

Rep. Jeff Reardon
Chair, House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce
Development
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

I apologize for my inability to testify in person, however, I hope this letter displays my sentiments regarding the functionality of the University of Oregon's Board of Trustees. I am speaking as the student representative on the Board.

The governance change at the level of higher education in Oregon has allowed for an incredible development in the University of Oregon's ability to pursue and receive philanthropic gifts. These gifts have gone on to enhance the general quality of the University for every student.

One frustration that people have surrounding the Board is that it can be hard to make contact with some of the board members who are not on campus. This problem is somewhat inevitable, unless the board were made up entirely of figures from the campus community. This is an idea that I adamantly oppose. What I will say is that out-of-town board members go a long way to try to make their presence on campus felt. This can be seen in many different ways including, but not limited to, arranging special banquets, meet-and-greets, and coming to large University gatherings. Earlier this fall a brunch was held between Board Members and student government leadership where all of ASUO was invited. In regards to public comment at board meetings, Chair Lillis does a great job of facilitating the time allotment and from what I can remember, there has never been a time where someone who has wanted to speak has not been given the opportunity. If that situation were to occur, there is an email where all trustees can be contacted (trustees@uoregon.edu). Finally, there is an "Invite a Trustee" link on the B.O.T. website that allows for personal connection with individual trustees or the entire Board.

The Board is often blamed for the rising cost of tuition, however, I believe that is just because they are tasked with the final approval of increases. The individual university governing system has allowed the University of Oregon to set a budget that helps achieve all of our goals outlined for the coming years. Furthermore, a majority of the funds that are generated from tuition increases go to cost-drivers out of the Universities control such as PERS and health benefit costs. No one likes increasing tuition, however, with disinvestment from higher education, the University is often left with no other option.

I have heard dissatisfaction from the campus community regarding the lack of student representation on the Board. As an undergraduate, it is impossible for me to speak to the needs and experiences of graduate students. While I understand the perspective that it would be unfair to faculty and staff if there were to be another student representative, I acknowledge that the experiences that undergraduate and graduate students have are indeed very different. The addition of a graduate student representative to the Board would be something that I would support.

I refute claims that Board members are not up to date on all of the meeting materials. The Board is sent all of the necessary materials at least one week prior to the meeting and we are kept apprised of potential topics in between meetings. To say the board is not always briefed on issues would not be a collectively accurate statement.

Again, I apologize for not being able to attend the hearing as I would love to testify on my behalf. I believe that the Board is taking the University in an incredibly positive direction and while there has been a learning curve, things are beginning to work as they should. I have the utmost faith and belief in the UO's board and what it can achieve for the University.

Sincerely,

William Paustian
Student Representative