

Members of the Joint Task Force On Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education:

My name is Maya Ward, and I am the Policy Director for the Associated Students of the University of Oregon. I am testifying today to urge you to consider the broad scope of the impact you could have with this bill and the communities that have the potential to be overlooked.

Today's college experience is very different from that of our parents or previous generations. Our student populations are more diverse, and students have very different needs. Due to inflation and government disinvestment, the cost of tuition at a public university and community college is much higher than it was a few decades ago. Additionally, Oregon is in the midst of a housing crisis, so students are struggling to pay for rent on top of tuition, books, and food. Many students experience food insecurity at alarming levels. I urge you to keep in mind that one of the greatest factors in student success more broadly, but especially for Underrepresented Students, is financial aid.

When I talk to my fellow students about the issues that make it difficult to attend college and stay enrolled through graduation, the first thing that comes up is always cost. The cost to attend college disproportionately impacts lower- and middle-income, BIPOC, and rural students – many of the student populations you outlined as hoping to serve through this task force. A fundamental part of supporting these students is increasing the Oregon Opportunity Grant so that more students are able to receive grants, and so the grants cover a larger portion of costs. It's time for our state to show an investment in hiring students by actually investing in them.

Today's student populations are diverse, and our campus communities are diverse. For example, the campus community at PSU is different from the campus community at UO, and different from the campus community at EOU, and we need student success services that are reflective of those differences and serve student needs. These institutions serve a broad range of students, veterans, nontraditional students, students with children or dependents, LGBTQ students, Students of Color, and many more. When conducting outreach, please put consideration not only to the students you are interacting with but the students you might be missing.

Thank you for serving our community. The experience of today's students is very different than it was 10, 20, and 30 years ago, and our college and university communities look very different. I appreciate your time and support for student success.

Maya Ward  
ASUO Policy Director