

January 31, 2025

House Committee of Higher Education and Workforce Development  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Hudson and Members of the Committee:

I am writing with strong support for the Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP) at the University of Oregon. As a former student participant, I found my “why” for what continues to motivate me in public service each day. My experience with SCYP was instrumental in readying me to help the built, natural, and cultural fabrics of communities get stronger and thrive—all before graduation.

Had it not been for SCYP, the 15-year path I have been on as a community planner right here in Oregon might not have existed. I did not come across SCYP through the University’s Planning, Public Policy and Management Program until late in my pursuit of a degree, when I asked myself during a seemingly unrelated summer job: “Is anyone trying to help make this place one where people can feel safe, comfortable, and maybe even enjoy? Does anybody care? How do we make it better, and how do we do so in a way that is thoughtful yet doesn’t delay?” I am still perfecting my answer to these questions, but the tenets of the SCYP program continue to be my compass.

SCYP provides hands-on experience and is testament of how fresh and deep thinking, multidisciplinary perspectives, and evidence-based findings can address the unique contexts of local Oregon communities to improve lives. My conversations with colleagues who attended universities in other states made clear that SCYP is truly a unique program that functions as a bridge between academic learning and practical application, fostering a new generation of leaders who are prepared to meaningfully address the multifaceted challenges of our time.

During my time in the program, I had the valuable chance to work on real-world projects that addressed pressing challenges many people faced. The practical experience I had in a class launched me into my first career-focused job having a paid position as a research fellow and report co-author in 2010, which directly moved a critical project forward to rethink how large-scale development sites can not just be economically sound but also respond to environmental and social needs, which are all inextricably linked to one another.

Collaborating with government staff, faculty, and fellow students further enhanced my technical and analytical skills, and it allowed me to hone my ‘soft’ skills like time and project management, engaging with community members, presenting to appointed and elected officials, and writing in a way that conveys messages clearly. While learning new skills pushed my comfort zone, I know that SCYP is also made of students like me, staff, and faculty who push to deliver effective work and hold themselves to the highest standard of knowledge.

I continue to see this caliber in my role at City of Springfield, and I see first-hand how the opportunity to instill confidence in our next workforce can come full circle. In my roles as a member of a core workgroup or in an advisory capacity, it has been a privilege to team with the University’s

students and staff on City and partner agency priorities to show how dreams, values, plans, and policies can turn into action.

In times where, the word “efficiency” rises to the top of priority lists, the time to act is now. This program embodies efficiency because this type of training in college enables people to enter the workforce ready to contribute. This funding embodies efficiency because time previously spent pursuing unknown funding means time actually accomplishing an ever-growing list of projects so that we can ultimately give more back to our communities. I wholeheartedly support sustainable, ongoing support of the SCYP and the profound benefits it offers to all of Oregon.

SCYP truly is a model of integrating the “public” into public higher education, and the State's investment in SCYP will help create leaders who are ready to tackle the economic, environmental, and social challenges of our time. Doing the best we can to steward our places now and into the future ultimately means doing the best we can for who depends on us and who we also depend on.

Respectfully,

Monica Sather, Eugene Oregon