

Submitter: Andrea Goering
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB604

Dear Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 604, the Strong Start Program at Oregon's public universities.

My name is Andrea Goering, and I am an instructor of physics and astronomy at the University of Oregon, and previously at Lane Community College. My time in higher education has made it abundantly clear that strong interpersonal connections are a key driver of student success. Research also supports this: students thrive when they are embedded in a supportive community network, with many ties to peers and faculty who can help them through their journey [1-2].

Especially for underrepresented students, sense of belonging can be tenuous - this is why we need Strong Start to help us build strong connections and begin cultivating a sense of belonging. Inevitably, at some point during college, students will question whether they have the "right stuff" to be there. Students experiencing this type of self-doubt may be struggling in class (a normal experience) - if they have peers and faculty mentors to turn to in these moments, the risk of drop-out is reduced, and our colleges have a better chance of educating students from many diverse backgrounds.

That's why I teach with the UO's Summer Bridge Program. My track, North Star, uses a cohort-based approach with peer leaders who are alumni of the program, and supportive faculty and graduate student instructors. While our students learn about robotics, mechanics, and programming, they are also learning essential college introduction topics from our Summer Bridge staff. This is the "hidden curriculum" of college, and knowing the ins and outs of registering for classes, navigating campus, and building strong study habits paves the way for student success.

Most importantly for me, North Star students, through teamwork and social experiences, are building bonds with one another and with their peer leaders and faculty. A disproportionately large number of students doing undergraduate research in our department are North Star alumni, because these students are not afraid to knock on faculty doors to pursue their interests. In fact, just last week I crossed paths with a North Star alumni and peer leader who is starting to seek undergraduate research opportunities. The best-fit faculty to mentor this student are currently on sabbatical, but I happened to know of one more faculty member to ask. While I don't

know how this student's story will continue, I am confident that he wouldn't have received that dose of encouragement and a new network connection if he hadn't known me through the North Star program.

I am so excited for some of the first North Star students in the cohorts I've led to graduate and enter the wider world, because I know that these students have a bright future. I hope that future cohorts of students can count on your support of SB 604, the Strong Start Program, so that we can continue to make a difference in student lives!

All the best,
Dr. Andrea Goering
University of Oregon
Eugene

[1] N. Simon, R. Hornung, and K. Dugan, "Summer Bridge Program: Helping Underserved Students Develop Social and Cultural Capital," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 126–148, 2021, Available: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1344912.pdf>

[2] B. C. Bradford, M. E. Beier, and F. L. Oswald, "A Meta-analysis of University STEM Summer Bridge Program Effectiveness," *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, vol. 20, no. 2, p. ar21, Jun. 2021, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.20-03-0046>.