Portland State
UNIVERSITY

Board of Trustees

Post Office Box 751
Portland, Oregon 97207-0751

503-725-2640 tel
503-725-2657 fax
www.pdx.edu/board

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Sent via US Mail & Email
bryant@bljlawyers.com
ben.cannon@state.or.us

Neil Bryant
Chair
Higher Education Coordinating Commission
255 Capitol Street NE, 3d Floor
Salem, OR 97310

Ben Cannon
Executive Director
Higher Education Coordinating Commission
255 Capitol Street NE, 3d Floor
Salem, OR 97310

Dear Neil and Ben:

We write to request reconsideration by the Higher Education Coordinating Commission of Portland State University's tuition increase.

The tuition increase before the HECC was unanimously approved by the PSU Board of Trustees following months of painstaking review and consideration of the University's financial health and stability. The Board considered alternative levels of tuition and concluded that the balanced approach of painful budget cuts and tuition increases reflected in our current proposal is the best approach for the University. This decision was the culmination of a process that took months and involved many. Students, including students of color, were included in the process and served as members of the Student Budget Advisory Committee. Meetings were held with the Student Senate and the student government executive committee. Students were invited to and attended a campus-wide town hall meeting. In addition, the Board held a special Board meeting with the sole agenda item being small group discussions with students about topics such as affordability.

We are well aware that tuition increases have real impact on our students, particularly our Pell-eligible and underrepresented students. With this tuition increase, we will continue our efforts to minimize the impact on low income students by increasing financial aid available to those students, ensuring that the increase is borne most by those better able to afford it. Paradoxically, an inability to implement the proposed tuition increase is likely to result in decreasing financial aid available to Portland State's neediest students.

Portland State University, like our sister institutions statewide, confronts significant cost-drivers beyond our control—particularly state-mandated retirement and health care costs. Portland State has one of the lowest tuition rates among the Oregon public universities and among our nationwide peers. We are already a lean organization. Portland State's revenue (tuition and state appropriation) per student is far lower than other institutions, both in and out of Oregon, which means that we already educate and graduate students at a significantly lower cost than other institutions. Balancing our budget through even greater cost reduction will detrimentally impact the education and services we provide to our students and harm those students you are most seeking to protect. We cannot cut our way to financial stability and academic excellence.

We understand that commissioners may be interested in knowing, with greater certainty, how Portland State would reduce this proposed tuition increase if the Legislature appropriates additional funds to the Public University Support Fund. Our Board has already committed to reducing the tuition increase in that event. We can, however, be clearer and more specific about that commitment. We will convene a special meeting of the Board to consider and approve a specific proposal for reducing the tuition increase in the event of additional funding. We will provide the resolution to you once it has been approved.

It is our fiduciary duty to govern the institution in a manner that is in the best interests of our current students and the long-term future of the institution. Our fellow trustees and we strongly urge the HECC to reconsider this critical measure. The stakes are critical for our institution.

Sincerely,

Peter D. Nickerson
Chair

Rick Miller /dr

Rick Miller
Vice Chair and Incoming Chair

cc: President Wim Wiewel
Board of Trustees