

To Joint Task Force on Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education,

My name is Sasha Arzner. I live in Coos Bay, Oregon and attend SouthWestern Oregon Community College. As a first-generation and low-income student, I am a part of the TRIO program of the Student Success Services provided by the school. I am currently pursuing my AAOT degree here at SWOCC to later pursue my Ph.D. in psychology. My current career path is to become a clinical psychiatrist for the CIA; however, this dream seemed impossible for me as a child. When we are young, we are given a question: what do you want to be when you grow up? Some children would respond with glee and say something along the lines of a doctor, nurse, engineer, and astronaut. Once I was asked this question, and I replied with the answer waitress. My goal in life as a child was to be a waitress.

I come from a low-income family, and first-generation at that. I wanted to make my family proud, and my family worked at a restaurant or fast-food diner. I remember when I was little that we couldn't afford bed sheets, and at one point I was homeless as a child. Thankfully things have changed, but I did not grow up in an educated household. A poor lifestyle was all I knew. My goal as a young child was to continue this, as I never knew I was smart enough-- or rather financially able--to pursue higher education.

One day a teacher of mine presented the idea of me going to college, and showed me about Student Success Services at a college in Coos Bay. I was interested, but wasn't sure I even belonged in college. I was later convinced by the College Dreams (now Project+) program at my school to join TRIO.

TRIO was one of the main reasons I went to college. They provided me with resources, support, financial aid, and advising help that truly got me to where I am today. There is a mentorship program, and my mentor changed my outlook on myself. She and TRIO staff have helped me go and achieve my dreams of being a Psychiatrist and changing my major. I am now a 4.0 student, the vice-president of Phi Theta Kappa, a student mentor for other students like me, and future honors student at SOU. TRIO invested in me, and with every accomplishment I am grateful.

I have faced many challenges for the past year in college, including mental challenges, family emergencies, and financial troubles. Instead of dropping out of college, I decided to talk to my advisor and school staff. Everyone stopped what they were doing to show me my strengths, remind me of how far I've gone, and how important of a change I make in their lives. These small acts prevented me from dropping out, even when I was at my lowest point.

Supporting TRIO, tutoring, and other programs at SouthWestern Oregon Community College is an investment into a new world. My generation will be the future, and the future is in the diversity of students in higher education. Young adults such as myself pursue our dreams because of the support given to us. Community colleges try to support and teach every student that wants to learn-- every single one. No matter who you are, you deserve to achieve your dreams. Coos bay isn't the most diverse area; however, SWOCC makes it a point to include diversity no matter where located. With a diverse community of those achieving their higher educational goals, there is a comfort and excitement on what the future holds. I look forward to when, later on in life, I can help another underrepresented student succeed--no matter who.

Thank you for your time,

Signed,

Sasha Arzner

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sasha Arzner". The signature is written in a light gray or blue ink and is positioned below the printed name.