

SOU sets campus agenda

Theater Arts Building, Science Building top list for renovations

By **By john darling**
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Reviewing their master plan in public workshops Thursday, Southern Oregon University officials said their first focus is expansion of the Theater Arts Building, followed by renovation and expansion of the aging Science Building and a new home for Jefferson Public Radio at the Highway 66 campus entrance.

Also rising to the top of the state funding list is renovation of historic Churchill Hall, new classrooms for the nursing department and renovation of Mulkey Auditorium, said Larry Blake, associate vice president for facilities management and planning.

The workshop was organized as part of a campus survey conducted by Eric Ridenour of SERA Architects of Portland. The team interviewed top administrators, a campus steering group and students on campus.

They stressed that all the projects on the list would cost a lot of money and would take time to realize.

Blake said the "key" projects of the Theater Arts and Science buildings will get 50 percent state funding, and SOU will have to raise the rest. The theater building was designed for 65 theater majors and now operates with 200, so the \$11 million addition would be for classrooms and practice spaces that would allow the department to expand into musical theater and continue to attract top high school students.

He said upgrading the Science Building, where some parts date to the 1950s, would cost \$30 to \$40 million.

He said JPR's "ambitious" plan for a new \$15 million building at the corner of Walker Avenue and Highway 66 "would make a wonderful entry for the campus," but would require a significant fundraising project.

The Nursing Department, which is spread across four sites around campus, has asked for its own building, but Blake said in the near term, improvements for the nursing program will likely go upstairs in Churchill Hall.

The survey also produced complaints about deteriorating residence halls, and Blake said SOU would like to reshape them with new Madrone Hall as a model, building four bedrooms off a central kitchen rather than packing students two to a room.

SOU staff members told SERA that SOU was losing teachers who love Ashland but can't afford to live here. Some suggested the school should use some of its real estate to build housing that faculty could afford.

SERA's surveys showed that SOU faculty and students have a deep "sense of place" about the campus, but understand that it has a lot of commuters and isn't a campus in the traditional sense. There's also an awareness that the campus needs to be updated to attract and hold new students.

Ridenour noted that SOU is fostering its own "university district" around the intersection of Siskiyou Boulevard and Highway 66. He said the school needs to present a better first impression with better signage and by finding a way to avoiding presenting the "back" sides of buildings such as Britt and Stevenson Union to Siskiyou Boulevard.

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