

Message from Interim Provost Scott Coltrane

Since becoming the University of Oregon's Interim Provost on July 1, I have spent considerable time immersing myself in the details of our emerging first-time labor agreement between the University and faculty. I'm impressed with the attention this process has focused on fundamental issues that will strengthen the University of Oregon and its academic mission.

We are in this together for the long term and I firmly believe that our new labor contract will be a useful tool to ensure equity and fairness, standardize procedures, and set mutual expectations.

For example, it's notable that language addressing academic freedom will be expanded to specifically include research as well as teaching. We'd like to think that has always been the practice, but it is useful to reaffirm the general principle. Faculty should have the latitude to delve into controversial issues or explore new and emerging areas in their fields of research without fear of censorship or retaliation. And it is important to reaffirm that faculty shape the content of the curriculum.

President Gottfredson and I also agree with the faculty that shared governance is essential to the well-being of the academy. I am certain the contract language will underscore the faculty's front-line role in this regard. We believe that faculty, working with the President, should have responsibility for setting academic standards, creating new classes, determining what material should be included and how classes are taught. The faculty also assigns grades to students and determines who should be awarded degrees.

Significant discussions have also been held on the topics of sabbaticals, tenure and promotion, and recognition of the role non-tenure track faculty play on our campus. For example, the University has proposed paying 100 percent of the salary for faculty who take sabbatical for one quarter; that's an increase in support from the current 85 percent pay.

The University and the faculty union, United Academics, broadly agree about maintaining the integrity of the tenure review and promotion process and the contract reaffirms procedures to protect that tradition.

Several of the proposals focus on non-tenure track faculty (NTTF). The UO will have a contract that ensures NTTF are eligible for professional development funds. The contract will also set down policies for regular review and appointment of non-tenure track faculty with appropriate faculty involvement and oversight. Along with better pay, it's important for NTTF to have stronger job security and potential for promotion.

Much attention throughout this process has been paid to enhancing the resources necessary for excellence. We all agree that students deserve a meaningful classroom experience and that the UO needs to recruit and hire more tenured and tenure-track faculty. Students, faculty, and our state deserve no less from an AAU research institution.

The negotiating teams return to the table on August 29. I'm optimistic that these talks will yield a faculty contract that builds on our areas of agreement and propels us into the next decade as a stronger, more united and more equitable institution.