestment and political change. According to Bluffstone’s research, in order to stop global warming, we need a policy that imposes a more direct monetary cost than divestment. “Send them that signal: coal is a real problem,” Bluffstone said. “If you and the economy insist on using it, then we’re going to have to make it really expensive for you.”

Bluffstone believes that a voluntary consumer mechanism like divestment cannot be considered any kind of stand-in for policy, but he does consider it valuable in shifting norms and quantifying the citizen voice. “Policy change has to go through government. Laws have to change, and laws have to change by representative democracy. Laws change when there is some evidence that people want them to change. This helps provide that kind of evidence.”

However, Paul Manson, a PhD student in PSU’s Public Affairs and Policy program at the Hatfield School of Government, is a bit skeptical.

“Divestment is an accommodating move that does not change the underlying problem,” wrote Manson over email.

“It’s like moving chairs on the Titanic. The economic system is what led us to be so dependent on oil and gas, and it makes us dependent on those that sell it to us... to think that we can use an economic trick to win at their own game is dangerous. It’s dangerous because it will give us false hope that we are and did do something. Those dedicated to change will struggle and use up their social energies to achieve disinvestment—and nothing will happen.”

Manson stresses that the discourse must be sufficiently global and intersectional to drive at the heart of the matter.

But judging by the organizing principles set out in the program of the National Fossil Fuel Divestment Convergence, the movement is already profoundly aware of the immensity of its mission. Workshops at the April 2014 convergence touched on intersections with divestment from prisons and international weapons companies; centering voices within the climate justice movement that have been historically silenced and marginalized; working towards transnational climate solidarity; and investing in the next economy in order to foster a just transition. In the front of the program is a letter of support from fourteen community leaders representing a number of indigenous groups and other frontline organizers.

These perspectives are also represented within Divest Portland State. Kevin Thomas, a current doctoral student in the Urban Studies department who also holds a previous degree from PSU in Women’s Studies and Indigenous Nations Studies, is the SSLC representative for both United Indian Students in Higher Education (UISHE) and the Coalition for Asian Pacific American Studies (CAPAS). For him the petroleum issue “cuts across all areas of sustainability,” including the environmental, economic, and social.

Wrote Thomas over email, “The petroleum industry conducts itself in an immoral manner and is willing to permanently displace First Nations peoples, permanently pollute ground waters used for drinking and food production, and permanently pollute natural wonders all for the sake of higher profits for their quarterly reports. They already make record profits and seem to know no boundaries.”

In line with Manson’s critique of the overarching economic system, some students such as Thomas are talking about more than just dropping fossil fuels. At one of the April meetings of the SSLC, students discussed the feasibility of ditching Wall Street giant JP Morgan in favor of the Portland-based organization EcoTrust and its ethical investment project called “Portfolio 21.” The logic is clear: even if PSU asks JP Morgan to end investments in certain companies, the bank itself will remain a major stakeholder in the fossil fuels industry. Students say our endowment should be managed by a firm that is socially responsible by definition, not just by limited compliance.

As for the possibility of financial loss, Professor Bluffstone asserts that some loss of revenue would not be so different from the university’s frequent decision to shell out extra for LEED-certified buildings and other sustainable options—such as when Lincoln Hall was rebuilt.

Said Bluffstone, “For 15 years Portland State has been trying to say ‘we’re extremely interested in the environment and extremely interested in sustainability, and as a community this is part of our values,’ and I think that message for Portland State is genuine. I don’t think it’s just marketing. And I don’t think there’s any doubt that it has helped the university in its mission. So if the university decided to divest and found a way to do that, it certainly would be consistent with past efforts to make a strong statement, and also previous activities that the university engaged in that have cost real money.”
My Academic Breakthrough
A Look at PSU’s Honors College

Opinion by Kate Jensen

The first term of my freshman year at PSU was absolutely miserable. I was annoyed with the quarter system (coming from semesters in high school), I despised living downtown, and I hated my Business 101 course. My Freshman Inquiry (FRINQ) was called Faith and Reason and felt to me like a high school level writing review. Throughout the term I slacked off more and more, but kept getting good grades in all my classes. I began to question if PSU was really the right choice for me, and then decided I needed to transfer out—ASAP.

Dr. Ann Marie Fallon was my FRINQ professor and the person I felt knew me the best academically, so I asked her for a letter of reference to apply to another university. Immediately, she counter-offered with a place in the Honors program where she was teaching the freshman sequence. Hoping against hope that maybe this was the key to college for me, I accepted and jumped right into Honors my second term at PSU.

A Change of Pace
Portland State University is home to the first Honors College in an urban setting in the state of Oregon. This recent change was in large part due to the $1 million donation from the Rose E. Tucker Charitable Trust in 2012 that allowed the Honors Program to become recognized as its own Honors College.

Sona Andrews, provost and vice president for Academic Affairs, points out that the change of language represents much more than the words printed on the degree. This change in status signifies the growth and academic excellence of the PSU Honors curriculum. In two years, enrollment in Honors more than doubled from 153 students in 2010 to 343 in 2012, and is expected to nearly double again by 2017 to a total of 650 students.

Dr. Fallon, director and associate professor of the Honors College, has been a driving force in the expansion of the program into a designated college. Currently in the fourth year of the Honors curriculum, I have personally witnessed the shift from exclusivity to inclusivity as more nontraditional and transfer students are welcomed into the program; today, almost 30 percent of Honors students are first-generation students. Before Fallon became director in 2011, Honors had a reputation of weeding out students who could not focus 100 percent on their coursework. As a freshman, many junior and senior-year Honors students warned me of the high dropout rate and intense junior seminars.

Since my transition into the Honors Program four years ago, the amount of resources available for students has expanded substantially. There is a group of peer advisors, an Honors computer lab, an internship coordinator, and an undergraduate student-run publication called Anthos.

The Honors curriculum has undergone alterations in order to further prepare students to attend graduate school, a central objective of the program. From the first year course, “The Global City,” to the senior year thesis, all coursework is designed to improve applications of students applying to graduate school. Nearly 80 percent of Honors students continue their education at prestigious universities across the nation, including Harvard, Cornell, and Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU).

My own journey through the Honors program has given me a strong foundation in interdisciplinary study and literature assessment of research in a given field. It is no surprise to me that so many Honors students pursue higher education; with high expectations from the very beginning, Honors forces students to produce only their best work. After four years of Honors curriculum, I can say that I have studied a wide variety of literature, intertextuality, ecology, fine art, genetics and communication disorders, and the psychosocial needs of young adult cancer patients. All that hard work must have paid off, because I have been accepted to the School of Nursing at OHSU and begin immediately after graduation over the summer.

I owe Dr. Fallon and the Honors program so much for encouraging me to further my education. PSU, I take back all the bad things I have said about you. Well, at least most of them.
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A Word With Mr. President
Part Two

Former ASPSU President Harris Foster clears up some concerns about miscommunication with the administration.

Last month, we ran a transcript of a press conference with Portland State University President Wim Wiewel. At that conference, in response to two questions I asked Wiewel, he mentioned Harris Foster, PSU student body president:

Colin Staub: There was a bill this year, House Bill 4102, that passed the house but did not pass the senate. It was going to regulate Higher One, and remove some of the more extreme fees charged to student accounts. It’s now stuck in committee. Since the legislative route is not working, will there be any work done in house at PSU to renegotiate the contract with less extreme fees for students?

Wim Wiewel: As I understand it, our contract with Higher One is very different than what they have with most institutions. Our contract was, in fact, held up as a model of a good contract. Harris Foster made that point as well. At many other universities they are stuck with high fees, but that’s not the case at Portland State. So there is really, from everything I know, no need for us to renegotiate the contract with Higher One.

Staub: After the bargaining process was over, you wrote an email saying you’ve been a little taken by surprise at the amount of unrest on campus, and that you were going to work to be more involved with issues students are facing. Since then, you’ve been to an ASPSU senate meeting, and of course this meeting is great. Are you going to continue engaging with students on a regular basis?

Wiewel: Yeah, and I want to point out that I had asked to be invited to the senate all year long. I asked for that at the very first meeting I had with Harris after he was elected. I want to make it very clear that it was not through lack of interest. I felt that discussion was useful, and I felt more discussions would be more useful.

I used Wiewel’s second response, regarding communication with ASPSU, to craft a question for the ASPSU presidential and vice presidential candidates in the May debate. After receiving some feedback that there might be different perspectives on Wiewel’s assertions, I sought out Foster, and he offered his take on Wiewel’s remarks.

Staub: At our press conference with Wim, he claimed to have asked to be invited to ASPSU senate meetings throughout the year.
Harris Foster: He did not.

Staub: He said nobody ever followed up, and he used this to show that he was not uninvolved through lack of interest, but because nobody communicated with him.

Foster: That is fully incorrect.

Staub: What do you make of his insinuation?

Foster: Honestly, it’s offensive and it’s childish that he’s lying, when he’s in such a high position. At the beginning of the year we had a meeting, and we had monthly meetings throughout the summer. At the first meeting and at the following meetings he offered the opportunity [to have his presence grace the ASPSU senate], however he never expressed desire to come to the meetings.

And because [at] every meeting he didn't actually answer our concerns that we were bringing up, but instead merely referred us to email chains that didn’t really go anywhere or actually help us, I didn’t see it as a priority to go out of my way and invite him.

It’s insulting that he would make it seem like I’ve been barring him from coming. He asked me once—he didn’t even ask me, he made the opportunity available [for him to be present during ASPSU senate meetings]. And it wasn’t a high priority for me, because all he does is pat you on the head and say, “Oh, what a cute student leader you are,” because they want to keep us in our place.

Staub: Was it valuable once he finally came to the senate meeting?

Foster: I feel like it was just a whole kiss-ass session, honestly. There were fifteen or so people who spoke on the speakers list. Eleven of them just said, “Oh, thank you so much for coming!”

That ticked me off when [the insinuation that ASPSU was unresponsive to the administration] was brought up through the questions at the presidential debate, because no one had talked to me before the debate happened, and everyone assumed what Wim was saying was true. Honestly it was insulting no one stood up for me in that meeting, and that everyone insinuated what he had said was true. Because it’s not.

The whole thing made me rather livid, if you can’t tell.

Staub: I asked him about Higher One, because the bill I interviewed you about several months ago failed the senate. I asked whether he’s going to renegotiate the contract, and he said PSU students do not have extreme fees like other schools do, PSU has been held up as an example of a good Higher One contract, and he dropped your name again, saying you had made this point as well.

Foster: Well, we have the best of the Higher One contracts, but that doesn’t mean it’s a good contract.

Staub: He said there’s no need to renegotiate the contract.

Foster: Well, that is happening right now, thanks to [Director of PSU Contracting and Procurement] Darin Matthews, who has been an ally to students in the renegotiation process, and ASPSU. We do have the best Higher One contract. That is true. However, it doesn’t mean it’s the best situation for students. Which is why I made it a campaign initiative. You think I didn’t know that when I made it a campaign initiative?

Staub: He seemed to think it needed no work at all.

Foster: That’s not true. Think about this: let’s say I go to a Chase bank ATM, and I use Higher One as my regular bank account. I get charged $3 from Chase, and another $2.50 on top of that from Higher One. And they don’t tell you that on the prompt. Most banks don’t do that. Most credit unions don’t do that.

Staub: So you think the contract needs to be renegotiated.

Foster: I do. And it’s under the process right now. Darin Matthews is doing it right now. I went to the re-negotiating table with Higher One. Darin Matthews has been keeping me updated. He says most of our concerns are probably going to be addressed. I don’t know the exact language, so I can only give you a general answer.

But I can tell you without a doubt that Darin Matthews is working on it, and that we’ve been working with him to renegotiate the contract.

Staub: What is Matthews’ position? Is he ASPSU?

Foster: No, he’s administration.

Staub: So in Wim’s same building, there’s work being done to renegotiate the contract.

Foster: Yes.

Staub: And he says it doesn’t need to be done, when I ask him a direct question about it.

Foster: If that’s what he said, then it’s very concerning. Darin Matthews has been our ally in this, we’ve been working on it all year. We did a Higher One survey in the fall, we used those responses to tailor how we were going to renegotiate with Higher One, and the process has been going off without a hitch, at least until what I’ve just heard from you today.
The new Board of Trustees and the future of student engagement

Analysis by Sara Swetzoff

Amidst all the talk about our new Board of Trustees, a clear conceptualization of student engagement with the Board has yet to emerge. The outgoing ASPSU officials are leaving us with many ideas and open questions. The incoming student government will bear the responsibility of actually structuring specific avenues of student communication with the Board.

And so we are faced with some of the most essential challenges of student organizing: how do you quantify the student voice, and then what do we do with that data—or how do we express it—once we have it? Are detailed testimonies the most effective? Or documents, or packing the room at critical moments? Who will be responsible for compiling such evidence or coordinating participation? Lastly—should students even take singular responsibility for this process?

How do we define administrative responsibility to represent students in the context of the Board?

These answers will not come easily, but in the following pages a few knowledgeable students offer some preliminary thoughts and attempt some tentative answers.

Oregon Student Association

While students involved with government and media seem to be constantly talking about the new Board, the average student may still find it difficult to grasp the change. Previously we had a State Board of Higher Education appointed by the governor; now we have a PSU Board of Trustees likewise appointed by the governor. Both meet on campus and are open to the public. So what’s the big deal?

One key difference highlighted in the first installment of this article is the loss of the statewide Oregon Student Association’s (OSA) centralized access to decision makers. With each campus now destined to determine tuition and governance separately, the OSA will no longer convene in Salem to lobby a common superior.

Harris Foster, outgoing student body president at PSU, emphasized the fact that this change puts more pressure on individual student governments to advocate on behalf of their students. Foster predicts that student power within the context of the new Board of Trustees could either decline or increase. Students involved in advocacy will need to rise to the challenge and shift their efforts to campus.

“At the moment, OSA does a lot of the organizing for us,” explained Foster. “When we decide that we want to take action on something, OSA takes that issue and talks to everyone within all seven student governments.”

“Right now we don’t have as many institutionalized policies to facilitate something like this for PSU students. We are going to have to create new systems to make the OSA more effective within the context of the new board.”

Continued Foster, “The way I see it, much will depend on how ASPSU does its communications going forward… The
new board scenario puts all the pressure on ASPSU to bring students to meetings. It will take a concerted effort to engage students and bring those personal stories to PSU's board.

Still, Foster is optimistic. “Some of our power is divided [by the new board], but certainly not all.”

Later over email, Foster described the joint ASPSU-OSA campus organizer position as an example of a staff person who could greatly enhance student engagement with the Board. This is a unique crossover position that answers to OSA but is funded by ASPSU. The campus organizer is a full-time staff member, unlike the rest of ASPSU who are students on leadership award stipends.

“An effective campus organizer can help us in this way because they transcend the one year term of office. They can provide training and aid in organizing and lobbying tactics and provide an important institutional memory.”

Foster added that an OSA staff person also transcends the limitations placed on ASPSU officials: “Because this person does not answer to PSU administrators, they can give the ASPSU of coming years a perspective that is not influenced by administrators.”

Bayd student government

The issue of ASPSU being restrained by its members’ contracts, and the need for action circumventing these restrictions, has also been highlighted by student organizations such as the Student Action Coalition (StAC) and the Portland State University Student Union (PSUSU). StAC operates outside of the Student Activities and Leadership Programs (SALP) funding structure, instead choosing to raise money among unions and students. PSUSU likewise describes itself as “founded on the principles of horizontality, equality, and direct democracy” and has also garnered support from faculty unions on campus.

According to the PSUSU website, “…direct democracy means students ourselves as the main actors in our struggle for a better university. We will utilize our own resources and capabilities to secure the university we need and deserve, discovering in the process what these are, and how much we can accomplish.”

In what would appear to be a direct affront to ASPSU and university administrators, the PSUSU website declares: “We can no longer defer solely to those representing—or claiming to represent—our interests for us.”

However, PSUSU never intended to replace ASPSU. In fact, the two collaborated closely during faculty contract negotiations. Rayleen McMillan, ASPSU director of university affairs, and Cameron Frank, of StAC and PSUSU, both attended the entirety of the collective bargaining sessions. They also spoke side by side at numerous events designed to educate students and community members about the importance of the contract negotiations. Both were, and continue to be, involved with a campus organization called Together for PSU (T4PSU), which brings together staff, faculty and students in a collective effort to restore “educator-led” priorities.

Rob Fullmer, a member of staff at PSU and a newly-appointed trustee on the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, is also involved in T4PSU. He predicts that such alliances will be essential to students advocating for their needs in the context of the Board.

“Through coalition-building and working together,” said Fullmer, “[the student, staff, and faculty representatives on the new Board] can help make sure that the conversations that take place in the board include all the necessary information from the campus community. That is their responsibility: to make sure that they are carrying the concerns of their constituency.”

While he admitted that we have yet to see exactly what the Board’s dynamics are like, Fullmer said, “I am optimistic that no matter the intent of those who supported the Board’s creation, we are in a position to be good advocates so long as the student, staff and faculty members on the Board work together.”

Finally, Fullmer issued an encouraging call to action: “Students need to seize power because they pay for the place! They need to realize that they pay for the university and therefore it is first and foremost their university.”

The Student Union has already answered the call. Regardless of how ASPSU decides to direct its energies, Frank indicated that PSUSU intends to head up its own initiative to contact and inform Board members.

“We hope to build strong relationships with sympathetic Board members, and do our best to educate them about what it is like to be a student at Portland State,” said Frank. “Though we recognize that there are some [trustees] who will never be sympathetic, who will never be looking for what is really in students’ best interest. We want to rally around those who care, and support them in order to give them the confidence to take a stand when the stakes are high, knowing their constituencies have their back.”

What about Pam?

Pamela Campos-Palma, the student representative on PSU’s Board of Trustees, is acutely aware of the difficulty involved in bridging the worlds of the trustees and the students.

“It’s very interesting to be on this upper echelon board as a student—it’s tough because we are down here on the ground,” she said, referring to her conundrum of having a foot in each world.

Campos sees an urgent need to increase student awareness about the Board. She has been doing a fair amount of outreach on her own, but it is simply not sustainable and poses the risk of burnout, in her eyes.

“There’s a big lack of education—how can you get students engaged when they don’t know what’s going on? Yeah, there’s a [ASPSU] website, but there’s not been an intentional effort to introduce students to the position.”

It’s possible to see the momentum building toward a changeover in our ASPSU government as causing the Board
Campos believes that students need to do more reaching out to fellow students—perhaps via student organization umbrella SALP—to create collaborative events and coalitions.

She mentioned the “Jobs With Justice” panel which took place the Thursday before faculty contract negotiations were settled. The event brought student, staff and faculty speakers to give testimonials to a panel of senators, representatives, and other community leaders. Campos called it “a great example of the power that this university can have when multidimensional planning happens on different levels.”

Another event of particular success she cited was the fall term “Racism and Settler Colonialism at Home and Abroad” panel, co-sponsored by four SALP groups. Involving both testimonials and break-out discussion groups, the event’s format ensured engaged participation.

“PSU has an incredible talent in organizing, even with such limited resources… How are we going to keep using the resources we have, and [push for] the ones we don’t?” asks Campos. “It’s going to require taking a step back and getting a clear picture of what everyone is doing, including more efforts to include more students of color in the organizing. Undocumented students are a huge population on our campus. How do we make a place for them?”

“We have yet to all get together. You see a lot of leaders on the forefront. Orientation ambassador team… religious leaders, student government… Leadership fellows, student leaders for service. Would it not be beneficial to get us all in the same room, talk about what we are doing?”

Campos points out that building such coalitions would be a powerful tool in communicating with administrators and the Board of Trustees.

Despite her many questions and feelings that much more...
“The Board is here for students. If people show up, they will see that the board is here for students.”

could be done, Campos does not fault ASPSU or anyone else for the current situation. She recognizes the inherent growing pains associated with such major changes and she sees great potential.

“To spin up a brand new board like this is really challenging, and I think that should be taken into account as well,” she said. “Everything is moving very quickly, and everyone has had to adapt very quickly.”

Finally, Campos underlined her strong conviction that the Board is ready and willing to listen, and therefore student engagement, participation, and testimonies hold great potential to influence the dynamic.

Campos offered a final word of encouragement: “The Board is here for students. If people show up, they will see that the board is here for students.”

Logging in face-time

No matter who is doing it, building relationships requires substantive face-time and outreach. Perhaps nobody is as passionate about this subject as Tia Gomez-Zeller, the outgoing Vice President in ASPSU. Currently spearheading an ambitious cultural competency initiative, she is all about supporting and empowering students. In her mind, the first hurdle is simply letting students know that ASPSU and the Board of Trustees exist.

Gomez suggested that the expectations for Student Life Director could be ramped up in order to reach more students: “Student Life does newsletters at the moment. That’s great, but they need to do more—more events, more tabling, more presence outside.”

While Gomez agreed that OSA is an important source of support for ASPSU, she also stressed that student government cannot just “wait for OSA to step in and help us.” In addition, Gomez believes OSA’s focus tends to fall short when it comes to representing international students. This is what inspired Gomez to push for the creation of an International Affairs Director in ASPSU.

“We are the host country telling people to come here and get involved,” Gomez said of Portland State and its purposeful advertising to international students. “The host country therefore has the duty to provide the resources and tools that international students need for success. OSA is not doing so well in that at the moment.”

Gomez continued, “The problem with OSA is that they focus on certain student populations. Personally and as individuals [OSA] members can be passionate about international students, but as an organization they don’t incorporate international students. That’s why it is so important [now] for students to be present at those Board of Trustees meetings.”

Marcus Sis, a recent candidate for PSU student president and a previous legislative affairs director with ASPSU, echoed Gomez’s emphasis on outreach. Sis thinks ASPSU can do a lot better than its past model of spending most of the fall issuing student surveys.

“I really don’t think it’s the best approach,” he explained, mentioning that the CPSO survey only reached a few hundred students. “Unless you can do a survey in a very professional manner, it will not be effective… we need to talk to people one-on-one. Relying on conversations is better.” Instead of surveys, Sis wanted to replicate the platform convention model that he encountered as an organizer with College Democrats.

In a platform convention, a number of people present issue briefs. For example, 20 to 50 issue briefs could be considered representative of the student body, and then based on the conversation around those briefs everyone agrees on shared priorities for the next year.”

Sis strongly believes that quantifying the student experience is the most effective tool we can offer our student trustee representative, Pamela Campos-Palma.

“The trustee is just one person. Being able to provide the political cover and the political support is essential,” explained Sis.

Sis also supports adding additional student trustees. “Having an undergraduate, a graduate and an international student [on the Board] would be absolutely fair,” he stated. He emphasized that advocating for such a change should happen sooner rather than later. “Everything is still very fluid—the Board and the structure. Things will get more set in stone as we wait. The board will develop its own structure and political momentum.

“I have talked to College Democrats, and also with a lot of legislators, and everyone is very keen on improving the current model. It is not a ‘for or against’ situation—it is a model that we need to continue developing. I know there will be big efforts to modify the board in the 2015 legislature. I’ve done this before when OUS was restructured in 2011—it was challenging to get it through the partisan environment, but we were able to.”

For this reason, Sis is determined to get out into the districts of our legislators and rally constituents. He explained, “The current ASPSU has done a great job of aligning our goals with SEIU, AAUP, etc. We need to also reach out to the broader community.”
THE HARDER THEY FALL

A record-high year for voter turnout was followed by the lowest turnout in over a decade. What happened?

Analysis by Colin Staub

One year ago, student elections had come to a close. The results were in, and the student body had decided on a new president, vice president, Student Fee Committee, and Senate. It was all over... but one troubling fact remained.

This election had been decided by 569 voters, a whopping two percent of the student population. Representing a student body of over 28,000, the newly elected officials had hardly received a representative mandate to lead.

This dismal figure was not an isolated incident. In fact, ASPSU struggles to bring in voters every year. Over the past two decades, turnout has fluctuated yearly. The size of the student body has not been a reliable predictor: in 1992, with a population of 12,540 students, 865 voted. 17 years later, with 11,000 more students at PSU, 800 students turned out to vote.

There are, however, notable exceptions. And it doesn’t even take a trip back to PSU in the 1960s to find them. Look no further than two years ago, when student elections saw a nearly unprecedented level of voter response.

The spike year: 2012

In May 2012, Tiffany Dollar and Marlon Holmes were elected as ASPSU president and vice president. Overall voter turnout for the election came to 2,771 votes, making it the highest voter percentage since 2005, and the highest number of voters in decades. It was well over double the number of voters from the previous year, and nearly quadruple the number from the year before that.

“I did a lot of research into past turnout when I was...
In May 2012, Tiffany Dollar and Marlon Holmes were elected as ASPSU president and vice president. Overall voter turnout for the election came to 2,771 votes, making it the highest voter percentage since 2005, and the highest number of voters in decades. It was well over double the number of voters from the previous year, and nearly quadruple the number from the year before that.

preparing to run,” says Dollar. Noticing the low figures from prior years, she and Holmes worked on tactics that would engage potential voters, and make sure the slate was memorable. As many ASPSU candidates have done, they spread the word through canvassing the park blocks, listening and responding to student concerns.

However, they took it a notch further: they treated the student election like an actual election, and employed tactics used by politicians in professional campaigns.

“After having a positive conversation with a student, our volunteers and candidates asked the voter to sign a card and give us their contact info,” says Dollar. These “pledge cards” provided the campaign with a large list of people to follow up on and remind to vote once the campaigning period ended.

“This is a strategy used in campaigns at all levels,” she says. “I’m sure you, or someone you know, has gotten that call during the local election, reminding you to mail in your ballot.”

Essentially, Dollar and Holmes did not rely solely on the chance that students would remember to vote. They were proactive, recognizing that students, and people in general, often need a reminder. Or, in the case of local elections, repeated reminders.

Aside from the winning campaign strategy, some of the factors leading to the high turnout were situational. “Competition certainly played into it as well,” says Dollar. “I believe five slates ran for the presidential spots, and three were very active in voter outreach.” Indeed, it was a tight race, coming down to 65 votes: Dollar and Holmes won with 741 votes, while the runner-up slate received 678.

A well-orchestrated elections process was also key. “[The previous ASPSU administration] set a goal of reaching 10 percent voter turnout in the election,” says Dollar. She recalls ASPSU dedicating a large amount of resources to put together non-partisan efforts. “This included voting booths located in the park blocks throughout the voting period.”

These efforts were at work during the 2014 election as well, as members of ASPSU—often the student body president included—manned tables outfitted with iPads or laptops to allow students to vote on the spot.

In 2012, multiple factors came together, and made for an impressive level of engagement and involvement. This makes it all the more curious that the numbers fell so far the following year, but even without the large drop 2013 would stand out: it was the lowest turnout since 1998, when only 421 students voted. The Student Fee Committee chair called the 1998 results “piss-poor,” reported the Vanguard.

While it’s tempting, and perhaps not entirely incorrect, to throw blame on student apathy in 2013 as well, there may have been more at work.

The perfect storm

In the 2012 election, when Dollar and Holmes won, voters also passed amendments to the ASPSU constitution. One of the changes was a move to dissolve the Election Board, which had previously organized and carried out the elections. This board had been made up of five people whose sole task was overseeing the election. Upon its removal, its responsibilities were transferred to the existing Judicial Board, which was renamed as the Judicial Review Board (JRB). The JRB also oversees other aspects of ASPSU, including misconduct allegations and questions of constitutional interpretation. The JRB is ASPSU’s version of a supreme court.

“Having the Judicial Board take on the functions of the elections made perfect sense,” says Aimee Shattuck, director of Student Activities and Leadership Programs. “It reduced the territorial back and forth between the Elections Board and the Judicial Board during elections season, when the candidates are constantly trying to bust each other through election violation complaints rather than get out and campaign.”

In addition to clearly laying out who was in charge of what, the change had other benefits. Since the JRB has responsibilities outside of putting on the election, the shift ensured that people who are very familiar with ASPSU are running the election. “This means that, ideally, they can start working on elections earlier in the year,” says Shattuck. “That’s what happened this year [2014].”

However, last year’s de facto trial run for a JRB-handled election did not go so smoothly.

“The issue with last year’s Judicial/Elections Board is that they were against the change to their responsibilities,” says Shattuck. “They did not want to run elections and purposely slack off to make a statement.” She cites candidate orientations, debates, and polling stations—all of which were carried out strongly this year—as having very little effort put into them in 2013. “They did the bare minimum, and student government and the student body paid for their spite.” Shattuck is not alone in this assessment.

“The Judicial branch came head-to-head with both the Executive and the Senate regarding elections procedures,” says Dollar. “We allocated funds to the elections and volunteered staff time to the Judicial Board for the elections. Much of this was not utilized.”

Some would put it even more bluntly.

“The Judicial Board didn’t do their job,” says Harris.
Foster, former ASPSU student body president who won the 2013 election. He also brings up the merger of the boards, explaining that, although the responsibilities of the Election Board were transferred to the JRB, the JRB did not carry out those duties. “That's why it kind of became a perfect storm,” he says.

The drama and controversy surrounding the JRB meant that there were very few of the non-partisan efforts Dollar described as being so helpful the year before. “They had one polling station open for two hours for one day—everything else was online,” says Foster. “So the only people who were getting out the vote were the candidates.”

A competitive election—such as the one in 2012—generally correlates with a higher turnout. “The biggest factor seems to be when there are multiple slates, and a larger number of students running in the election,” says Shattuck. “The more people running, the more people voting.”

In this arena, too, 2013 was lacking.

“In the beginning there was [competition],” says Foster. He had a slate of around 25 people, which grew to 51 when his biggest competitor’s campaign collapsed, and members of that slate joined Foster’s. There was a third slate on the ballot, but it also provided little competition, only spending around $10 on the campaign, says Foster. “They didn't spend any time really getting out the vote.”

In the end, Foster’s closest competitor was a write-in candidate, who received more votes than the slate which was actually listed on the ballot, coming in at 17 percent of the final vote. Foster won with 59 percent. “We blew them out of the water,” he says. “Mostly because the most competitive slate to us, the one we built our campaign around trying to beat, folded at the last minute.”

Seen through the lens of the 2012 election, it is clear why turnout dropped so far in 2013. Dollar cites three major factors contributing to 2012’s success: personal campaign strategy, a dedicated Election Board, and a stiff competition. With the board and the competition removed from the equation, Foster and his slate had to rely on their own efforts to get people to vote. And while personal campaign strategy and outreach increases votes for a particular slate, it can only do so much for election turnout as a whole.

**The war on apathy**

Even though the low turnout was largely an institutional problem last year, ASPSU still took measures to increase voter participation for the 2014 election. After all, while 2013 was
particularly unimpressive, turnout through the years has never
been strong.

“Student government on a college campus is a microcosm
of local, state, and national politics,” says Candace Avalos,
coordinator of student government relations. “[It] faces the
same struggle to combat voter apathy.”

Strategies used to overcome apathy have included cross-
departmental promotion of elections, hosting successful
debates—Foster says this year’s presidential debate had
a larger turnout than the one at University of Oregon, a
departure from previous years—and simply canvassing
the park blocks for voters.

Other strategies came out of specific, creative thinking.
“During the open poll, every computer accessed through the
PSU network will redirect to the election page as soon as you
open your web browser,” says Avalos. This simple tactic is a
change from previous years, when computers might have had
an ASPSU advertisement as their desktop background, but
would not automatically point the user to the election site.”

Another tactic is the addition of a survey at the end of
ballots, which will ask voters where they received information
about the election. Ideally, the answers will be used to improve
the election process next year. “What ASPSU needs to focus
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Overall, the only consistent trend in voter turnout is its inconsistency. “There’s no one
formula for every campus on how to engage students in the voting process,” says Avalos.
This has been the case for decades, and the sentiment has been reinforced many times,
as members of student government have tried to come up with creative strategies.

Shattuck, who has been involved at PSU for 14 years,
has noticed other trends which seem to correlate with
increased turnout. “I also think it matters when there is a
topic relevant to the wider student body,” she says, citing
the Campus Recreation Center construction as an example.
In 2004, students voted on whether or not to approve the
construction—that election saw the third highest turnout
since at least 1996. “When the big topics are important, but
only ASPSU insiders would understand—like the ASPSU
Constitution—less people can relate,” says Shattuck.

This year, it seems such topics could include Campus Public
Safety Office deputation, sexual assault awareness, cultural
competency, or perhaps the closure of Food For Thought Cafe,
all of which have received significant student interest on

If I were to guess on topics that might be relevant, I would
say Food For Thought or cost of tuition,” says Shattuck. “But,
the debates and platforms haven’t really touched on Food
For Thought. I get the sense that candidates are in general
agreement.”

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inconsistency. “There’s no one formula for every campus on
how to engage students in the voting process,” says Avalos.
This has been the case for decades, and the sentiment has been
reinforced many times, as members of student government
have tried to come up with creative strategies. In 1979, the
Vanguard reported on an innovative tactic employed by
University of Oregon.

“Apathy on college campuses has reached such pinnacles
that at least one university is offering financial incentive for
students voting in elections,” it reported. “The University of
Oregon offered a coupon for a dollar off a pizza at a Eugene
restaurant for those participating in the democratic process.”

That year, 9 percent of the student body voted in the
UO election, suggesting that even free food is ineffective
against apathy.

Perhaps it’s encouraging that, even after receiving only two
percent of the student body’s vote, ASPSU has not stooped to
paving for votes.

“Have you voted in student elections yet?” Foster asks a
passerby, as he mans the non-partisan voting booth between
Smith and Neuberger. The student looks down and quickens
his pace.

“Come on!” Foster insists. “Be a part of the democratic
process!”

The student is not enticed, but Foster has already moved on
to another potential voter. This time, his “democratic process”
pitch works—either through genuine interest or lack of a
timely excuse, the student comes over to the table and begins
to vote on the iPad.

Perhaps there is hope yet for pizza-free idealism.

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This month, Portland Spectrum asked each voting member of PSU’s Board of Trustees two questions:

1. What would you like to see the board change about PSU, specifically?
2. How do you think your skill set/experience will best benefit the board?

We contacted every trustee with these questions. Some replied. A few even gave us answers.

**CHRISTINE VERNIER**

1. I really think the PSU board members can lobby the legislature to allocate more money to higher education—both for the University itself and for the students. We simply have to make college more affordable for our students. I think if all of the institutional boards can work together on that goal, our State will be an even better place to live.

**GALE CASTILLO**

1. Continue to increase the reputation of PSU as an outstanding university which is accessible and affordable for all students
2. Continue to work with the legislature and donors to increase resources for students

**SWATI ADARKAR**

1. The board is a very new addition to the PSU community and I am looking forward to our role taking shape. We were not created to change PSU but to support the mission to ensure that students can reach their education, development and professional goals. I look forward to being a part of this effort.
2. I have been involved in education policy issues from early childhood through higher education. I am passionate about Oregon working to develop a high quality P-20 system of education. To accomplish that we must do much more to make college more affordable and accessible and to increase opportunities for underserved students and communities. This will take time given Oregon's recession and many economic challenges but investing in public education across the continuum is critical for Oregon residents and the state to be successful and competitive.
1. Although it seems like it goes without saying, it can’t be iterated enough how our University has a lot of challenges that make it exceptionally unique to other Oregon public higher ed institutions. The new Board presents an opportunity for a more accessible governing body that may be in tune with our unique demography and realities. My first hope for the Board is to analyze those unique realities of PSU (urban campus, commuter, transfer-reality, demography) and that institutional initiatives positively correlate to ensuring students’ success (and ultimately the campus community being properly served). The graduation rate at PSU requires dire attention. This is tied to the school’s financial insecurity, which needs to be creatively evaluated. This is especially important given that PSU pretty much serves our region and is a critical means of access for many in terms of achieving better life chances.

2. While our Board is comprised of intensely smart, dedicated, and seasoned folks, my insight and intersectional perspective as an experienced student leader has proven very useful. My extensive campus involvement and thorough hands-on knowledge of the University best benefits the board in allowing me to bring clarity to important decision-making that ultimately impacts the entire institution. I am an anomaly as a woman of color, a veteran with a military career that’s very similar to the Board’s power dynamics, and a political science major, along with other aspects that have led me to become very involved. All this and my student experience has made me an asset at the table and it’s been great to have the Board not only be receptive of my insights but be intentional in asking my opinion. This has been especially important as we’ve had to quickly learn the ropes, and digest the enormous amount of information covering every aspect of PSU.

Though so far my experience with the Board itself has been rewarding, I do feel the Student-Trustee position is challenging on several levels. While I’ve managed this well, I see the Student-Trustee being vulnerable. There is still a lot of work to be done in structuring a means for that individual to be supported mainly by ASPSU, and other folks. This is something I’ve tried to model after the Faculty-Trustee, Maude Hines, and her relationship with the Faculty Senate. I have been working on this since November, and is why I’ve been so diligent in following this year’s elections. Since you’re asking about my concerns, one last one, is that I’ve come to realize that students are not largely well-versed or aware of this critical governance change, and some of the education that has happened seems to have some slanted speculation. As I discussed with one of the election slates who proposed adding several more students to the Board, little is widely understood about the history of bringing the board about, and the fight to even have one student on the board at all, which is a rarity for University Governing Boards nation-wide. Despite our challenge with student involvement on our campus, I hope campus leaders, especially student leaders and ASPSU may organize to make best use of the now accessible governing board and supporting our Student-Trustee.

1. Relative to your first question, I would like to see a smooth transition to the new form of governance. It will take the new Board, not effective until 1 July, 2014, some time to get a feel for the business of the University. We have great confidence that during the transition President Redd will continue to steer the University on the great course it is currently set upon. That’s another way of saying I don’t anticipate the new Board will be making any significant changes in the near term.

2. I have a couple of skill sets that might be relevant. The first is six+ years’ involvement with PSUF. Through that I’ve come to know much about the goings-on of PSU, particularly regarding fund-raising, and the endowment. The second is board work and governance in general. I’ve spent a lot of time in the last 10 years in that space. Helping to get the new board launched is what I hope to focus upon.
In December 2015, a majority of the members of the American Studies Association (ASA) voted in favor of the boycott of Israeli academic institutions. The vote to impose an academic boycott was undertaken in response to the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PABCI), which maintains that “all Israeli academic institutions, unless proven otherwise, are complicit in maintaining the Israeli occupation and denial of basic Palestinian rights.” According to the ASA, “The goal of the academic boycott is to contribute to the larger movement for social justice in Israel/Palestine that seeks to expand, not further restrict, the rights to education and free inquiry.”

PABCI is one facet of the broader Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Initiated in 2005, BDS asks individuals and institutions worldwide to boycott Israeli goods and divest from both Israeli companies and international corporate stakeholders until three demands are met: the end of Israeli occupation, full equality for Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, and full right of return for Palestinian refugees. Opponents claim the BDS movement is counterproductive to peace because it refuses to support a two-state solution that leads to a viable Palestinian state and a secure, democratic Israel. Critics also say that the BDS movement delegitimizes Israel by making no distinction between West Bank Settlements and Israel proper in its call for boycott.

Sara Swetzoff of Students United for Palestinian Equal Rights (SUPER) at PSU and Robyn Gottlieb, Co-Chair of J Street U Portland State, the political home for pro-Israel, pro-peace Americans, discuss their opposing views on academic boycott in the context of their groups’ differing political platforms.

(The full text of the ASA resolution can be found here: http://www.theasa.net/american_studies_association_resolution_on_academic_boycott_of_israel)
Stance Against the American Studies Association’s Vote to Boycott Israeli Institutions

Opinion by Robyn Gottlieb

Like many, I am frustrated at the status quo of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Like the American Studies Association, and those who support its decision to boycott Israeli academic institutions, I am concerned about the current situation in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. I joined J Street U because of this concern. We at J Street U have spent the past nine months supporting the negotiating effort because we want to see a two-state solution come to fruition, with a state for Israel and a state for Palestine. I understand the ASA boycott to be, in part, a response to this frustration.

The two-state solution is the only way to achieve peace, security, and the right to self-determination for both peoples. I’m concerned that the ASA, and the wider boycott movement, seem to be agnostic about two-states. Further, I’m worried that a boycott tactic may hinder the realization of a two-state accord—especially an academic boycott, like the ASA’s. The boycott movement fails to articulate an endgame to the conflict that would bring about peace for both peoples.

The ASA’s boycott does not merely fail to address the urgency of ending the conflict. Its premise, to boycott Israeli academic institutions, runs counter to the ASA’s commitment to universal academic freedom. The ASA claims that the goal of the boycott is to expand the rights of Palestinian students and scholars by keeping institutions from forming academic partnerships that are integral to the free movement of ideas. The boycott prevents Israeli students who want to end the occupation from collaborating with potential allies in the 2,200 academic institutions of the ASA. Expanding the rights of one party should not restrict the rights of another.

The ASA’s call to boycott Israeli universities places blame for the conflict solely on one side. By demonizing one party, their boycott undermines the responsibility of both parties to negotiate a lasting accord. Demonization leads to a never-ending blame game in which both sides are more interested in finding faults than brokering a solution, shifting the conversation away from ending the occupation and finding a solution to the conflict.

The two-state solution is the only way to break free from this zero-sum status quo. In neglecting to advocate for two-states, the ASA—like the larger boycott movement—also neglects to recognize the essential role of American leadership in ending the conflict. American leadership is crucial due to the lack of trust between Israelis and Palestinians. It’s clear that without a mediator, the two parties will not be able to resolve the conflict on their own. Not too long ago, neither party recognized the right of the other to national self-determination. That time has passed, in large part thanks to determined American leadership.

The most peaceful and equitable way to solve a conflict is through negotiations. Boycotts are destructive to this peace process because they disregard the responsibilities and rights of the other party. Lead negotiators such as the United States’ Martin Indyk and Israel’s Tzipi Livni said that moves from both sides outside the negotiating table caused the current round of peace talks to crumble. Throughout the negotiations, the Israelis and Palestinians continued to accuse one another of obstructing the peace process. Boycott tactics on a more regional level, like the ASA’s, reinforce this blame game because they ignore the political reality of the situation—that it will take cooperation on both sides to reach a just end to the conflict.

This myopia around the political reality extends to some opponents of the boycott movement as well. By focusing all their energies on opposing boycotts, and none on advocating for a negotiated resolution to the conflict, they ignore the justifiable frustration felt by students at the 40-plus year occupation of the Palestinian Territories. Students recognize that the occupation is morally wrong. By not offering a viable political alternative to boycotts, these opponents not only prolong the conflict, but also the boycott movement itself. Thus, if anti-boycott activists truly want to put an end to the boycotts, they must actively advocate for the only viable solution to ending the conflict. This is why J Street U supports vigorous American leadership toward a negotiated two-state solution.

Now that peace talks have stalled, it is especially important for us to show Secretary of State John Kerry that we support...
his efforts to broker peace, and not tactics that sideline the only viable solution to this conflict. The only way that Secretary Kerry will push the parties to make the necessary tough decisions they need to is with our support. As Americans, the most effective role we can play in ending the conflict is to influence the political process here at home. Engaging with the conflict by boycotting Israel—or boycotting the boycotters—has no endgame. It is the same old cycle that has colored this conflict for its entire history. Lost in this polarized rhetoric is any solution that would bring about an end to the suffering of Israelis and Palestinians.

People on all sides of this issue are passionate and frustrated, both with the conflict itself, and with the broken conversation around it. A peaceful, lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—with a state for Israel and a state for Palestine—will only be achieved through constructive dialogue between the parties. Similarly, the antidote to the cyclical blame game on campus is a healthy, open conversation between students—like the opportunity to publish these two opposing viewpoints, side by side, in our campus magazine—not boycotts of these exchanges. This is precisely why the ASA’s decision to boycott Israeli academic institutions is so counterproductive. The ASA boycott silences dialogue, which is the only means by which resolution or understanding will be achieved—between Israelis and Palestinians, and on our campus.

Stance in Support of the American Studies
Association’s Vote to Boycott Israeli Institutions

Opinion by Sara Swetzoff

I remember when I first became aware of the Palestinian experience. It was my freshman year of high school and I had to present an article in my Social Studies class. By chance I ended up reading about a young man from Gaza. With an Israeli work permit and extended family in the West Bank, the plight of this young man was his complicated commutes. The buses crossing from Gaza into Israel, or from Gaza over to the West Bank, were always held up by Israeli checkpoints and lengthy security procedures. He was often late for work despite leaving hours ahead of time, and risked losing his job.

Flash forward more than a decade. Now I’m 28 years old. The idea of Gazan residents commuting into Israel or visiting the West Bank with any regularity seems like a distant utopia. After the Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip were withdrawn in 2005, the border was clamped shut. Food aid is allowed into Gaza based on an Israeli calculation of the minimum number of calories Gazans need to survive. Gaza is strangled, flooded with sewage, without fuel and potable water. A Gazan friend here in Portland tells me how the soldiers sometimes come into houses unannounced and order everyone to go out and sweep the streets. The Gaza Strip is an open-air prison, with Israeli soldiers as its wardens.

I know this from what I hear and what I read. Very few people come and go from Gaza except for Israeli soldiers. When my Gazan friend got his student visa for the US, he spent two months trying to get out. Every day he would take the bus one hour to the Rafah crossing with all of his bags, and every day he would come home. Until one day it was finally open, and he was able cross into Egypt to catch his flight out of Cairo. Why travel 20 hours to Cairo when Tel Aviv is just a couple hours away from his home? Even with an American student visa, the Israelis do not allow Palestinians to fly out of their airport. There are thousands of Gazan students in this situation. Many never make it out.

In September 2012 I had the chance to visit the West Bank. A German friend was living in Bethlehem at the time when I booked my ticket to Tel Aviv’s Ben Gurion airport, and she reminded me to have a story ready about my planned tourism in Israel. The Israeli authorities will ask me exactly where I am going. I can’t tell them if I am going to the West Bank.

However, with my Jewish last name and my toddler on my hip, I was stamped through without many questions.

Another friend here in Portland who carries the last name of her Egyptian father was not so fortunate. A visual artist and photographer working on her thesis exhibit, she was traveling to West Bank locations to replicate the photos taken by her Anglo-American maternal grandfather back in the 1960s when he worked at a Quaker school in Ramallah. She was immediately profiled for her Arabic name. When soldiers found photos she had previously taken in the West Bank featured on the website of an American gallery, they denied her entry, detained her in solitary confinement for two days, and then deported her back to the United States.

In order to get to Palestine, you have to pretend that Palestine does not exist.

The official maps produced by the Israeli ministry of tourism make this rule painfully clear. They include no demarcation whatsoever of the West Bank, the 1967 Green Line, or even the massive security wall that winds through Palestinian towns and fields like a 26-foot tall concrete tape worm unfurled across the landscape. There are no Palestinian village names. Instead the area is labeled with the ancient Israeli term favored by settlers—“Judea and
Samaria.' Israeli settlements, illegal according to international law, are clearly labeled. Little crosses and Star of David icons mark historical locations of Christian and Jewish interest. Despite the majority Muslim Palestinian population of the West Bank and its numerous old mosques, no icon exists for Muslim sites. I think back to a paper I wrote on the Muslim Mamluk architecture of Hebron and realize that such an innocent subject of art history would pose an existential challenge to this Israeli project of erasure. I wonder: if that were the subject of my PhD dissertation, would the Israeli authorities even let me in to do my research?

If the experience of other academics is an indication, the answer would likely be no. Just as the Israeli authorities often prevent Palestinian academics from exiting the West Bank and Gaza, international academics are routinely denied access to conferences and lecture opportunities in the Palestinian territories. This fact was highlighted in a statement released by the 50,000-member Modern Language Association (MLA) in January 2014, just a month after the American Studies Association passed its boycott measure. Resolution 2014-1 accuses Israel of “restricting the academic freedom of scholars and teachers who are United States citizens” and calls on the US Department of State to contest Israel’s denials of entry for American academics.

The MLA resolution also echoes the ASA in its condemnation of Israel’s “violation of international conventions on an occupying power’s obligation to protect the right to education.” The ASA is more explicit, stating, “There is no effective or substantive academic freedom for Palestinian students and scholars under conditions of Israeli occupation.” I hold in my mind the image of a UN map of the West Bank, covered with a dense matrix of Israeli-only roads and settlements. Icons indicating roadblocks, dirt mounds, and checkpoints populate every inch of the page. A friend in Nablus, a northern city completely surrounded by Israeli settlements, says that many young men are not allowed through the checkpoints. Thus, deep within the territory supposedly earmarked for a Palestinian state, Israeli flags line the main road going into Nablus and an entire generation of young men has never even left the city.

The American Studies Association was not the only academic organization to endorse the Palestinian call for an academic boycott of Israel. The Asian Studies Association passed a similar resolution prior to the ASA, and the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association released an additional resolution closely on the heels of the ASA. As our nation’s academic associations with some of the most significant representations of people of color and other marginalized groups voted for boycott, PSU president Wim Wiewel and a host of overwhelmingly white and male university presidents—many of whom make around half a million dollars a year and are arguably hired on the basis of their connections to the upper echelon of business and politics—accused the boycott of stifling “the free and open exchange of ideas and knowledge.”

With all due respect to President Wiewel, I reject the idea that any academic conversation, whether domestic or international, can transcend the very real socio-economic and political contexts in which academia is embedded. If PSU cannot even see the value of funding tenure-track positions in its Black Studies department, then how can administrators possibly empathize with those who suffer in Palestine? I reject the idea that academic freedom can exist on any level within such deeply entrenched asymmetries of power. Opponents of boycott and divestment efforts claim that the answer is “a mutually negotiated agreement between both parties,” and yet we have recently seen peace talks collapse once again, with John Kerry condemning Israel for continuing to build settlements and perpetuate conditions of apartheid. It is as though the negotiations are purposefully designed to fail again and again.

The 2005 call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions was issued by 173 Palestinian non-governmental organizations. Many more have since joined. Let us take steps towards change by upholding the call and generating real political and economic pressure that cannot be ignored. For those of us who have friends, family and loved ones in both Palestine and Israel, the imperative to action could not be more urgent. I have watched the situation worsen for 14 years. Others have watched for nearly 70 years. The time for justice, equality, and peace is now.
Wim Wiewel: The Problem at PSU

“Let them eat... tuition?”

This past year, as a full time student at PSU completing my undergraduate degree, I began hearing some whispers and hushed conversations about the inequalities within the Portland State University community. During the fall and winter terms, those whispers revealed numerous inequities regarding the way professors are treated and compensated at PSU.

The salaries paid to professors, the people that actually teach students, and top administrators, who don’t teach students, reveal a huge and growing disparity.

Each term, the buzz became more intense, the complaints by professors more vocal, sometimes shared with students in the classrooms. Something was wrong with the pay equity system, and the boiling pot of discontent was on the verge of spilling over.

Talk of a faculty strike was everywhere. Posters of an impending strike were taped to walls in the restrooms and on the entrance doors to various buildings, and in other unauthorized locations. Something was about to happen. The posturing was over and the message from professors was clear. Pay us a decent and livable wage, with better contract security, or we will strike. In essence, that meant they would quit working and go home, throw the university in turmoil, embarrass the administrative leaders, and make national news. The administration’s response? Essentially: “Sorry, we can’t afford a substantial raise for adjuncts. The status quo must be maintained.”

But the fact is, professors create the product the university manufactures: education, and educated professionals.

This scenario sounds a little like the precursors to the French Revolution of 1789, between the haves and the have-nots. And we all know how that ended up. The king who wouldn’t listen to the people, and the queen who was so far removed from the reality of French peasant life—both were beheaded. Well, we don’t behead people anymore, but in the case of PSU, a symbolic beheading may be in order. Let’s check the facts.

First, the terms. I don’t like the words “rich” and “poor,” because these terms are relative. How rich is rich? How poor is poor? The expressions “haves” and “have-nots” resonate better with me, because we all know our group.

The president’s annual compensation of $540,000 per year is broken down here into a 40 hour work week we can all relate to, to get a more nuanced view of exactly how much money he makes: $540,000 divided into 12 months is $45,000 per month, which breaks down to $11,250 per week or $281.25 per hour. An adjunct professor making $34,000 annually breaks down to $2,850 per month, $712 per week or $17.50 per hour, at 40 hours a week. Most of these adjunct professors are highly educated PhD’s who invested both thousands of dollars and thousands of hours into their education, in order to teach and impart knowledge to the rest of us.

Now, we at PSU are all smart enough to see there is a problem here, when adjunct professors can’t pay their bills, and continually struggle under the mantle of adjunct-ness and all of its present strictures. Besides salary considerations, of equal annoyance is the continuing employment anxiety of short term contracts—of a single nine-month term or even the ten-week contracts that the newer adjuncts must accept.

This treatment of professors by PSU continues to perpetuate the administration’s notion that adjuncts are worriesome part-time employees replaceable at any time. This process of forcing adjuncts to re-apply for their positions term-to-term is demeaning and insulting to valuable and educated instructors who represent the backbone of Portland State University.

President Wim Wiewel’s salary and contract length are also public information. Let’s have a look.

On June 21, 2015, the Oregon State Board of Higher
Education extended President Wiewel’s contract until June 30, 2016. This represents no short term contract anxieties for the president. He can relax knowing he has a job for the next two years, while he looks down at the adjuncts struggling to cobble together yet another short term contract for very little money.

Of equal interest is the breakdown on how the president is compensated: his $260,000 base salary, paid by the state, is more than seven times the $54,000 salary paid to a PhD adjunct. Now here’s where it gets interesting. The remaining balance of the president’s compensation, $280,000, comes from the PSU Foundation, a non-profit whose mission is “to enhance the development of PSU through [their] relationships, resources, and guidance. Gifts to the foundation advance PSU by providing scholarships, supporting faculty research and instruction, enhancing facilities and nurturing new programs.”

That balance, referred to as a “salary supplement,” is $141,000 direct pay and $158,000 in deferred salary. The president’s housing is provided, as well as $750 per month for vehicle compensation.

This begs the question; does the president have to pay income tax on the “supplement,” or is it a non-taxable revenue source for him? Note that nothing in the mission statement indicates the PSU Foundation can be a back-door tax free paymaster. Is this what’s happening? The inequities here are piling up quickly.

The president’s annual compensation of $540,000 per year is broken down here into a 40 hour work week we can all relate to, to get a more nuanced view of exactly how much money he makes: $540,000 divided into 12 months is $45,000 per month, which breaks down to $11,250 per week or $281.25 per hour. An adjunct professor making $34,000 annually breaks down to $2,850 per month, $712 per week or $17.50 per hour, at 40 hours a week.

President Wim Wiewel can live like a king, while the peasants operate as his wage slaves. This system is so upside down, no thinking person could justify it continuing at Oregon’s largest university.

A Portland Oregon Trimet bus driver, with no education beyond high school, can make $24.75 hourly. A journeyman plumber, also with no education beyond high school, can earn an average of $24.92 per hour according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Compare that to the $17.50 that a PhD, adjunct professor at PSU earns.

Perhaps there is something in the rarefied atmosphere the top PSU administrator is breathing that brings about his confusion over the turmoil swirling about the university (and ultimately, him). The unrest came as “a surprise,” he claimed.

Surprise surprise! Why is it a surprise that the rabbles are not happy with Mr. Wiewel making more money in a month than they make in a year? Because it’s a representation of obvious inequity they’re no longer willing to tolerate in the climate of economic hardship that currently exists in much of Oregon.

To me, Wim Wiewel’s “surprise” at the discontent on campus sounds a little like Marie Antoinette’s “let them eat cake.” In both cases, true reality is lost on them. And frankly, a man making $540,000 a year (which, by the way, is more than the president of the United States earns in a year) had damned well better know what is going on in his fiefdom.

President Wiewel seriously overestimated his leverage in assuming the PSU administration could win a strike. And when confronted with the reality of losing the strike, he responded to faculty members at a senate meeting, “I have heard you and I am listening.” Just like a politician.

As a tactician in this period of labor unrest, President Wiewel has demonstrated his lack of savvy, and I would hesitate to seek counsel from a man with his misunderstanding of labor relations and basic gamesmanship. He simply didn’t have enough marbles to win the game.

PSU is a microcosm of American society, and the labor unrest at universities across the country mirrors the Occupy movement—it rails against America’s battle with the elites, who are more than happy to continue this manner of economic inequity. In my opinion, President Wim Wiewel is a head-in-the-clouds elitist, who has lost touch with the common realities of the working class and what it takes to survive in this world.

I would not present a problem for dissection without also suggesting a solution. My recommendation is this: since a large part of the president’s job is to solicit funds, tie his compensation, over and above his base state-paid salary, to a percentage of the funding he brings in. That would encourage him to be a fundraiser. Return the “salary supplement” provided by the PSU Foundation to “research and instruction,” which actually is in the mission statement of the PSU Foundation.

It is past time to review the royal, near God-like treatment of all of Oregon’s university presidents, who earn more money than the president of the United States does. These university presidents simply make too much money and the disparity is too great to be further tolerated by the public, and particularly by the thousands of professors who live in near-poverty conditions.

President Wim Wiewel teaches no students but has provided a discouraging lesson to academia. It is this: there is no money in teaching. The real money is in power and administration.
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JUNE 2014

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TACKIN TATTOOING

one of the goals of the system of education established by napoleon bonaparte was to

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SEARCHES THAT LED TO OUR WEBSITE SINCE MARCH 2014

Of course, we’ve had some normal searches online that have led to portlandspectator.org. But we thought it’d be cool to showcase the weirdest, most misspelled and/or funniest things people have typed into a search engine which, thanks to the mysterious magic of the internet, led them to our site. You can’t say we haven’t covered a wide spectrum of issues this year.
June is upon us and summer grows near. For some of us June brings the walk—cue “Pomp and Circumstance”—as you accept your degrees and head out into the job search world of post-graduation. Others buckle down for summer quarter courses which, as full-length classes are reduced to a short term with the same amount of work, means greater effort to keep up.

Then there are those who will hurry to mountains and beaches, catch some rays or chase some fish or rack up some swimming laps. Summer can be a time for relaxation and play. But summer can also be a time for broadening your horizons and learning in a less-formal manner than university summer courses. There are many opportunities in any given field; for the history major there is the chance to join an archeological dig, some as close as the Macaw Indian Village at the Macaw Nation on the tip of northwestern Washington, or at several sites at parks (Champoeg) and forts (Vancouver or Stevens) throughout the area. Geology seekers can locate trips to the Columbia Gorge or to the Pacific Coast, as can those interested in biology. Check in with your department to see what opportunities may still be available and see what discoveries can lie ahead for you this summer.

To plan ahead, check with Portland State University and look to next summer or fall and consider studying abroad. Whether it’s a year abroad or a summer workshop, opening yourself to another cultural environment will certainly round out your world view and give you valuable experience. Universities in many places, including England, as well as France and Mexico, offer a wide curriculum of courses in English. This is a vast difference from some years ago when one had to pre-learn the language or immerse oneself in the process of learning on the spot, rather akin to being thrown to the wolves like a defenseless lamb!

No educational opportunity, in my opinion, can leave a greater imprint on the individual than studying abroad. When we open ourselves to other lands and people we come away much wiser and worldly, and we are able to appreciate the differences and the similarities of the inhabitants of the globe.

Also on that great American pastime: the road trip; with less necessary planning, it is possible to not only discover the historic and regional differences of our own vast nation, but also to cross our borders and investigate our neighbors of Mexico and Canada. With roots ranging from Spain to England and France, one can absorb the feeling of being abroad. Sitting at a sidewalk café in some city or village in Mexico, one looks up at the architecture of ancient Spain. In Montreal, a cup of coffee poured with scalded milk and paired with a flaky croissant provides the very essence of a morning in France, while a banger and beer in a pub in British Columbia filled with locals and atmosphere transports us to jolly ol’ England.

So whether scraping with a trowel to discover an ancient artifact, visiting a castle in Europe, reading a good book on a sunny beach in Mexico, hunting for a job, studying flora and fauna in a Northwest temperate jungle, or pondering calculus in the park blocks, it certainly is a pleasure to wish you all the most productive and enlightening of summers.

To finish this brief (on purpose, as I’m getting ready for my own summer sabbatical) column: as my southern father used to say, quoting his Grandfather who had served in the Civil War (which he would have called “The War Between the States”)... “See you in the fall, God willin’ and the Creek don’t rise!”

**Opinion**

**by Eugene Messer**

Eugene Messer is a longtime Vancouver resident who has been writing for over 40 years. He was a campaign manager/speech writer for Robert Kennedy, Hubert Humphrey and George McGovern, among others.

“Summertime and the livin’ is Easy”...but not too easy, hopefully.
CALL FOR EDITORS

Portland Spectrum Magazine is still accepting applications for editors next year! Editor-in-chief and subeditor positions available.

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HAPPY SUMMER!