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Information Report on Role of Portland State University in the Community

City Club of Portland (Portland, Or.)

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Information Report on
ROLE OF PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY IN THE COMMUNITY

I. Introduction. In 1978, a City Club committee was charged to investigate and analyze PSU's role in the community with an eye to making recommendations deemed "appropriate in order that the community and PSU may attain maximum advantage from their association." The Committee looked at PSU goals and community attitudes toward PSU. It also examined PSU's financing "to determine if state support adequately allows for differences from other state institutions of higher education." This report is an update on the 1978 committee's findings.

Two other City Club studies have addressed the role of PSU and higher education in Portland. The 1980 "Report on a Vision of Portland's Future" stressed the concept of public and private local colleges as "islands of excellence" but rated Portland's educational institutions as "largely forgotten, ignored, or taken-for-granted assets."

The 1983 "Report on High Technology Industry-Education Cooperation" suggested that clarification of the roles of Oregon's post-secondary schools and cooperative work among campuses would improve an educational climate where turf battles and lack of flexibility or motivation to change predominate. The report suggested, "The general failure of public higher education to meet industry's needs...is particularly evident in Portland." It recommended a consolidated higher education system with a program focus "where there is substantial industrial support."

II. Background. PSU started in 1946 at Vanport as a two-year non-residential school offering returning veterans extension courses of other state system schools. In 1955, it became a four-year college. In 1969, the legislature made PSU a university, empowered to offer undergraduate, graduate and professional school education programs.

The early rapid growth of the school has slowed, and its challenge now is to serve the community well as an urban "multi-purpose university." Today, PSU's 15,000 students are generally older than those on residential campuses. About 70% work full- or part-time and must be served year-round through evening classes.

Six years ago, the City Club committee saw several factors as encumbering further development at PSU and offered these recommendations:

- A permanent, community-based advisory committee should be established to serve as an advocate of and communication tool for PSU (a recommendation reiterated in the 1980 "Vision" report.)
- PSU should take the initiative in planning its future and do a better job of publicizing its strengths to the community.
- PSU should work with local community colleges and businesses to develop goals and programs to serve its urban constituencies.
- Four state guidelines should be modified to allow the Board of Higher Education to take a more expansive view of change at PSU. These guide-

lines are: 1) avoiding "unnecessary" duplication of programs; 2) funding based on full-time equivalent student numbers; 3) placing quotas on enrollment; and 4) restricting PSU activities to the Park Blocks.

The university and outside parties appear to be taking some steps in pursuit of these or similar goals but these efforts are in various stages of development.

III. Discussion. In spite of obstacles along the way, significant initiatives have been made by PSU, the higher education system and the community to bring excellent, responsive programs to the city. These include the development of the Council for Advanced Science and Engineering Education/Research for Industry (CASEERI) (a liaison group between industry and the state system), the funding and staffing of PSU's International Trade and Commerce Institute, the approval and implementation of Ph.D. programs in electrical engineering, and a legislative appropriation of nearly \$1 million for engineering education at PSU.

In the 1983 Higher Education Strategic Plan, Chancellor William E. "Bud" Davis recommended expanding PSU programs but "within the constraints" of non-duplication of programs. This plan, which retains major research roles at the University of Oregon and Oregon State University, has been perceived by PSU advocates as a hindrance to development of new research programs at PSU. Reflecting a different priority, PSU'S 1979 "Institutional Goals Survey" and a 1984 draft of "A Strategic Plan for the 1980s" proposed that the school expand its research thrust and, like U of O and OSU, become a Comprehensive Research University.

Higher education in Oregon has been beset by funding problems. Cutbacks in 1981 led to loss of whole programs at PSU. The institution was forced to declare financial exigency and lay off tenured faculty. In addition to funding problems, a number of other issues continue to affect development of the university. These issues include concerns about school leadership and a clearly articulated internal vision, campus morale, community misunderstandings about the quality and direction of PSU programs, and a sense of inadequate political influence and resultant lost opportunities.

Previous Club studies have concurred that Oregon lacks an adequate plan for growth of its higher education system, especially as it relates to Portland. The issues that continue to warrant attention by City Club members are: 1) Does PSU lack direction and purpose and thereby maintain its own "second class citizen" posture as an urban university? 2) Is PSU being treated as a "poor relation" by the community and/or the state system's administrative hierarchy? 3) Do state higher education financing mechanisms provide PSU with the ability to meet its goals? and 4) What is the definition of the relationship between PSU, other public and private colleges, and community colleges? Continued discussion and resolution of PSU's aspirations and community needs with a state plan will mean much to the direction of higher education programs in Portland.

EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

NOTE: BECAUSE THIS REPORT CARRIES NO CONCLUSIONS OR RECOMMENDATIONS, NO OFFICIAL ACTION IS REQUIRED OF THE MEMBERSHIP.