

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

My name is Dr. Gavin Keulks. I am a tenured professor of English and directed our university honors program for the last 15 years. I also served two years as the faculty representative on our board of trustees at WOU.

I feel that our board at WOU is transparent. However, that transparency is massaged, so to speak. The dockets, public agendas, and minutes don't convey the fullness of what's being discussed -- nor its controversy. This became pointedly true under Article 15 a few years ago. Additionally, for at least the time that I served on our board, our president, provost, and key board chairs all lived near each other, raising proximity and privileged access concerns.

I can't recall who said the following, but it's a quote I've had copied down for years: "Students today often view higher education as an expense, not an experience. This is the chief threat to the traditional liberal arts degree." This is very true. Markets change too rapidly for private-sector continuity. Universities should never become leaves in the wind of trend. Public management and state level oversight are key to a public system.

With the new board structure came some key changes. At WOU, our administrative pay structure has become unnecessarily high, at least compared to past individuals in those roles. Additionally, too many important decisions are being made by new administrators in their first or second year, lacking sufficient understanding of campus tradition and processes. Additional problems have occurred with job searches. We've had examples of key administrators overruling a search committee for a hand-picked candidate. We also have too many internal interim positions, when national searches can bring vital outside ideas.

The trends I am seeing are thus: WOU is sneakily eliminating academic programs through attrition. When a tenured professor leaves or retires, they simply aren't replaced. NTTs are simply let go. The merry-go-round of newbie administrators views faculty and staff like a deck of cards. They just keep shuffling.

Having worked during both the OUS and independent board regimes, and having served on our WOU Board of Trustees for two year, I have no hesitation saying the OUS system worked better. We know that OUS was destroyed because Phil Knight was pissed he couldn't toss money at UO during a pay-freeze year. He then pressured legislators to depose the chancellor. It's time to stop catering to billionaires.

We need this bill to inform action. Universities now simply are cannibalizing each other. UO and OSU are the chief culprits, whether its UO's Portland campus or OSU's Bend campus. It's a Wild West. Better options exist through centralized management. Civilization is superior to the Wild West.

I support House Bill 4125.