

**Public Testimony to the Joint Ways and Means Committee of the Oregon Legislature  
March 30, 2015**

Good morning, Honorable Co-Chairpersons Komp, Monroe and members of the Distinguished Ways and Means Committee of our Legislature.

My name is Yvette Marie Alex-Assensoh. I serve as Professor of Political Science and the Vice-President for Equity and Inclusion of University of Oregon.

Thank you very much for your exemplary service to the fine citizens of the State of Oregon, including your efforts to reinvest resources in public higher education.

My invited public testimony is focusing on the importance of using Equity as a lens through which the State of Oregon reinvests in higher education, with a particular focus on a continuation of the tuition off-set investment, additional support for opportunity grants and an outcome-based funding model that is clear, respectful of institutional differences and which uses meaningful levels of funding to incentivize change.

The research on these issues and my own experience as VP for Equity and Inclusion at University of Oregon show that meaningful reinvestments in higher education are not only important for our State and its citizenry, but the Equity lens is crucial to help knock down structural barriers so that all of our students are achieving in ways that allow Oregon to assume its rightful place as a model of student success nationally and globally.

Within this context, I'll turn my attention now to a brief explanation about what we mean by structural barriers, and why Equity in our case, initially, necessitates a focus on race and ethnicity. I'll begin with an illustration about financing a college education. Most Oregonians, regardless of race or ethnicity, are faced with financial constraints in paying for college costs. That is because the financial constraints of our national and state economies -- coupled with rising costs -- present difficulties in making ends meet for everybody. However, for Latino, Native, Black and some Asian students, the financial constraints, which are common for many Oregonians, are compounded by a legacy of racial and ethnic discrimination, which was targeted specifically on these groups. Historically, it was encoded in the state constitution to affect political, social and economic rights as well as resources.

Many aspects of *de facto* and *de jure* policy manifested themselves in unfair labor practices, irregular access to health care and good nutrition, unemployment, under-employment, rogue system of laws that targeted people of color unfairly, and an inability to access schools, whereby Advance Placement, International Baccalaureate courses and other resources prepare students for the rigors of a viable trade or success in higher education. These are just a few of the barriers that stand in the way of equality for many students of color in Oregon and other places in our country. While a history of racial discrimination is certainly a part of our past, it does not have to chart the course of our future.

That is why a focus on equity is very important. Rather than using a cookie cutter approach, equity focuses resources in ways that remove barriers and provide a route for all of our students

to be successful. It ensures that students, who have been undermined by racial injustices, get what they need in order to be successful in ways that help them, their families and the State of Oregon. A focus on equity can maximize the impact of resources spent on education, leading to better student outcomes and a better quality of life for Oregonians.

Your continuing reinvestment in Oregon's public universities will enhance our ability to facilitate student success at our UO Center for Multicultural Academic Excellence (CMAE) and other centers like it at our sister institutions across the State. Such centers provide holistic advising, retention programming, curriculum support, classes with small teacher-student ratios, tutoring and professional development with a focus on students of color and first-generation students. While the work of CMAE, which is part of my portfolio, is helping to ensure that our students of color and first generation students graduate at the same rate as majority students, our recent assessment data show that we simply don't have the capacity to keep pace with the growing numbers and needs of our students. Therefore, your reinvestment will help to ensure that all of our students are receiving what they need to be successful so that they can complete their degrees in keeping with the 40-40-20 goals.

Equally as important is Oregon's planned shift to an outcome-based funding model. If designed properly with the right metrics and institutional differences in mind, allocated resources will actually drive innovations in teaching, research, and public engagement that help to incentivize success for under-represented students. Here again, our Division of Equity and Inclusion at the University of Oregon is working diligently in order to innovate pipeline programs, faculty engagement and student retention activities with the aim of facilitating completion. Most certainly, what we need for continuing success are your support and continued re-investments to help scale up viable projects in ways that lead to a lot more success and to provide a path forward for our citizens so that, in the final analysis, no one of us will be left behind.

Again, thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before your august Committee.