

Tuition Advisory Council
Thursday, April 9, 2020

Council Members (✓ indicates the member was present)

Stephen Battaglia – Student

- ✓ Katie Carr – Student
- ✓ Leslie Eldridge – Faculty Member
- ✓ Sarah Guenther – Student
- ✓ Johanna Pardo – Student
- ✓ Dennis Slattery – Faculty Member
- ✓ Matt Stillman – Administrator
- ✓ Susan Walsh – (Chair) Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Guests Present

Greg Perkinson, Josh Lovern, Neil Woolf

The meeting started at 11:30am.

Walsh thanked the Council members for joining and said there is still work for the Council to do. She said she talked with the Board of Trustees leadership on Monday and it was agreed that it would be better to have more time before considering tuition rates. Rather than considering tuition at the April 20th and 21 meetings, the Trustees agreed to postpone discussion and call a special meeting in May. Walsh said this will give the Council some breathing room to allow it to really carefully consider the work it needs to do.

Guenther/Eldridge moved to accept the minutes from the March 9th minutes; the motion passed, 7Y/0N/0A. Carr/Guenther moved to accept the minutes from the March 16th meeting; the motion passed, 5Y/0N/2A (Pardo and Eldridge abstained because they were absent).

Walsh said she listened to the HECC meeting this morning and she was pleased to hear Sandra Slattery testify on behalf of SOU. She said there was a lot of focus on the virus during the meeting. Walsh said that Statewide Provosts Council has been meeting remotely on a regular basis; every day at first, now twice a week. She said Oregon schools are unlike many universities because they're on the quarter system. Many are on the semester system and those institutions were closer to being finished with their year.

Walsh said she can't say enough about how the faculty have sprung into action to move to remote instruction, and she mentioned the massive efforts made the people in Information Technology, the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, Enrollment Services, Vice Presidents Perkinson and Woolf, and many other around campus who mobilized in a way she couldn't even have imagined would be possible. She said she just wants to say thank you. Slattery said he would like to say thank you back. He said that giving the faculty an extra week

to prepare was key, and everything faculty asked for to help make the transition to remote delivery they got. From across the board there was a lot of really great support. Walsh said that's good to hear and pointed out that the Division Directors deserve a lot of credit.

Walsh asked how the students are feeling. Carr said the experience is fine so far, but the bigger struggle for her is having a preschooler out of school and at home while taking 16 credits. She said she agrees that the transition to online has been smooth for most of her classes, and she appreciates everyone's efforts. She said it seems like it will be fine. Guenther said it's definitely a transition, and noted that students are going to have to work on time management skills. Pardo said she is used to online classes so it was not hard for her to adapt. She said she is surprised some of her professors adapted so quickly. She added the Oregon Student Association leapt into action to address the crisis. She said one of the first things she did, even before the virus started disrupting things, was to try to implement virtual meetings, so they were well-prepared when in-person meetings became impossible. She said one silver lining is that people should be prepared for stuff like this in the future. Walsh said another silver lining is that we're hearing from vendors with free products we can test to see what works best.

Walsh said she discussed the agenda for today's meeting with Perkinson and he suggested getting feedback about the idea of staying under a 5% total increase in tuition and mandatory fees. He also mentioned just getting back on track in the discussion of student fees. She said it would also be good to get on the same page around what the special Board meeting in May might entail.

Eldridge asked if there is information available about how COVID-19 has impacted SOU's enrollment. Walsh said there is some data that can be shared, though we still don't know about state and federal funding. Woolf said we have not seen a big enrollment drop at this point for spring or fall. Walsh said she's heard it discussed that it was probably helpful that this happened in spring term rather than fall, because maybe students felt like they could see light at the end of the tunnel; 10 weeks might seem more do-able than a whole academic year. She said recessions tend to increase enrollment in higher education, as we saw in 2008-09. When there's an economic downturn people tend to turn to skilling up and getting more education. Woolf agreed and said we've sent messages to students to encourage them to continue taking at least 12 credits so their financial aid will continue. He said in spring term approximately 87% of students are on financial aid, so hopefully some of those messages helped resonate with students who might have been on the fence. He said education is something you can continue and build while the job market recovers. Eldridge said also people are probably bored; what else do you have to do, might as well take a class.

Perkinson provided some high-level information on the CARES act and what it looks like SOU will receive to help offset losses and additional costs. He said it looks like the direct allocation from the Department of Education for SOU will be approximately \$3.4M. He said at least half of that would have to go to directly support students, and we're optimistic that we'll have some broad discretion on the other half, though we're not sure when that money will flow. He said the student portion of that money may start flowing as early as a couple weeks from now.

Walsh said in her earlier comments she meant to mention that the Incident Response Team (IRT), which includes a cross-section of folks from across campus, has been meeting twice a day, with Perkinson as the incident commander. She said we've been trying to get the most current information available on all sorts of issues. She suggested that Perkinson might be able to talk about how we're tracking losses and additional expenses related to the virus. Perkinson said he would be happy to. He said the IRT is about 25 people and it's task-organized with different components focusing on different issues. The people focusing on the financial side of things have a framework that will track lost revenue, additional expenses, and any federal and state recovery dollars. He said there's a fair amount of money that flows directly to the Governor through the CARES act and we'll soon find out if any of that money will come to us. He said we're tracking lost revenues and increased costs so we can quickly report on those, and he expects to review that data weekly. Pardo said groups across campus had been asked to reduce expenses even before COVID and asked if there's any chance the recovery money SOU receives will change that. Perkinson said that's a good question. He said some of the losses from COVID are known already; for example, we have a normal capacity in university housing but only have about 133 students committed to staying in residence halls, so there's a dollar value associated with that, about \$1.5M in lost auxiliary revenue in the housing and dining area. He said some of the recovery money could get channeled that direction if it makes sense. He said the process of allocating those funds will be a very visible, transparent process. He said athletics is another example: they normally get \$.5M in private donations that support scholarships for about 380 student athletes, which is most of our student athletes. The question is whether we can offset that loss. If we can make sure some of those funds are supporting remission, that would go to directly benefit the education and general fund. Right now it's hard to predict exactly how it will work out.

Slattery said there's another component worth mentioning and that's SOU's role in the economic vitality of the region. There may be some money that's not strictly earmarked for education, but that could still benefit institutions like SOU that are big employers in their regions. He said an earlier version of the CARES act would have meant more money coming directly to different regions rather than being channeled through the Governor.

Walsh said we've really prioritized student jobs on campus, and any kind of student work, doing what we can to allow students to keep their jobs. She said that in addition to the couple examples mentioned by Perkinson, there are other events and programs that would have generated revenue that have had to be canceled, like music and other performances. She said our priority has been keeping students working.

Woolf said looking at the latest enrollment report we did not see a huge drop as we might have expected. Still, our spring term enrollment is down 3% by headcount compared to last spring, and our FTE is down 4%. Walsh said we've also been tracking the week-to-week behavior of students in terms of enrollment and haven't seen any huge fluctuation so far. Woolf said that the group not coming back in the largest numbers are our non-resident students. He said he

may have left an impression earlier that all things are rosy. They're not as bad as they could be, but we are down a little bit.

Carr said she's curious about FTE change from the previous year. Woolf said we went from 2.5% down in FTE compared to last year to 4.2% down, but there could be a lot of factors contributing to that. He said we may see something different next week because students are still adding and dropping courses. Walsh said in meetings she's had there's been agreement that the experience the students have in the first couple weeks will make a big difference. We believe they'll be forgiving because they will understand the challenges faculty face converting to remote delivery, but the first couple weeks will make a big difference.

STUDENT FEES

Lovern provided an update on student fees. He said the student fees were not approved at the most recent ASSOU Senate meeting but they may be approved at the next meeting. Woolf suggested that the students might be able to provide more context around the fees not being approved by Senate at the last meeting. Guenther said the allocation was presented at the meeting and there was some argument about whether the Committee and Senate should go back to look again at student fees and the allocation because of possible issues related to COVID. She said the Judicial Branch has to meet about it to check the bylaws to see how to proceed because there is some uncertainty about what should happen next after the allocation wasn't approved. She said she hopes Senate can re-vote tomorrow and approve the allocation then. Woolf said he think it's important to note that the spirit now is to approve, and it's just a bylaw question at this point. Walsh asked if that will go to the Board of Trustees for the special meeting in May. Guenther said she hopes so.

Pardo asked if other students are aware that the Board of Trustees discussion of tuition has been pushed to May. Guenther said she doesn't think so, but she'll let them know. Walsh said the dates in May are the 21st, for the Finance and Administration Committee (4pm – 6pm), and the 22nd for the special meeting of the Board of Trustees (beginning at 12pm).

Lovern said the fees proposed include a 20% reduction to fees overall, with different rates for different fees. He said several different models were considered before landing on this one.

[Eldridge left]

Lovern displayed a tuition and fees spreadsheet and asked if anyone wants to discuss anything in the tuition and fees spreadsheet. He said the spreadsheet allows us to factor in a 5% increase in tuition to see what that would look like.

Walsh said seeing the health center fee reminded her that the Student Health and Wellness Center has been continuing to work remotely, and even in person sometimes, to provide mental health services and other services.

Lovern said the proposed student fees would not make a change to the building fee, which was raised last year and funneled directly into IT infrastructure. He said we might need to raise this a little more in next few years. Perkinson said SOU has an IT ecosystem (network, gear, switches, etc.) that had a lot of single points of failure with no spares, so there was some significant risk in the IT area. Thankfully, we have a team shoring that up. Walsh added that we found ourselves this term scrambling to make sure students have access to technology; we bought Chromebooks for students and we're sending them to make sure students can continue their education, even in other states in some cases.

Pardo asked if there have been accessibility issues. Walsh said we've worked very hard to make sure there are computer labs open and available, allowing users to maintain social distancing and working within the Governor's guidelines. She said there are Chromebooks available for checkout in the library to bridge the weekend when the labs aren't open. She said SOU's CIO, Tom Battaglia, did a survey of students to see what technology needs they had and got a really good response rate. Many said they had what they need, about 50 or so indicated that they needed help and we were able to send Chromebooks out to help. Student access was a huge concern. Walsh said people are pretty scared to be on campus, so there were some difficult conversations around having labs available.

Lovern said feedback on the tuition and fees spreadsheet would be welcomed. Walsh reminded the Council about the importance of the fund balance and said there are competing interests that we're dealing with. Perkinson said a couple weeks ago when the Finance and Administration Committee of the Board met he briefed them that there was so much uncertainty that he was reluctant to give them much of a forecast as to how the fiscal year would finish. The committee agreed to wait and see how things develop. Perkinson said that back then he was of a mind to recommend that the President's recommendation to the Board be under 5% because there was so much uncertainty and we wouldn't want to add more price uncertainty. However, just a couple days ago President Schott asked whether it may make sense to consider a higher tuition rate as we get more certainty around enrollment and the losses we know about. Perkinson said it sounds like she's willing to consider whatever this group recommends. Walsh said we still don't know what fall enrollment will look like, we have very little certainty around that. Woolf said this is true and to some extent that's always the case. He said that in new student enrollment we're tracking slightly ahead, which is nice, but the challenge is on the continuing student side. Our spring numbers are down, so that likely will continue into the fall. It's less and less optimistic that we'll be ahead overall. Over the next week or two we'll know better, then as fall registration starts we'll have a better sense.

Perkinson referred back to Pardo's question around the already planned budget reductions for the current fiscal year. He said we were driving toward achieving a balanced budget for the current year. We were about a million dollars to the good, then as the virus hit we saw some escalation of costs in IT, as well as some unintended positive benefits in things like lack of athletics travel (which saves about \$200K), faculty travel (which saves about \$160K), and so on. He said how well we finish this fiscal year will set us up for next year. Uncertainty would drive us crazy if we let it. Things are still very volatile. There's a chance we could save another \$1M

in coming months with hiring freeze, if we decide to do that. But then we'd have big holes to fill on auxiliary side and on education and general fund side.

Walsh said that on today's HECC call one Commissioner said that if the state doesn't do right by public institutions then it clearly can't fall on the backs of students to weather the storm. It'll be interesting to see how the funding happens. K-12 made a big gain in the last session, but higher education did not. The Governor has said publicly in different meetings that higher education institutions got a raw deal last session and she'll see that they get a better shake in the next session. There's going to be a lot of pressure not to hurt students because of lack of support. Perkinson added one other significant dynamic: the current pro forma uses the number of state dollars promised for the second year of the biennium. He said he's heard a pessimistic suggestion that if state revenues fall there could be a rescission of the second year funding. We really don't know how hard that would hit us. Perkinson said the plan we have now is what he thinks we should run with because we don't have better information, just speculation.

Pardo echoed that OSA has also heard from legislators and the Governor that they do want to address higher education. She said it's imperative that we take next year to drive that message home and OSA will be pushing that issue. Walsh said she would love to see OSA join to help send that message on behalf of all the publics.

Carr asked if anything can be done to attract more students during what will almost certainly be a deep recession. She said her plan is to go straight to grad school when she graduates next year. Walsh said that's a great question. She was on a call recently with Provosts and an economist named Tim Dewey was sharing anecdotally that more students graduating this year or next year are looking to continue their education. She said the financial aid looks promising and there's another house bill in which higher education is being considered. There might be a lot of incentive for students to continue. Carr said she was thinking about not raising tuition more than 5% as one way we might attract more students who are on the fence. Walsh said that is excellent to consider, there's every reason to take that into account. Woolf said for recruitment we're always pushing the envelope, and our Admissions folks have pivoted hard in the last couple weeks so we'll be able to communicate with prospective students in an easier and better way in addition to being able to get financial aid to our students in a better way.

Pardo asked about a potential tuition freeze at the University of Oregon. Walsh said there has been some talk freezing current students at a certain rate and charging a different rate for new students. Perkinson said the University of Oregon is talking about a tuition increase for continuing students of 3% for resident and non-resident and a new student rate locked for 5 years that's 7% higher for non-resident and 9.5% for resident. He said it's a risk. These rates were adopted at their March Board of Trustees meeting. He said OSU is doing a 0% raise for continuing students and a 3.2% increase for new students. Most of the other publics are in the range of an increase just under 5%.

Walsh thanked all for their participation and commitment and said the work of this group has become even more important. She said she also wanted to thank people for their great questions today. She invited them to email any additional questions.

The meeting ended at 12:55pm.