

My name is Rain Roark, a student at the University of Oregon, and a participant in the Summer Bridge Program that was 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.

Before coming into college, I had a lot of fears about what the experience would be like. It was a huge, looming transitional period, and I wasn't quite sure if I would be able to handle it. I decided to sign up with Summer Bridge with the help of my parents, in the hopes it would help me adjust. It ended up being a huge highlight of my freshman year, and I am hoping to return to it as a Peer Leader! As the first person in my family to go into STEM, I was unsure what the whole experience would look like and if I could even do it. But after coming in, I was able to meet lots of incoming freshmen, peer mentors, and professors in Biology, Chemistry, Neuroscience, and Physics who helped support me through deciding career paths, finding research opportunities, and tutoring. Without them I would not have been able to join labs and be an undergraduate researcher or have been in Neuroscience and pre-med. Because of their help I will be shadowing a doctor for the first time this summer.

Through our shared experience through this program, I was able to form bonds that will last a lifetime! I remember having game nights with my friends I made there, and we would share stories from the chemistry lab we just did that day and connect over our hopes for our future careers. Working together and problem solving together in Summer Bridge has helped us come together now when we all need to study together or need help on something outside of school. My favorite part was when we all got together at the end of the program to go white water rafting, we got to say goodbye to summer and hello to college after swimming around and racing our rafts.

Outside of making new friends, Summer Bridge really prepped me to get started on my freshman year in terms of schoolwork since I had more time to practice my lab skills, more time to memorize campus, and learn about resources that a lot of my friends outside of the program had no idea about. Furthermore, this program has helped me make connections with professors that I still have here in the middle of my sophomore year. Summer Bridge helped me put the right foot forward in college by helping me connect with academically minded students and friendly professors. Please consider giving this program and ones like it a chance so that more people can know what its like to experience freshman year feeling prepared.

Please continue funding and expanding the Strong Start Program so that more students can benefit from its impactful services. Your leadership and commitment to education will help ensure that Oregon's public universities remain places of opportunity, inclusion, and achievement.

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

Sincerely, Rain Roark, University of Oregon (Eugene Oregon)