

OSU's new Hatfield Campus: expanding marine studies and fair employment

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Driving over the Yaquina Bay Bridge and seeing the new construction on the south side, it's clear that Oregon State University is significantly expanding its footprint in Newport. The new marine studies facility promises to prepare students and others to meet the ecological, economic and social problems that confront us, and make Newport a top destination for marine and social scientists worldwide. But the expansion of OSU's Newport campus could also mean the expansion of unsustainable employment practices on the Oregon coast.

Our university's child care options and family leave policies are abysmal. More and more, teaching and research are done by contingent faculty with short-term contracts and limited benefits — including at the Hatfield campus in Newport. Salaries don't keep up with the rising cost of housing and living. Meanwhile, students are paying more and more for tuition. Administrators are getting paid massive salaries and seeing more lucrative jobs created for them by the board of trustees, while faculty are not able to hold administrators accountable for their budgetary decisions. These are not just OSU problems. They are examples of nationwide trends.

One great way to help solve these problems — and to make OSU's Hatfield Campus a beacon of both marine studies and fair employment — is faculty unionization, which has created transparency and accountability on campuses across the country. At OSU, faculty initiated a successful unionization effort in 2017, and became legally certified in 2018. Our union ([United Academics of OSU or UAOSU](#)) is homegrown and faculty-led, just like faculty unions at all of Oregon's public higher education institutions.

Currently, we are collectively bargaining with the OSU administration for our first contract. But the administration is playing hardball in our negotiations.

We have participated in more than 20 bargaining sessions since the process began in March. Most bargaining sessions occur in Corvallis, though one session was held at the Hatfield campus in Newport in September. To date, our union has brought dozens of [proposals](#) developed by a hardworking team of faculty, based on thousands of conversations with colleagues across the university. These proposals are reasonable, based on careful research, contracts at peer institutions and existing (but unprotected) policies

currently in use at OSU. Our proposals aim to protect health and retirement benefits, contracts and salaries that allow all faculty to afford homes and pay bills, as well as intellectual freedom and transparent promotion procedures. In short, we are for protected policies that will make OSU a stronger and more just public institution.

Rather than engage with these proposals in good faith, however, the administration has chosen a more stubborn approach: taking an average of two months to respond to proposals, using deliberately vague wording and even rejecting language from current OSU policies. The administration's team has thus far failed to bring counter-proposals on economic issues. This is one of their tactics, aimed at forcing faculty into concessions that will hurt us and our students.

University administrators are playing hardball because they are (rightly) concerned about shrinking financial support from the state and federal government, which we ought to work together to reverse. The administrators overseeing negotiations, Provost Ed Feser and Assistant Provost Heather Horn, were recently hired from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Although they played hardball with the faculty union there, they have a chance to take a different approach and make OSU a true leader in fair employment.

Our faculty pushed to make bargaining sessions free and open to the public, and we welcome people to attend as observers. The next session will be held Oct. 28, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., in the LaSells Stewart Center in Corvallis. Visit our website (www.uaosu.org), which has more information. Write Provost Feser an email (ed.feser@oregonstate.edu) and let him know that you support a fair contract with the faculty of OSU. OSU faculty who have not yet become members of UAOSU can sign up today on the same website, and send us a message.

Our union steadfastly supports and depends on the support of other local employee unions within and beyond OSU to strengthen fair labor policies for all. We have maintained reciprocal support with unions in Corvallis and hope to nurture similar relationships with unions and community organizations in Newport. By supporting our faculty union, we can make OSU a leader in fair and sustainable employment — and marine studies — on the Oregon coast.

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