

Testimony of interim President Scott Coltrane, University of Oregon  
To the Oregon House Higher Education Committee  
December 8, 2014

Good morning, Chair Harker. Good morning, members of the committee.

For the record my name is Scott Coltrane. I am the interim president of the University of Oregon. Thank you for the opportunity to share information about the critically important issue of addressing sexual misconduct and violence on college campuses.

I appreciate hearing from my colleagues from other Oregon universities. The University of Oregon, like so many universities and colleges in our state and across the nation, is urgently working to better assess, prevent and respond to sexual assault. This is a serious nationwide problem, and it is a problem on our campus.

It is also an incredibly complex issue that is rooted in social, cultural, gender, bias and power issues; exacerbated by drug and alcohol abuse; and that thrives in the shadows of fear, shame and ignorance. It doesn't start when students enter college and doesn't end when they leave. However, research shows us that the unique circumstances in college—in which young adults are gaining their independence, testing their boundaries and having some of their first experiences with sex and alcohol—make them particularly vulnerable. This places a great responsibility on and opportunity for universities to make a difference in the lives of their students.

The UO's primary mission is to ensure our students are able to get a quality education. That is only possible when they feel safe and respected. It is both our moral obligation and a legal requirement for us to work to educate, prevent and respond to sexual assault. This is very important to me – as the president of the UO, as a father, and as an academic who has spent most of my career researching gender issues.

National and local awareness of this problem has peaked over the last year, but it's been a problem for far longer. The UO began assessing and investing in sexual assault prevention several years ago, starting in 2010 with a review of our prevention efforts and continuing over the years with an independent review of our Division of Student Life in 2013.

Over the last year, the University of Oregon has taken key steps to improve our prevention and response to sexual assault. These investments include the following activities:

- Making changes to the student code of conduct – including expanding it off campus to follow students where they may be harmed.
- Creating new messaging to all of campus and employees about our responsibility to address sexual assault and where to get information.
- Investing in new initiatives such as creating a comprehensive prevention and reporting web site, 24-hour confidential reporting hot line, and expanding education for entering students.
- Committing to more research. The university will take part in climate surveys to better understand the issue. I've authorized resources for the UO to participate in the Association of American University's nationwide climate survey as well as a local survey by our own researchers.

While we have taken great strides, we are continuing to work to improve. Currently there are several review processes on campus that will help inform a comprehensive plan to address sexual assault.

First is the President's Review Panel. Last spring the UO enlisted the help of an external group of experts to review campus efforts to address sexual assault. The review panel consists of experts in law; experts in higher education administration, student life, admissions, and athletics; as well as a UO Board trustee; and a recent graduate who is a sexual assault prevention advocate. They held four public forums on campus, visited the UO a half dozen times, and talked to hundreds of students, staff and faculty about the issue. The review panel will issue its report and recommendations to me tomorrow. I will make this report public, and I will ensure that this committee receives a copy of the report.

Just the process of this review panel's work has already inspired great change. The questions they asked about our prevention services over the last six months helped our Division of Student Life begin a university-wide gap analysis of our education and prevention services.

Finally, we are also benefiting from the efforts of our faculty. The University Senate's Task Force to Address Sexual Violence and Survivor Support has issued recommendations that we are beginning to review and implement, including creating a survivor fund, annual messaging to faculty, and working to create more confidential reporting options.

All of these UO efforts will be paired with the continuing national conversation informed by the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault and the US Department of Education guidance on Title IX and the Clery Act.

The next step is to review all this information to create a comprehensive plan to address sexual assault, to focus our efforts and resources.

I have shared a lot of information and facts today, and perhaps it all sounds very official-se. Here's what I hope you take away from my testimony:

- At the UO – we've made a commitment to work as a community to create a university-wide comprehensive plan to address sexual assault.
- This comprehensive plan will be formed by many recommendations, perspectives and research.
- We are taking action, but we must do more.
- We will invest and focus resources for the greatest impact on student safety – the cost of not doing so is too great.
- The plan must address sexual violence and misconduct, as well as related drug and alcohol, gender and bias issues.

Here's my bottom line. Everyone should feel safe and respected at the UO. This national epidemic is hurting too many students and ruining lives. One sexual assault is one too many. As the recent national and UO campaign says: It's on us – to say something, to do something. It is on all of us.

We look forward to working together to ensure we are best serving our students - and I would be happy to answer any questions from the committee. Thank you.