

## **EXCELLENCE AND ACCESS: PROMOTING AND SAFEGUARDING THE MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON**

The University of Oregon is *the* flagship PhD granting research institution in our state. As a public institution dedicated to the advancement of society through the acquisition of knowledge and pursuit of learning, UO's mission has always united the questions of access and excellence. Access means that all qualified students in Oregon have the chance to develop their talents and to fulfill their dreams through a superior university education. Without upholding the most rigorous standards possible in teaching and research -- standards already defined and exemplified by our sister institutions in the AAU -- we significantly erode that access and its desired outcome, academic excellence. Simply put, to fulfill our public mission we must vigilantly promote, enhance and safeguard the highest standards of academic achievement, both among our students and among our faculty.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of actions the University should undertake to achieve this goal. **The first action item is the top priority; without significant progress here, our goal of safeguarding the highest academic standards cannot be achieved.** However, all items require immediate implementation this academic year.

- 1) **INCREASE FACULTY COMPENSATION.** In order to retain and further recruit a faculty that is extremely active in research and highly regarded nationally and internationally, we must achieve a level of compensation competitive with our peer institutions. The single, most important factor in attracting high achieving students, recruiting first-rate new faculty, acquiring extra-mural funding, increasing donations, and achieving a high national academic reputation is *the faculty*. To reach a competitive level with our peers, faculty salary increases must be annual, must exceed the cost of living, must follow the Senate White Paper guidelines, and must be broadly distributed to the vast majority of faculty in all departments and schools. Salary equity issues including fairness, gender, compression and inversion must also be satisfactorily redressed. Other forms of compensation must not be ignored, however. Health and retirement benefits have been dangerously eroded of late and need be addressed. Research support in the form of Academic Support Accounts, departmental S&S budgets, teaching relief in the form of smaller classes, adequate GTF support and/or teaching releases, enlightened "spousal hiring" policies: these are all forms of compensation which can address the broader questions of recruitment, retention, and faculty morale.
- 2) **UPGRADE THE UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE.** Students' overall access to research faculty is essential for an improved undergraduate experience. After years of actively encouraging departments and programs to develop large, "efficient" general education courses, we need to offset this trend by enabling and encouraging the same units to reduce high student/faculty ratios whenever possible. Class sizes need to be capped at an educationally appropriate level. Faculty should be compensated for taking a more active role in student advising; training programs for departmental peer-advising should be developed. We need to provide more GTFs. Most

importantly, we need to ensure that every student takes at least one small enrollment course (~25 students) each term that has strong writing and synthetic thinking components. Each undergraduate major should offer an honors designation that includes independent research and a thesis. Units should be rewarded for developing more rigorous learning and research experiences for their majors.

- 3) **IMPROVE UNDERGRADUATE QUALITY. To enhance the overall academic experience of its students, the University must better attract and retain the most talented and the most highly motivated students in Oregon.** The University must more aggressively pursue top in-state students to keep them in Oregon, while it makes a stronger effort to attract top out-of-state students. Our current admissions standards *must be strictly enforced*. The number of students with records that do not meet our admission standards yet who are admitted under special circumstances should be substantially reduced. Students should be offered a variety of inducements, including scholarships to defray tuition and some living expenses. All undergraduates who maintain a distinguished cumulative GPA (e.g., 3.0) should be given free tuition in the term that they graduate. The benefits of remedial courses in math and English need to be weighed against the impact of such courses on the overall academic performance and quality of the student body.
- 4) **DEVELOP STRONGER GRADUATE PROGRAMS. Motivated graduate students fuel both the research and the educational missions of the University.** Substantial efforts must be made to attract and support more, and more highly motivated, graduate students in all appropriate disciplines. UO graduate funding packages are well below standards set by our peer institutions; our current percentage of graduate enrollment is below the minimum threshold set by the AAU. Enhanced funding opportunities for doctoral students would enable significant improvement in our doctoral programs.
- 5) **DEVELOP INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND TEACHING INITIATIVES. Almost by definition, knowledge expands across disciplinary boundaries.** Advances in research yield new ideas, insights, and methodologies, not merely within particular fields, but across disciplines. Faculty should be better rewarded for collaborative efforts in teaching and research, which are at the heart of scholarly innovation and progress. We *must* enable cross-listing of courses, for example, so that student credit hours follow *the student* and not the instructor. We should create incentives and provide resources for faculty to organize symposia, colloquia and conferences that nurture interdisciplinary work. And we must provide more research funding and an expanded role for interdisciplinary centers such as the Oregon Humanities Center.

Implementation plans for each of the above must be discussed openly and approved by the University Senate. All plans *must* include attainable and measurable annual goals. Some goals will require new funding, ideally from outside sources. To this end, we urge that faculty be included more substantively in the setting of fundraising priorities.

However if outside funding does not materialize, there must be firm campus-wide agreement that our annual goals will be achieved through internal reallocation. The Provost should make an annual progress report to the University Senate on the status of the implementation plans.