



Higher Education for Adults in Custody

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Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber, members of the Senate Education committee,

My name is Nick Keough, and I am the Legislative Director of the Oregon Student Association. OSA represents and advocates for the collective interests of students in postsecondary institutions in Oregon. **I am writing you all today to ask for your support on SB 269 and SB 270.**

In the 2021 Oregon Legislative Session, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) was directed, through the passage of Senate Bill 234, "to convene stakeholder group to study ways to best serve adults in custody who are recently eligible to receive student grants." During the Fall of 2021, the SB 234 work group issued their [final report and recommendations](#) – which identified a multitude of policy changes that would better support AICs and maximize the impact of Pell grants statewide.

As may not be a surprise, AICs in higher education program face unique barriers to student success. This is highlighted in the final report of the SB 234 work group, that found barriers for AICs when it comes to technology access, the availability of and access to remote courses, limited curriculum and course delivery, and the lack of support staff for coordinating higher education prison programs and working directly with students to assist with advising, coordination, and FASFA applications.

As was also identified by the SB 234 work group, women, and people of color, have been particularly underserved by higher education prison programs. During the site visits to Snake River Correctional Institution and Coffee Creek Correctional Facility conducted by the Joint Taskforce on Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education in July of 2022, we heard directly from women in custody about the gendered disparities that existed within higher education prison programs.

We know how transformative access to a higher education can be for an individual when it comes to developing critical thinking skills, expanding worldviews, and developing good citizens and stewards of our communities. For incarcerated students, this is even more salient. Equitable access to higher education in prison holds immense promise to improve and transform the lives of students and their families, reduce recidivism, improve economic opportunities and to contribute meaningfully to safe and healthy communities. SB 629 and SB 270 will act as important first steps in promoting collaboration between the Department of Corrections and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, and will help expand access to academic programs for adults in custody. **It is for these reasons, that The Oregon Student Association urges you to support SB 629 and SB 270.**

Thank you,

Nick Keough
Legislative Director
Oregon Student Association
nick@orstudents.org

OREGON STUDENT ASSOCIATION

635 NE Dekum St, Portland, OR, 97211 | (817) 889-0787 | www.orstudents.org | @OregonStudents