

23 July 2020

Dear Trustees,

We wish to bring to your attention a number of recent interactions with the university administration that are concerning to faculty. As you are aware, faculty morale is very low, and these recent developments further strain the relationship between faculty and administration, an administration that professes a desire to improve this relationship.

We are frustrated by the lack of progress in our contract negotiations. The administration has selected and continues to use an outside attorney as their lead negotiator for the faculty union contract negotiations. We believe that through bargaining we can improve working conditions, morale, and collegiality at Oregon Tech, but only if the administration is willing to engage in discussions with us and work toward solutions. However, the administration team has indicated that they are not interested in negotiating with us over key issues such as academic rank and promotion for non-tenure track faculty, intellectual property, and promotion and tenure—areas that are standard provisions in almost all faculty contracts.

Furthermore, the Provost's office has recently announced changes to working conditions (workload and the stipend/release model) that are mandatory subjects of bargaining. Under Oregon law, any changes to mandatory subjects of bargaining must first be negotiated with our union, so this action by the administration is troubling. As our Board, we ask that you hold the university administration accountable to this legal requirement that changes to mandatory subjects need to be bargained at the table.

Finally, we are unimpressed with the progress of the administration's planning for reopening this Fall term in the light of the growth of the COVID-19 pandemic. Oregon Tech, in its continued insistence on in-classroom instruction and lack of planning for hybrid delivery, is an outlier among higher education institutions both in Oregon and nationally. For example, the lightly modified class schedule that was adopted in haste at the end of the Spring term does not allow for social distancing between classes or adequate time for cleaning classrooms between sessions. Additionally, the different contexts of our different campuses—especially Portland-Metro, which is so far much harder hit with COVID-19 than Klamath Falls—are not adequately addressed in the current, one-size-fits-all university planning around re-opening.

While the stated goal of the administration is to reset their past relationship with Oregon Tech faculty and put us on a more positive path, the actions we have outlined above seem designed to do just the opposite. We urge the Board to take note of these actions and discuss strategies for improvement with the administration.

Please recognize the incredible effort our faculty put into transitioning our courses to remote delivery for Spring term and understand that the faculty's dedication to our students' success is key to maintaining the reputation of the institution in the state and beyond. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,  
Oregon Tech AAUP Executive Committee