

Chair Alonso-Leon and Members of the Joint Task Force On Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education:

My name is Tiana Tozer, and I am University of Oregon's 2010 Outstanding Young Alumna, and in 2019 I was named as 100 Ducks who made a difference. Since being injured by an intoxicated driver at the age of 20 as a college student in Eugene, Oregon, I have worked to change attitudes about people with disabilities, lobbied for the ADA, served on the board of the National Industries for the Severely Handicapped (now SourceAmerica), and ran an employment program for people with disabilities. I am a two-time Paralympic medalist, bringing home bronze and silver, and I was a member of the USA Women's Wheelchair Basketball Team for five years. I am gainfully employed and have been since I graduated with my MA from the University of Illinois in 1993. I am a taxpaying Oregonian.

When I was injured, the UO did a great job accommodating me and supporting my recovery. Our public universities all have supports for students with disabilities, but we have far to go if we want students and people with disabilities to be treated like first class citizens. We truly need systemic change at every level of government to truly make college accessible for students with disabilities. Right now, if you are a person in a wheelchair in Portland or visually impaired, it is difficult just navigating the sidewalk due to the homeless crisis, scattered scooters, and other barriers. This is a basic needs issue – the ability to move about society is just as important to students as food and housing.

It is critical that we improve the rate of post-secondary achievement for people with disabilities, but we can't do that until we affect a culture change in the way able-bodied people and society views people with disabilities. The Accessible Education Center at my alma mater, University of Oregon, encourages the university community to institute universal design in learning, which means creating equitable access to education through designing an environment that can be accessed by the greatest number of people. Our public institutions and society should strive towards designing our buildings, products, and environments so that they are accessible regardless of disability and other factors. When one set of people isn't able to access what others can, it makes those who are left out feel like they don't belong. That is unacceptable.

People with disabilities don't need pity or for people to lower their expectations for us and what we are capable of achieving. What we need and what I'm asking for today is empathy and solidarity from you and other members of the Oregon community who have the ability to make change. As I outline in my [TEDx talk](#), first we need to redefine disability; change our attitudes about it and the way that society views us and is organized to treat those with disabilities as less than. Solidarity means providing adequate funding to our state's public institutions of higher education so that they have appropriate services and the ability to make campuses, buildings, and learning environments accessible for all.

As a person with a disability I have lived a life of service, much of that service to the State of Oregon. I ask you to remember that 14% of the Oregonians that you serve, live with disability. As you move forward I ask you to remember that you cannot solve the issues that people with disabilities face without their involvement. I have been truly troubled by the recent equity conversations which exclude the minorities they are supposed to be helping. Thank you for this opportunity to speak, I hope you have heard me. I look forward to seeing the proposals this task force develops to better support student

success for students and people with disabilities.

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