

Paul L Evans
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 20



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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House Committee on Education
Oregon House of Representatives
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Chair Doherty, Members of the Committee on Education:

House Bill 4137 (HB 4137) attempts to accomplish the following: 1) establish parity among universities; and 2) eliminate the possibility that Oregon tax dollars could be used by students in higher education programs with demonstrated predatory practices.

Sections 1-3 repeal the existing prohibition on the “Technical and Regional Universities” (TRUs) specified as the Oregon Institute of Technology, Eastern Oregon University, Southern Oregon University, and Western Oregon University to offer up to five (5) doctoral degrees until January 2039. This language differs from a senate bill that would provide the TRUs with the ability to offer “professional” doctoral degrees: professional doctorates are not the same as research doctorates – and this promises to continue to advantage Oregon State University – Cascades (OSU–Cascades) in specific, the other large universities in general.

OSU-Cascades is introducing a doctoral program this coming year: something the TRUs are currently legally prohibited from doing. On top of that, any research degree could similarly be offered at OSU-Cascades because it exists in its own unique category: reaping the benefits of being an agent for OSU even as it receives capital construction dollars for a campus that recent Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) capital assessments demonstrate to be at best unnecessary, at worst – redirecting scarce resources that are badly needed by the TRUs.

Limiting the TRUs to only “professional” doctorate degrees makes no sense in 2020. While I recognize potential concerns of scale, scope, and size for the TRUs, they should have an ability to offer terminal research degrees in areas of specialty – if they have the capacities to do so well. 21st Century technologies yield TRUs with significantly enhanced research possibilities; it is time we recognize these structural changes to the learning environment.

To ensure universities remain focused upon specialties, the bill would limit each TRU to not more than five (5) doctoral degree programs until 2039. This approach should yield enough flexibility for the development of programs that can play to the individual TRU strengths without opening the flood gates to the development of internally redundant, competitive programs.

Section 5 of the bill provides HECC with increased authorities to identify, research, and determine when professional education corporations act in a manner detrimental to the welfare of students. It provides an authority to prevent all Oregon based funding for programs that demonstrate predatory practices such as extending programs without reason, requiring additional course credits for completion of a program (after a contract has been signed), and other similar tactics used to fleece students who often have little recourse.

Thank you for your consideration of this measure. If passed, Oregon students would benefit from greater fairness in program development among and between our public universities, and enhanced protection from predatory tactics used by far too many for-profit corporate universities.

Respectfully,

Paul L. Evans