



BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Feb. 9, 2021

Dear Co-Chairs Bair and Youngblood,

Attached please find follow-up information for your committee based on my recent annual budget presentation.

Over the course of Education Week, I want you to know I heard concerns from the legislature on a variety of issues that have been described as discriminatory, anti-Idaho “social justice” issues and how they impact my institution and its mission. Many of these concerns emerged prior to my presidency. As you can see among the items in the attached, I have inaugurated new programming to instill in our campus culture a sense of respect and fairness for all people and voices. I aim to ensure that, when we fall short in achieving this ideal, we address it earnestly and in good faith. I recognize there remains more work to be done.

There are those who would suppress or ignore — often for political reasons — the evidence of both our genuine and honest efforts and those at universities across the state, but that does not make them less true or diminish the good work of many hardworking Idahoans. I would like to be clear on two points with you and your committee.

We exist to provide a meaningful education experience that prepares students for a prosperous future in Idaho as nurses, educators, entrepreneurs, innovators and leaders. On this note, we continue to prove uniquely successful and a tremendous return on investment.

We meet our students where they are to ensure their success. Supporting a first-generation student, a rural student, a veteran — all of our students — in ways that they find meaningful is fundamental to our success. Doing so does not make us an antagonistic “social justice” institution that aims to harm our people or our state, nor is that a path on which I would take the university. I believe our willingness to be responsive and initiate new efforts shows a real commitment to honoring all of our students.

I am proud of Boise State’s ability to attract, grow and retain talent for a bright future here in Idaho.

I look forward to working with you and your colleagues.

Best,

Dr. Marlene Tromp
President

Creating a Fair and Balanced Culture

OUR FOCUS

Boise State is laser focused on preparing our students with the knowledge and tools to be successful in college and beyond.

We are dedicated to respecting the full array of voices on our campus. At Boise State, **we teach students how to think, not what to think.**

- This principle is so important that the President's Office created **a new event series, "[Conviction and Conversation in Contested Times](#)."** In this series, we invite leaders (including Speaker of the House, Scott Bedke, Senators Abby Lee; and Michelle Stennet, Idaho Falls Mayor Rebecca Casper, Judge Sergio Gutierrez) and religious leaders pursuing the question "How do we use the wisdom of faith traditions as a guide for talking across differences?" (including Zach Evans (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), Rabbi Daniel Fink (Judaism), Rev. Sara LaWall (Unitarian Universalism), Msgr. Joseph da Silva (Catholicism), Mark Thornton (Evangelical Protestantism), and Said Ahmed-Zaid (Islam)) to model dialogue about critical issues and to talk about how one can hold deep convictions and still respectfully engage with a person with different opinions — even in this difficult moment.
- This successful effort inspired a plan for a **new center**, tentatively called "**The Center for American Values: Advancing the American Experiment**," which has already received generous support from an Idaho philanthropist. It will bring together voices from both the right and left and model respectful dialogue and inquiry in the same spirit as our Conversations Series.

FREE SPEECH

Boise State supports and never infringes upon [First Amendment](#) Rights. Part of what helps people learn is rich dialogue. Universities are places where complex issues can be discussed and where differing viewpoints are welcome. Bringing people **together with differing viewpoints** means there will be disagreement. Such disagreement can even be uncomfortable at times, but can be a critical part of learning when it happens respectfully. Through conversation, we aim to facilitate peaceful and free expression that results in deeper learning and growth for all.

Critical to us are the words of Justice Scalia, Justice Clarence Thomas, Chief Justice Rehnquist, and others in a unanimous Supreme Court ruling regarding the special value in freedom of speech on state university campuses. They remarked that "in the public university setting. . . the State undertakes to stimulate the whole universe of speech and ideas." We respect the need for "this whole universe of speech and ideas" to be available on our campus.¹ We do not have "Free Speech Zones." Our whole campus is a space for free speech.

You can find our Free Speech Policy here: [University Policy 1100](#).

¹ BOARD OF REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM v. SOUTHWORTH et al. CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE SEVENTH CIRCUIT. No. 98–1189. Argued November 9, 1999–Decided March 22, 2000. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/98-1189.ZS.html>



DEFENDING STUDENT'S RIGHTS

If students at any time feel they are experiencing discrimination because of their viewpoints, background, or any protected characteristic, we have robust processes, including our [academic grievance policy](#) and our [anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policy](#), which protects students' rights. Boise State takes these concerns very seriously and implements corrective action when appropriate.

If you hear of these types of allegations, please direct your constituents to this process so that any issues can be properly addressed.

- We are working to make these processes **more accessible and efficient** for students, for example, we are exploring a **new reporting mechanism** that would highlight cases more broadly to the Provost (our Chief Academic Officer) and a **shared statement on faculty syllabi**, so students can discover the process more easily. The process is available to all students now and has been in the past.

[Policy 4300](#) requires that “The instruction of courses, including those taught by adjunct faculty and graduate assistants, will be evaluated by students in every section of every course, in every semester, and in summer.” These student evaluations are reviewed by instructors' supervisors as part of the annual evaluation process and in making employment decisions.

In the following section, find detailed information regarding questions we've heard from you during Education Week.

OUR OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Our new Strategic Plan focuses on three themes 1) Student Success, 2) Advancing Idaho, 3) Strengthening Boise State's Culture of Innovation and Global Impact. This plan includes a special emphasis on fairness. We will be publishing this plan soon.

There remain four significant external factors that drive elements of our institutional structure and actively require disaggregation of student data:

1. The Idaho State Board of Education's (SBOE) called upon us to implement [Complete College America's](#) “Game Changers” in order to address student persistence, retention and graduation rates. This work utilizes disaggregated demographic data (including a variety of factors, including veteran status, socioeconomic status, race, age).
2. Our accrediting body (the national organization that ensures that our students' credentials are recognized as legitimate worldwide) is called the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities ([NWCCU](#)). They require that we address student success and achievement gaps, explicitly requiring us to disaggregate data and attend to factors like first-generation status, socioeconomic background, and race. Like all universities in our state, we must respond to any differences in performance with correlated supports.
3. The university complies with state and federal laws that require equal treatment of individuals based on gender, race, age, disability and other protected characteristics. These laws, including Titles II, VI and IX, require the university to respond to and actively remedy complaints of inequitable treatment.
4. Federal grants that fund projects for students and pathbreaking research often require that we report disaggregated data.



● **Expansion of Veteran Services**

Veteran Services has expanded under a new federal grant to increase academic support. We recently established a Coalition of Veteran and Military Programs which brings together all Boise State military-affiliated programs to focus on alignment, access, and student success.

● **Community Impact Programs Rural Initiative**

Tailored to support students in rural areas with less access to the University, Boise State worked with business and civic leaders to identify content for these programs and offered them in a hybrid format, so students would have access to live faculty, as well as retain the flexibility of online courses, so they can carry on with their busy lives. This brand new program was launched this fall in Payette, Mountain Home, and McCall, and not only served the students in the program, but inspired a higher go-on rate in those communities.

● **New Services at Educational Access Center**

The Educational Access Center is implementing a new federal grant to increase focus on students with disabilities, ensuring they have the support needed to complete degrees in a timely manner.

● **New Student Success Hub for Idaho Students**

We have changed several programs to better facilitate and support student success. We have created a new Student Success Hub that directly focuses on Idaho students who are not being retained at the same rate as their peers including commuter, first generation, underrepresented minority students, and rural students.

● **Restructured Offices of Multicultural Student Services and Student Diversity and Inclusion to create office of Student Equity**

This year, we restructured an office called Multicultural Student Services and Student Diversity and Inclusion to create a new unit called Student Equity, which focuses on ensuring that all students can locate support, so we can better ensure student success. One of the largest programs in this unit is First Forward, a recognition of first-generation graduates and their families.

● **New Partnership with DOJ and BPD**

The Department of Justice recently funded a grant for the Gender Equity Center, in partnership with Boise Police Department (and other agencies), to better educate around issues of sexual misconduct prevention.

● **New Programs for First-Year Experience**

We are in the process of strengthening support of first-year students, the most critical year for long-term retention and academic success. In this programming, focusing on academic preparation, time management, test taking strategies, budget and accounting skills, community building, and career counseling, so our students are prepared to be successful in college and the world beyond university.



Like our colleagues in the legislature, we have recently heard a concern about our University Foundations courses.

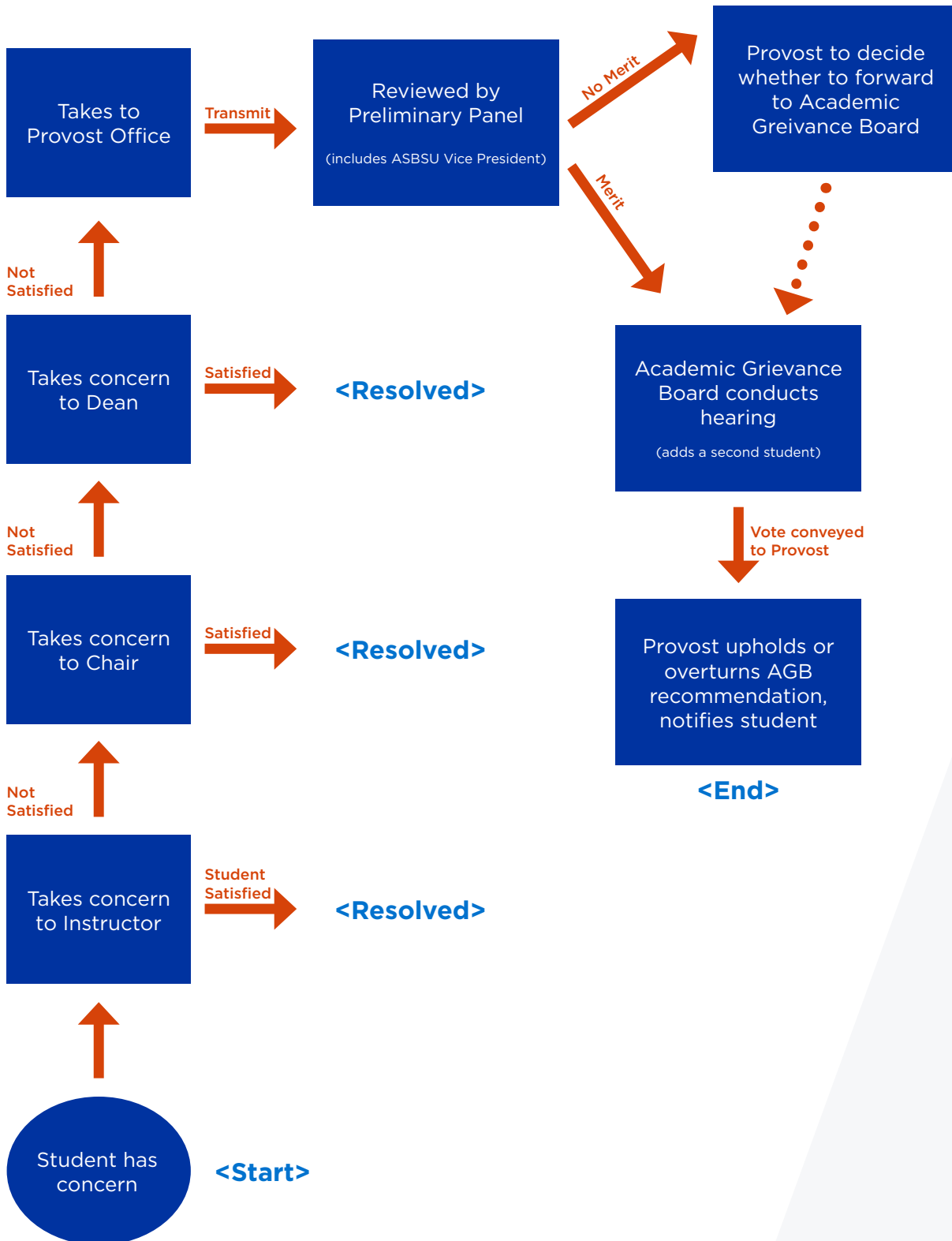
- In response, and as part of our continuous improvement process, our Provost's Office is **conducting a review** of courses at this time to identify any corrective action that may need to be taken. Significantly, **students always have options** in these courses as well. Individual choice is something upon which we place high value.

We encourage students to select courses attentively, just as they would in any other part of their curriculum. No student is required to take any specific course within our UF100 or UF200. We currently have 11 different options within UF100 and 37 options within UF200 (including examples like "God and the Good Life" and "Moral Courage"). These options are visible to students and their academic advisors at the time of registration, and we encourage students to register for the option that best suits their academic and personal interests.



Academic Grievance process

All students have access to [policies and procedures](#) that allow them to come forward if they believe that they have been treated unfairly by a course instructor.



In the context of student clubs and activities, Boise State University does not attempt to control how our students exercise their freedom of expression, freedom of religion, or freedom to assemble. For any state institution to do so would violate the protection of those very freedoms that residents of Idaho and America hold so dear and that our constitution guarantees. That means that some Boise State students voluntarily associate with groups like Student Veterans of America, Young Republicans, and Turning Point USA. Others join groups and activities like Young Democrats, Tunnel of Oppression, and Black Student Association. Still others join religious groups like Cru, the Latter-Day Saint Student Association, and the Jewish Student Union. The majority of the university's affinity groups focus on common interests like mountain climbing, fishing, sculpting, and more. Student-driven offerings like this can be found at public institutions across the Mountain West and the nation. At Boise State, tax dollars do not fund these associations.

The University's Stance on Politics

Boise State's Policy on Political Activities

Student Activities and Events

No student activity, including The Tunnel of Oppression, is a university graduation requirement; Tunnel of Oppression is not funded with state dollars. It is one of hundreds of student-designed and student-directed activities in which students can engage on campus.

Black Lives Matter

While Boise State serves all of its students, regardless of the color of their skin, and believes each student deserves access to support to be successful, Boise State does not fund the Black Lives Matter organization, locally or nationally.

Boise Police Department Contract

In summer of 2020 Boise State renewed our contract with the Boise Police Department.

Big City Coffee

The owner of Big City Coffee requested to be let out of their contract early. We agreed to the owner's request. At no time did the administration at Boise State ask Big City Coffee to leave campus. Our students hold a wide range of opinions about this business. For more information, please visit <https://www.boisestate.edu/news/2020/10/28/boise-state-university-statement-regarding-big-city-coffee-on-campus/>.



