

It's time to speak up against LCC program cuts

At their June meeting, several members of the Lane Community College Board of Education emphatically declared they are doing the right thing in eliminating two long-standing professional-technical programs. I cannot stand by silently, watching the college be dismantled without seeing evidence the board has given meaningful consideration to viable alternatives.

The vote at the board's May meeting to eliminate the Auto Body and Electronic Technician programs was based on a projected state funding level of \$535 million for community colleges and an administration budget analysis that many thought faulty.

No substantive response came to requests for thoughtful consideration of an alternate analysis that shows these programs actually bring revenue to the college.

One contested claim by the administration — that 75 to 88 percent of students in the eliminated programs will come to LCC anyway — was never justified. The alternate analysis, based upon an actual survey of these students, concludes that fewer than 20 percent will still attend.

We now know community college funding has been approved at \$550 million, which will bring an additional \$830,000 to LCC each year during the next biennium — far more than the administration's projected savings of \$195,000 next year from eliminating the two programs.

I strongly encourage the board to reinstate these programs. As faculty member Adrienne Mitchell said to the board, "These programs provide an opportunity for our students, many of whom live in poverty, to have a chance at social mobility. ... It's about fulfilling our mission." Lane was a beacon of hope in our community. Let's rekindle that flame.

Other comments by board members at the June meeting (Audio link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LaOL5Ny_GfM) are also on my mind. Board member Gary LeClair complained about the same people coming to the microphone month after month: "I'm reminded of the little kids that go ... 'Mom-Mom-Mom.' They don't stop until you finally say something to them."

In 23 years at Lane, I had not spoken before the board until the June meeting. I am not alone in this feeling of urgency to speak — many of us for the first time. Wouldn't stakeholders be irresponsible if they didn't make every effort to bring viable alternatives to the board and apprise it that these alternatives are being dismissed by administrators?

In response to LeClaire's complaint, faculty member Christina Howard commented at the end of Penny Scott's June 17 guest viewpoint: "I am deeply disappointed that a publicly elected board member would speak so disrespectfully of our vested public stakeholders. ... Infantilizing democratic processes around public programs and services ... disregards diverse public voices. Likening the process to nuisance parental roles reinforces the notion that the public, at best, is tolerated as long as it adheres to administrative recommendations without resistance or debate."

Board member Robert Ackerman declared, "If you attack the president, the board is going to form an intense perimeter and you'll never get anything done."

Ackerman's comment confuses "attack" with statements of dissent, attempts to call attention to institutional dysfunction and recent evaluations of administration and board job performance by faculty. It does not describe what one expects of board members. Boards exercise oversight, guidance and final decision-making authority,

responsibilities which require vigilance.

Vigilance implies seeking to understand all circumstances surrounding an issue and adherence to certain principles, one of which is excerpted here from LCC Board Policy 325: "... the best decisions regarding policy and planning at the institutional level are made through the inclusion of many and diverse voices."

Widespread perception of the board's refusal to seriously consider input, along with board members' comments, have created a crisis in confidence for many at LCC (see faculty evaluations of the administration and board at www.lcctorch.com/article/faculty-evaluations-of-college-administration-and-board/).

Chairman Pat Albright commented that his and Vice-Chairman Matt Keating's invitation to a "friend raiser" golf tournament was ignored by union leadership. If building a bridge is the goal, why not have the board do substantial things?

Visit the Auto Body and Electronic Technician programs and have a real conversation with faculty, staff and students.

Attend events like the recently held Open Budget and Faculty Council Forums and see firsthand how events unfold.

Communicate willingly and openly with stakeholders having perspectives different from the administration.

Recognize that while the president may be the board's primary employee (by Oregon statute), the board is also responsible for the entire college, including its approximately 1,600 employees, and what it offers our community.

Demonstrate active oversight of the president and administration by asking hard questions, requiring accountability to faculty, staff and other stakeholders.

Reinstate the Auto Body and Electronic Technician programs now that the college is receiving an additional \$830,000 per year for the next two years.

There are many things the board could do that would contribute to building a real bridge. Besides, a lot of people don't golf.

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