July 21, 2015

Budgeting for UO’s Academic Reputation: A Petition of Faculty

We, the undersigned faculty, are deeply concerned about budget prioritization at the University of Oregon. Budgets are not neutral: they reflect and perpetuate priorities. We believe the budget priorities of the last dozen years have hamstrung the true mission of our university. We urge you, as our representative on the Board of Trustees, to convey to your fellow Board members the importance of a budget that puts the academic excellence of our university first.

Last year there was a large revenue surplus, and unrestricted reserves in the General fund exceeded $106 million (with additional restricted reserves of $110 million). According to forensic accountant Howard Bunsis, these growing reserves are also boosted by increased support from the state, stable tuition income, and very favorable first-time ratings by two leading national bond agencies. Video and slides from his presentation are available on the United Academics website.

Yet numerous contradictions are apparent: inexplicable structural imbalances and transfers between schools and colleges; heavy and unexplained legal fees; austerity for top-notch graduate programs; disinvestment from core academic divisions; new cuts to library resources; and tours around campus by top administrators describing impending budgetary doom. At the same time, administrative positions and salaries expand, and the Athletic Department faces no comparable call for austerity or shared sacrifice. Just last week the Administration once again proposed a cut in real income for faculty, as USA Today reported, the UO led the nation last year in athletics revenues while maintaining a $2.5 million subsidy from the academic budget.

A one-year “deficit” has been presented as a justification for austerity, despite the $10 million surplus over the biennium, and cash reserves which have doubled in 5 years. The CAS deficit is treated as a fact of nature, while it actually comes from a budget model and subsequent decisions by central administration that lack clarity and transparency. Reacting to short-term deficits with austerity to academic programs, libraries, and faculty erodes long-term academic excellence.

The budget model now in place stresses student majors to determine where funds flow on campus and diminishes general education courses, minors, and certificates as criteria for allocating those funds. This new system is causing confusion for its lack of transparency and dislocation in student registration for non-major courses.

As a whole, these decisions severely curtail the activities germane to our education and research mission and our status as an AAU research institution, and yet this is happening without the transparency and oversight appropriate to a public institution.

Faculty understand that strengthening our academic core builds the long-term reputation of our programs and inspires students, parents and alumni. Faculty know that we must work within budgetary constraints; the problem is that the conditions that create these constraints are not clear either to us or to the public.

We ask you to push for a fully transparent budget—including a detailed explanation of the budget model—so that the instructional and research mission of Oregon’s flagship university are front and center.

Your concerned constituents,
Jean Nelson, Neil Johnson, Lance Robertson
Dr. Tina Starr, Derrick Hindery, Frank James
Astra Henner, Christine L. Sundt, Joe Harwood
David Luebke, Kathleen Horton, Randy Blazak
Sergio Rigoletto, Bruce Evans, Jennifer Freyd
Sander M. Goldberg, Linda Fuller, Patrick Greiner
Lanie Millar, Tyrnas Warren, Trevor Whitbread
Andre Djiffack, Seth May, Greg McLaughlan
Gina Herrmann, Jenifer Presto, Michael Peixoto
Laurie A Graham, Forest (Tres) Pyle, Elizabeth A. Bohls
Pat Curtin, Eric Mentzel, Ryan Light
Mark Quigley, Eileen Otis, Miriam Gershow
Daniela Vallega-Neu, Colin Ives, Anne Laskaya
Darrin Divers, Julie Voelker-Morris, Lydia Van Dreel
Philip Scher, Roxann Prazniak, Warren Gerald Gast
Alex Dracobly, Gordon Sayre, Joanna Goode
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Bonnie Ullmann, Tom McDonnell, Richard W. Albin
Andrew Goble, Scott R Maier, Sandra Clark
Zhuo Jing-Schmidt, Analisa Taylor, Ellen Herman
William Rossi, Julie Weise, Nancy Bray
Margaret Sereno, Constance Dickey, Angela Montague
Jim Palandri, Deborah Healey, Dean E. Mundy
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Anne Forrestel, Bryan Moore, Daniel Wojcik
Gina Psaki, Simone DaSilva, Nora Terwilliger
Tanya Sheehan, Carl Bybee, Randy Sullivan
Michael Taormina, Gordon Hennesy, Dorothee Ostmeier
Idit Shner, Richard A. Sundt, Roland Good
Larry Wayte, Ocean Howell, Michael Hames-Garcia
Mike Urbancic, Carl Woideck, Daniel Steinhart
Crystal Dehle, David Turner, Masami Kawai
Diane Baxter, Laurie de González, Nancy Y. Cheng
Harinder Khalsa, Amy Costales, Robert Haskett
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Andrew Noonan, Craig Parsons, Sierra Dawson
Alexandre Albert-Galtier, Mary Jaeger, Tara Gabsi
William Toll, Garron Hale, Joseph Fracchia
Gerald Berk, Daniel HoSang, Marsha Weisiger
Kristin Yarris, Loren Kajikawa, Hanan Elsherif
Brian Butler, Reuben Zahler, Heidi Kaufman