



Dr. Yasmeeen Hanoosh
Professor of Arabic
Arabic Section Head
Department of World Languages and Literatures
Portland State University

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Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the committee,

I am writing in support of SB 604: The Strong Start Program at Oregon's Public Universities, which will continue funding programs that give underrepresented students the support they need to find success as they start their journey in higher education by giving them an early start and providing additional resources to set them on the path to success.

I have been a faculty member at Portland State University since 2010 and I have taught in the Summer Scholars Program for three consecutive years. Teaching the Summer Scholars has been one of my most rewarding experiences as an educator because I see the positive impact of the curriculum on our students immediately.

As an immigrant youth from the Global South who excelled in US higher education, I can testify that the institutional support I received during my first year of college played a foundational role in my academic success. My personal experience as a student, and later as an educator, assure me that the first year of college is one of the most challenging periods for students, particularly those who do not speak English as a first language, are the first in their families to attend college, come from underrepresented backgrounds, or face financial hardship.

Teaching the students who attend our Summer Scholar Program has provided me with the opportunity to share the story of my academic journey and inspire new generations of underprivileged students to succeed and build the confidence to thrive in a competitive environment from which they have been excluded historically. Through the Strong Start Program, my colleagues and I will be able to provide essential resources such as academic advising, peer mentorship, financial literacy education, and access to critical support services on campus. These provisions and the human care that comes with them help underprivileged students to ground and adjust to university life expediently, and to foster a sense of belonging that is critical for their long-term success and wellbeing.

At Portland State University, the Summer Scholars Program is meticulously designed, and annually revised based on informed analysis of student feedback, to help students transition

successfully into college life. Having access to structured support at PSU has shown to boost our students' confidence and help them stay motivated to overcome challenges throughout the four years leading up to their graduation.

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

Sincerely,
Yasmeen Hanoosh