



**For Official Release March 18, 2017:**

Statement on “Board of Trustees Member, Dr. Otto, Resigns,” an article which appeared in “The Blade”  
The online student newspaper of Providence Christian College

Providence Christian College has and will continue to be a vigorous supporter of journalistic freedom and inquiry in its student-led publications. Toward that end, it is important to maintain journalistic standards that fully seek out the truth in matters where facts can be known and conveyed, in order to tell the full story. This is all the more necessary when dealing with items of controversy that concern the integrity and health of the college that we all seek to promote and see flourish. It is regrettable that that the article published on March 15, 2017, regarding the resignation of board member Dr. Paul Otto falls far short of those standards. The article is marred by false and unsubstantiated allegations, omission of critical and relevant facts, and the propagation of false narratives. It is for these reasons that the executive committee of the Providence Christian College Board of Trustees has prepared the following statement.

We received considerable feedback on Dr. Otto’s interview. One particularly insightful response came from Mary Ellen Godfrey (Member of the Providence Christian College Board of Trustees, member of the executive committee, chairwoman of the Academic Affairs Committee, and founding administrator\academic dean\accreditation liaison officer who led the Providence campaign over 10 years to successful accreditation), who stated the following:

*1) The principles of good journalism might require an interview of a member of the executive committee of the board.*

*2) One might ask how Dr. Otto knows so much about the change in the board's "humility and concern" when he was not in attendance at a board meeting for more than 18 months. He missed the very important discussions on finances, the painful layoffs of two full-time professors, the reports of the executive committee on its actions in the name of the board, and other difficult decisions. He was not there to participate in discussion of these challenging issues.*

*3) Dr. Otto’s comments are based on second hand information. This shows up in his erroneous comments regarding the letter sent to the students after their presentation of concerns at the October 2016 meeting, another meeting Dr. Otto missed. One board member--not on the executive committee--was tasked by the whole board with writing a letter on behalf of the board. The letter was drafted then circulated to the board for review and comment. The letter reflected the suggestions and revisions sent by many board members. Dr. Otto sent no comments or revisions. By agreement, this letter went out in the name of the board as a whole. By his absence at board meetings, I think he has forfeited significant credibility in his criticism of the board's work in setting the direction of the college.*



In the interest of setting the record straight, we will address Dr. Otto's "grievances" in the following seven statements:

First, Dr. Otto accuses the Board of Trustees of the abandonment of shared governance. In fact, the opposite has occurred. Over the past year, the Board has reaffirmed its long-standing commitment to shared governance and has passed the following Board resolutions for policy changes to strengthen our shared governance.

1. Pathway for Academic Decision-Making
2. Communication Pathways between Board and faculty, staff, and students
3. New hiring practices and procedures and forms for doctrinal review and academic screening
4. New faculty committee structure that has increased the decision power and voice of the faculty
5. Creation of a formalized orientation for new faculty, empowering them as teachers and members of the governance structure.

In sum, not only does Dr. Otto's criticism miss the mark badly but it neglects the exciting changes that have happened to strengthen the role of faculty in the shared governance of Providence. The new Health Science concentration, which was recently approved by both the Academic Senate and the Board is a great example of shared governance in action!

Second, Dr. Otto's contention that there is too much concentration of power in the executive committee is simply wrong. Amazingly, he asserts that "there had been a number of instances over the summer and fall semester in which ... the Executive Committee made decisions without full board input ... and apparently expecting the board to simply approve the decisions post-facto." This is a failure to understand simple Board governance. The Bylaws of the College explicitly authorize and empower the executive committee to act when there is not a stated board meeting (standard practice for governing boards). Far from being a usurpation of authority or a gambit of dark villainy, such committee action is normal, authorized, and a sign of a healthy Board.

His third criticism that the College has abandoned a strong academic environment in favor of a corporate environment is completely unfounded and lacking in fact. It is a typical and unfortunate claim by those who wish to remain unaccountable to the measurable success of students and appropriate stewardship of college (and Kingdom) resources. If "corporatization" means creating proper policies and procedures that provide the foundation for ongoing assessment and improvement of our curriculum, pedagogy and student success, then Providence is guilty as charged! Not only do we not see these things in conflict with a strong academic environment, but we see them as part of the very foundation on which academic rigor, support and success depend. And the most recent data of student success at Providence bear this out. As we grow, we must become more thorough and thoughtful in our policies and procedures specifically in order to maintain our focus on student learning and success! And our students are the ones who benefit the most.

Providence Christian College  
1539 E Howard Street  
Pasadena, CA 91104  
www.providencecc.edu



The next set of grievances--efforts to eliminate free speech and scholarly inquiry among students and faculty and a shift from cultural engagement to cultural warfare--are without merit and proof and are simply nonsensical. A healthy culture of academic freedom is of great importance to our accreditors, and has consistently been affirmed throughout the College's history. Providence stands strongly for academic freedom and cultural engagement as so eloquently stated in the Preamble to our Bylaws and this is borne out in our robust classroom debates and dialogues, what our professors publish, and our experiential program called Avodah that exposes our students to cultural engagement and strong intellectual conversations.

Sixth, Dr. Otto, accuses the College of "intimidation of students, faculty and fellow trustees." Again, another unfounded claim without merit and NOT borne out by the facts. On dozens of occasions the administration has held open town hall meetings, small group discussions and one-on-ones to address student concerns. We have welcomed their feedback and participation. All administrators, including the president, follow an open door policy in which any member of the student body, faculty or staff, can stop in and talk or set up a meeting for a lengthy conversation. Student representatives sit on most college committees and are an integral part of the leadership, governance and communications strategy of the College. Last October a group of students were invited to address the October Board meeting and present their concerns and ask questions. If the College was trying to silence them, why would they invite them to the Board meeting? Dr. Otto's contention, sensational and conspiracy laden, is simply wrong and posited to put the College in a bad light.

In contrast to Dr. Otto's claim, Dr. Belcher enjoys a good working relationship with faculty, under the able leadership of Dr. Ann Hamilton, interim vice president for academic affairs. The new structures, processes and procedures adopted by the faculty under the new leadership have only served to strengthen this relationship and provide a solid foundation of confidence in the excellent work of very committed faculty.

The Providence Christian College Board of Trustees fully understand and fulfill their responsibility in hiring, reviewing and providing oversight of the president and strategic direction of the institution, trusting oversight of the organization's day to day affairs to the president. Dr. Belcher has tremendous respect for the board, trusts their wise leadership and seeks diligently to carry out the directives provided to him.

Regarding Dr. Otto's criticism of the president, he once again misses the mark greatly. The president is under direct oversight of the Board and is in weekly and at times daily contact with members of the executive committee and various board members. The president undergoes a lengthy job evaluation every year and continues to have the full support of the Board. As to Dr. Otto's suggestion about fundraising, he might like to know that the current president and his VP of advancement have raised more money over the past three years than in any other three years combined in the history of the College. Dr. Otto's comments show a lack of awareness and appear to be meant to stir up trouble.

Providence Christian College  
1539 E Howard Street  
Pasadena, CA 91104  
www.providencecc.edu



The College is grateful for the time Dr. Otto actively engaged in his role as trustee and for his contributions, including serving as the primary search consultant in the hiring of Dr. Belcher. It is deeply sad and regrettable to all of us who served alongside him for so many years that he has decided to burn bridges on his way out and harm the Providence community and the opportunity for students, so many of them first generation college students, to receive a wonderful Christian college education.

In conclusion, Providence Christian College is committed as ever to the founding mission and vision of the College. The board of trustees, the administration, the faculty, the staff, and the students continue to enthusiastically and passionately pursue this mission. As a community, we refuse to downplay the difficulties of the past year; however, we also refuse to let them define us. We serve a sovereign God who works all things for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purposes. We are named Providence because we believe in God's providence. We trust our God and we trust those whom he has placed in oversight of His college.

As members of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees of Providence Christian College:

John Jansen, Chair

Geoffrey Vanden Heuvel, Vice Chair

Pete Nanninga, Sr, Treasurer

Brad Burke, Secretary

Mary Ellen Godfrey, Member-at-large