

Submitter: Melanie Landon-Hays
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Higher Education
Measure: HB4125

Hello and thank you for the opportunity to deliver testimony.

My name is Melanie Landon-Hays. I am a Professor of Teacher Education at Western Oregon University. I am the WOUFT (faculty union) President. I love preparing future teachers to be successful in the classroom. Their impact is so important and widespread. I love what I do, and I love my mission at our very special and important regional university.

In my experience, decentralization has increased competition between campuses, and has allowed for the big Universities to cannibalize the smaller, regional universities. The break up of the OUS system has been devastating for regional campuses, and the lack of oversight for program creation, admissions criteria, etc. has led to big losses that the regionals can't recoup, affecting personnel most heavily. As regional universities are some of the largest employers in a region, this has also had negative impacts on local economies.

WOU had a closed loop for our BoT up until a few years ago, when there was a push for greater transparency. The new board structure had disastrous impacts on our University as our past president did not operate openly or in the best interests of the students and faculty, striving only to make himself look good. Our enrollment plummeted under his tenure and campus climate tanked as he scapegoated faculty and told negative stories to the Board. Because he helped recruit and appoint board members, then they provided oversight over him, it felt self serving and was detrimental. There were not good incentives for success.

Today, work loads and teaching conditions are heavy as Oregon's regional public university campuses continue to make cuts and fewer people do more of the jobs, pay has frozen for years for both staff and faculty, leading to decreased job satisfaction, fear of job loss, and overall scarcity. Financial management has hinged on cuts that have negative effects as there is not enough money to pay staff and faculty well. Meanwhile, administrative jobs have increased, as well as costs for services that used to be shared. For example, WOU, at one point, had two lawyers and a paralegal, for its own campus, where under OUS, those services were centralized and more affordable.

This bill would be pivotal in quantifying and making public the real issues our campuses are facing due to longterm scarcity and false competition that has been put in place by the break up of the system. Attention to pay parity and working

conditions across campuses, while sharing some services, could help campuses to grow and thrive, fostering collaboration rather than competition.

This bill will help to identify and prioritize checks and balances in the system and allow for better oversight, shared services, and other necessary structure that has caused our small regional campuses to bleed employees, patch systems with temporary bandaids where once concrete systems and structures were in place, and allow us to move on from the longterm scarcity and climates of fear that have hit us since the breakup of OUS. It might also provide the oversight needed to put needed boundaries in place on upper administrative salaries, replicated services that could be centralized, admission and enrollment models that foster shared growth rather than competition, and more pay parity across campuses; it could perhaps provide a solution to the influx of low paying, unstable adjunct jobs, by creating pools across campuses to have adjuncts work across campuses, increasing stability. Additionally, boards of trustees are largely made up of privately wealthy outsiders who often think in terms of profit driven business models, rather than collaborative shared public good models.

Thank you - I support HB 4125 and hope that it passes. Please support this important bill.

Melanie Landon-Hays
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