

Chair Alonso León and members of the Joint Task Force on Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education:

I would be most supportive of expanding the current student aid program funding versus expanding the portfolio of programs offered by the State of Oregon. The Oregon Opportunity Grant helps Oregonians at both 2-year and 4-year institutions.

For the 2022-2023 school year, the increases in the Oregon Opportunity Grant have opened the door to funding students who have not received funding in my 11 years as an aid administrator in this state. Needy Oregonians who were just outside of Federal Pell Grant eligibility, but may not have had the family financial resources to pay all of their educational expenses, received funds to assist with college costs this year. This meant that students who would maybe be considered middle income, the students who aid programs seem to miss each year, received some funds this year. As we recover from the pandemic, and knowing that families are still experiencing the impact of the pandemic, this was a very helpful aid opportunity. Supporting the Oregon Opportunity Grant program by increasing funding would have the biggest impact on needy Oregonians.

Federal Work Study has been an important program in not only helping students earn money for college, but have an opportunity to maybe work in an area that complements their educational objective, and to serve the community through the Community Service programs. During the pandemic students cut back on working as opportunities for employment decreased, and students became more cautious about during the pandemic. Students have not returned to working at pre-pandemic level, and aid administrators struggle to spend their Federal Work Study funds.

Implementing a state work study program does not seem wise at this time. If there was a concern about the availability of student workers, then it might be more feasible, but with student employees seemingly choosing to stay out of the part-time labor market, it may be a program that doesn't receive much support. Community service opportunities exist for Federal Work Study eligible students who want these types of employment opportunities to supplement their educational experience.

Expanding the Oregon Promise program to 4-year institutions, while a well-intentioned proposal, would not serve students best. Funding students for just the first 2 years of their academic program, means that they then have to determine how to pay for the remaining 2 or 3 years of study, depending on their program. While the current Oregon Opportunity Grant programs would assist with 2 of the remaining years, it would not cover as much of their cost as the Oregon Promise would.

I would suggest that a better proposal would be to fund the Oregon Opportunity Grant at a higher level, so that it covered more of the student' tuition and fees for 4 years. It allows them to build a 4-year budget, especially at a school like the University of Oregon where their tuition is set for 5 years, and then plan out paying for their education early. 4 years of funding is more conducive to student success, and our goal is to graduate Oregonians who can then go on to serve our state.

Sincerely,

Jim Brooks
Senior Associate Vice President for Student Services and Enrollment Management
Director of Student Financial Aid and Scholarships