



EOU rejects Pearson OPM partnership

■ Administration decides OPM decision should be postponed

By Max Denning and Alyssa Sutton
The Observer, Aug. 17

Eastern Oregon University President Tom Insko announced Aug. 16 that it will not be partnering with Pearson Online Learning Services for its online program management company.

The announcement came after a year-long look at hiring an online management company.

In August of 2017, EOU requested proposals from online management companies. OPMs are third-party for-profit companies that assist universities in developing online curriculum and marketing strategies.

Three OPM companies submitted proposals to EOU, and two were invited to campus in October 2017 — The Learning House and Pearson.

In December 2017, Insko and David Vande Pol, executive director of regional outreach and innovation at EOU, decided the university should explore the possibility of partnering with Pearson, and they presented this plan to the board of trustees at its February 2018 meeting. The original timeline was to have a partnership decided on by May. However, Insko decided to postpone the decision to November 2018 to allow for faculty and staff to be back on campus before any decisions were made.

But now, with the rejection of Pearson, Insko has



Observer file photo

The EOU board of trustees listened to staff from Pearson Online Services, which is an online program management company. The board decided not to pursue the OPM partnership.

announced he would not be making recommendations to the board in November of 2018 on an OPM to partner with, according to a press release from EOU.

In the announcement, Insko said one factor that led to the mutual decision not to move forward was cost.

“One element where we did not find alignment was around online tuition levels. It is central to (Eastern’s) mission to provide an affordable education and what we felt was best for our students did not work out for Pearson’s business model,” Insko said.

Tim Seydel, vice president for university advancement at EOU, said the college will continue its evaluation and assessment of OPMs it could potentially partner with.

“That doesn’t mean it’s a foregone conclusion that we would utilize an OPM, but we will continue to evaluate what options we have with an online management firm,” he said.

Seydel also echoed

Insko’s statement about tuition levels. “

“As we evaluated the potential OPM partnership with Pearson, we were discussing a number of different issues, but key among them would be our core commitment to providing accessible education particularly for in-state students. When we looked at where we needed to be and where Pearson needed to be (in relation to tuition), it was not going to pencil out,” Seydel said.

In terms of a new timeline for deciding on an OPM partnership, Seydel said the university did not yet have one.

“There is no deadline, nor are we setting a firm time frame in place yet,” he said.

Vande Pol said at the April meeting of EOU’s board of trustees that the reason partnering with Pearson was being considered was simple: to increase enrollment.

He said there has been a shift in demographics,

and what was previously regarded as the non-traditional student has become the traditional student.

“Things are only going to get more competitive in the online space, especially for smaller universities without brand recognition,” Vande Pol said at the meeting, explaining why he believed the university should partner with an OPM.

Those who expressed doubts about Pearson included DeAnna Timmerman, assistant professor of psychology at Eastern. Timmerman told the Observer in May she was concerned because the Pearson model called for teacher assistants to instruct some classes rather than professors as a cost saving measure.

“What we do really well at Eastern is have personal relationships with our students,” Timmerman said. “I’m not sure how a model that takes the professor out of the classroom is reflective of our culture.”



Cherise Kaechele/The Observer

Union County Sheriff’s Deputy Tony Humphries speaks to Union Elementary School Principal Chris Dunlap, who also serves as the school district’s athletic director, and Superintendent Carter Wells. Humphries stepped into the role of school resource officer in Union, Cove and North Powder in August

Adding a measure of security

By Dick Mason
The Observer, Aug. 24

The La Grande, Cove, North Powder and Union school districts have a new staff member walking their halls — one who wears a badge but gives high fives to students instead of tardy slips.

The new face in the hallways will be Union County Sheriff’s Deputy Tony Humphries, who is beginning a stint as a school resource officer for the four school districts. Humphries is the first school resource officer the Cove, North Powder and Union school districts have had.

Carter Wells, superintendent of Union School District, is delighted to have Humphries on board.

“We are very excited about it,” he said. “The safety and security of the school district (will benefit from Humphries’ presence). He will also enforce attendance rules and regulations, which will help reduce the drop-out rate.”

Humphries has served as a Union County Sheriff’s Deputy for 13 years, and before that was an officer for the former Union Police Department. He is no stranger to many local students, since he has taught Drug and Alcohol Resistance Education classes to fifth- and sixth-graders for many years in Union County. He made lasting connections with many of the students he taught.

“I’m still in contact with some of (them),” Humphries said.

Humphries was named a school resource officer last spring and since then has been meeting with the staff of the four school districts he is assigned to. He began working with students the week of Aug. 20 when classes started in the Cove School District. He made a point to exchange high fives with many students and played in one of their kickball games as part of his familiarization process.

“The students have been great,” Humphries said.

Wells anticipated Humphries would be a hit with students in Union when classes start Aug. 27.

“He is a very kind individual who cares about kids. It really shows in how he has run the D.A.R.E. program in Union,” Wells said.

Humphries and his wife, Merry, who live in Union, are the parents of two daughters,

the youngest of whom is a senior at Union High School this year, and a son. They also have a granddaughter.

In the La Grande School District, Humphries will be working with fellow Union County Sheriff’s Deputy Cody Bowen, who has served as the district’s full-time school resource officer for four years.

“He is a huge resource for me,” Humphries said of Bowen.

Bowen, who is continuing to be a full-time SRO in La Grande, has received praise from many La Grande School District educators for his work, which is a big reason why the second position was added.

“We saw a lot of benefits. (Bowen) helped a great deal with safety and security and helped with the orderly operation of the school environment,” said Larry Glaze, who served as the La Grande School District superintendent from 2008 to 2017 and is now director of operations for the InterMountain Education Service District.

Glaze added Bowen connects well with students and staff.

“He provides a human side to the face of law enforcement,” he said.

Glaze helped coordinate the creation of a collaborative composed of the La Grande, Cove, Union and North Powder school districts, which are sharing the expense of Humphries’ position with help from the InterMountain ESD.

Union County Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen said Humphries and Bowen are well suited for their roles as school resource officers because of their approachability.

“Let’s face it, not everybody is cut out to be a school resource officer,” Rasmussen said. “Not everyone has a personality that gives them the ability to put kids at ease.”

Humphries, like Bowen, will be patrolling schools, assisting at school cross-walk sites, reaching out to students who need help and attending school events like athletic contests to provide an additional measure of security.

The new SRO said he enjoys being in a school environment with students.

Pros and cons of Greenway Project discussed

By Dick Mason
The Observer, Aug. 29

The Grande Ronde River Greenway Project is a polarizing issue.

This was clear again on Aug. 28 during the second of three hearings on the Grande Ronde River Greenway Project being conducted by Island City’s city council.

The hearing was conducted by the council to take input on how it should use a \$1.1 million grant from the state for Phase II of the Grande Ronde River Greenway Project. The grant, awarded in 2016, is for a trail that would run from an area east of Riverside Park to a pond in eastern Island City north of Highway 82.

Supporters said the Greenway would draw in visitors, boost the local economy and improve the overall quality of life for residents. Opponents expressed a fear that having a public path close to their homes will cause problems.

“I’m completely opposed

to the project,” said Julie Bodfish, who owns a home with her husband, John, adjacent to the proposed Greenway path.

The Bodfishes are one of four families who own land along the proposed routes for which easements would have to be purchased by the city.

Bodfish noted at the meeting the owners of the four pieces of property sent a letter on Aug. 5 to Island City Mayor Delmer Hanson, City Recorder Karen Howton and Island City’s city council stating they have no intention of selling easements to the city.

“We have told you multiple times in every way we know that you will not be granted a right-of-way or be sold our property,” the letter stated. “We do not support this project in any way.”

The letter also stated there is no support from any homeowners who will be affected along the path.

“We are beyond tired of this situation. There is no

good way to resolve the problems that you face. We are asking you to just stop,” the property owners said in the letter.

Easements would be needed for Option A, which was discussed at an Aug. 21 city council hearing, and Option B. No easements would be needed for Option C, because it calls for two bridges to be constructed. Option C, however, would cost \$2.69 million, significantly more than the other options, because of the cost of construction.

Several people at the hearing told the city council it should consider Option C because it would have less impact on landowners.

Option C was discussed at a Sept. 6 hearing. This option calls for a pathway from May Lane that would follow the river until it reaches a severely eroded cut bank and a private property. At this point a bridge would be built on the north side of the river, and a second bridge would be constructed on the south

side of the river farther down the trail.

Option A calls for a 10-foot wide, 6,000-foot pathway to run from the end of the existing Phase I trail east of Riverside Park to the Island City pond. The path would follow the south bank of the Grande Ronde River.

Option B, known as the “Ditch Easement” option, would follow the same path as Options A and C until it reaches private property. The pathway would then follow a ditch easement through two to five other properties before reaching the Island City park area at the pond site.

A number of people at the hearing said the Greenway Project is needed because there are few safe places to ride bicycles in the La Grande and Island City area. Susan Brudi said the cities of La Grande and Island City would be better off focusing energy and resources on creating safer bike riding areas in the community.



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