

Task Force on Long-term Responses to COVID-19 2021 Report

June 16, 2021

Dear President Schill,

The Task Force on Long-term Responses to Covid-19 has temporarily suspended its work due to the improved financial projections regarding the university's health coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic. The UO has been able to navigate the past academic year through a combination of substantial personnel actions in the most-affected auxiliary units, savings from the hiring freeze, support from federal funds, and other spending reductions. Knowing that there are still fiscal challenges ahead, and predicting the residual effects of the pandemic to last at least the next three years, we expect to resume this work in the future. In the interim, the Task Force offers this report as a summary of what it has learned and observed until such time as the group might need to be assembled again. The following topics were investigated and thoroughly discussed over the past several months in alignment with our committee's charge. We concede that these and other topics need further exploration, examination, and assessment before concrete recommendations can be made. However, we respectfully submit the following summary for consideration.

Cost Savings/Revenue-enhancing Actions

The Task Force decided not to identify specific cost saving/revenue generating opportunities. However, some topics that seemed promising and worth additional exploration included:

- Investigate the viability of additional online programs at the graduate level, particularly those in niche areas where UO has a strong competitive advantage or enters a space where competitors are not already established.
- Improve lobbying and diversify outreach efforts touting the significance and importance of UO to the state, targeting voters and Salem lawmakers:
 - Make a strong case about the value of graduate education and research to the state.
 - Lead initiatives that are high priorities for the state.
 - Use storytelling to capture the attention of audiences inside and outside Oregon.
- Explore ways to extend existing UO programs and services to enhance the state. Identify economic initiatives or programs the UO can offer that better and more visibly serve the state, including:
 - Develop a Resource Center for the state to advise on priority issues such as equity and inclusion.
 - Engage the Law School in collaborations with other state institutions.

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- Create a listing of a la carte classes, workshops, lectures – edutainment space for people who are not yet interested in pursuing a degree.
- Create online courses for seniors to increase SCH and on-time completion.
- Offer programs and courses that attract future generations of college students:
 - Gather more extensive data to learn about what these students want.
 - Expand offers to include students who have not historically been the target of higher education. What types of industry and non-academic career programs can we offer with our existing faculty and resources?
- Explore ways to attract more Hispanic/Latinx students in Oregon and neighbor states on the West Coast:
 - Include Southern Oregon as an area of priority for outreach and impact.
- Align our internal and external communication around what liberal arts means and what it does:
 - Explain to potential students the value of liberal arts.
 - Increase consistency with what high school counselors are discussing with their students on what liberal arts means.
 - Identify additional ways that Admissions can communicate our strength in the liberal arts and the value of a liberal arts education to students' personal and professional development.
- Develop stronger central and more localized HR and administrative services (e.g., payroll) to streamline administrative processes wherever possible and increase cross-unit compatibility.
- Develop mechanisms to help departments determine whether and how to wind down initiatives that are no longer strategic or beneficial.
- Improve information-sharing opportunities across departments, in terms of administrative projects/efficiencies and academic initiatives and programs, to reduce duplicative work and encourage synergies/partnerships.
- Consider potential benefits (and costs) of focusing more on rankings (e.g., USNWR) to increase recruitment from area or demographics where we are lagging.
- Explore alternative or new avenues for fundraising:
 - Account for the fact that younger alumni are not reading email updates but are using social media platforms.
 - Address economic and societal challenges on giving.
 - Invest more in telling a story that advocates for our campus and our values.

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Principles to Consider in Reallocating Resources

The Task Force understands that resources are strained; we recommend that the following be considered when making decisions about the allocation of those resources:

- Prioritize strategic, responsive, and forward-looking initiatives. Questions to ask of potential initiatives include:
 - How does the initiative build on the investments in technology and remote learning/teaching that we have already made?
 - How does the initiative consider (1) demographics shifts of students entering college in the next 5-10 years; (2) learning and career goals of the students entering college in the next 5-10 years; and (3) the role of athletics in our institution?
 - Does the initiative have long-term potential in terms of growth, contribution, and re-shaping UO?
 - Does the initiative help UO be more dynamic and flexible with our curriculum to stay current and relevant?

- Center actions on decisions that are consistent with a shared mission and values of higher education broadly:
 - Delivering high-quality, relevant scholarship and research (as understood in the fields).
 - Be attentive to student needs and demands.
 - Ensure high-quality instruction with special attention to the role and critical importance of career faculty.

- Remain faithful to our own identity, region, and “brand”:
 - UO is the flagship liberal arts school in the state with strong athletics teams.
 - Our identity as a predominantly liberal arts institution.
 - People identify with Ducks, athletics, and football.
 - We can be using the visibility of athletics to pull students into units they might not otherwise know about.
 - Part of our mission is to serve the state and region.
 - UO should foster a sense of connectivity and integration with the Pacific NW.

- Build on recognizable and/or plausible areas of strength such as those identified as Provost’s Initiatives or similar campus-wide investments.

- Continue to shape UO’s mission:
 - Promote open dialogue of leadership with diverse campus groups (versus town halls) to allow more people to engage in the conversations.

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- Continue our commitment to enter into all decisions with a diversity and equity stance in alignment with the UO DEI's IDEAL framework (broadly construed and aligned with the Governor's definition).
- Be a conspicuously responsible steward of state funds:
 - Deploy efficient systems across campus that streamline operational processes (e.g., payroll, reports, and data systems) with uniformity that provides employees with standardized guidance. There is an important role for strategic centralization or "regionalization" here.
 - Help departments and faculty make sound programmatic decisions, including not only investment decisions but also those related to pruning, redirecting, and winding down.
- Increase consensus and unity centralization around university priorities, communication, and administrative systems to promote a sense of shared purpose and vision.
 - The UO's decentralized culture is a challenge to achieving this goal.
 - Set clear, consistent priorities at a central level and allow units to retain some amount of autonomy in execution.
 - Consolidation and rationalization Centralization of select administrative functions can increase efficiency.
- Actively nurture the sense of a unified community on campus by fostering cross-unit interactions and relationship-building.
 - Consider conducting a regular, campus-wide climate survey including both the strengths and weaknesses.
 - Continue to invest in programs such as the Leadership Academy, the Trauma-Informed Leadership Workshop series, and the Faculty Club that bring people from across campus together to work on topics related to our academic mission.
 - Break down unit-level silos to build a more connected community.

Limiting Factors

The task force would have benefitted from having additional information to help form more specific recommendations, including:

- Data on teaching loads and internal course releases by department:
 - Schools/Colleges workload policies.
 - Data showing how course releases are allocated in areas of diversity and equity and other areas of priority (scholarship, service, teaching).

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- Data on the timeline trend of gain/loss/breakeven by unit.
- A summary of the investments that have been made from the items outlined in the last strategic plan and their outcomes:
 - A summary of strategic investments made in areas that were not outlined in the last strategic plan and their outcomes.
- A list of planned or proposed investments that can be made in programs or services to improve our strategic growth:
 - What are areas where revenue can increase rapidly relative to cost if we were to grow capacity, add students, and so forth?
- A financial strategic plan.
- More information on how athletics affects the UO budget, brand, recruiting, donations, etc.

Additional Inquiry

Over the past ten months, the Task Force met with a number of university stakeholders. We asked for their input on the values and principles that should be considered when making our recommendation, as well as for any strategic investment ideas and general concerns.

SEIU and GTFF representatives wanted us to ensure that all voices would be heard during this process, recognizing the importance of all community members at UO while being open to rethinking long-held assumptions. They also hoped that we would share information with the university community, as much as possible. Some of the ideas/concerns these groups wanted to share regarding general university climate included: having more town halls, providing more surveys and places to give feedback, requiring more training for supervisors, devoting more resources for translators, modification of the tenure-track system, consider having top administrators take pay cuts, and explore changing policies regarding donations.

The OA Council gave feedback on the inefficiencies of:

- Non-academic functions: units across campus have very different ways of handling processes and there is lack of unified best practices because of which makes units feel siloed.
- Communication among units: The lack of trust across units is apparent.
- Finding efficiencies (central services example) for functions will help staff across campus feel supported in the streamlining of processes and functions.

ASUO wanted us to consider things that seem limited from their perspective, such as academic support for remote student learning, advising resources to students, communication as to how

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students can find these resources. Some of the opportunities they felt were important to consider included having a flipped classroom approach in more classes. They also shared that from their experiences, having intense courses and intense classwork in a quarter system can be very challenging.

The values that United Academics wanted us to consider included recognizing the critical role that NTTF play in our teaching mission and rethinking a campus-wide cost savings shift away from PEBB. Additionally, they also wanted to know what constitutes the strategic vision and mission of the UO and how that fits with the direction the campus is heading in. More directly focused on the Task Force, they asked about our commitments and hoped they included ensuring that the liberal arts are as much a priority as other programs as the UO positions itself in the future. United Academic echoed the Task Force's thoughts about amplifying our lobbying efforts in Salem and hoped that this might emerge as one of our recommendations.

In summary, the above topics, suggestions, and feedback are based off of the inquiry and discussion our Task Force has engaged in over the last several months. We decided not to make any definitive recommendations at this time because the budget projections do not indicate the need for substantial programmatic changes. The Task Force has decided to suspend its activities for the time being, but we are ready and willing to resume our charge should the financial circumstances of the university change and it becomes necessary.

Respectfully submitted,

UO Task Force on Long-term Responses to COVID-19