

Submitter: CRYSTAL TENTY  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Education  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB604

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Crystal Tenty and I am the Assistant Director of the Learning Center and a Summer Scholars Instructor at Portland State University. I am writing in support of SB 604: The Strong Start Program at Oregon's Public Universities, which will continue funding for programs that give underrepresented students the support they need to be successful in college by providing them a solid foundation and resources early in their educational journey.

Most of our students who benefit from this program are low-income, first generation students who have enormous academic potential but may be lacking wrap-around support needed to help them persist to graduation. As a first generation student from a working class family myself, I have first-hand experience of what it means to navigate the challenges of college without the knowledge and skills of close trusted adults in my life and would have greatly benefited from a program like Summer Scholars when I was a student.

When I started my college journey over two decades ago, I had no idea how to navigate any part of the process. I began with the belief that I wasn't academically strong enough to be accepted into my colleges of choice and that even if I were, my parents had no money to pay for it. I didn't understand the financial aid application process and wasn't even aware of resources like scholarships or work study that I would have been eligible for. I started with community college because I thought that was my best and only option.

I worked nearly full time throughout college, off campus, trying to juggle being a full time student and coming very close to dropping out many times due to financial struggles. Additionally, because I was required to work, I had little time for any of the other aspects of college life that enhance the student experience and are so important for cultivating a sense of belonging and I never took advantage of the many resources available because I was simply not aware of them. I didn't know what I didn't know or who to reach out to when things got tough.

The Summer Scholars Program at PSU helps to demystify the college experience for our students and help them make social connections, build supportive community, provided information on financial resources, and give them the skills and resources needed from the moment they step foot on campus. As instructors we teach students non-cognitive skills like perseverance, growth mindset, and self-advocacy to help

empower them to be able to take ownership of and shape their college experience to their needs and desires. We combine these “soft skills” with an abundance of more tangible skills many of them have never learned or had to implement in high school like time and energy management, effective study strategies, and managing test anxiety.

We also regularly expose them to many of the resources they are likely to need throughout their time here, taking them to campus centers to meet staff, connecting them with peer mentors and encouraging early participation in campus events and activities. Through their reflective journal assignments, many of my students have shared how nervous and anxious and unsure of themselves they felt when first starting college and how much this program helped them build confidence, develop positive relationships with faculty and staff, and make friends.

I encourage you to pass this bill so that we can continue offering our Summer Scholars Program at Portland State University and support the next generation of incoming first year students in their college success.

Sincerely,

Crystal Tenty, MA  
Portland State University  
Portland, Oregon