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State teaching program needs Salem's backing

By ERIC BENJAMINSON
Of the Emerald

A five-year-old Oregon State University program aimed at improving faculty teaching quality could extend to the other state system colleges and universities, if a proposal currently in committee is successful in the Oregon Legislature.

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The College and University Teaching Project (CAUT), created in 1974 by OSU's Office of Undergraduate Studies, provides services that will enable faculty to design and implement approved instructional procedures.

The program is meant primarily for faculty who "show an interest in improving their teaching, but have trouble picking the proper route," according to a CAUT pamphlet.

CAUT is a full-year program incorporating four phases of instructional activity. Workshop sessions that expose faculty to different teaching methods, make up the first part of the program.

Following that is a two-month planning period, during which comprehensive instructional plans are designed with the help of CAUT personnel and campus resource departments.

Further consultation at the instructor's own pace makes up the program's third phase, followed by a colloquium-style evaluative section.

After the program CAUT staffers remain available to assist their ex-students.

Faculty participants are chosen by application to department curriculum committees and deans, who also nominate faculty members on the basis of faculty proposals to improve their courses. The program reports a "robust" past enrollment.

Participants receive a \$1,000 stipend to attend the workshop. In addition, their departments contribute a \$500 subsidy. To date, 150 faculty members have gone through the program.

Until now, CAUT has only been in effect at Oregon State University, and program funding has been "inconsistent," according to Cindy Wilhite, director of state affairs for the Associated Students at OSU.

Money has not been budgeted directly for the program — instead, funds have been "taken from where they can be gotten, mainly from surplus budgets in other areas." CAUT's latest was \$101,000.

Program supporters are currently lobbying in the Legislature to assure a direct state commitment for program funding. Such a bill has been drafted in the Senate Education Committee, but has not yet been scheduled for committee discussion.

The proposal, sponsored at the request of the Oregon Student Lobby and the ASOSU, will be sponsored on the floor by Sen. Cliff Trow, D-Corvallis, who chairs the Education Committee.

The bill calls for an \$800,000 appropriation to fund the program for the next four years, and to extend it to all schools in the state system. The present CAUT program is considered a "pilot effort to this end," according to Wilhite.

Dave Hebert, an ASUO administrative assistant for state and federal affairs, reiterates OSU support of the measure.

"We hope to tie in this bill with the issue of faculty evaluations," he says. "The only opposition we have noticed are financial objections."

Wilhite also hopes to link the bill with other issues. "The Senate Education Committee is currently discussing teachers' standards at the high school level. With this bill, we hope to extend this concern to the level of the universities."

The position of the Oregon Faculty Lobby on this bill is now uncertain. James Tattersal, University economics professor and OFL member, says the lobby has not "got around to a specific position on the CAUT issue."

He predicts that the issue will come up at the next OFL meeting, scheduled for Feb. 27.

Bob Becker, an OSU biochemistry professor and OFL president pro tem, agrees with Tattersal.

"We cannot anticipate the position we will take yet, nor can we be sure of the opinion of the general faculty on the issue." He adds, however, that a poll of faculty would probably show a majority supporting the bill.

Becker guesses that "an audible faculty thought is that we would be enthusiastically for the bill were it not for the method of funding." He says that "line budgets" like this should not be funded through the Legislature.

"The problem with these little bills for specific plans is that it usurps power from the State Board (of Higher Education)." Becker stresses the uncertainty of the OFL position, and the difficulty in guessing at faculty response.

Wilhite disagrees with Becker on the issue of funding methods. "Line items are necessary to assure the Legislature of what we are doing." She says. "This is the only way to assure consistent funding of what we consider a very important program."