

Office of the Provost

Dear University of Oregon Colleagues,

I am writing to share some updates on a number of academic initiatives that we have been working on with faculty over the last 18 months. These initiatives flow through the Office of the Provost because they represent unique opportunities to draw on university-wide strengths across multiple schools and colleges, amplifying years of effort by faculty and staff in a diverse set of areas. They are not intended to supplant the excellent work going on within each individual school and college. Yet, for every initiative, the focus has remained on faculty efforts built within and between those units: past, present, and future. As importantly, these initiatives represent opportunities to continue to expand our place in the broader world and fully embrace our role—and impact—as a major public research university.

These five initiatives focus on areas of strength, growth, and potential related to the environment, innovation, diversity, data science, and sports and wellness. These efforts will catalyze our growth for national leadership within a variety of fields; leverage our existing research and scholarly strengths and align them to educational impacts; help meet student demand; and enhance student success. This work is inextricably linked to what it means to build the university of the future. As I see it, we must move forward and be more than just the University of Oregon. Rather, we must be a university *for* Oregon, and for our region and the world.

President Schill and I are committed to keeping you informed and engaged as we work together to advance these exciting opportunities. Each initiative is at quite a different stage of development, and this email represents an invitation to be involved in ongoing conversations about the future of each effort. And, during these challenging times, it is important to emphasize that the work within each of these initiatives is supported through the generous philanthropy of donors who are as committed to future of the UO as are all of the faculty, staff, and students who are more directly engaged in the work itself. I believe that something truly special is afoot here.

Here is some information about the progress of these initiatives:

Environment Initiative

This initiative is focused on how, through our multi-disciplinary academic strengths, we can lead and take action to conserve, preserve, and sustain our environment. The UO is well-positioned to amplify our work and claim our place among the best universities in environmental-focused teaching and research in ways that will improve the world we inhabit.

Our prowess and standing as a premier institution in teaching and research of the environment shows every day in our work. For the latest proof, look no further than the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Design's collaboration that two weeks ago [received a \\$4.52 million grant](#) from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for a racial and climate justice project. Or the School of Law, where Assistant Professor Greg Dotson was just named chief counsel for the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, with the opportunity to help write national climate change legislation.

Clayton R. Hess Professor of Law Adell Amos is the director of the Environment Initiative. Adell's experience with natural resources, water law and policy, and environmental conflict resolution make her a natural leader of this effort to connect and strengthen our collective work on the environment. Already, she has led a series of informational sessions and workshops involving more than 60 faculty and staff to spark collaboration and gather information. In addition, she has collected written responses from more than 120 community members.

Next, she will help to develop a draft strategic plan that we will share with campus for input. We are eager for your involvement. For more information, please visit the [Environmental Initiative website](#). If you have an

interest in helping the initiative team organize and generate new approaches to how we can have a positive impact on the environment, please contact Adell at aamos@uoregon.edu.

Innovation Initiative

Our institution has a historic legacy of innovative thinking and action dating back more than 100 years. Today, we see new research-based innovations and creative pursuits across every school and college, in particular, with the recent opening of the Knight Campus for Accelerating Scientific Impact presenting new opportunities. The Innovation Initiative is designed to foster deep relationships, both across the university and between UO and a variety of community partners. It emphasizes experiential learning and practice, connecting students, faculty, and staff from every discipline and background with members of the UO academic and entrepreneurial network to ultimately develop new solutions that address social and economic needs.

Lundquist College of Business Associate Professor Andrew Nelson, who is also UO's associate vice president for entrepreneurship and innovation, has been organizing this initiative and helps coordinate the wide range of innovation activities within the UO community. He will be handing leadership of the initiative off soon to Tim Schwartz, who recently joined the university as the director of entrepreneurship and economic transformation. Tim will be responsible for creating a vital and burgeoning entrepreneurial ecosystem that reaches all corners of our campus, across the state, and beyond.

For more information, or to get involved, please visit the [Innovation Initiative website](#) or contact Andrew at ajnelson@uoregon.edu.

Diversity Initiative

The Diversity Initiative is one piece of the important anti-racism work our university is undertaking to create a more inclusive, equitable, and diverse institution. This initiative aims to build inclusive academic excellence and a more diverse faculty presence at UO immediately, as we seek to better represent and be more welcoming to students, faculty, and staff of color. The new [Black Studies](#) and [Latinx Studies](#) minors, the Black Cultural Center, and [other programs are a start](#), but not nearly enough.

This initiative will create a research and policy center on racial disparities and resilience. The center will focus on developing solutions to the historic problems people of color face in the United States and beyond – systemic and entrenched racism, economic segregation, and discrimination, to name a few. Lesley-Anne Pittard, assistant vice president for campus and community engagement in the Division of Equity and Inclusion, will join the Office of the Provost half-time to begin organizing this effort and supporting engagement. Lesley-Anne is in the process of organizing a series of engagement opportunities so that all members of the university community have an opportunity to help shape the future vision of the center.

For this critical endeavor, the UO is committed to investing more than \$11 million over a five-year period. Additionally, up to six additional new positions will be allocated for new faculty members into departments with historically low numbers of underrepresented faculty.

Additional information will be provided in the near future about other elements of the university's efforts to address systematic racism across campus that affects Black faculty, students, and staff. In the meantime, please email Lesley-Anne at lpittard@uoregon.edu if you have any questions or an interest in assisting this effort.

Data Science Initiative

Launched in 2017, this is our most established initiative. The sophisticated analysis of large and varied data sets is changing UO research as we know it, and investigators across the university are transforming society and scholarship through data science. We are applying our unique strengths as a liberal arts university with a strong culture of interdisciplinary activity to a growing tide of elite institutions using data science to change the way we understand the world.

Under the direction of Professor of Biology Bill Cresko, the initiative is designed to support the incubation and launch of novel educational and research opportunities for the university and the state of Oregon, and it has rapidly expanded our existing data science activities to support undergraduate education and research university-wide. The new undergraduate degree program, which was launched this fall and is offering its first formal course this winter, has dramatically exceeded our enrollment goals and we anticipate there will be 50

data science majors at UO by the end of the current academic year. A graduate program is in the works with an estimated launch in the fall of 2022.

Fundamentally, this initiative is about making decisions earlier, faster, and better, and nowhere is that more apparent than in UO's response to the coronavirus. The initiative leads our efforts in the critical COVID-19 Monitoring and Assessment Program, which has provided more than 30,000 tests to the campus and surrounding residential communities. It has allowed us to track the prevalence of the disease on campus and in the community and, by identifying positive cases early, helped prevent outbreaks on campus.

Under the initiative, we will soon be launching a Data Science Research Services unit, a group of analysts dedicated to supporting research at UO by helping faculty members integrate cutting-edge methods and best practices, leading to better outcomes and faster results. To learn more, visit the [Data Science Initiatives website](#) or contact datascience@uoregon.edu.

Sports and Wellness Initiative

This new initiative is designed to gain recognition for UO's integrative sports and wellness programs, which are among the best in the nation. Our worldwide reputation in college athletics often overshadows our academic strengths. Through this initiative, we will leverage the incredible attention on UO athletics, our world-class sports facilities, athlete health and performance programs, and our role as hosts of global competitions, to shine a spotlight on our programs in sports industry expertise, health and the human condition, and societal transformation.

The initiative is in early stages of development, which are being organized by Assistant Vice President for Presidential Initiatives Carlyn Schreck. It will build upon and help amplify the state of Oregon's worldwide leadership position within the sportswear and activewear industries. The goals include integrating and increasing the impact of a wide range of academic fields in sports and wellness; providing world-class experiences and educational opportunities to attract students; and aligning the university with research and expertise on healthy living and environmental quality, while helping the residents of the state live longer, healthier lives.

A faculty steering committee is helping to shepherd campus-wide engagement, examine appropriate academic structures, and define strategic priorities and goals, and is engaging external consultants to help facilitate discussions with faculty from across campus to develop a shared vision for a strategic plan. We will share additional information about this new effort in the very near future. In the meantime, please email Carlyn at cschreck@uoregon.edu if you have any questions or an interest in assisting this effort.

In closing, when I started the job of provost and senior vice president in July 2019, I did so with the knowledge that the University of Oregon is a top public research institution and a firm belief that we have so much to offer its students and society. It is a faith built upon 20 years of working closely with the incredible faculty and staff that we have, as well as the commitment of the students who put their futures in our hands. And it is a faith that has deepened tremendously during my time as provost. If the last year has told us anything, it is that our role in society is more important than ever, but also that we must continuously work to define that role in the face of a future that seems to be rushing at us at a blistering pace.

And in this I am confident we can meet these challenges and play a role in building a brighter future—in part by creating and strengthening interdisciplinary opportunities that synergize on work drawn from across the entire campus. I believe the Office of the Provost is uniquely positioned to help facilitate a broader set of discussions across the entire university, with the potential to span strengths in multiple schools and colleges. These initiatives are a start.

Anyone with an interest in learning more is encouraged to contact the initiative leads above, or send me an email at provost@uoregon.edu. Soon, we will unveil a website that encapsulates all the initiatives under one roof. We will also continue to offer opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to provide input. I look forward to hearing from you, and I hope you and your families are healthy and safe.

Sincerely,

Patrick Phillips
Provost and Senior Vice President

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