



Academic Initiatives 2019-2020

The last five years have seen the University of Oregon redoubling its efforts toward enhancing our scholarly and research profile via the hiring of dozens of tenure-related faculty, and the implementation of five new clusters of excellence. There has also been an unprecedented investment in research facilities during this time, including a nearly complete remodel of Pacific Hall and the construction of the new Knight Campus building.

Now is an ideal time to pause for a moment and think about our next major investments in time, energy, and resources. Each individual unit on campus should always be examining itself and evaluating what it can do better, and thinking about what the next great thing each can do might be. And the creativity that is born from these discussions will always form the core of our institutional vision. The Office of the Provost is uniquely positioned to help facilitate a broader set of discussions that range across the entire university, especially those that have the potential to span strengths in multiple schools and colleges. The Presidential Data Science Initiative, which resides in the Office of the Provost, is a good example of such a program as it spans a great swath of the university, is highly responsive to institutional and student needs, and has the potential to have a large impact within the state.

Provost-level initiatives should strongly resonate with the following principles:

- Catalyze growth toward national leadership of the university within that field
- Align research/scholarly strength with educational impacts, and student interest and success
- Leverage unique strengths of the University of Oregon
- Resonate with Oregon values and Oregon as a place
- Directly address our mission as a public institution in Oregon
- Enhance the future financial stability of the university

Not every initiative will resonate equally with each element, but each one must substantially elevate the university along several of these axes.

Over the next several years, we will have the opportunity to explore a number of different areas that address these principles. This year, we will begin examination of three potential initiative areas in three fairly distinct tracks. This process will likely involve creating a small group of faculty members and others to gather input from campus stakeholders, and to formulate a plan for moving forward by the end of the academic year. Note that I am using very generic titles for these initiatives; they are likely to change as the university works together to refine these ideas. Everyone need not see themselves in every initiative here. There will be many more opportunities to engage moving forward, as I anticipate that this will be an ongoing process over the years, and these initiatives do not preclude ongoing unit-level work (although they may amplify them).

Enhancing Our Academic Impact

1 Environment

“The Environment” as a topic of scholarship and education writ large is something that people expect Oregon to do well. And we do. We have national strengths in a number of areas across nearly all schools and colleges. Recent work on the resilience initiative led by the Office of Research and Innovation has helped to pull together a number of researchers across campus. New and existing academic programs continue to be elevated and defined. Perhaps most importantly, there is a perception that we are good-to-excellent at a variety of different areas within this broad umbrella. But there is also wide consensus that we do not celebrate and leverage our strengths as well as we might. From the provost’s perspective, it is also worth exploring whether we are configured appropriately as an institution. Do even more multidisciplinary interactions make sense or is it better to keep things as they stand relatively static? Where would strategic investments make the most sense? What are career opportunities for students in this space, and are we configured to maximize their lifelong success? What are our peers doing in this space?

2 Humanistic Studies

The University of Oregon is founded on its strength as a liberal arts institution. We have many outstanding areas in what is often loosely called “humanities.” For the University of Oregon, this goes well beyond the division with that name within the College of Arts and Sciences. We have recently started to make new investments in scholarship within this area via the Presidential Fellows in Humanistic Studies. What opportunities do we have to rethink our educational offerings to ensure the long-term success of students who major in humanistic fields? Are there focused integrated areas within this very broad area that would both resonate strongly with our students and build toward a nationally recognized program? Or is a push toward shared foci incompatible with the individual goals for excellence in humanities research? Are there areas of the humanities that would particularly resonate with Oregon as a place and culture?

3 Innovation and Entrepreneurship

The combination of business and law schools is unique at a public institution within Oregon. The unprecedented opportunity of the Knight Campus allows the university to rethink its role within the state in terms of its direct impacts and as a major driver of economic activity. Many other groups have important contributions to make in this space. There is a distinct need for new vision in this area within the state. We have a great opportunity to take the flagship mantle to heart, provide leadership, and build partnerships broadly across the region. How can we best couple educational programs with innovation opportunities within the university? What kind of investments in infrastructure are needed to best support entrepreneurial activity? How do we best engage external entities, including state agencies? How do our efforts in this space best align with the core values of the institution?