

April 24, 2021



**FROM THE OFFICE OF THE ASWOU PRESIDENT**

Werner University Center #122 | 345 Monmouth Ave. N. | Monmouth, OR 97361

Dear members of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Higher Education,

My name is N.J. Johnson. Originally from Scappoose, Oregon I am now a 4th year student at Western Oregon University with the honor of serving as this year's ASWOU student body President.

Having been in student government for several years now, I am very concerned with the seemingly never-ending cycle we go through with regards to supporting higher education in Oregon. Every year of the past decade, we come back to the table and have the same conversations. Our public education system is becoming less affordable to students seeking an education, and we see enrollment declines at nearly all the publics. Since the breakup of the Oregon University System, administrators have told students and the legislature that investing in capital construction will solve these enrollment problems. Several years' worth of data is in and could not be clearer that it hasn't worked out in the way that was promised.

It is my belief that meaningful investment in access to higher education is the only way Oregon can recover from COVID-19 and the subsequent economic downturn. That is why the Oregon Student Association's top priority is increasing accessibility by funding the Oregon Opportunity Grant at \$290 Million in order to cover all students with household incomes from zero to \$100,000. Number two is we are joining OCCA to ask for \$702 Million for community Colleges. Community colleges are an important provider of educational and economic stability for our lowest income and most underrepresented students. Now, our Public Universities need \$900 Million, but we also need legislators to have a conversation with us over the next few years about governance. We frequently hear the legislature is wary of investing in universities because their priorities and financial accountability are questionable. We wholeheartedly agree. Let's put a stop to new-fangled construction project debt and unaccountable Board of Trustees decisions which do not prioritize the student voice and affordability. We hope you can help us work to better regulate public universities over the next few years because we don't want to discuss university funding without discussing accountability.

Finally, please fully fund part time faculty healthcare (HB 3007), the student voice bill (HB 2590), and the basic needs navigator (HB 2835). These are all reasonably small fiscal asks that would go a long way towards advancing the needs of students.

Thank you, all very much for your time and the work you do for our state.

N.J. Johnson

**ASWOU President**

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