

March Budget Madness

LCC BOARD WRESTLES WITH HOW TO DEAL WITH DEFICIT GAP

By Henry Houston



LCC STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT NICK KEOUGH ADDRESSES THE BOARD

Public meetings aren't exactly the best way to spend a late Thursday night. That didn't stop about 80 students, faculty and community members from attending the March 14 Lane Community College Board of Education meeting to protest a proposed tuition increase and the outsourcing of the college's food services and bookstore.

The college has to balance next year's budget by dealing with a deficit of \$8.5 million. It took the board more than four hours to discuss and act on just three action items aimed at closing that gap: tuition increases ranging from \$6-\$38 per credit as well as faculty layoffs and outsourcing the bookstore and food services.

The meeting was filled with tension, including *Robert's Rules of Order* blunders, spats and rolled eyes between board members. Board member Matt Keating was accused of grandstanding by two other board members. The first time, he asked faculty in the audience to stand and a segment to sit to illustrate faculty loss. The second time, when voting whether to outsource food services, he told the rest of the board to remember how he made a compromise in his values to balance the budget, and they should do the same by voting to raise tuition.

The heated meeting, which prompted a college official to hand out candy during a break to ease tensions, ended without definitive action to resolve the deficit. If the board continues to delay on whether to increase tuition to close the deficit gap, the college's default action is to issue layoffs.

The college sent a general notice of possible program and service reductions to employees during the week of March 11. Employee contracts require LCC to issue a notice by May 1 to faculty whose positions would be cut, and classified employees must be given a minimum of 21 working days' notice.

LCC officials have provided regular budget updates to the board since last November, says Joan Aschim, the college's spokesperson.

The college spends \$1.16 million in subsidies to support

the bookstore and food services. The board voted to allow the college administration to outsource its food services, which cut LCC's expenditures by about \$420,000.

Board member Phil Carrasco proposed requiring the vendor to be local. However, Robin Geyer, the president of the Lane Community College Employees Federation, tells *Eugene Weekly* she has reservations that a private vendor would want to come in if food services subsidized by the college doesn't make money.

"I'm not sure how any vendor can come in and do any better," she said. "The reality we need to recognize is that food service is a service. The college needs to fund the service. We need the service. We're too remote not to have food for our students. To not have it is a disservice to the students and the staff who work here."

The college will begin engaging with local vendors, Aschim tells *EW*.

The college's recommendation of outsourcing the bookstore drew criticism from Meggie Wright, LCC's open educational resources (OER) librarian.

Before the board meeting, Wright told *EW* that she was concerned about the future of OER at the college if Barnes and Noble College were to operate the bookstore. OER is course material that has an open license, which allows faculty to revise and use it in courses and offers students a free or low-cost textbook for class. LCC's open education is one of the most robust and oldest in Oregon, she added.

Barnes and Noble College initially approached the college in 2008. Ten years later, LCC reached out to Barnes and Noble College and another out-of-state company to explore partnership opportunities, Aschim tells *EW* in an email.

What Wright feared was a contract that would resemble the one Clackamas Community College signed with Barnes and Noble College in 2018 to relinquish control of the college's open education program to the private company.

"We're concerned about the contract language that restricts what our instructors are able to do," she said. "In the Clackamas contract, OER is specifically called

out as something there's a restriction on. So that's really concerning to our program."

In addition, Wright expressed more concern about how Barnes and Noble College would make revenue at a bookstore in a college that is pushing for increased OER.

Encouraging faculty to use OER generally saves an individual student \$100 per class, she added.

However, the success of open education at LCC has resulted in diminished revenue for the bookstore, Tony Sanjume, the bookstore's manager, tells *EW*. The bookstore has been losing money because of its large employee pool.

"The largest controllable expense in retail operation is payroll," he says. "I have not been given the opportunity to transfer people out because that's a college decision."

The college has already transferred out a few employees from the bookstore. And, if Barnes and Noble College were to operate the Titan Bookstore, the college would have transferred out more employees.

Sanjume adds that sales have changed drastically because of the declining sales of textbooks, which is due to the success of the college's use of OER. Usually at a community college, textbooks are about 70 to 80 percent of a store's revenue.

"It's great for the students, but the store needs to be given an opportunity to adjust its operations so it can create a model that's gonna work with a more digital course material assortment for classes," he says. "OERs are essentially free. A class that was using a \$150 textbook is using a \$40 digital or even zero online or \$15 photocopy of class notes."

The board voted 4-3 to not outsource the bookstore right now. The bookstore must provide ongoing financial updates to the board. If the bookstore continues to have financial losses next year, the board will revisit whether to outsource it.

The board plans to have a special session to hear from faculty and students on how either an increase in tuition or faculty cut would impact them. During that session, the board can also vote on how to close the deficit gap.

slant

• In the March 4 edition of *Editor and Publisher* magazine, *Eugene Weekly* was recognized as an honorable mention in the newspaper industry journal's list of "10 Newspapers That Do It Right 2019." The magazine looks to honor innovative revenue strategies, impactful journalism and creative audience growth. *EW* was recognized for teaming up with the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication's Catalyst Journalism Project to break news, hold people in power accountable and shine a light on possible pathways to make the community a better place. You can find the stories at EugeneWeekly.com tagged Catalyst Journalism Project.

• You've heard of the luck of the Irish, but what about the luck of the Emeralds? **University of Oregon's men's basketball team** must've had our minor league team's mascot, Sluggo, say a prayer while they were in Las Vegas for the Pac-12 championship. On Saturday, March 16, UO beat University of Washington, 68-48. UO's underdog tournament performance was similar to that of the Ems. The Ems made it to the playoffs despite having a losing record and went on to win the championship on a balk, leading to the team winning in extra innings. UO's team has some slim Vegas odds in its future at the NCAA tournament, but, hey, when you see 150-1 odds, you send in some money.

• **New Zealand's mass shooting** brought Eugeneans, and people all over the world, out to support their Muslim friends and neighbors after the tragedy. It also brought speculation that

the anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant rhetoric spewed in the U.S., particularly by the current president, may have contributed to the racist beliefs of the terrorist who killed 50 people. The shooter called Trump "a symbol of renewed white identity and common purpose." New Zealand immediately began to look at tightening gun laws and canceled its largest gun show. We should take note.

• **Enjoying the sunshine? Go home, Oregon, you're drunk.** We just went from snow and ice to temps in the 70s in a matter of weeks. While we celebrate the warmth, let's let the crazy weather remind us climate change is playing havoc with the planet. Adults have failed, so the kids have stepped up with lawsuits like that of Our Children's Trust and the March 15 climate strike that organizers say had 1 million students protesting climate change. Perhaps this is yet another sign the measure to lower the voting age in Oregon to 16 is worth talking about.

SLANT INCLUDES SHORT OPINION PIECES, OBSERVATIONS AND RUMOR-CHASING NOTES COMPILED BY THE EW EDITORIAL BOARD. HEARD ANY GOOD RUMORS LATELY? CONTACT EDITOR@EUGENEWEEKLY.COM