

HIGHER EDUCATION'S SLIDE

Funds flow elsewhere

A REGISTER-GUARD EDITORIAL

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Everything in higher education is connected - that's why they call it a system. Oregon's low state expenditures lead to universities that are poorly equipped and pay uncompetitive salaries. Such conditions in turn lead to stagnant performance in winning federal research grants. As the accompanying chart shows, Oregon's major research universities are being left in the dust.

The chart shows the total amount of federal research grants received by the eight institutions the Oregon University System regards as the University of Oregon's peers. Measured in inflation-adjusted 1983 dollars, all of them received substantially more than the UO in 2003, the most recent year for which figures were available. The gap widened over a 10-year period, with the UO posting the only single-digit increase in research funding.

Earlier editorials in this series have established the fact that such schools as the University of Michigan and the University of Washington are out of Oregon's academic and financial league. So the chart also lists universities that are members of the Pac-10 athletic conference. Again, the UO's increase trails them all - except Oregon State University, where the 10-year increase in research funding was 3.3 percent.

OSU's performance is significant, because as a land-grant institution with an engineering school it is relatively well-positioned to win research grants. Its totals were higher than the UO's in 1993 and 2003, but its growth was even slower.

Both the UO and OSU are sometimes cited as an excuse for the other's weakness. If Oregon had one truly dominant research university, the reasoning goes, it would stand higher in the rankings. Both Washington and Arizona, for instance, have powerhouse institutions in Seattle and Tucson that bring in \$300 million and \$200 million in research funds respectively. But OSU and the UO wouldn't match either even if they were combined. Meanwhile, Washington State

and Arizona State both showed respectable 10-year gains and are closing on OSU.

The legislators who are proposing once again to scale back state funding for the Oregon University System might not grasp the connection between their actions and the volume of research grants. They might even believe the universities should solve their own budget problems by winning more federal research support.

But it is the state that builds the pipeline for research. Universities need the resources to build facilities and attract researchers, creating a physical and intellectual infrastructure for investigation, discovery and development. Successful research programs not only bring in tens or hundreds of millions of dollars in outside money to support their universities and their states, they also create or nourish new businesses - even new industries.

The political leaders in most other states understand that strong research universities are an investment, not an expense. The message hasn't gotten through to Oregon's legislative budget-makers. They can study the chart to figure out where their children and grandchildren will be working.

Growth in federal research funding

Oregon universities show small increases from low bases

	1994	2003	Percent of Increase
University of Oregon*	\$19,089	\$20,166	5.6
University of Washington	\$216,754	\$309,604	42.8
University Virginia	\$79,308	\$93,223	17.5
University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill)	\$123,473	\$176,564	43.0
University of California (Santa Barbara)	\$45,084	\$67,422	49.5
University of Colorado (Boulder)	\$86,079	\$96,755	12.4
University of Iowa	\$96,169	\$132,029	37.3
Indiana University (Bloomington)*	\$33,466	\$61,064	82.5
University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	\$263,808	\$352,662	33.7
Oregon State University	\$73,348	\$75,786	3.3
Arizona State University	\$38,314	\$65,822	71.8
University of Arizona	\$165,311	\$205,679	24.4
University of California (Los Angeles)	\$171,392	\$383,994	124.0
University of California (Berkeley)	\$177,371	\$229,299	29.3
Washington State University	\$58,067	\$74,685	28.6
Stanford University	\$195,087	\$272,719	39.8
University of Southern California	\$126,925	\$187,214	47.5

Note: Figures are in thousands of inflation-adjusted 1983 dollars

Source: The Lombardi Program for Measuring University Performance, 2005 (Univ. of Florida, Gainesville)

* typos in 1994 figures corrected from RG graphic