

Does state board inhibit Portland St. development?

By KATHY McMANUS
Of the Emerald

Some people in Portland say state policies have inhibited Portland State University's development. Special needs arise for PSU, they say, because it is Oregon's only urban university.

An "urban university" serves a larger number of older, part-time, mid-career and minority students than other schools, says PSU Pres. Joseph Blumel.

The university's unique nature is posing some problems for members of the State Board of Higher Education who are now reviewing PSU's 1973 guidelines. The guidelines—a general statement of the institution's purpose—need to recognize PSU's special nature, some argue.

One policy that Blumel and others say hurts PSU financially is full-time equivalency funding. FTE is a unit for budget purposes that indicates the number of 15-credit hour (full-time) students that total enrollment represents. For example, 5,000 students taking 45,000 credit hours would represent only 3,000 FTE.

It is PSU's high incidence of part-time students that makes FTE funding unfair, PSU marketing Prof. Edward Grubb says. This is due to the ever-present cost of registering, processing and advising students regardless of their class load.

"FTE funding is fair to a certain degree," Les Morton, president of the Associated Students-PSU, says. But he'd like to see additional funding allotted to PSU.

Another problem facing PSU is a state policy aimed at avoiding "unnecessary" duplication of graduate programs. Legitimate reasons often exist for duplication, Grubb says.

The enrollment ceiling is another obstacle to growth at PSU. It is set at 10,000 FTE students, which Blumel says is artificially low for PSU.

An institution can enroll more students than the FTE limit, but it doesn't get state support for the extra students, state system Vice

Chancellor Miles Romney says.

Chancellor Roy Lieuallen is giving some thought to raising the ceiling, he adds.

The problems of the enrollment ceiling, duplication and FTE funding came out in a recent report prepared by the City Club of Portland, a non-profit civic research organization. The independent report was submitted to the state board in October.

Graduate programs that are in demand in Portland include engineering, the sciences and advanced teacher education, says Leigh Stephenson, chairman of the volunteer committee that wrote the City Club report.

Stephenson says he'd favor state wide program-based funding to replace FTE funding.

But the biggest problem is the mood of the electorate to "cut back everywhere they can," he says.

State Rep. Ted Kulongoski, D-Junction City, is also worried about higher education's fate in the upcoming legislative session.

He called the idea of a different kind of funding for PSU only "absurd" and agrees with Blumel and Stephenson that a statewide switch to funding based on educational programs would be more equitable.

Because the Legislature has limited funds to work with, program expansion means the programs, the faculty or both will suffer as the dollar is stretched too far, Kulongoski says.

The end result of this is higher tuition. "And that's going to deprive a hell of a lot of people of higher education," Kulongoski says.

PSU proponents want a stronger university. They want more programs, more students and more money. But they also admit that if a different method of funding were used to the benefit of PSU, the slice of pie left for Oregon's other colleges and universities would diminish accordingly.

University of Oregon Pres. William Boyd says this possibility is "not intrinsically unfair." He is opposed to FTE funding and would rather see money appropriated

according to educational programs. But Boyd doesn't rule out a unique funding system for PSU.

Boyd says he recognizes some basic differences between PSU and the University. PSU dwells on urban problems and is more sharply focused than the University, which instead offers a general liberal arts education," he says.

But the gap between urban and non-urban universities is closing. Boyd says that the University shares the tendency to have part-time students.

He also advocates flexible scheduling, with one-third of the classes offered at night. PSU offers a large percentage of night classes in order to accommodate its working and married students.

Boyd agrees that cooperative programs are a good idea.

"It is very important that universities not become competitive. They need to become more efficient," Boyd says.

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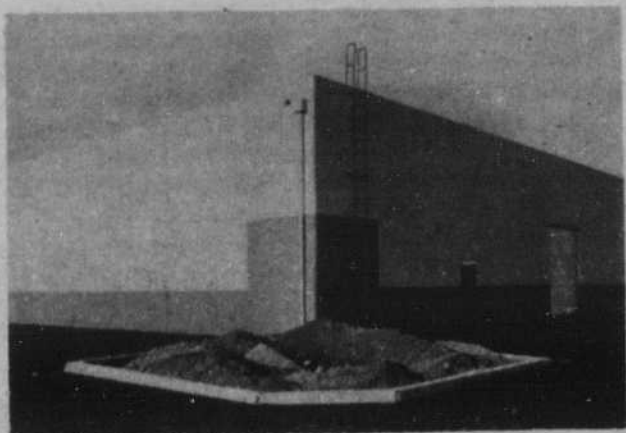
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