

An Open Letter To Governor John Kitzhaber and Members of the Oregon State Legislature:

The members of the Faculty Advisory Council, a group of faculty elected to consult weekly with the President and Provost on matters of importance to the University of Oregon, join with our colleagues in supporting President Richard Lariviere and his vision for excellence at the University of Oregon and indeed for the system as a whole. Central to this vision is the implementation of independent institutional governing boards system-wide. Such independent institutional governing boards would provide oversight that recognizes the unique opportunities and challenges of Oregon's public universities.

The seven institutions of higher education in the Oregon University System differ from one another. Each has a specific purpose and promise it makes to its community and to the state. The seven universities offer different programs and attract different student bodies. The academic and research programs conducted on each campus reflect the diverse faculty at each institution. Our campuses are in cities, in valleys and in the mountains. It is this rich canvas of people, place and programs that truly captures what a special place Oregon is.

It is now overwhelmingly evident that a single governing board cannot effectively oversee, innovate, and create policy for this collective of institutions. In the complex economic and social world of 21st century Oregon, each campus faces unique challenges and opportunities that warrant individual and particular solutions. While the rumored "local governing board" plans appearing in SB 559 and SB 242 may seem like the solution they are not. Retaining the State Board of Higher Education as it is structured now simply adds administrative layers (decision makers in the form of a local governing board) that will only complicate and slow innovation and campus-specific solutions. Instead of having oversight in key areas of governance such as the setting of tuition rates that would allow for a more transparent understanding of the economies behind tuitions, the local board proposed in HB 559 and 242 would address issues such as landscaping. To state it simply, the local board plan ensures the status quo and does nothing to create the kind of independent, responsive, responsible, and innovative flexibility required to address local challenges and opportunities. They do not provide informed, involved, and committed oversight needed by a growing institution like the University of Oregon.

The notion of independent governing boards is rare but not unprecedented. The university system in the state of Virginia reorganized in 2005 to allow for "greater financial and administrative autonomy in exchange for their commitment to meet specific statewide goals." Such goals include providing access, maintaining affordability, and establishing programs with K-12 schools to improve student achievement and teacher skills. Similar plans are also being considered in the states of Louisiana and North Carolina.

We respectfully request that our Governor and legislature take up House Bill 3683 in its February, 2012 session to evaluate the value of independent governing boards instead of just adding another layer of administrative oversight within the current system. Furthermore, we request that such a system be put in place at the University of Oregon without delay. While we cannot speak for the other institutions in the system, we welcome their thoughts on the value of independent institutional governing boards as well. In our opinion, such boards are the best way to serve all the people of Oregon now and in the future.

Sincerely,

The University of Oregon Faculty Advisory Council

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