

# Memorandum

**To:** President Davies, Interim President Kenton, Provost Adkison, Interim Provost Witte  
**From:** DeAnna Timmermann, Faculty Senate President  
**CC:** Faculty Senate, Shonda Hampton  
**Date:** 5/27/2014  
**Re:** Response to Draft 2014 Sustainability Plan

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Succinctly, Eastern Oregon University's mission is to guide student inquiry through integrated, high-quality liberal arts and professional programs, and to serve as an educational, cultural and scholarly center which connects the rural regions of Oregon to a wider world. The Faculty Senate fully supports this mission. First and foremost, any decisions of the proposed 2014 Sustainability Plan must be guided by the ideals set forth in our mission statement.

As noted in the Draft 2014 Sustainability Plan, it is imperative the financial health of the institution be addressed. A number of proposed academic changes have been posited in the draft plan which may indeed help EOU to better meet our mission and our financial demands. We agree that focused, streamlined programs are appropriate for our students and our mission. Program offerings do need to be reviewed systematically to ensure clear pathways for student progression and timely graduation. We also agree that faculty release time reduction is appropriate. Faculty release time should be used rarely and judiciously. We hope, as we move forward, administration will refrain from past practices in which administrative duties have been assigned to teaching faculty in lieu of teaching responsibilities.

However, several elements of the draft plan hobble our mission to offer high-quality liberal arts and professional programs. Obviously, the suggestion to eliminate academic programs is problematic, as these cuts undermine the opportunities for those in our region to pursue their desired educational and career pathways. It is troubling that programs have been judged for elimination by student graduation rates, rather than the quality of the program or the needs of the region. A reasonable balance must be established between streamlined program offerings, the number of program choices, and student access opportunities. We recommend that the decision to eliminate academic programs be the *very last* to be pursued in the final version of the 2014 Sustainability Plan, and that any cuts in academic programs be balanced by similar cuts in administration.

Teaching faculty are the guarantors of academic quality and integrity. Faculty, as experts in their disciplines, are best equipped to determine degree requirements and the intricacies of a complex university curriculum. The proposed elimination of the Liberal Studies capstone may be

warranted. However, this is a curricular decision that must result from the proper, faculty-determined curricular process, and cannot be an edict by administration. The cancellation of the Liberal Studies capstone in Summer 2014 simply cannot be done. It is recommended that a faculty-led discussion be initiated in Fall 2014 to review the current status of the Liberal Studies major and to determine its future direction. This discussion should be university-wide and not limited to a few select members of a Task Force.

Two other proposals in the draft Sustainability Plan pertain to curriculum. First, recommendations to change General Education do not seem critical at this time, and may siphon away needed energy and focus from retrenchment needs. It is recommended that conversations about changes in our General Education structure be set aside until such time when faculty can devote more sustained attention to the matter. Second, in the worst case scenario in which the elimination of one or more program moves forward, the proposed one-year teach-out plans for majors are unrealistic – we must honor declared majors, regardless of students' class level. Even two-year teach-out plans may prove to be difficult to establish, as the curriculum within a given major is often scaffolded vertically. Any substitution of required courses within a major must be made rarely, with full program faculty collaboration, and in a way that maintains the academic integrity of the degree.

In addition to the above points, the Faculty Senate would like to see a much stronger effort at the administrative level in marketing the university as a whole, and all of our particular programs. EOU provides outstanding academic programs and opportunities to our students. However, advertising for EOU has been dismal for numerous years, which has left most in our region, and throughout the state, unaware of the quality of the university, its programs, and its faculty.

The sustainability plan has become a de facto revision of the mission of our University – and this is disconcerting. This version of a Sustainability Plan must help us make our mission viable, but financial sustainability should not become the defining value of our university. Careful attention must be paid to our mission as we make decisions about the programs and offerings we carry forward. We need to ensure that who we set forth to become is who we want to be – the educational, cultural, and scholarly center for our region's needs.