Oregon 2020 Initiative: Cultivating a Vibrant Community of Scholars

The Oregon 2020 initiative is a comprehensive plan resulting in a more evident and dynamic community that fosters intellectual activity and a sense of openness and creativity. A community of scholars can be defined by the programs and services, both academic and social, and campus facilities and landscapes within its purview. This initiative will encourage the UO to go beyond creating individual buildings and programs to create a comprehensive plan that cultivates an environment supportive of inquiry and dynamic human interaction.

As the world becomes increasingly more complicated and interwoven, students (our future leaders) need to be adept at looking at problems from a variety of perspectives and need to be skillful at collaborations among diverse populations in order to come up with the most viable solutions. Oregon 2020 will create an environment that builds that vital skill set in our students. This will serve the world community as well as our student and faculty bodies. Building on unique UO characteristics and a record of successful academic-student affairs collaborations, we can distinguish ourselves from many large research universities through a sense of intimacy and attention to individuals and their ideas. The aim of this initiative is to help students discover the world of fundamental questions and problems that motivate the inquiries of our faculty and the university as a whole. This will position the UO as an educational leader and ensure the UO’s continued success as an institution.

Unfortunately, further progress in developing an inclusive community is clearly impeded by many of the physical and organizational barriers of the campus. Faculty offices are cramped or insufficient in some buildings. The Erb Memorial Union and the Student Recreation Center are currently bursting at the seams. Students are telling us that there are very few places for them to gather, study, socialize, or interact with other students, faculty and/or staff. And we have long known that the majority of the residence halls are gravely outdated. Rebuilding these highly used spaces with the objective of integrating academic opportunities with co-curricular, social and cultural learning opportunities will help our students thrive.

Under the Oregon 2020 initiative, the Student Recreation Center becomes a space that meets the needs of students and faculty/staff, and the EMU becomes the University Center with enhanced spaces for conferences, a cultural arts center, classroom spaces and a multitude of retail spaces that complement the development of the Eugene and Springfield areas close by. The Library and other gathering places are accessible within a schedule that reflects the needs of the 21st century student. A new “Student Success Center” replaces Oregon Hall and becomes the gateway to campus, complementing the new Alumni Center and signaling our commitment to the success of all students. The residence halls built in the 1960s are replaced and surpass the success of our newly created Living-Learning Center. These types of physical spaces are created all across
campus to foster academic, social, and cultural learning that extend beyond the classroom and create a vibrant and seamless educational experience for the entire UO community.

This envisioned campus will not only help recruit and sustain strong faculty, staff and students, but also communicate the UO’s value to the larger community. Its key attributes include:

- A strong “university presence” in the design and quality of the buildings and open spaces.
- Reinforcement of academic values that support the academic mission both within and outside the classroom.
- Broad appeal to students, faculty, staff, and community members as a destination for academic, cultural, and social enrichment.
- A reputation as a cultural center that draws outside visitors.

To achieve this, we need:

- A common sense of purpose among faculty, staff, and students. Oregon 2020 is a campus initiative that requires collaboration and participation from the entire community.
- To shape all campus planning projects with a vision of Oregon 2020 in mind.
- Residence halls that build upon the success of the Living-Learning Center and include relevant satellites of academic programs and central student services.
- Top-notch conference facilities and performing arts centers.
- A Student Success Center that assists students with the wide range of elements that contribute to a successful educational experience -- e.g. academic and financial planning, study abroad, internships and other opportunities for applied learning, and the exploration of possible careers.
- Spaces that create informal opportunities for interaction among faculty in different disciplines, as well as for student engagement with faculty and staff.
- “Learning Neighborhoods” – college-like settings within the larger university where theory and practice meet, where students work closely with faculty and staff, and where cognitive and leadership skills are developed both in and out of the classroom.
- Technology to enhance and facilitate intellectual and social engagement.
- Spaces whose extended hours of operation and accessibility to multiple users foster broad academic and social engagement. The goal is to promote learning and interdisciplinary interaction by minimizing the restrictions of time and location.

The 2020 Initiative addresses the 8 Big Idea criteria as follows:

**Criterion #1: Aligns with UO mission and the general goals in the Academic Plan**

Oregon 2020 will provide a competitive advantage for recruiting and retaining outstanding students, faculty and staff. It will signal the priority we give to undergraduate education and our commitment to an educational experience that is both
challenging and innovative for undergraduate and graduate students alike. The sense of community generated by Oregon 2020 will be a powerful positive force for the involvement of faculty and staff as well. It will create a setting in which the richness of a liberal arts perspective can be part of the everyday experience of the entire community.

Criterion #2: Addresses the core missions including teaching and learning, impact on general education, the student experience, research and engagement

The purpose of Oregon 2020 is to strengthen the core missions of teaching and learning by ensuring that the campus environment supports intellectual engagement created by, and for all members of the community. It will also contribute to the research efforts by promoting the kind of interactions among faculty that lead to new insights and approaches. The residential university we envision is much more than simply living quarters for students. It strives to link the world of the mind with all aspects of the university experience. This linkage will enrich the educational experience of students in all majors and should have particular benefits in making general education come alive for students. Our confidence on this point comes from the success of residential Freshmen Interest Groups (FIGs). The FIG program as a whole encourages intellectual exploration through general education, and we have been delighted to discover that residential FIGs are particularly effective. In many ways, FIGs epitomize what a liberal arts education can truly be:

“Modern liberal arts education is a system of higher education designed to foster in students the desire and capacity to learn, think critically, and communicate proficiently and to prepare them to function as engaged citizens. It is distinguished by a flexible curriculum that allows for student choice and demands breadth, as well as depth, of study, and by a student-centered pedagogy that is interactive and requires students to engage directly with critical texts within and outside of the classroom.”

Oregon 2020 fosters a sustainable competitive advantage by creating additional opportunities for this type of engagement.

Criterion #3: Builds on existing UO academic strengths, including disciplinary or interdisciplinary programs

For more than a decade, University Housing and other Student Affairs departments have collaborated with Undergraduate Studies, the Clark Honors College, and faculty in the Colleges of Arts and Sciences and Education to integrate students’ classroom experiences with their everyday lives. The effort was initiated in the mid-1990s when University Housing staff arranged for a few intrepid faculty members to meet informally with students in the unfamiliar territory of the residence halls. Residence halls were still foreign to most faculty members when residential FIGs were launched in 2001, but the positive effect of the residential environment on students’ performance in FIGs was immediately apparent. Moreover, residential FIGs served as catalysts of greater
academic engagement throughout the halls, and are now placed strategically within housing complexes for this purpose.

Student interest in current problems and age-old questions spawned the “Community Conversations” series where residence hall students work with faculty advisors to invite panels of experts to discuss topics such as stem cell research, deaf culture, the future of the UN, and Japanese tea ceremonies. Students have come up with ideas for programs to satisfy curiosity sparked in classes. For instance, FIG assistants expanded this idea and created the thriving SuperNova program through which students invite individual faculty for an evening of informal discussion of their research. Topics have ranged from the origin of the universe to human psychology. We know that our students have many more ideas and we’re confident that, given space and encouragement, their ideas will enrich the entire university.

**Criterion #4 : Fosters new cross-institutional collaboration and partnerships with other units at UO**

The creation of community and cross-collaboration are the essence of Oregon 2020. Community and collaboration are fundamental to both research and teaching. Ideas generated through individual effort are nearly always examined and tested through a very social process. We believe that fostering a vibrant community will pay off in new collaborations and partnerships. We have already seen this happen as the result of “The Process for Change” and in many ways, we are seeing that type of cross-collaboration in this “Big Idea” process. The sense of community developed by these enterprises connected people typically segregated by the university structure, and the novel partnerships that were forged by “The Process of Change” and now with the “Big Idea” submissions will continue to shape the university. Other examples are the collaborations between Housing and the Humanities Center to offer 1-2 credit courses to students in the halls, using readings and discussions with visiting scholars. Oregon 2020 can create a culture and physical environment that fosters more and stronger partnerships, collaboration, and communities.

**Criterion #5: Strengthens existing disciplines**

The structure of academic institutions often limits the potential of stronger community by inadvertently putting up barriers between disciplines and between the communities that comprise the university. The vision and engagement required by the Oregon 2020 initiative would help to remove those barriers and blur the lines of division that sometimes exist.

For example, Oregon 2020 will help students find practical applications for their interests (increased opportunities to participate in FIGs, incentives to develop in and out of classroom activities and programs, social spaces to allow for informal gatherings of faculty, staff and students, enhanced facilities constructed with the Oregon 2020 vision in mind, etc.), which can be easily imagined in disciplines such as business, environmental studies, sociology, psychology, language and cultural studies. Less obvious, but just as
important, is the potential for informal intellectual experiences, to introduce students to subjects that are unfamiliar and much farther from their own experience. For example, we’ve found business students discovering art history and music students discovering basic science. While student interest doesn’t strengthen academic disciplines directly, it encourages students to think critically which makes teaching more satisfying and learning in every interaction more customary.

**Criterion #6: Links to fundamental societal opportunities challenges or needs.**

**Incorporates assessment and communication strategies to articulate benefits and impact**

This proposal aims to provide physical structure and planning policy that will nourish the very core of the University – that is, the creative intellectual efforts of all of its community-members. As such, Oregon 2020 will enhance the University’s ability to encourage the habits of mind and broad-based acquisition of knowledge that underlie a flourishing society. Through collaborative work with UO faculty and each other, as well as interactions with visiting scholars, our students will practice identifying significant problems and questions and working toward answers that are not yet in their textbooks or internet haunts. We expect these experiences to expose our students to viewpoints besides their own, to sharpen their ability to distinguish evidence from opinion, and to inspire in them a deep sense of their own capacity to be effective. In this way, we will shape national and international leadership in the future.

We plan the following assessments to estimate the extent to which students participate in and are influenced by the Oregon 2020 initiatives. We recognize that there are few, if any, objective measures of the qualities of mind we seek to encourage. However, we intend to make good use of the respected proxies, that currently exist, listed below.

1. We will use StudentVoice and the surveys currently in use by existing programs (e.g. Residence Life, FIGs, Career Center, EMU, the Library, etc.) to track student participation in the out-of-class activities promoted by Oregon 2020. We will want to know whether the overall number of participants increases, as well as whether representation from diverse segments of the student population broadens. Linkage of the surveys of individual programs will allow us to follow students who have been introduced to possibilities for enrichment. Do these students follow-up with actual participation?

2. Through NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement), we can determine how students perceive the University community and how they view their own engagement with it. Specific survey questions examine some of the experiences and attitudes we are particularly interested in – the frequency with which students consider viewpoints other than their own, read books that aren’t assigned, or discuss ideas from their courses outside of class, for example. Although NSSE data are based on self-reports, and are thus not objective, they can reveal trends over time and differences among groups of students distinguished by other characteristics (e.g. age, living arrangement, academic performance). We are
favorably positioned to interpret NSSE results because we have collected and analyzed these data on a regular schedule since 2003. Therefore, if Oregon 2020 has a significant positive effect, we may be able to see it by comparison with past results.

3. Through the SERU (Student Experience in the Research University) survey, we can get a more highly-resolved picture, though a more academically-focused one, of what students are doing and how they are reacting. Like NSSE, SERU is based on self-reports, but because it elicits responses from many more students, it offers the potential to examine segments of the student population that are too small to be sampled by NSSE. We have not yet participated in SERU, but are poised to do so in Spring 2010.

4. Other assessment tools will be developed as the Oregon 2020 initiatives are further defined.

Criteria #7: Proposes a viable funding model from a combination of revenues such as private fund-raising, general fund dollars, and/or competitively awarded grants or contracts. Include infrastructure investments needed.

Oregon 2020 offers a unique opportunity to collaborate with a variety of university partners in different ways. This would also be true for the funding model. Utilizing private fundraising to support our desire to create academic spaces in University Housing and other auxiliary funded buildings, we will reach our goal to construct student-centered building spaces that foster student learning and community connection. We will also realize a vital goal for the Oregon 2020 initiative-- to build buildings that can “stay open” and plan buildings that incorporate innovative technology and amenities that a faculty, staff or 21st century student would need.

Auxiliary units that are revenue-generating and would be eligible to utilize F-XI bonds based on their revenue potential. A more strategic approach would be to leverage private fundraising, and student referendum dollars along with G Bonds and/or F-XI bonds. This approach would ensure a lessening of the burden on students and allow for a whole new untapped vein of fundraising by actively touting the importance and value of the student experience in combination with faculty, staff, and student engagement.

Investment will also be needed to provide incentives to faculty, staff and students to create and maintain co-curricular activities that integrate well with the academic mission and create the vibrant community that is the hallmark of the residential university.

The following estimates were generated based on existing funding models and considering a more shared responsibility in the future. This is not an exhaustive budget, but more a sample of potential project costs that could be associated with Oregon 2020. Construction, infrastructure and programming dollars to be sourced by fundraising dollars are noted in blue, while general fund/central administration commitments are
noted in green. All other dollar amounts in black are either pledged or already provided by an auxiliary.

Programming and New Initiatives:

- $25,000 from the University Foundation for Strategic Planning, communication and creating publications for the Oregon 2020 initiatives
- $75,000 for faculty, staff and student incentives to create and implement innovative engagement activities that substantially improve the learning opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students in and outside of the classroom. An RFP process that encourages innovative integration of curricular and co-curricular programs will be used and awards of varying sizes will provide the resources to support the various initiatives.

Renovation and New Construction:

- $85 million to complete the master plan of the EMU and construct the new “University Center” for the University of Oregon (1/3 funding from student referendum, 1/3 from fundraising, 1/3 from bond match). Inclusion of academic spaces, faculty and staff offices, classrooms and academic linkages.
- $45 million to complete Phase 3 of the Student Recreation Center and creating a University Recreation Center (1/3 from student referendum, 1/3 from fundraising, 1/3 from bond match). Inclusion of academic spaces, faculty and staff offices, faculty/staff club, classrooms, innovative technology and academic linkages.
- $500 million (over 20 years) to complete renovation, remodel and new construction of all residence halls (3/4 from F-XI bonds and Housing revenue; 1/4 from fundraising to fund building of academic spaces, faculty and staff offices, classrooms and academic linkages.
- $10,000 to conduct a viability study of building a Student Success Center that would serve as the student gateway to campus and a gathering spot for students, staff and faculty engaged in ensuring student success and complement other gateway buildings such as the Alumni Center.
- $55,000 to hire Brailsford and Dunleavy to assist in estimating the costs associated with constructing a new EMU and completing Phase 3 of the Recreation Center as well as surveying student attitudes and opinions regarding a student referendum to fund the renovation of the EMU, Recreation Center and Student Success Center (3/4 funded by EMU and PE & Rec. reserves ¼ funded by central coffers to explore the feasibility of providing academic linkages, faculty and staff linkages and community spaces in these buildings.

Staff Positions and Infrastructure that would support the Oregon 2020 Initiative:

- $150,000 to hire staff for the university scheduling office and to build and maintain the university-wide schedule.
- $75,000 to hire staff to develop and spearhead the “Healthy Campus Initiative.” This position will work with the Healthy Campus Initiative Committee to establish a robust strategic plan to substantially increase the health and welfare of
the members of our campus through healthy minds, body and soul. Partner with PEBB and our various university insurance partners to leverage funding for prevention programs administered on campus such as cholesterol screening, wellness programming for all employees and other health-related screening programs.

- **$30,000** to provide permanent staffing and security for the 24/5 library initiative
- **$50,000** in incentives to provide stipends to faculty and staff (10 stipends at $5,000 each) committed to living and learning in the residence halls. These “faculty in residence” positions will include stipends to support innovative curricular and co-curricular opportunities to our residence hall students such as the formation of a language immersion hall; a social justice hall and a sustainability hall—all areas of faculty/staff expertise and keen interest to our students and to the world.

**Criteria #8: How will be project be sustainable beyond the three to five year "focus phase"?**

If Oregon 2020 is adopted as a central component of the UO’s future direction and planning, it will not only be sustainable, but it will build upon itself and reinvent the campus to create a new sustainable competitive advantage. This would be a driving force in recruiting and graduating students, recruiting and retaining high caliber faculty and staff, and in invigorating the Eugene/Springfield community.

Operational funds would be generated from a mix of private fundraising, endowments, funds from student affairs auxiliaries, and the general fund. Ultimately, this initiative would become incorporated into the very fabric of the institution.

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1. “What a liberal arts education is an is not,” Jonathon Bard, Dean, Bard College
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