



## ***GOVERNING STRUCTURES FOR EASTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY***

In the 2013 Oregon State Legislative Session, Senate Bill 270 addressed university governance for the three larger universities in the state by creating institutional governing boards at the University of Oregon, Oregon State University and Portland State University. In addition, House Bill 3120 formalized the role of the Higher Education Coordinating Council (HECC) and the reporting relationships of universities to the HECC. The HECC will be the organization that formally allocates funds from the state to institutions of higher education, enacts statewide academic and other programmatic policy decisions and will establish legislative priorities, including capital requests, among many other key decisions.

In SB 270, three key components and the impact on Eastern Oregon University are important to note. First, while the bill clearly outlines the pathway forward for the larger institutions, it does not detail a specific and clearly defined approach for the Regional and Technical Universities (TRU) which includes Eastern, Southern, Western and Oregon Institution of Technology. Second, to this point, it must be noted that in Section 172a of SB 270 it states, “This 2013 Act is intended to preserve the autonomy of the universities listed in ORS 352.002 whether they are governed by a university governing board or a university consortium board.” Third, the bill does allow for Eastern (and the other TRUs) in Section 168 to request an institutional board. The process of this is for the president of the university desiring an institutional board to formally make this request to the current State Board of Higher Education and between March 1 and July 1, 2014. The SBHE must either endorse this request or decline it within 45 days. If it is endorsed, the Governor will initiate the process of selecting the members of the institutional board. According to Section 166 of the bill, should EOU (or others) select not to have an institutional board or have their request denied, a special committee of the legislature will determine its governance structure. The special committee has been impaneled and they initiated their work and are scheduled to make an interim report for the 2014 legislative session.

As such, this is an historic time for Eastern Oregon University, as we have the opportunity to determine and recommend the appropriate governing structure for our university. It is imperative that the EOU community be actively engaged and committed in this process. Governor Kitzhaber has stated on many occasions, in supporting his vision of implementing a “Jeffersonian Democracy” philosophy for Oregon, the important role of local communities coming together and developing solutions and recommendations to difficult and pressing issues. This is evident through the numerous Regional Solutions Collaboratives that have successfully been initiated under his leadership and guidance. Based on this approach, and following the lead of PSU, UO and OSU, it is important for the communities, constituents and stakeholders of Eastern Oregon University to provide their advice and insights as we prepare to make a recommendation on the future governance structure that will guide our university through our challenges and enable us to seize the opportunities that are before us.

To date, there are three models being discussed: 1) an independent institutional board for Eastern; 2) a consortium board approach (a single governing board/structure for all or most of the TRU's, an example would be the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, or to some

extent, the “Claremont Colleges” model); and 3) a “branch campus” of one of the larger universities, presumably Oregon State University, (for an example, refer to the structure in state of Montana or the Pennsylvania State University model). Each of the three options has advantages and disadvantages. And, it is important to note that while I provide various examples, these are not “locked in” models as each can be altered as necessary.

Generally speaking, and according to the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (a national organization that supports the work of university governing boards), a governing board has the following overarching roles and responsibilities:

- Setting and affirming the mission, vision and core themes of the university;
- Hire, fire and evaluate the president;
- Approve and oversee long-range planning;
- Review educational and service programs;
- Ensure adequate resources and allocation processes;
- Ensure good and proper management;
- Preserve institutional independence;
- Create opportunities for collaboration with other universities and post-secondary institutions and enhance a P-20 continuum;
- Relate to, and build a bridge, between and among the campus and community constituencies;
- Assess the performance of the board; and,
- Advocate for and protect the integrity of the university.

In addition to these broad roles, Eastern has several significant areas to address in which we need a strong and dedicated governance structure that will be in position support and assist our efforts. These specific areas, challenges and opportunities include, but are not limited to:

- Fiscal and resources challenges—we need a governing body that will understand the unique cost curves along with revenue constraints of a rural university and the pressures this presents and be able to provide in-depth knowledge, advice and insights;
- Understanding of Eastern's student populations—the recruitment, retention and graduation of students from non-traditional segments is a core element of Eastern as we serve students from a lower socioeconomic status, who are first generation college students, are from underrepresented groups, of non-traditional ages, etc. As a result, we have many unique challenges and programs to meet the needs of our students and the members of our governing structure must be able to recognize these challenges and opportunities and apply these insights into long-range planning as well as programmatic evaluation;
- Understanding and embracing Eastern's mix of modalities—Eastern is one university; however, we have two robust modes of delivery through our main campus in La Grande and our “at-a-distance” delivery models. Our governance structure must be able to embrace this unique feature as well as understand the importance of each and the challenges it presents;
- Fundraising—while we do not have a proverbial “Sugar Daddy” in the wings, we do have enormous potential to increase philanthropic activities and the governance structure should enhance and build on these efforts;

- Connecting academic programs to community needs—we have a robust academic enterprise and we need to, especially with limited resources, ensure that we are meeting regional economic, civic and cultural needs;
- Understanding of Eastern's role and mission as an access university focused on teaching and learning and how this is furthered in our policies and procedures for evaluation, promotion and tenure;
- Advocacy—with the creation and empowerment of the HECC, and the impaneling of its membership, it is clear that a consistent and proactive voice to maintain EOU's presence will be needed; and,
- Establishing achievement compacts that reflect Eastern's missions and vision and ability to assist the State in achieving the goal of "40-40-20."

This is a critical decision and crucial time for Eastern. University governance is a critical connection between a university and its stakeholders; it holds the leadership of the university accountable to the goals and vision of the university and the stakeholders it serves; it is a powerful mechanism and tool to secure resources and provide transparency in the allocation process; it will establish clear long-range goals and expectations of all parties involved in the University. This is not a decision or a process that will be taken lightly and while the course will be, relatively speaking in terms of higher education, expedient; but know it will be done with a depth of understanding and in a prudent manner. All constituents will be afforded multiple opportunities to provide insights and wisdom into the process. It is my goal that by the end of Fall term I will be able to announce the intended pathway, a "straw proposal" if you will, that maybe best suited to serve Eastern now and for the foreseeable future.

I look forward to your ideas, suggestions and input into this important process.

Sincerely,



Bob Davies,  
President