

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).

Please note that given recent developments the last several days, I have amended my remarks from those distributed to Board members at Monday's meeting, and given the transitory nature of higher education governance in Oregon, I have forwarded a copy of my remarks to HECC Executive Director Cannon and Chair Nesbitt.

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 ultimate decision on this vital issue.

Recently passed HB 4018 significantly expands your potential options with regard to the decision over TRU institutional boards. IFS keenly understand how financial thresholds such as exceeding a percentage of reserve funds by a stipulated date may be at the nexus of your decision today, and subsequent negotiations should you decide to "conditionally" approve any of the TRUs request for an institutional governing board. However, IFS respectfully urges you to contemplate how fiscal metrics may adversely affect the third conditional "leg" suggested by HB 4018: the stability of the university's academic programs. Placing the financial threshold "bar" too high, or the timeframe for achieving such a fiscal goal too short, could conceivably result in a fiscally challenged institution deciding to eliminate academic programs in order to maintain an institutional governing board, and concurrently, reduce educational opportunities for students. From IFS perspective, this course of action makes achievement of the State's 40-40-20 goal increasingly difficult. IFS recommends if fiscal metrics are employed as a condition of institutional board approval, that a multiple year, i.e. through the 2015-17 budgetary cycle, be utilized, and academic program reductions be avoided as a 'lever' to maintain the existence of institutional boards.

A solitary focus on fiscal metrics evades a learned consideration of other factors, re "quality", that aid in providing a more comprehensive prism on the institutional board question. IFS strongly recommend any conditions placed on your approval of TRU institutional governing boards be linked to adherence to accreditation standards as articulated by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). The Interinstitutional Faculty Senate acknowledges that institutional governing boards should be fully engaged in the accreditation process.

Understanding accreditation and its relevance to educational quality is extremely important if institutional governing boards are to be successful in their mission fulfillment and fiduciary responsibilities. IFS recommends the orientation and training process for all TRU institutional governing boards should include a significant component on accreditation. Challenges to accreditation threaten

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institutional governing boards' ability to ensure in the delivery of a quality educational experience for TRU students, and more importantly, the very foundation of higher education in Oregon.

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. While legislation dictates the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) will engage in annual evaluation of institutional boards, at this critical juncture you have the ability to thoughtfully frame conditions which have the potential to strengthen not only the TRUs, but, moreover, higher education in Oregon. We urge you, should you decide on conditional approval for institutional governing boards for any of the TRUs, that faculty should be involved in the negotiating process. Institutional boards are ultimately a central facet of shared governance, and robust communication between faculty senates, institutional governing boards, university leadership and state-level stakeholders can only benefit our students, and moreover, the citizens of Oregon. Hence, should you decide to cast your vote for conditional yeses on the TRU institutional governing board question, a comprehensive and long-term approach, focusing on what is ultimately best for students, is essential.

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 and cooperation 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, working in collaboration 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 all of 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. While we keenly understand development and implementation of this collaborative governance concept may fall on the shoulders of the state legislature, and eventually HECC, 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.