

Commissioner.HECC@state.or.us

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Regarding the 12 % tuition increase for SOU, submitted by an observer.

Over the past 5 years I have been an observer of the ASSOU student senate meetings. And for the past 2 years an observer of the board of Trustees (BOT) of Southern Oregon University (SOU), attending all but one one of the monthly BOT Finance Committee meetings, the majority of the BOT Academic Affairs meetings, in addition to the quarterly BOT meetings. I am writing not on behalf of the LWV of Rogue Valley but as myself. Last night (May 9 2017) I attend the Senate meeting of the ASSOU- (Associated Student of Southern Oregon University) as an observer in the gallery.

May 9 2017 between 6 and 9:30 pm the ASSOU Senate struggled with the concerns of the representation of the Tuition Committee's letter to HEEC. As a student in the 1960s our complaint was that we did not have a seat at the table; now students have one. Students are fully aware of the responsibility, and the honest and forth-rite discussion was inspiring, all while maintaining decorum of meeting rules.

Student participation in the tuition setting process as President Linda Shott became uncomfortably aware, is inadequate. It is my observation that one of the pitfalls of student input, is that institutional history has to be re-communicated with each cohort of student leaders. It is also my observation that the commitment of students to their education and future when setting policy like tuition, is not the same as the faculty and staff who are committed to continuation of the educational institution and its excellence for the students. Students concerns are about mortgaging of their future for an institution while the state legislature has reduced tax payer support. The discussion of who should bear the financial burden of the public good of post secondary education is needed among, students, taxpayers, or corporations, but is not part of this letter.

In my opinion there were two points on which ASSOU Senate students were disadvantaged in their May 9 meeting.

The entire Senate was at a disadvantage without the depth of understanding that those members of the Tuition committee had. Some Student Senators were were not knowledgeable that tuition covers only academics and not buildings or building maintenance. They were debating a decision on process that the Tuition Fee committee members had reported was inadequate, while reaffirming that the ASSOU Senate had voted to confirm the 12% fee increase.

The second point on which the ASSOU student senate and indeed the entire student population at SOU are under an enormous disadvantage is the structural disadvantage of the haphazard way Southern Oregon University has been transitioned from a regional university, within a state supported system, to an independent public university. In 2013 2014 ASSOU actively lobbied the Oregon legislature regarding the re-engineering of the Oregon University System. The students in 2014 lobbied the legislature to provide two million dollars in transition support to SOU, and came home with \$500k.

Because of the inadequate restructuring financial support this 2017 cohort of students are being asked to take the brunt of this disinvestment funding. The state and the institution is asking students to mortgage their future to support a underfunded transition, and using them as a funding source of last resort.

Students leaders understood that SOU retrenchment was difficult. Some knew students who left SOU because their major was cut, it was disheartening, and makes the point that cutting programs is not the way to fix the budget crisis. Some ASSOU senators understood that the 12% tuition increase was necessary.

The HEECs responsibility is to request of the Legislature the Higher Education budget, but policy changes can help to alleviate the budget crisis for SOU.

A interim policy solution, rather than raise tuition by using students as the funding source of last resort. Revise the SOU Retrenchment contract to allow this arbitrary 10% fund balance to be reduced till the State budget crisis is solved.

The current tuition increase is to maintain the fund balance at 10%. The purpose of the fund balance is to give Institutions the flexibility to respond to crisis. The current state budget crisis is not the fault of 2017 students. Reduce the fund balance to 5% for an interim time to allow the institutions to recover.

SOU because of its unique regional nature should have the funding model supplement extended to support the transition from regional to comprehensive university. The development opportunities for SOU were suppressed for 80 years as the State of Oregon multiversity system allowed UofO and Oregon State, (adding in PSU in the 1990s) to developed as Research Universities. Research and Institutes are needed to broaden the financial base of SOU. Strategic planning is underway and SOU is ideally situated in a town of arts and letters, Ashland, to leverage off the proximity to Oregon Shakespeare (OSF) and develop institutes. It should not be missed that the OSF originated from the collaboration of an SOU professor Angus Bomer in 1930s that extended his English classes to a theater company. The funding model is disadvantage to SOU and if supplemented for the transition period would reduce the need to increase tuition as much. Change policy to revise the funding model to advantage SOU during its transition.

These opinions are mine and are rooted in my personal family story of the power of higher education to elevate the standard of living of 3 generations of Southern Oregon University graduates and residents. 1933, 1956, 2009.

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