

April 1, 2015

## **Kurt Willcox Testimony on HB 3237**

Chair Read, Vice-Chairs Gallegos and Whisnant, and committee members:

My name is Kurt Willcox and I am here to speak in support of HB 3237.

I am a researcher at the University of Oregon. I work at intoCareers, which is part of the College of Education. We develop and maintain websites for 22 states, including Oregon, that help people identify careers to pursue. I have worked there nearly 6 years.

I am also the nonfaculty staff member on the UO Board of Trustees, so this issue of Board membership is of great interest to me. I have served in this position for almost 1½ years and am hoping to be reappointed for another two-year term. I want to be clear, though, that I am here today speaking for myself and for SEIU 503 which supports this bill, not our Board or the university.

Before coming to my present job, I spent nearly 30 years as a union representative and labor educator, working for both the University of Oregon and the University of Iowa. I also spent 1½ years at Oregon State University working for the Coalition of Graduate Employees (CGE), so I am very familiar with the work of graduate employees and the role they play on our campuses.

I support HB 3237, because I believe it is vitally important for our institutional governing boards to include active members from major segments of the campus community. We provide the Board members who are not on campus every day with an insider's view of how things actually operate. We can function as a bridge to the constituencies we come from in ways that top administrators cannot. And we can help engage our constituencies in the vision, work, and proceedings of the governing board.

For example, our faculty Board member at the UO has been directly involved in helping the administration and faculty resolve several major disagreements over proposed new Board policies. She has also been instrumental in arranging informal meetings of faculty with groups of Board members to discuss faculty concerns and the needs of the university. Likewise, our current student member has provided Board members direct insight into how concerns about sexual violence play out among students. She has encouraged us to take a hard look at tuition increases and she, too, has initiated informal meetings of students with groups of Board members.

Graduate employees are a unique and sizeable group at the UO. They play a critical role in both undergraduate instruction and faculty research and ought to have their own voice within the Board of Trustees:

- Graduate employees are students, but their interests and perspectives are not the same as those of undergraduates. It's not reasonable to expect an undergraduate Board member to effectively present the concerns of graduate students – and vice versa. Our first student Board member at the UO was a graduate student from the Law School. Even though he was student body president and well-connected to undergraduates, I heard from numerous undergraduate students who felt their concerns would have been better represented on the Board by a fellow undergrad. HB 3237 solves this dilemma by ensuring that we would have both undergraduate and graduate employee members on our governing boards.

- Graduate employees are also university employees, but they don't fit easily into either of the two broad categories of employees who are currently permitted to be members of institutional governing boards. They aren't exactly faculty and they certainly aren't nonfaculty staff. Most graduate employees at the UO teach, but their work arrangements, job expectations, and interaction with students differ greatly from those of tenured and non-tenured faculty. Board members from the faculty and nonfaculty staff constituencies can't adequately present the interests and perspectives of graduate employees. HB 3237 recognizes this and provides graduate employees with a voice and vote on the Board.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you today. I hope you will support HB 3237 and I'd be glad to answer any questions.

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