

Editorial

Board's reason casts shadow of mediocrity

The Oregon State Board of Higher Education's reason for retiring University President Paul Olum in June 1989 shows not only immaturity as a decision-making body but also an inability to tolerate opposition to its policies and political agenda.

The state board released its secret "reason" for retiring Olum only after the Eugene Register-Guard forced disclosure via the state Public Records Law. And not included in either the board's letter to Olum or its secret list was the board's "bill of particulars" referred to in its telephone conference call two weeks ago.

In the board's assessment of Olum, it claims Olum "antagonizes" the people of Oregon who provide the University with its resources and the state board itself.

This reason, which lacks substantiation and specifics, is profoundly inappropriate.

Antagonism between the two administrative organizations is mutually beneficial because it fosters the effective resolution of issues that directly affect the University.

Olum merely has stood up to the board for University rights. The state board apparently cannot handle having its policies questioned, a trait that reflects the board's immaturity as a decision-making body.

By putting forth the antagonism argument as the reason for its decision, the state board patently has made clear it intends to replace Olum with a president who will not question its policies — thereby stamping its seal of approval for mediocrity in higher education.

Resolution puts ball in Goldschmidt's court

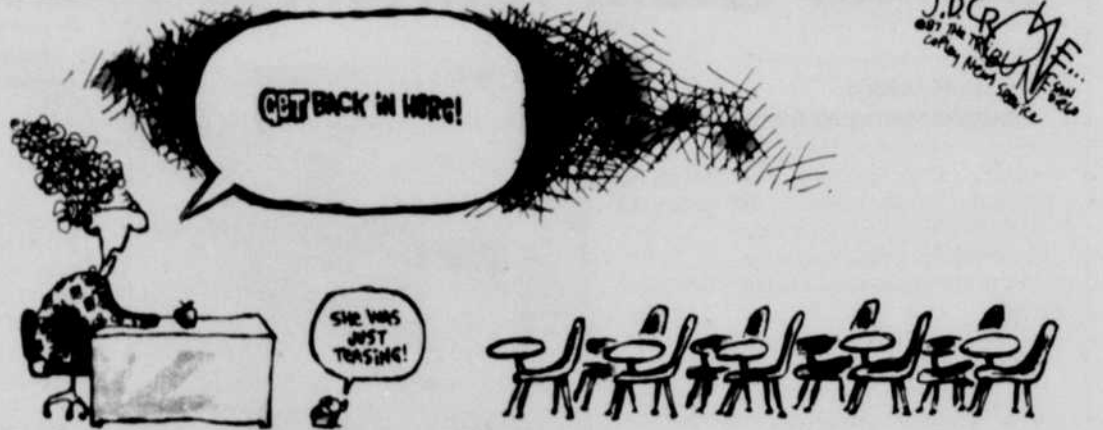
The University Senate's resolution asserting a vote of no confidence in the State Board of Higher Education and its chancellor illustrates the need for an independent review of the board's decision-making process.

The resolution calls on Gov. Neil Goldschmidt to take appropriate action in response to the board's highly questionable process through which it has decided to retire University President Paul Olum in June 1989. Goldschmidt should establish an impartial committee to review state-board procedure for the retirement of university presidents.

The state board has acted with disregard toward the economic and academic future of the University and toward student and faculty sentiment. The state board repeatedly has changed its argument for retiring Olum, which shows not only fragmentation but incoherence as well. The board also has failed to substantiate its arguments and has declined to engage in public debate with the University community over the issue.

The board's lack of accountability and relative autonomy raises serious questions concerning whom it is meant to serve. As demonstrated during previous weeks, the State Board of Higher Education obviously is not accountable to those it directly serves: the students and faculty of Oregon's public universities.

Goldschmidt should intervene to correct the flawed process involved with the state board's decision — if not for the benefit of the current conflict then for the benefit of future deliberations.



Commentary

Democracy must be restored to board

They actually did it.

Despite an enormous outpouring of support for University President Paul Olum, members of the State Board of Higher Education voted 9-2 to force him to retire three years earlier than either he or the University faculty, students, alumni and community leaders had requested. The board's ouster of President Olum certainly will harm the University, and it also hurts to see a good friend have to leave for no good reason.

Commentary by
Randy MacDonald

What is going on here? Did the board even listen to us at all?

No.

The board's decision makes it clear that there is a serious lack of accountability in the very governing body that most affects conditions at this institution. Board members refused to

give any adequate reason for their decision, and they also refused to consider in good faith the heartfelt, well-considered input of hundreds of concerned individuals.

Worst of all, this is just the latest in a series of arrogant actions by the board that appear to be designed to centralize its power and flaunt its authority over the State System of Higher Education.

This travesty of a decision follows on the heels of others just like it: The board's reduction of faculty and student participation in search committees for future university presidents, which strongly was objected to by the University Senate; the board's insistence on the adoption of a state-wide centralized computer system that experts have said will be a disaster; the latest effort by State System Vice Chancellor Bill Lemman to curtail the activities of OSPIRG and thus the Oregon Student Lobby; and the list goes on!

So what are we going to do? Just shrug our shoulders and let them get away with it?

No.

It is time that we restored democratic input into the State System of Higher Education. Now is the time for reform of the board. Control of this university must be returned to those whose lives are invested in it: the University faculty, administration and students.

We need to start an inter-

institutional dialogue among the state centers of higher education about the reforms needed in the structure and methods of the board. These talks should begin soon, and would benefit from the concerned input of faculty, students and alumni around the state.

We are not the only institution that is threatened, and our situation has engendered sympathy and concern among many of our Oregon colleagues. The talks would culminate in a proposed board reform package that would be placed on an initiative ballot measure in the November 1988 election, or submitted as a bill in the 1989 Legislature.

This reform process is already beginning. Students, alumni, faculty and community leaders have been expressing their displeasure with the renegade board in a variety of ways. Protests, letters to the governor, votes of no confidence in the board, and the consideration of possible lawsuits are some of the shots that have been fired in the escalating conflict.

However, long-term solutions are needed. Nothing less than permanent reform of the board will suffice. The inter-institutional dialogue process will give our reform package the legitimacy of broad input, and it will be strengthened through the inclusion of many different points of view. With a proposal forged in this manner, we will be able to gain the support of the people of Oregon and change the board so that it is more accountable to those whom it is supposed to serve.

So what are we waiting for? Let's get started!

Randy MacDonald is a junior studying political science. He was the 1986-87 ASUO Student Senate chairman.

Letters Policy

The Emerald will attempt to print all letters containing comments on topics of interest to the University community. Comments must be factually accurate and refrain from personal attacks on the character of others.

Letters to the editor must be limited to no more than 250 words, legible, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is submitted.

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