

Hello,

My name is Hope Lorentzen, I am an Administrative Program Assistant at the University of Oregon and for the last two years have worked closely with the Summer Bridge Program, funded by Strong Start. I am writing in support of SB 604: The Strong Start Program at Oregon's Public Universities, which will continue funding for programs that help ease the transition to higher education by providing an early start and giving them access to additional resources.

Through Strong Start we are able to give a group of first year students the opportunity to move to campus before the start of fall term. They will get acquainted with campus resources, learn important skills for success in college, make connections with peers, UO staff, and faculty, and receive yearlong support as they learn to navigate higher education. In my time working with Strong Start at University of Oregon, it is clear to me that this program has a profound impact on students starting their first year of college, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds. Students from underrepresented backgrounds (first-generation, Pell eligible, BIPOC), often do not have the advantage of generational knowledge on how to succeed in college. More often than not, they may struggle to find success because higher education has historically not supported these populations. Their path to success may take longer, be more difficult, and include more barriers than their peers. Strong Start helps to take down some of these barriers and give more support to the students who need it most. I have worked with students who came to University of Oregon scared and overwhelmed as they realize the vastness of higher education. As a first-generation, Pell-eligible student myself, I know from experience that being welcomed with empathy and a passion for the university community upon arriving on campus greatly enhances your sense of belonging and the value you bring to your new home. When I was beginning college, I wish that I had a resource like Strong Start which would have given me the opportunity begin my college career with confidence and a baseline knowledge of higher education.

As student affairs professionals, it is our job to continue to make changes in higher education which work to create new ways for this system to exist and reach all students and not simply trying to fit these students into the mold of higher education which already exists. Creating an inclusive environment goes beyond providing resources; it involves fostering a culture of understanding and respect and intentionally supporting students who grow our college communities.

I hope that you will continue to fund and expand the Strong Start Program so that more students can benefit from its impactful services. Student needs are ever changing and your leadership and commitment to education will help ensure that we can continue to evolve to support their needs.

Thank you for your time, and I hope I can count on your support of SB 604, the Strong Start Program.

Sincerely,
Hope Lorentzen

University of Oregon

Eugene, OR

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hope Lorentzen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.