With the help of research collaborators combined with his tireless curiosity on the topic, recent University of Oregon alum and community organizer Valentine Bentz has published the university's very own *People's Guide to the University of Oregon*. A People's Guide to the UO is a walking history guide that educates readers and tourists about place-based stories of political movements on campus. Documenting the sites of recent struggles such as UO's Save the Urban Farm campaign of 2023 and the student Boycott Divest Sanction Pro-Palestine encampment of 2024, the zine memorializes events during his tenure as well as the rich history of on campus organizing such as: the formation of the Lyllye Reynolds-Parker Black Cultural Center in 2017, the student movements against South African Apartheid and the Vietnam War of the second half of the twentieth century, and the installation and eventual toppling of UO's infamous pioneer statues that had been on campus for nearly a century— to name a few.

Inspired by his work with the Radical Organizing and Activism Resource Center on campus, Valentine developed a passion for local movement history and set out to create an institutional record of organizing on campus dating back to when the university was founded. Honoring other *A People's Guide* projects, A People's Guide to the UO champions the importance of telling history from the perspective of grassroots organizers and everyday people often invisibilized by mainstream historians. Moreover, the broad tradition of "people's guides" and corresponding tours helps readers better understand and internalize the significance of not only the history itself, but the everyday places and everyday people that helped create history.

What follows is a transcript [edited for clarity] of my and Valentine's conversation about this work and its broader reaching significance.

A People's Guide to the University of Oregon was not meant to convince prospective students not to attend the University of Oregon, rather it is a historical anthology intended to provide insight and a mindful, justice-oriented lens for the UO community to look at their surroundings through. It informs the community of things that I, when I was a student, and countless others could only pick up through bits and pieces over time that now has a place in one home. And I think that's really special and significant. So, what impact do you hope this has on students either thinking about attending the university or people who are currently at the university, and that can include administrators and faculty too. What's the purpose of it on campus?

Over time, I've kind of flipped where I used to be super hard line, like when I saw a [campus] tour, I'd always want to yell at them to not come here. But the more I went deep on this, I was like, *huh, if they're gonna do higher-ed, anyway and go to college, and I don't really have an ability to sway them from doing that, I actually do want them to come to the school* because of how deep enriched the struggle has been over years and years. And also, it's a relatively privileged environment to organize from compared to a lot of schools— like we don't face the repression.

I think of it like for prospective students, it is kind of a pitch to be

like, come here and be a part of something. For people already here, it has different goals for different people, and that's what has made it kind of difficult to create since the audience is catch-all.

For the average unpoliticized student, I hope this politicizes them and get them thinking critically about their own life. And [that] if there's things you're struggling with, you can actually do something about it. [The goal is to] basically illuminate what power even is as a concept, because the more you get out of the insular leftist community, the more it is clear the people are just so not even there. And the nihilism or the just being checked out or the privilege has removed people from thinking about their lives as something that could be worth struggling with. So that's kind of the goal, to reorient that type of person– which is a ton of people. And that's why the tours and the format as a tour guide is super important to me because if you can get people out on the tour –and we've been able to do it in classes, so people have to show up who wouldn't if they just saw a poster– it actually breaks through all of those initial things that would stop someone from picking up a radical zine. It's like we're here in the place and I'm reading the story about what actually happened where we're standing. It just soaks in a lot better.

I realized as I was making it though, there's a deeper goal for the already oriented organizer or activist. [It's also for] everyone who's been on the other side of state or institutional violence or has tried to organize and struggled with that process and felt really isolated, depressed, or burnt out. And for me, I wrote this zine from that place after the [Pro-Palestine] encampment and had this really profound sense when I was doing the research of like, *oh my gosh, other people have been here before me*. And everybody says that "we stand on the shoulders of giants," but it's different to actually know where they stood and know who they were, specific to the exact same context I'm organizing within. So I hope that the zine can catch people when they're in that spot and celebrate the work that makes them feel a sense of pride for what they're trying to do by showing them these other people.

As we do more work a third goal is to, with that celebration, also become a healthy analysis of the different things, from a place of love and respect for the prior movements: actually looking at them and picking out what worked, what didn't. Because right now it's really celebratory publication. There's not a ton of political analysis in that zine. But that's what we're building towards with the next iteration of it.

What was the most surprising thing that you learned?

I think so many people get stuff wrong. Like, even specifically around UO I think most of the work that's been done on these topics has been done by students and not done, probably, the very rigorous fact checking. Like, I'm using Daily Emerald articles from the '70s as my sources. So who even knows if they got that stuff right in the moment?

Also there's the sheer level of activity that you become acquainted with as you dive into the different eras. With the book, it's been really challenging to focus on specific things because we have such a wide range, but one thing

I feel like I'm a pretty good expert on at this point is the school year of 69-70. And in so many ways, the madness that I experienced in '23-24, '24-25 is mirrored and intensified and almost the same dynamics exist between some of the groups or the factions of people. And it was so shocking to see things play out. And it was covered so much better back then in the paper. And the groups all did, whether they were newsletters or just posters with writing on the back of them, they all printed stuff that all made it into archives. So I was able to not only have a secondary source, but primary sources from people and groups themselves and to see the relationality between the groups or lack thereof, was really surprising. And just how much happens at one time is kind of crazy.

Tell me about distribution and reception to this work on campus. Has there been any other groups of students or faculty that have asked to go on tours? And what type of feedback have you received?

We've gotten really good feedback, I couldn't ask for anything anything better. We've done probably between 20 and 30 tours at this point for different groups. It's been everything from doing them as a public thing that we put a flyer up for to the librarians, [and] the GTFF requested a tour to be done during their 50th anniversary weekend. That was really cool. I do them for the conferences that come to campus when the conference organizers want to throw [one] in there, like I did one for the HOPES conference. I had I think four class sections on tours now because the GEs were either teaching a section or teaching the class and they were people I knew through organizing.

We give [tours] to anyone upon request if I can make it happen in my schedule. So, we have other students who are starting to co-lead the tours with me, then I'm hoping by the fall, [we'll have] the first tour that I'm not saying anything at. I'm just walking and there for questions if needed. It is kind of tough because it's kind of specialized work, to be honest, for a student who's busy with other stuff to kind of feel comfortable with. If there are people reading the thing who want to get a tour, we could always do one.

And then what would you like to expand on? It sounds like there's a lot in terms of political analysis, but are there movements that didn't make it into this edition? Are there things in the next edition that's coming out that we can expect to see?

The University of Washington had a cool disorientation zine in 2012 where they did eras on their timeline and then did some different vignettes with themes. And I kind of want to try to do that at risk of cutting stuff out and platforming certain things over others. So I want to show how these different political eras have found a spot on the campus and also in the community.

We're gonna basically do a whole other tour guide for the EMU itself… so I've been working on that for the better part of the year now. It's still very much in research. We're basically using each one of the places as an excuse to talk about the different movements. I think the two or three biggest analysis chapters will be a chapter on police. And it's kind of hard not to

talk about the community campus kind of divide or lack thereof, depending on the situation. But we're gonna look at how…something I found through research is the university is the reason EPD was founded, because they were bringing higher education to Eugene, and they needed to clean up the town. That's in the Lane County Historical Museums' exhibit on the formation of the police, which is really brief. It's in there, though. It's interesting, the first police officer's job was to fix street lights, the boardwalks, then care for fruit trees and make sure that wild hogs didn't destroy people's yards.

It was called the Eugene Marshall. And then they basically expanded that course when they got hired because there were a ton of homeless people in Eugene at that point. And so even just from that anecdote, it's like, whoa, you can see a lot of the present day echoing in that. Like, harassment on unhoused people, the campus bringing a lot of people to the town, and then it changes it and it needs to be policed differently. So I want to unpack all that and also look into federal policing, and obviously the FBIs had a historic presence in Eugene from the Earth Liberation Front. Also in the 70s they were actively surveilling people. Of course, they're always up to shit now. And then also, of course, the formation of the campus police department in 2011 is a big deal.

[There's] that, and then the admin chapter, which I find super important, basically unpacking the privatization of the school. We kind of do that with the Knight Campus thing, [but we want to] work through the far right project to privatize higher ed and then create a board that's undemocratic. And then we'll do a lot of analysis in our divestment chapter, which is going to look at the [University of Oregon] foundation and then also compare South African divestment to fossil fuel divestment to the Palestine BDS [Boycott Divest Sanction movement] campaigns, because those are probably the three strongest movements that have ever hit the campus as far as their duration and peak strength.Which is just really interesting that there was this sustained energy around three completely different issues, but the mechanism that they were seeking was the same. So I kind of want to do some push and pull on that. And then we'll look into the labor unions in a very big way that we don't [currently]. So we'll also do little histories of each one of them and kind of compare kind of demystify the labor language, but also be more specific about what we're talking about when we're talking about unionizing our workplaces and what that does. Because at the university, they all function very differently and at times they can work against each other in a really unfortunate way. I think that's the meat of the next version.

What role does the people's guide have in the broader non-university community in Eugene? What role do you think that this historical scholarship has for everyday people in Eugene who are non-university affiliated?

It's honestly the central tension of the project for me right now. I'm no longer invested in the school, I'm not not a student anymore, so sometimes I'm thinking like man, am I just wanting to write a People's Guide to Eugene instead? And how is that different? And I think unfortunately, yeah, it's a little unappealing for the average Eugenian to pick up a People's Guide to the UO, specifically if they're disenfranchised by the university, which the vast majority of people in town likely are. I hope that it will generate

further people's history work in the town. You know, there's so much good local history and political history work done about Eugene and so many knowledgeable people still here from movements that happened a long time ago, but none of it's put together anywhere— it's fragmented. And so, I hope that parts of this book can kind of stitch it together for people and it can be a tool whether someone's a student or not. But in that same vein, the university and Eugene profoundly shape each other. They're constitutive, and if anything, as much as it's disenfranchising, people need to have a good critique and be aware of what the school's doing.

Even if you live far away, it's easy to see that our only emergency room in town got torn down and now it's being redeveloped as a billion dollar student housing project by one of the largest housing equity firms in the country. When enrollment's decreasing! So [this] profound spiral of capital is just playing out on the ground because the school is there. So I hope to kind of break through that tension as we get more into it. And I do want to demonstrate that…I don't think there's an anti-community vibe on campus. I think within certain individuals, we definitely deal with that. But I just think there's a lack of awareness about the impact of the university. So I hope it can also show students their responsibility to the town they are in. It's been really helpful for me to think about, as a tour guide, students are kind of tourists in Eugene— even if they're here for 4 years. Even if they're like most students and say, *I'm getting the fuck out of this place, as soon as I can and leaving*, I at least hope they'll become witnesses and responsible people to what the university is doing. And if not, like actually get both feet on the ground and decide to do something about it and stay or stick around like some of us do— if they do come to enjoy the community. And I hope that folks who are not at all involved at the university can get something out of it just from the work we do on the local history. We have so much resources to be doing this work, I do want it to be useful in a way that's completely unrelated to the goals of the project as far as the school is concerned.

With plans to expand on this research and publish a full-length book, *A People's Guide to the University of Oregon* is just the beginning of this necessary scholarship. Read the zine and learn more about this project at https://peoplesguideuo.com/.