

Hello Strong Start members of the committee,

My name is Brittany Robles Jimenez, and I'm currently enrolled as a student at Western Oregon University (WOU).

Today, I would like to share my personal journey, of what the Strong Start Grant has done for me at Western Oregon University. I wasn't fortunate enough to be in the program as Destination Western (Strong Start program) wasn't designed yet. However, I have been fortunate enough to be in the program as a peer advisor for three years.

During my time in the program, I have seen how much of an impact this program has had on incoming students. Some of those impacts are Destination Western (Strong Start) students are retained at a rate of 5-10% greater than their non-participant peers. Destination Western (Strong Start) students on average carry greater credit loads, while maintaining a stronger GPA growth than their peers (leading to more on time graduations). And nearly 20% of WOU students have been able to benefit from the program.

While those are all the statistics I have to inform you with, I also wanted to take the time to talk about my personal experience with the program. If I had known what kind of effect this program would have on incoming students I would have advertised this program alone to get people to come to WOU. I have seen the quietest of participants I had in my group be so involved on campus now. A lot of them are joining hall government, student government or being on an executive board for a club. And I can't help but think this is because of Destination Western (Strong Start). The program outline is quite simple, and its purpose is to just help incoming students so that they can thrive by the time school starts in college courses, social skills, and getting used to their new surroundings.

I come from a Spanish speaking Mexican household. I am also a first generation college student and the oldest of two younger sisters. No one helped me adjust to college life. I didn't have anyone to turn to for help when I couldn't keep myself accountable with my academics, or when I needed to find resources on campus like tutoring centers or the financial aid office. As sad as it is to say, I know that I am not alone when it comes to situations like this. It brings me happiness and an ease of mind knowing that I can take all the knowledge I have learned from my mistakes and pass it on to incoming students who may have similar backgrounds or struggles as me. Being

a peer advisor for the Destination Western program (Strong Start) has helped me learn who I am as a person and just how much I like to help people. I am wanting to go into occupational therapy so that I can continue to help others.

Maintaining the funding for the program Strong Start, makes a difference by giving our communities the opportunity to prosper.

We deeply appreciate the investments the state has made in supporting Oregon students thus far. I implore you to continue offering this vital support to students like me, individuals who once believed that a higher education was unattainable.

Let us chase our dreams and make them a reality.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.