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President Lariviere punished for pursuing progress

You thought you were being pretty sneaky, didn't you, Oregon University System?

Excuse me, let me explain. Last week, the Oregon Board of Higher Education gave University President Richard Lariviere a list of conditions by which he can keep his job. A couple of them make sense.

The contract conditions start with requiring Lariviere to attend the board meetings and Presidents' Council meetings, "absent a legitimate and unavoidable conflict," and to participate in discussions at those meetings about the issues his New Partnership proposal raised.

We all want our president to attend meetings where decisions take place and to continue to participate in the discussions to fix Oregon's universities.

However, the next contract additions take a turn for the absurd. First of all, Lariviere is not allowed to advocate for his proposal in any way, except working in the "board's processes." Additionally, it restricts him from opposing any proposal the board puts out to the state legislature.

And, to boot, the board can fire him, without cause and with just 30 days' notice.

Ahem. You sure thought you were going to get away with

something, didn't you, OUS? Otherwise, why would you wait until now — just now — to respond to Lariviere's fighting for the New Partnership?

And more importantly, why would you respond so aggressively? At this point, it's clearly a political power grab — The Oregonian already wrote an editorial based on just this idea.

Worse still, the restrictive measures pull back on Lariviere so harshly that he is unable to comfortably act independent of the board. The kicker of the new measures, the firing authority, discourages the president from (for lack of a better term) acting out.

I know, personally, if my boss was detailing new contract measures, including making the process for termination simpler, I would do everything possible to not shake the boat. Unfortunately, Richard Lariviere is not opinion editor at the Oregon Daily Emerald. He is the University of Oregon's president.

And in May 2010, under less pressure, the University of Oregon's president saw a problem with Oregon's higher education funding and attempted to fix it with a set of white papers. It was flawed, yet ambitious. And perhaps he should have sought more board advice before going directly to the Oregon

Senate, but considering the initiative a first-year president took to question the basic structure of Oregon's public schools, should we discourage that?

And if university presidents in the system believe that aggressive action on their part will result in aggressive action from their direct supervisors, will that not cause a restriction of innovation?

We're in a tough spot. The University's tuition is set to increase by 9 percent this fall and public funding to fight the skyrocketing tuition is nowhere to be found. It's going to take a radical solution to solve the dilemma of decreased public funding and contingent private donations, to say nothing of the governance model issues.

And if you threaten to get rid of every university representative that "steps out of line," you're going to get a whole lot of ineffective leaders.

So ask our president to show up to meetings and continue discussions, but please don't try to silence him and don't you dare threaten him with termination. Oregon's students are asking for a bold solution and deserve nothing less.

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