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[Lariviere's pitch](#)

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University of Oregon President Richard Lariviere makes a pitch for reshaping the university's financial health and making the college more accessible to under-served populations during a Portland visit to the university White Stag block in Old Town. Photo by Jake Thomas.

Richard Lariviere has been president of the University of Oregon for just over a year, but he has already hatched a plan to drastically reshape how the college is governed in hopes of bringing greater financial stability to the school, and giving students a better sense of how much their education will cost.

Lariviere spoke about the sweeping changes he aims to bring to the university during an interview with the Portland Observer at the college's Portland campus in the White Stag Block of Old Town.

Lariviere, 60, explained that when he was an undergraduate at the University of Iowa, it was possible for a student to work during the summers and save up enough for tuition at a public college that was heavily subsidized by the state.

"That's what we are hoping to go back to, and those days are gone forever," he said.

With fewer taxpayer dollars allocated by the state to public universities, students increasingly fund their education through a patchwork of grants, part-time jobs, family support (if they're lucky), and, probably, lots of loans.

Lariviere said that with UO's ~~\$8,000-a-semester~~ \$8,000-a-year tuition many families, particularly low-income, think that school is out of reach.

"And that infuriates me because they can go," he said, referring to financial aid through loans, grants and scholarships that can make college possible.

But what makes matters worse is that it's often unclear how much tuition will be raised from year to year. This year, at the University of Oregon, tuition shot up by 6 percent. Last year it was increased 3 percent.

"It scares the hell out of everybody," he said.

Under Laviviere's financial stability plan, which he said hasn't been tried at any other public university, the state would issue \$800 million in 30-year bonds to the UO. The state would spend about \$64.5 million servicing the debt, which is about the same amount it gives to the university each year. UO would invest the money, creating an endowment that would steadily generate money for the school. This would free the university from having to rely on revenue from the state's increasingly volatile coffers.

"If we know three years out how much money is going to come from the state, we can now manage our environment such that we can predict what the cost is going to be for the entire four years that you're an undergraduate," he said.

Lariviere argues that if his plan is successful, the university will be able to tell students about how much they can expect to spend for tuition, room and board. They will also have a sense of how much they will have in grants, and how much they will have in loans.

Currently the University of Oregon is overseen by the State Board of Higher Education and the Legislature. Lariviere's proposal would create a new board to oversee it, giving the school more autonomy.

"This isn't a model that's radical or unknown in Oregon," he said. Lariviere pointed to Portland Community College, which, like other community colleges, operates this similarly. Lariviere also mentioned that the PCC recently won approval of nearly \$400 million in property tax bonds.

Lariviere also talked about his plan to revamp the UO admission process putting less emphasis on test scores and GPA's in favor of a more holistic approach that will diversify the university.

"We know beyond a shadow of a doubt that they [test scores and GPA's] are skewed throughout the population in favor of families that prepare their children from youth to be ready to go to college. That's the only thing that most parents focus on when they are in the upper educational socio-economic strata," he said.

He hopes to bring in more students who may not have the best GPA's, but have life experiences that will enrich the university.

Lariviere was also asked about the tough job market for recent college grads, which has prompted some to question if college is worth the trouble.

In responding, he recalled seeing a newspaper article describing how the job market was the worst it's ever been for new grads. The date on the newspaper was 1972.

"It's always terrible; there are no guarantees," he said.

However, Lariviere said that college grads, in the long run, will be richer, healthier, and happier.

"No bank, no credit card company can ever take away this education; it's yours," he said.

He also weighed in on an incident that occurred last February, where a swastika was found spray painted on an office for gay and lesbian students. In the aftermath, the student senate considered a resolution asking the Pacifica Forum, a controversial organization some believed to be tied to the incident, to leave the campus.

"The students argued about the principals of free speech that in a way were more lucid, better informed, and clearer than almost any other debate surrounding these issues," said Lariviere, who added that he was "intensely proud" of how they handled it.