

IFS STATEMENT ON TRU GOVERNANCE DECISION, MARCH 31, 2014

Chair Donegan, Chancellor Rose and Members of the Board:

For the record, my name is Jeff Dense, Professor of Political Science at Eastern Oregon University and President of the Interinstitutional Faculty Senate (IFS).

I must preface today's remarks by noting IFS does not, and will not, advocate for a specific governance model for Oregon's Technical and Regional Universities (TRUs). Instead, after careful and thoughtful analysis, IFS is compelled to share several important observations we hope will guide your contemplation and decision on this vital issue.

Recently passed HB 4018 significantly expands your potential options with regard to the decision over TRU institutional boards. IFS sincerely understand how financial thresholds such as exceeding a percentage of reserve funds by a stipulated date may be at the nexus of your decision this Friday. However, IFS urges you to contemplate how fiscal metrics may adversely affect the third conditional "leg" suggested by HB 4018: the stability of the university's programs. Placing the financial threshold "bar" too high, or the timeframe for achieving such a goal too short, may result in an institution deciding to eliminate academic programs, and hence, reduce educational opportunities for students. From IFS perspective, this course of action makes achievement of the State's 40-40-20 goal increasingly difficult. Our students are Oregon's future. We must be ever vigilant to ensure affordable and accessible educational opportunities for Oregon citizens, especially in the regions served by the TRUs.

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As the baton of higher education coordination is about to be passed to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC), IFS believes the current debate over TRU governance provides a unique opportunity to ensure long-term collaboration between Oregon's public universities that will serve the best interests of future generations of students. A tripartite horizontal shared governance scheme consisting of a Presidents Council comprised of the presidents of all of Oregon's public universities, alongside the Provost Council and IFS, each with clearly articulated roles and responsibilities and meeting jointly on an annual basis, would provide significant synergistic opportunities for shared governance. Collaboration and cooperation between Oregon's public universities is essential if we are to reach our 40-40-20 goals. Without significant collaboration and coordination between campuses, in an atmosphere where fiscal resources are scarce, we may ultimately cannibalize each other. This is not in the best interest of students, and moreover, the citizens of Oregon. In order for the state to achieve its 40-40-20 goals, a spirit of collaboration and coordination within public higher education is essential to the future success of the state of Oregon. IFS remains fully committed to this spirit, in order that we may protect the best interests of our most valuable resource: our students.

Thank you for your time, and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.