

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

I write to you in favor of House Bill 4125 and urge its passage.

Senate Bill 270, enacted in 2013, quickly transformed the governance landscape of Oregon's universities, with one goal to reshape university funding, hopefully ameliorating the lack of direct state funds for its higher education institutions by increasing philanthropic contributions. In this respect, SB 270 has been quite successful; donations to the University of Oregon (UO), where I am a graduate employee, have been at historic peaks. But simultaneously, SB 270 has accelerated UO's corporatization as the Board of Trustees seemingly ignores its statutory (ORS 351.006), public-minded goal of "ensuring a high-quality learning environment that allows students to succeed."

The most obvious example of how the Board of Trustees is a structure which cares about money more than student interests is this summer's frantic jump from the Pac-12 to the Big Ten. With the prospect of tens of millions of dollars more annually in television deals, the Board of Trustees leapt into action, holding an emergency meeting the afternoon of August 4th, 2023, hours after 1. Apple reportedly presented its TV package to the Pac-12 Conference and 2. the Universities of Oregon and Washington reached an agreement with the Big Ten Conference. The Board of Trustees considered this rapidly changing landscape in a meeting that lasted exactly 10 minutes.

In the scant sixth of an hour it took to inform the Board and hold a roll call vote, UO's President and Athletic Director spoke of the Big Ten Conference's benefits and how this move would better position the university's athletic department both financially and athletically. According to [meeting minutes](#), nods were made towards the Big Ten's commitment to academics, but no thought is truly given to how student-athletes will maintain their academic progress during months-long seasons requiring regular cross-country trips. Barring fellow escapees of the Pac-12, UO's nearest in-conference "neighbor" is the University of Nebraska, 1600 miles away, almost twice the distance from Eugene to the University of Southern California's campus. Travel will require *student*-athletes to miss massive portions of their courses each season.

I would know. I was a student manager on Loyola University Chicago's Final Four team in 2018. That month, I traveled to Dallas, Atlanta, and San Antonio for the various March Madness games and attended, at the absolute most, seven lectures across my five classes. I also received a 40% on my Introduction to Programming final. Granted, the postseason requires more attention and time than the regular season. But events coinciding with class is normal. 16 men's and 17 women's basketball games in their 31 game 2023-2024 regular seasons are scheduled for weekdays.

The collapse of the Pac-12 Conference was a telling example of the demonstrated prioritization of money over the University's public mission by its Board of Trustees. On the ground, we see the need for changes to the current state of governance, and an enacted HB 4125 should demonstrate to our legislators the concrete cost these Boards have inflicted.

Sincerely,
Andrew Ducharme

PhD Candidate, McMorran Lab
Member, Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation (GTFF), AFT Local 3544