



Public University Governance 10-Year Study

02/06/2024

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

My name is Nick Keough; I am the Legislative Director of the Oregon Student Association. **I am writing you all today to ask for your support on HB 4125, which would commission a 10-year study of Oregon's public university governance system and identify trends over the last decade related to student costs, enrollment, educational attainment, workforce trends, and the overall effectiveness of the system.**

At just 10-years-old, the Board of Trustees system is relatively new. Prior to 2015, The Oregon University System (OUS) historically governed the state's public universities. However, in 2015, the Oregon Legislature dissolved the OUS and created a new governance structure that allowed each university to have its own governing board. Today, these boards are responsible for setting policies, approving budgets, and overseeing the general management of their respective institutions. The transition from a statewide centralized board system to institutional Boards of Trustees at Oregon's public universities has been a subject of debate and contention – with the Oregon Student Association [opposing](#) this transition in 2013.

While the shift in Oregon's governance structure has allowed for more localized decision-making and autonomy for individual institutions, significant drawbacks have arisen. One of our primary criticisms of the change has been the lack of consistency and coordination across the state's public university system. It is no secret that issues related to affordability and accessibility have been exasperated under this system. Without a statewide perspective, there is a lack of cohesive efforts to address overarching challenges such as tuition costs, financial aid, and equitable access to education. This study will allow us to take a closer look at this.

With each institution having its own board, there is additionally the potential for divergent policies, priorities, and resource allocations. This fragmentation hinders the overall effectiveness of the public university system in Oregon and has resulted in increased competition among the public universities for resources and students. Instead of collaborating for the greater good of the state, institutions may prioritize their own interests or agendas. This was most recently exemplified in the University of Oregon's [decision to abruptly leave the PAC-12 athletic conference](#), which will result in "devastating" financial impacts to Oregon State University (OSU). As OSU President Jayathi Murthy put it, "[this decision] was made very quickly, with little regard for the fallout to sister institutions and to taxpayers." Not only does this decision validate concerns about overall consistency and coordination, but it additionally highlights how institutional boards have become more susceptible to external influences, such as political or corporate interests.

It is for these reasons that the Oregon Student Association supports HB 4125. At the ten-year mark of Oregon's public university governance system, it is important to audit and assess the effectiveness of this system. The passage of [SB 572](#) (2023) was a step in the right direction, but we need more data and information to better inform future policy considerations related to public university governance in Oregon.

Thank you,

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