

Chair Lively, Vice-chairs McIntire and Ruiz, and members of the House Committee on Higher Education:

My name is Emily Beatty. I am a graduate employee at the University of Oregon. I am primarily a teaching assistant and grader for faculty in my department. I have a passion for teaching, and I hope to extend my curiosity and dedication to education to my students.

I support House Bill 4125 because our state needs to monitor and study the effectiveness of the current system in relationship to meeting the public interest. Public higher education is a public good, because it intends to make quality education more accessible. It enables working class families to send their children to college at more affordable rates, and thus to open opportunities for their future. However, decentralized governance in the OR university system has enabled the encroachment of competitive market forces into public higher education, and consequently degraded the quality of education for its students. The primary goal of universities under this structure is to increase profits through increased tuition, requiring room-and-board payments for first-year students, charging obscure facilities fees, and investing in only the most "profitable" of career fields. These trends have not only made public education less accessible, but it has also shifted the quality of education being provided at such institutions, because certain fields lack the funding + institutional support necessary to properly educate students. For example, business and STEM fields attract substantial institutional funding, leading to improved facilities and available funding for faculty and graduate employees, while humanities, education, and arts fields are left with degrading buildings, offices, and lacking funds to attract quality scholars to the institution. Even for students who are able to keep up with the rising costs of education through private and public loans, which places them in a state of future economic precarity, the education being received is not as well supported as it needs to be due to the rising influence of competitive, private-style market forces in public higher education.

I also have concerns about the structure that was chosen 10 years ago and want our state to study its effectiveness. The UO Board lacks in transparency. The Board only meets quarterly, and much of their decisions are made based on work completed in obscure committees, the activities of which is incredibly difficult to track. The meetings of such committees are also relatively inaccessible for students and university workers, so even those who are aware that crucial discussion + decision making happen in these settings cannot attend to keep track of the work being done. The UO Board also lacks accountability to its student body. For example, campus labor unions and student organizing groups have frequently used Board meetings to address the Board with issues that affect students and workers

on campus, yet the Board does not respond to these concerns. Instead, the meetings simply serve as an open forum for a limited duration, and the Board feels no responsibility to address the concerns brought to the Board - no matter how much support is expressed by the campus community. The most recent Board meeting had over 60 people attend to demand the UO's divestment from companies that profit from Israeli investments, due to the ongoing conflict in Palestine, and over a dozen people gave testimony to the Board. These concerns have still gone unaddressed. Similarly, a divestment resolution was passed by the UO student government in 2019, but this resolution was swept under the rug and no changes were made to university investments.

One of the primary issues faced by education workers at UO is the rapid influx of undergraduate students. There is no longer any cap for undergraduate enrollment, which has led to double-digit percent increases in the freshmen class for the last three consecutive years. In my department of Political Science, introductory courses have tripled in size in two years - yet the number of graduate employees to teach and educate these students has not increased proportionately. This has meant trends of overwork and degrading qualities of teaching, because there are too many students to sufficiently engage with. Graduate employees are capped at part-time hours, yet are expected to grade and often teach up to 80 students in a course, which leaves little time to help students process & reflect on completed assignments. Even further, this influx of undergraduates has had a direct impact on the community as it exacerbates the housing crisis in Eugene. First-years at UO are required to live on campus, but not even housing is available to house them all. Recent stories by the campus newspaper (Daily Emerald) expose that students are being asked to live in the common areas of dorm halls, with no sufficient security or privacy standards, because there are not enough rooms for the students. This has led UO to build more housing complexes across campus, the construction of which frequently causes disruptions to classes through loud noise. Worse, some have expressed concerns that these projects are being rushed to accommodate the rapidly expanding undergraduate class sizes, which leaves students at risk of paying inflated costs for poorly constructed, and perhaps unsound, housing. This also pushes upper year students into the community, where rising rent costs have caused many to need second or third jobs to afford monthly payments.

A second major concern is that of administrative bloat. Recent campus union campaigns at UO have exposed the severe underpayment of its education workers, particularly graduate employees, while administrative employees earn six figures not including benefits, such as car stipends. This issue goes hand-in-hand with an over focus on campus sports, a profit-seeking

endeavor, that has enabled multi-million dollar contracts for sports coaches, while graduate employees and part-time faculty live in poverty-like conditions. The disparity between administrative and athletics pay and the pay of education workers is unacceptable for a public education institution.

This bill will help to develop concrete insights on the trends that many education workers are already deeply familiar with. However, without that concrete data, our lived experiences as workers can easily be overlooked and undermined by those on university governing boards, hindering necessary change from happening.

Through concrete data, different parties will be able to see how funding is accumulated and dispersed across educational institutions, as well as how different areas of these institutions are impacted by those funding + governance trends. Such information will enable our legislators and campus communities to make decisions on how to improve the governance and overall functioning of public higher education across OR.

Thank you,

Emily Beatty
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