



Testimony on SB 1552
Senate Education Committee
February 8, 2024

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber, and members of the Committee. My name is Kyle Thomas and I am the Director of Legislative and Policy Affairs for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on portions of SB 1552 relevant to HECC, as detailed in the -1 amendment.

Section 11 - Direct Admissions

The bill adds responsibility over establishing a direct admissions system into HECC's general powers and duties statute. Direct admissions is the process by which qualified students are proactively offered admission to higher education institutions on the basis of certain markers of performance that are identified before the student needs to apply at the institution, and is viewed as a way to encourage those who otherwise may not view themselves as college-ready, or who may not be thinking about postsecondary education, to consider it.

HECC has been working for several months with a voluntary coalition of public institutions interested in the potential establishment of such a system. We've just entered a new phase that aims to involve a broader range of participants, including community colleges and K-12 representatives, to address the challenges and opportunities in implementing direct admissions processes more effectively across Oregon.

Our work group's objectives include developing a specific process for identifying and enrolling high school students, understanding their experiences better, seeking funding for pilot programs, refining the admissions flowchart, identifying institutional responsibilities, and recommending strategies for student retention and financial aid information dissemination. This effort is geared towards creating a more accessible, streamlined pathway to higher education for Oregon students, particularly those who may not otherwise consider college due to various barriers. Participation is open to representatives from public universities, community colleges, and K-12 school districts, with the aim of fostering a collaborative approach to enhancing direct admissions and college accessibility statewide.

If passed, HECC looks forward to continuing work with ODE, institutions, school districts and other partners to develop a system of direct admissions that encourages more students to attend college and university and would necessarily rely on collaboration with ODE specifically when it comes to adopting rules regarding use and collection of data, as HECC cannot utilize high school student data for admissions purposes that ODE does not itself collect.

Sections 15-19 - Oregon Opportunity Grant

The bill as amended requires HECC to establish in rule the manner by which HECC determines Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG) awards and replaces references to the Director of the Office of

Student Access and Completion with a general reference to HECC. This measure ensures OOG award conditions exist in rule as do the award conditions of other financial aid programs.

If passed, HECC will convene a partner group to consider rules that ensure that OOG grantmaking is transparent, and the parameters on which HECC determines student awards is well-known, with the goal of having rules in place at the close of this calendar year—well in advance of publishing 2025-2026 award tables, which is most likely to occur in early 2025.

HECC requests an amendment to apply the rulemaking provisions to awards issued for the 2025-2026 academic year, as requiring rules to be in place with immediate affect could have a negative impact on HECCs ability to issue timely student award decisions for the current cycle.

Section 28 - Open Educational Resources Program Technical Fix

This is a technical item that will allow HECC to continue to contract with the Open Oregon Educational Resources program housed at Linn-Benton Community College for the continuation of statewide activity to promote the use of free and reduced-cost textbooks at campuses around the state. The provision does not change any program policy but is vital to supporting the ongoing activities of the program in the manner they are currently being conducted.

Sections 33-34 - Corequisite Remedial Education

As detailed in a presentation the House Higher Education Committee received prior to the start of session, the current tiered remedial education structure requires students who place below college-ready levels in math and writing to take between one and three courses prior to enrolling in college level courses. An alternative model, adopted by numerous states and institutions across the country, shows that by placing students in college-level courses and providing additional support alongside that course, there is significant improvement in the completion rates of college level work for students. Multiple examinations carried out by researchers have shown compelling evidence that these models work to improve success rates for students across all demographics.

The provisions of this bill require HECC to convene a workgroup to examine whether and how similar policy could be implemented in Oregon.

Sections 35-38 Applied Baccalaureate Degree Funding

Currently, as was detailed to the legislature at the time community colleges were authorized to offer applied baccalaureate degrees, these programs do not receive funding through the community college support fund (CCSF). As the programs are public programs, this is inconsistent with the treatment of any other degree or CTE program. While the Commission believes that such programs can be funded today with minimal impact on the CCSF, the bill takes the step of opening such programs up for funding to support their development. This represents a significant shift in the current structure of how programs are funded, where institutions start programs, and the state funds the institutions for the students that participate. The Commission understands that forthcoming amendments offer a simpler funding structure in line with how all other program types are treated—by providing the opportunity for formula funding.

Section 43 - Transfer Council Subcommittees

Because the Transfer Council makes recommendations directly to the Commission for, all of its meetings and the meetings of its subcommittees are public, even though that may not have been

the intent at the time of passage of the bill. Most subcommittees are bodies of faculty, negotiating and debating course outcomes and sequences necessary to build transfer pathways.

In 2024, 17 separate subcommittees are scheduled to meet on the issues of common course numbering and major transfer maps, and the requirements of public meeting law are burdensome to the faculty untrained in the particulars, as well as HECC staff, who estimate two hours of public meeting related prep and wrap-up work for each public meeting.

The proposed measure exempts just these academic subcommittees from public meeting requirements, allowing for the smoother operation of these subcommittees, for academic discussion to proceed in a continuous manner between colleagues across institutions, and significantly decreases the burden on staff. The work of these subcommittees must still be reviewed at the Transfer Council (a public meeting) and if supported by the Transfer Council, the Commission (also a public meeting).

Thank you for your time today.