

Mark Henkels, Ph.D.
Professor of Public Policy and Administration
Western Oregon University

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Budgets are about priorities. Nobody knows better than the Ways and Means Committee that the list of potential priorities is infinite. And nobody knows better than you that each person and groups has their own vision of what should matter most when spending the state's dollars.

I am a professor of Public Policy and Administration at Western Oregon University. But I have never really been a political person and in 34 years at this job I have only given testimony maybe 5 times. I am retiring in June. So why am I here now. It's about priorities.

I believe that Western Oregon University and the other Regional Universities are critical components of any effort to address three highly publicized state priorities: 1) meeting our state educational targets; 2) creating opportunities for all people in the state, and particularly for groups that have historically not had easy access to higher education, and 3) helping to bridge the rural-urban economic and social divide.

State Educational Goals

HECC still states the goals to be 40-40-20. More than just university capacity, this requires diverse on-ramps to degrees. The TRUs stand out for being accessible to many people in ways that the bigger universities are not. We fit in Oregonians lives differently, both geographically and socially. In the ecosystem of higher education, we fill important niches both on programming and access. In concrete terms, this ramp to four year degrees is demonstrated by how in 2021-2022, the TRUs and Portland State all had higher percentages of CC transfer students than OSU and U of O.

Equity and Access

While nearly 39% of white Oregonians have Bachelors degrees, only 18% of Latin@ residents have such degrees. This population is one that the TRUs can very specifically serve, again for both geographical and social reasons. Western Oregon is now well over 20% Latin@ and moving quickly towards being recognized nationally as an HSI institution. The other TRUs similarly serve the diverse groups of their regions, notably Native Americans. And the TRUs disproportionately enroll First Generation college students, whose families often find the smaller and more personalized communities more comfortable.

The Rural-Urban Gap

The evidence is clear that Oregon is a divided state. The red-blue political maps are striking, but it is also apparent in any map showing per capita earnings. The Oregon Office of Economic Analysis recently found that rural incomes lag the urban counties by over 30%. One reason for the gap is the lack of an adequately prepared workforce or the capacity to re-tool workforces in the rural areas. The TRUs are a critical component in any state-wide effort to address these

gaps. People do not want to leave their rural communities even to improve their economic circumstances, and they would like their children to have local options to advance themselves through education.

Three final points:

1) The TRUs are transforming even as I speak. They have new leadership and have embraced new possibilities of service delivery. Oregon's TRUs have never been so committed to providing programs that meet the needs of their students, regions, and state.

2) To properly re-boot their operations in the post-COVID world, the TRUs (and Portland State) need transitional money. These institutions have already made major cuts to ensure their budgetary responsibility, more cuts will deny them the transitional money they need to retain the professors and staff working in their core. The \$15 million more for the TRUs and \$10 million more for PSU are critical to a positive next step.

3) My personal experience informs me that many very productive people thrive in part because they chose Western, or Eastern, or Southern, or OIT.

Just this morning I had coffee with a graduating student, Alejandro Perez. Alejandro is going to Willamette Law in the Autumn with a big scholarship. He is a smart motivated guy who has overcome his undocumented status to be perhaps a top student in our program this year. In our meeting, Alejandro handed me a note stating his thankfulness to me and my colleagues for how we helped him achieve what he once thought was impossible.

There are many pathways to success, but I know the TRUs are a critical one for folks like Alejandro.