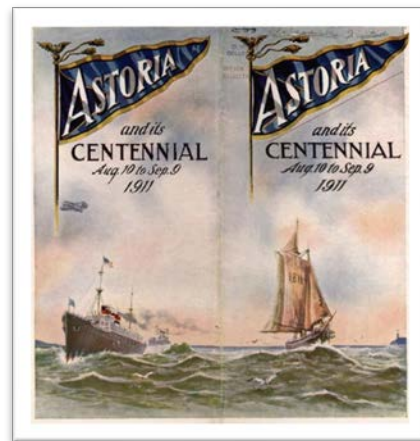


Trail Notes, Fall 2020

Dear Colleagues,

The tumultuous year for higher education and reasoned scholarship that was 2020 took a turn for the worse shortly after I sent the Spring 2020 Trail Notes. Perhaps it was inevitable that sending college students home in March due to COVID-19 was a bad idea from the perspective of restless youth. As warm weather returned, the death of George Floyd on May 25 provided the perfect starting gun for a summer of youthful protest and destruction. Although Portland is 1,700 miles from Minneapolis, the young people of the city took it upon themselves to avenge what they saw as a wrongful death, and to roll into the festivities all manner of other complaint and grievance. The moral panic that ensued in the higher education sector was a wonder to behold. Universities and their constituent units rushed to issue breathless denunciations of racism, promises to impose new ideological thinking on their operations, and illegal pledges to “hire more black faculty” among other undertakings. The OHSU president helpfully provided a link entitled “Anti-racism resources for white people.” Students returning to campus in September, it became clear, whether virtually or in person, would be subjected to an unprecedented assault on their individual freedom and academic pursuits by university administrators and radical faculty

determined to root out “structural racism” from every dorm room and study hall on campus. The University of Oregon outdid itself in shabbiness by forcing its incoming undergraduates to undergo thought reform using the *New York Times* 1619 Project – the widely discredited attempt to center American history on slavery – as its mandatory freshman incoming class Common Reading. Alas, NAS president Peter Wood’s new book *1620: A Critical Response to the 1619 Project* appeared too late for inclusion on the syllabus!



In the midst of the moral panic, your Oregon Association of Scholars teamed up with our doughty headquarters staff at the National Association of Scholars to launch an online *Critiques of BLM Reading Group*. The group attracted 110 participants from colleges and

universities across the United States. Each week in the Fall, we met remotely to discuss several readings and videos featuring scholars critical of the Black Lives Matter Movement, the most vocal of whom over the summer were black scholars like Glenn Loury of Brown University and the timeless Thomas Sowell of the Hoover Institution. All the reading group materials as well as brief summary videos of each section were made freely available on your Oregon Association of Scholars [website](#), where they have been widely accessed.



Bandon Beach Coast Guard, 1920s

The much-anticipated collapse of higher education as a result of COVID-19 proved to be a case of wishful thinking for many critics of the sector. Nationwide, enrollment was down 1.9% at public, four-year universities across the nation in the Fall quarter, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. The figures for the University of Oregon and Oregon State University were 3% and 4% respectively. In addition to tuition losses, the loss of federal grant monies due to budgetary constraints, as well as athletics revenue, facilities rentals, and foreign students combined were likely to add to the pressures. But if there was any expectation that this fiscal tightening would lead to a renewed emphasis on controlling administrative bloat and trimming non-remunerative departments and centers, that hope seems forlorn at this writing. The true fiscal impact may be felt if the plummeting

freshman class numbers are repeated next year.



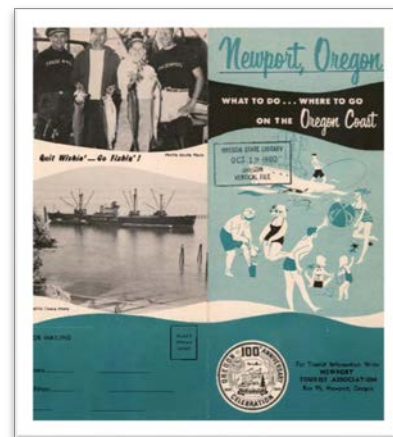
The possibility is growing that Oregon colleges and universities will follow their counterparts elsewhere in the nation to expand the definition of “bias” incidents on campus to include “climate” or “culture” problems. At the University of Nebraska (of all places) the list of “bias incidents” that could be reported to campus commissars was expanded in the Fall to include “incidents that may not violate the university’s Student Code of Conduct or Title IX compliance regulations, but run counter to the university’s core values and beliefs.” The university asserted that it “takes these matters seriously and that it is extremely important to address incidents that do not align with the values of the institution.” But with university presidents and college and faculty leaders at Oregon universities asserting that the “core values” of their institutions now include everything from race and gender victimization theories to fossil fuel hysteria, this means any student not fully in compliance with the party line risks being punished. The University of Oregon’s diversity police, for example, now [proclaim](#) that BLM is a core campus value that must be agreed to by everyone (signage is recommended). This is thought control, pure and simple. Oregon State helpfully informs its students that bias reporting is not “thought-

policing, censorship, [or] a way to avoid hard conversations.” But it’s hard to imagine, given that it is not deployed that way given that their definition includes even “perceived” slights that “create a hostile working, learning or living environment” or “a negative psychological, emotional, or physical effect.” What I hear from conservative, classical liberal, and other open-minded college students in Oregon is that they have simply developed strategies to keep silent in class, mimic their professors Woke expectations in their writing, and avoid all “hard conversations” on campus. The Oregon State administrators, we might say, doth protest too much.



It is always useful to check in on the latest data showing how well Oregon colleges and universities are doing in delivering value for money. A fabulous new [tool](#) was created by the Texas Public Policy Foundation and released in January. Taking just the three major public universities in Oregon – PSU, OSU, and UO – we find some familiar patterns comparing undergraduate disciplines and institutions using the standardized “student debt-to-annual income” ratio that captures the relationship between what students paid for college and what they are earning after college. There are four majors -- English, Fine Arts, Liberal Arts, and Natural Resources – that appear in the worst quintile for all three universities,

indicative that these majors are a bad deal from a financial perspective. By contrast four other majors – Mechanical Engineering, Computer Engineering, Computer Science, and Accounting – appear in the top quintile for all three universities, indicative that these majors are a good deal from a financial perspective. Economics ranks in the second quintile, Political Science in the second or third, and Sociology in the third quintile for all three universities, not a bad showing for the social sciences. The variations are no less interesting. There are four disciplines – Anthropology, Psychology, Biology, and Human Resources – where graduates face different fates depending on which of the three universities they attended, indicative of the importance of knowing the quality of the department you plan to study in. The more than students and parents demand value for money in their college educations, the less room there will be for those institutions to abuse their positions to impose irrelevant indoctrination on their charges.



With football suspended, it mattered less than the former “civil war” between the state’s two football powers was formally unnamed in June in order to avoid causing offense. As the *College Fix* noted, a civil war

refers generally to a war between two factions in the same political jurisdiction, precisely what the annual pigskin rivalry was. But BLM activists needed only a few phone calls to end the traditional name. The *Fix* humorously referred in its reporting to the Oregon president as “the aptly named Michael Schill.” Like any great assistant to a confidence trickster, he played his role to perfection in unnamng the civil war.



Oregon Beach Wear, 1910

Sometimes, one needs only popcorn. In June, a delicious little “civil war” erupted at the University of Oregon between a Black Studies professor in the Ethnic Studies Department and the Black Student Taskforce. The latter accused the former of “anti-blackness” for failing to launch a black studies major. The former [responded](#) with charges of “black macho”, “anti-feminism”, “sexism”, and “misogynoir.” The university solved the factional tiff with—what else – handouts, in this case more money for black studies and the launch of a new black studies minor. This on top of a new \$11 million “anti-racist research center” announced in October whose offerings will be forcibly “integrated across the university curriculum.” As they say on the highway billboards: “Your Tax Dollars At Work!”



Wreck of the Oakland, Nehalem Spit, 1916

It is not often that I rattle the tin cup for the OAS, but there is a direct link between our incomings and our ability to defray outgoings. I do not expect OAS members to draw from their limited resources, but would ask you to keep your ears open when you come across like-minded friends and colleagues who have prospered and might be interested in a closer relationship with your humble organization. My bank in Portland is at present boarded up in anticipation of “celebrations” by those who have been warning about assaults on democracy for the last four years. Once this passes, I would be more than happy to enter the lobby clutching a handful of bills made out to your Oregon Association of Scholars.

Thanks for all you do!

Bruce Gilley

OAS President

www.oregonscholars.org