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Academic Freedom

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Joint Statement by Provost Randhawa and Faculty Senate President Bill Boggess

February 8, 2006

OSU Campus Community:

Oregon State University has recently been the subject of public discourse regarding publication of a research article in Science. The incident has also raised the broader issues of academic freedom and professional responsibility that are fundamental to an academic institution.

What seems to have been forgotten in this debate is that a number of OSU scientists and researchers, including graduate students, had their research published in a very prestigious scientific journal. First and foremost, we and the OSU community are proud of our colleagues and congratulate them on this significant accomplishment.

The specific issue that has drawn public attention resulted from a request by a group of scientists in the College of Forestry that the Journal delay publication of the article. The scientists disagreed with the study's conclusions. It is inappropriate that a request to delay publication of other scholars' work was used as the vehicle to express these concerns. Differences of perspectives drive the scientific inquiry process. These should not only be encouraged, but fostered in our academic community. We are guided by our institutional values of respect, integrity, and social responsibility. It is imperative that we participate in creating a culture of open query and expression, where diversity of opinions is valued and individuals are free to express themselves without the fear of censorship.

The essence of academic life is to participate in the astonishingly complex search for truth. As such, the academy must be a place that encourages and celebrates innovative, exciting, and unfettered research. Recent events remind us that we can never become complacent in these matters. With an increasing proportion of resources needed to run the academy coming from private sources, maintaining the University's impartiality and independence in research and educational activities is becoming more complex and important. While OSU has developed protocols to monitor activities at the individual and unit level (conflict of interest policy, for example), it is ultimately our values and our culture that will insure the integrity of OSU as a public institution serving in the best interests of society. We intend to initiate campus-wide forums to address these increasingly important issues.

Together the Faculty Senate and University Administration hereby reaffirm our commitment to academic freedom, professional responsibility, and the scientific method. Oregon State University has a proud tradition of producing the very best, unbiased science. We invite all members of the academy to join us in a renewed commitment and continued vigilance to insure that academic freedom continues to lie at the very heart of our academic enterprise.

Sabah Randhawa - Provost and Executive Vice President

Bill Boggess - Faculty Senate President

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Resolution Passed by Faculty Senate on 9 February 2006

Whereas the Oregon State University Faculty Handbook "Statement of Faculty Responsibilities" expresses that members of the university community:

"Respect and defend the right of free inquiry of fellow faculty members,"

"Encourage free pursuit of learning and free inquiry in students,"

"Seek and state the truth as he or she sees it,"

"Exercise critical self-discipline and judgment in using, extending, and transmitting knowledge to diverse audiences on and off campus,"

"Contribute to the development of the discipline" and

"Show due respect for the rights of others to hold and express their opinions,"

The Faculty Senate of Oregon State University stands resolved that the actions taken by faculty members of this university that attempted to interfere with the publication of Mr. Dan Donato's (et al.) research in Science violated both the spirit and the letter of the "Statement of Faculty Responsibilities."

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