

November 16, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Last spring, in response to critical budget short-falls, the WOU Board of Trustees instructed me to take action and produce a balanced budget for fiscal year 2021 (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021), which, unfortunately, led to layoffs and non-renewal notices for more than 50 classified and unclassified employees. These actions were not taken lightly, especially given the larger context of the ongoing pandemic. The decisions have been heart-wrenching and our campus community is grieving the loss of so many positions, which have impacted employees' careers and livelihoods. The next step in our efforts affects faculty positions in accord with Article 15 of the faculty collective bargaining agreement. At this time, we have developed a draft plan related to program curtailment and the prospects of some faculty layoffs.

All these efforts are necessary for the university to meet the mandate of the Board. Our work will be guided by our mission and strategic plan and we will strive to continue to provide an affordable education for Oregon residents. Quite frankly, our options for achieving a balanced budget are limited, given that more than 85% of our expenses are salary and benefits. With limited options for tuition increases, declining enrollment, and likely cuts to state funding, we must act decisively to align our budget with our fiscal reality.

Since Fall 2011, WOU's enrollment has decreased over 25%, from 6,217 to 4,552 in Fall 2020. This is coupled with a decrease in our student to faculty ratio from 19:1 to 13:1. This ratio is simply not financially sustainable.

Some have argued that this decrease is caused by COVID. However, the data from Fall 2011 to Fall 2019 shows that enrollment decreased from 6,217 to 4,929, a decrease of 20%. The enrollment decreases from Fall 2011 to Fall 2019 account for over three-fourths of the overall decrease. While-COVID-19 has clearly dampened enrollment this year, the larger and more permanent factor has been a long-term decrease in enrollment over the past decade.

On November 12, I sent a [draft plan](#) to curtail a relatively small number of academic programs and some faculty positions to both the Presidents of WOU Federation of Teachers and WOU Faculty Senate, in order to allow them to make comments and suggest alternative approaches to reduce faculty personnel expenses. After feedback is received on November 23, 2020, I plan to release the final plan for implementation on or around November 30, 2020. During the month of December, division chairs will work with faculty in affected programs and deans to determine, based on guidance provided in the WOU-WOUFT Collective Bargaining Agreement, which faculty will be laid off.

Office of the President

It is important to note that students in affected majors and minors will still be able to complete their degrees, in a timely manner, even in areas where a major may ultimately be eliminated. Once the program curtailment plan is finalized and academic programs have created their 2021-2022 academic year schedules, academic advisors will work with students in affected programs to find pathways to graduation. Students will continue to receive the personalized support they have come to expect at WOU. And, we will be as flexible as we can in supporting students and their educational goals. If students have scholarships based on their major, we anticipate those will all continue to be available.

WOU will continue to offer courses from the programs that are being impacted. Those courses may be used for General Education and may be a part of other majors. Even after Article 15 implementation, [WOU will continue to offer a large number of undergraduate majors, minors, graduate programs and certificates.](#)

We will continue to keep the campus community informed about the work being done to align our personnel expenses with revenue and will continue to support our students in developing an academic plan that helps them meet their educational goals.

Sincerely,



Rex Fuller, President