

Dear Oregon Senate Education Committee:

We write this in response to the Association of Governing Boards (AGB) of Universities and Colleges study commissioned recently to assess how Oregon's public universities boards of trustees operate throughout the state. As union representatives of faculty members at Oregon Tech, we find AGB's report one-sided, and lacking to meaningfully address the concerns of our community.

As examples, we will focus on just two areas that AGB's report notes: board composition and board member selection. In terms of board composition, AGB states that

“Oregon is one of only three states that provides for a faculty member, a staff member, and a student to serve as members on its university governing boards.”

We see this as valuable, and assert that the number of voting faculty, staff and students members serving on our Boards should be increased, not decreased or eliminated. Further, the AGB report suggests, for example, that instead of granting graduate student representation on Boards those students should just make presentations to the Boards as needed. That may facilitate a veil of transparency but without corrective actions - through voting - presentations to Boards have little impact. At Oregon Tech, a presentation to the Board of Trustees of a vote of no confidence in our president was met with laughter, and an immediate move to an executive session that resulted in a climate survey carefully curated by the very president who received the vote of no confidence.

In terms of board member selection we would like to advocate that, as appropriate, faculty senators, union representatives, or student body representatives solicit and provide nominations directly to the Governor for board membership. Nominating board members by other entities besides the university president would improve diversity, equity and promote inclusion. The AGB report seems to imply that such nominations would result in more faculty, staff or students serving on the board, and these board members might be in vulnerable positions. However, that may not be the case - students for example may choose to nominate important alumni and faculty may choose to nominate non-faculty members to serve on the Board.

Senator Wyden used to talk about the “Oregon way” as the spirit of Oregonians to build community and work together to solve problems. The AGB report simply does not promote what we all know to be The Oregon Way, and we respectfully ask that this committee take AGB's report with the perspectives offered here.

We appreciate your time and consideration of this testimony. We value the transparent hearing facilitated by your committee and look forward to working together to improve higher education in our state.

The Executive Committee of OT-AAUP