



American Association of University Professors

Academic Freedom for a Free Society

Representative Lively, Chair
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Senate Bill 273A – Support

Chair Lively, Vice Chairs Ruiz, McIntire and members of the committee,

On behalf of the more than 6,300 members of the American Association of University Professors in Oregon, our collective bargaining chapters at the University of Oregon, Portland State University, Oregon State University, and Oregon Institute of Technology, and our faculty members across the state, I urge you to support SB 273-A.

When the governing system of Oregon universities was broken into individual groups, the claim and hope was that the newly-created institutional boards would then be able to govern more closely to their campuses and include a wide variety of voices in the governance of the university. What we have experienced does not live up to that vision. The boards have not expanded to include outside voices, but rather have often grown more insular and siloed in their decision making. To some on the institutional boards and in the university administrations, shared governance is narrowly defined as the relationship between the board and the administration. This is a dramatic and unwelcomed development, as it removes institutional memory and the important role of faculty governance in its various roles on campus.

The reforms proposed in SB 273-A are long overdue, and this bill represents an important, positive step forward in creating a more inclusive and responsive university governance system. By expanding board composition to include graduate students, an important sector of the university workforce will take its rightful place on the board alongside undergraduate students, staff, and faculty. SB 273-A also enshrines the voting rights of each of these board members, which will ensure that there is no doubt that these are equal members of the institution's board, not merely honored guests.

Furthermore, by requiring policies from the SB 854 (2021) MOU to be adopted as official board policy at every university board, it establishes a consistent baseline that all public universities must adhere to. Presently, Oregon's public universities have varying interpretations of the SB 854 MOU, especially around "allowing a representative from official campus labor organizations to provide comment or report to the full board at regular board meetings upon request". And unfortunately, my personal experience as an OSU faculty member and the experiences shared with me by AAUP-Oregon members at PSU and Oregon Tech reflect a pattern of graduate employee and faculty voices being siloed and not effectively engaged with under the existing MOU. It is my sincere hope that SB 273-A will change this.

How can working relationships between the board and the university community improve when there is clear preference towards the administration's interests and viewpoints above those of all other stakeholder groups? SB 273-A can change this by requiring the board to receive and respond to reports from employee labor organizations and community comments. By requiring a process to research and respond to reports and comments, the university community can be assured that their concerns are not simply being heard and discarded.

All members of the university community deserve to feel not just heard but truly represented by their institutional board. By expanding the board, enshrining voting rights, and establishing clearer policies for all public universities to follow, SB 273-A can significantly improve higher education in Oregon to the benefit of all who reside in this state. **Please support SB 273-A.**

Thank you for your consideration,

Steve Shay
President, AAUP Oregon