

Political Activity Guidelines

State budget laws as interpreted by the courts prohibit the use of public funds and public resources for political activity. These resources have been defined to include telephones, equipment (copy machines, fax machines, computers), supplies (paper, envelopes), meeting and office space, and mailing services (including e-mail).

With respect to “Academic Freedom,” the faculty and administration of Oregon State University feel a responsibility to protect the right of each employee to express his or her personal opinion. In doing so, employees also have an obligation to avoid any action which purports to commit the institution to a position on any issue without prior appropriate approval.

Advocating as a private citizen

If a public employee advocates on behalf of a bill, measure, or candidate, they must be on personal or leave time. They also must clearly state they are presenting their personal opinions as a private citizen, not a position of the University.

If OSU public employees sign a letter or any document of advocacy, they must not use their OSU title or letterhead. If employees use their OSU title or letterhead, they are representing the University. If employees plan to submit a reimbursement claim to the University for expenses in regard to any activity, they are considered to be on official duty and represent the University at that activity.

Political activity by public employees is complex in that it can be allowed outside of “working hours.” A January 28, 1998 letter from the Office of the Secretary of State (attached) describes acceptable and prohibited practices. The best practice is to avoid any political activity in an OSU Extension office.

Seeking legislative support

When an OSU faculty member has contact with state legislators or asks constituents to contact state legislators about Extension or University funding or programs (including creating “good will”), this activity is considered part of the Legislative Protocol for State Agency Personnel dealing with lobbying. Executive Order # EO 98-1 (January 7, 1998) provides strict requirements on reporting time and money spent on lobbying. Oregon Revised Statute 171.725(9) defines lobbying as:

Influencing, or attempting to influence, legislative action through oral or written communication with legislative officials, solicitation of others to influence or attempt to influence legislative action or attempting to obtain the good will of legislative officials.

Because the Oregon University System employs a lobbyist, University personnel must report *all* time spent lobbying for legislative support. Extension employees must submit a report *quarterly to Extension Administration*. If more than 24 hours or \$100 is spent lobbying by a University employee within a quarter, the University employee must register and file other reports with the Government Standards and Practices Committee. Directions and forms for reporting are available from Extension Administration. These reports are filed centrally in the Chancellor’s Office.

Lobbying as defined by Executive Order is specific to face-to-face contact, phone conversations, time spent reading a letter, etc. It does not include preparation time the employee spends nor the time another public employee uses to prepare the material. It does include time spent asking constituents to contact legislators to support or reject measures or programs. The strict definition does not include time presenting neutral educational information. Asking for support or asking people to contact legislators to support the Extension budget is considered lobbying time. The amount of time spent may be less than one minute, but the time must be recorded as lobbying.

Direct all questions in advance of political activity to Extension Administration.

Participating in Legislative Hearings

Prior to attending or participating in any legislative hearing, all faculty members are required to contact the Extension Director's Office. The Extension Director will notify the OSU President and the OUS Chancellor's Office. Participation in a legislative hearing, where your presence is noted in the public record, is exempt from the lobbying rules because your presence and role is already recorded.