



PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

**American Association of
University Professors**

Promoting Quality Higher Education – An Investment in Oregon's Future



Chair Read and members of the committee, for the record, I am Pam Miller, President of the Portland State Chapter of the American Association of University Professors. Our union represents 1280 full-time faculty members.

This is my 24th academic year at PSU. I am a full, tenured professor in the School of Social Work. My research and scholarship focus on best practices for social workers that provide services in end-of-life and palliative care in Oregon. I worked as a hospice social worker for many years in Appalachia. Upon receiving my Ph.D. in 1992 from the University of Pittsburgh, I joined the faculty at PSU. I am a Fulbright Scholar, Latvia 2001, and a recipient of Rotary International Higher Education Teacher's Grant, Krakow, Poland, 2009.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify about experiences with the Board of Trustees at PSU. We realize the role of the Board is new and that we are all learning during this transition process. My observations are divided into 5 points with a summary statement:

- 1) The Board only meets four times a year. Although 4 committees work during the academic year as well, the full Board meetings are very long and the agenda is often loaded with extremely important decisions that need discussion and engagement that appear to sometimes be rushed.
- 2) The Board members are not very accessible to the PSU community. There is not a way to contact them. The Board secretary can carry or forward messages but there should be some way to contact each board member directly. Their website provides no contact information. We do not expect personal e-mail addresses yet a PSU email address seems reasonable.
- 3) Although the Board at PSU represents a small slice of the campus (alums and donors, one faculty member, one staff member, one student), for which we respect their service, the majority of its members are not part of the everyday life of the PSU community. They do not live or work on the campus. This limits their ability to understand deep seated problems on our

campus. For example, hunger is a concern on the PSU campus (in 2014, 59% of over 2500 students were found to meet the definition of food insecurity) and when this was presented to the Board, a couple of members became almost indignant at these survey results. This is a long way to say that instead of composing the Board predominantly of people who are large donors to PSU, who we greatly appreciate, we need to also have civic leaders from the community be on the Board, too, to provide some balance of perspective and power.

- 4) Employees of PSU have constricted opportunities to speak at Board meetings and we must sign up to speak during the first 30 minutes of the public comment time. I specifically asked as President of PSU-AAUP if I could speak at each meeting as a regular agenda item to keep the Board informed about its full-time faculty. The Chair told me that I could sign up for the public comment period or contact him personally and ask for consideration to be on the agenda. I am not the public at PSU...I work at PSU. I will add that during bargaining, I was *permitted* to speak at the September meeting of the Board of Trustees and I assume I will speak at the December meeting since we are still bargaining. I have never in the 24 years I have been employed at PSU had to “sign up” to speak at a working meeting.
- 5) The Board does not understand the policies that underpin PSU, specifically the PSU standards that evolved from the former OARs, particularly the section on Conditions of Service. The Board does not understand our Collective Bargaining Agreement and the subsequent conditions that must be followed.

In Summary:

The Board is accountable to the President or the President is accountable to the Board, and his voice seems to be dominant, particularly since they are not easily accessible to students or to those who work or live at PSU. Aside from the employee Board members, employees, even those like me who are leading democratically chosen organizations, do not have access except at the public comment period at the beginning of each Board meeting. The Board appears to need some education about how the university works, what its policies and practices are but more importantly, to understand that on a university campus, we have faculty governance. This means that we all have access to each other, we

communicate, and we are all transparent and accountable to the campus community. That's how higher education works.

Remember, one of the pillars of governance is the opportunity to have robust debates and conversations about how the university works or does not work. I have been immersed in deliberations like this for what seems like a lifetime! PSU-AAUP looks forward to more discussions about the role and work of the Board and we stand ready to work for changes that benefit the higher education community both in Portland and around the state.

Thank you.