

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE ASSEMBLY

November 17, 1998

I have asked the university community to meet today to discuss and update the enrollment information that I shared with you at the last meeting of the University Assembly. We have a serious situation, and I need the help of everyone on this campus if we are to avoid a difficult financial condition.

To explain where we are currently, I really need to describe the University in terms of our past, our present and hopefully our future. I do not intend for any of these comments to be viewed as criticism of past decisions or an attempt to be pejorative in any way. Enrollment strategy, in the past, had been determined by the requirements of the BAS Budget Model. In this model, a targeted, on-campus enrollment for the biennium was established with each OUS institution. This target was described as the midpoint, it was projected using historical retention rates over the three quarters, and state appropriations were determined by this estimate. On either side of this midpoint was an enrollment cushion called the corridor. Enrollment could increase or decrease by a hundred students on either side of the corridor without budgetary implications. However, if enrollments fell out of the corridor, institutions were required to return a proportional amount of allocated dollars back to the state. Importantly, in the BAS model, students enrolled through DEP were not counted and state appropriations were not received for these students.

Because the greatest amount of state support per student could be obtained if an institution's enrollment was near the bottom, but not outside, the corridor, a strategy was pursued at Eastern to keep the enrollment near the bottom of the corridor. As this overhead demonstrates, the success of this strategy varied over the years.

So much for the past, and now for the present. Although overall enrollment is up because of our DEP, for whatever reason, we have experienced a significant, on-campus enrollment shortfall for the Fall Quarter, and our state-supported enrollment is down by nearly 10% from last year. As a result, our projected three quarter enrollment falls significantly outside of the corridor.

When I spoke to you earlier in the month, we were about 200 students below the floor of the corridor. We have worked hard to count every student that we can, including those EOU students at the University Center in Bend and by moving graduate students from DEP to the state support side. We have played every imaginable—and some unimaginable—cards that we could. Nevertheless, using our historical retention rates, we are still projected to fall short by about 40 students. Although this doesn't sound like a lot of students—and it isn't—we are required to return a portion of our allocation, not back to the bottom of the corridor, but back to the projected midpoint. By our current, best estimate this amount is now \$420,000. We do not have the financial reserves to cover anywhere near that amount. If we can not work ourselves out of this situation, we will need to consider every option, unfortunately even that of faculty and staff layoffs.

Importantly, we do still have some opportunity to change that dismal prospect. First, remember that the three quarter endpoint is projected using our historical retention rate. I know that you have heard me mention this before, but we need to dramatically improve our retention rates. Unfortunately, I do not mean improvement in five years—I mean right now. This must become an immediate campus priority. I need each of you to individually and collectively

examine what you may do to help retain the students that we have. We need to share the good ideas and to shoulder responsibility.

For example, there is one immediate thing that was suggested that might help with some of our current students. There are a number of students that have not preregistered for Winter Term. We have a list of these students, grouped by faculty members and their respective advisees, that I am requesting each advisor to call their students. What I would like you to do is to remind your advisee to preregister, and if they do not intend to register, please find out why. We will distribute this list at the end of the Assembly today.

Our second option, although limited, is to try to recruit additional transfer students this year. I have asked our admissions people to double their efforts to bring in additional students. As faculty and staff, you play an important role in recruiting students, and you may be asked to help by calling some of these prospects.

We are in this situation together. The problems are solvable, but we must work together to retain and to recruit our students. There is not time for finger pointing or assigning blame. We do have the opportunity for positive change.

And that brings us to the future. We are making a transition to a new budget model that only emphasizes the importance of enrollment and retention. In this new model, tuition dollars will flow directly to campus, and all students—both traditional or served through DEP--will be counted. Our budget will be even more tightly tied to our enrollment. Our opportunities for the future are based on this model, whether we are considering faculty raises or new positions. We are opening up the budget process so you will have the opportunity for input and for developing priorities. However, when we develop budgets for programs or Schools in the future, the same basic premise will be applied. The number of students enrolled at the end of the year will determine future allocations, and not the enrollment at the beginning of the year. The benefits of successful enrollment and retention strategies will be rewarded and the consequences of poor retention in individual programs or majors will be borne by those programs.

I sincerely appreciate the value of small classes, and I want to keep our student/faculty ratio at 17:1, but there is a real need for us to increase our enrollment and retention. Again, we will need to be individually and collectively involved. We will all need to write and call prospective students, to serve as mentors and advisors, to design a curriculum that our students can complete in a timely manner, to schedule classes at times convenient for all of our students, and to help our students meet the high standards we have set for them.

I have described to you my goals for Eastern Oregon University. I think Eastern can continue to succeed, grow, and eventually prosper by reinforcing its reputation as a high quality, cost efficient, effective and student-centered university. With the emphasis on high quality, my vision is for EOU to lead the Oregon University System in retention rates and graduation rates. I would like to have Eastern Oregon University nationally ranked as one of the best public institutions in the United States. We need to make the transition from a teaching-centered institution to a learning-centered institution.

To achieve these goals, we must all form a partnership for success. We must truly be a student-centered campus, where all of us treat students and each other with the same degree of respect that we as individuals want to be treated. We need to remember and to embrace those qualities that we value as a small university. It is those daily interactions that define who we are. Here, all students should have the advantage of personal and professional advising from faculty. Students should have the opportunity to work closely with faculty in the classroom and on

projects, and students should consider our faculty as mentors and someone on their side.

While I don't want to underscore the seriousness of our current enrollment problem, there are already many good things going on here. We need to build on these good things for the future, and I look forward to working with you to take Eastern Oregon University to the next level of excellence. Thank you! I'm sure there are some questions and suggestions, and I welcome your input.