

Testimony of Patricia A. Schechter, Legislative Committee Chair of the American Association of University Professors at Portland State University and Professor of History – Portland State University

15 February 2013

Thank you to chair Dembrow and members of the committee for hearing us today. I am the Chairperson of the Legislative Committee of the American Association of University Professors at Portland State University. We represent the full time faculty at Portland State University.

“Administrative bloat” in higher education is making headline news. It figures in a national discussion about how to keep student learning at the center of education in tough economic times. In December, the *Wall Street Journal* cited U.S. Department of Education figures showing that “employees hired by colleges and universities to manage or administer people program and regulations increased 50% faster than the number of instructors between 2001-2011,” and the data put the state of Oregon in the spotlight on this issue.

I am so pleased that HB 2155 puts the focus right where it belongs: on the staffing to STUDENT ratio.

This focus is crucial because classrooms are a critical location of value added for public and tuition dollars. Students and the public deserve the accountability that this bill promises.

The power of this bill is its focus on a key theme I’ve heard the chair voice early this session: the importance of investing in human infrastructure.

By carefully tracking the ratio of instruction to various faculty categories, the review process outlined in HB 2152 promises to help direct resources so that they yield the highest return to students.

As my colleague Rob Fullmer points out, the faculty to student ratio trend line at PSU is downward and worrisome, and indicates a thinning of faculty contact with students.

Figures from the OUS fact book and Human Resources prepared by AAUP suggest that the best-supported faculty, the tenure-related faculty, have slipped in their place in the instructional mix on campus. Between 2002 and 2012, student enrollment increased about 24% but tenure-related hires increased only 18.5%.

The professional literature confirms that faculty student ratios remain key indicators of quality and student success in higher education. One researcher, Dr. Bruhwiler in 2011 found that “smaller classes led to higher academic learning progresses, better knowledge of students, and better classroom processes.”

In 2012, Dr. Johnson, a researcher at the University of California, stresses the “...benefits for reducing class size for student grades across all disciplines” and that “the effect of increasing class size is more pronounced in engineering, biology, and social science...”

I can tell you from my own experience that when I started teaching at PSU in the mid 90s, my classes were booked for twenty five students. Now they are booked for 60. As higher education research confirms, large class sizes can foster creative teaching strategies . I arrange students in small groups discussion, structure peer review of writing assignments, and now require every student to meet with me outside of class time. But students also tell me that they are keenly aware of paying more and more money for less and less of faculty time.

PSU-AAUP supports the transparency and disclosure that HB 2152 requires.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Do you have any questions?

Sources Consulted:

- Bedard, K. , P. Kuhn, "Where class size really matters: Class size and student ratings of instructor effectiveness," *Economics of Education Review*, 27 (2008), pp. 253–265.
- Brühwiler C, Blatchford P. "Effects of class size and adaptive teaching competency on classroom processes and academic outcome. *Learning & Instruction*. February 2011;21(1):95-108.
- "Dean's List: Hiring Spree Fattens College Bureaucracy—And Tuition" *Wall Street Journal* (29 December 2012).
- Gibbs, Graham. "Teaching Intelligence: It is possible to avoid the negative mass effects." *Times Higher Education Supplement*. January 17, 2013;(2084):22-23.
- Ginsberg, Benjamin. *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why it Matters*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Glenn D. "Big Classes Encourage Experiments in Teaching." *Chronicle Of Higher Education*. March 12, 2010;56(26):A1-A11.
- Johnson I. "Class Size and Student Performance at a Public Research University: A Cross-Classified Model." *Research In Higher Education* [serial online]. December 2010;51(8):701-723.
- Mandel P, Süßmuth B. "Size matters. The relevance and Hicksian surplus of preferred college class size." *Economics of Education Review*. October 2011;30(5):1073-1084.
- Mulryan-Kyne C. "Teaching large classes at college and university level: challenges and opportunities." *Teaching In Higher Education* April 2010;15(2):175-185.
- Schenker-Wicki A, Inauen M. "The economics of teaching: what lies behind student-faculty ratios?" *Higher Education Management & Policy*. November 2011;23(3):31-50.
- Tierney, W. "Creating a Meaningful College Experience in an Era of Streamlining." *Chronicle Of Higher Education* June 17, 2011;57(39):A64.