

# Southern OREGON UNIVERSITY

## GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

February 13, 2025

I am submitting this letter on behalf of Southern Oregon University to express our strong support for initiatives that address the basic needs of college and university students, including access to food, housing, childcare, and other essential resources. We know that the cost of education—at all levels—has continued to rise over the past decade. For post-secondary institutions, the increases in costs have been driven particularly by state mandates related to wages and benefits for personnel; and due to a level of state funding for higher education that lags far behind that of other western states. In the end, students and their families have had to shoulder the vast majority of the burden of these increased costs, even while our higher education institutions continue to stretch our dollars as much as possible.

At the same time, as the cost of education continues to rise, it is increasingly clear that students face significant barriers to success beyond tuition. Oregon has been slow to fully recover from the learning gaps that occurred during the pandemic, and the social and emotional challenges that arose during the pandemic and continue today. Such barriers can prevent students from fully engaging with their studies and achieving the academic outcomes that lead to meaningful economic opportunities, despite our best efforts to address some of these at a basic level on our university and college campuses.

In particular, many students struggle with food insecurity, unstable housing, and the difficulty of balancing academic work with family responsibilities. Research has shown that students who are able to access basic needs support when needed are more likely to stay in school and graduate, ultimately increasing both their knowledge and learning potential, and contributing to the broader economy.

Addressing these issues is not just a matter of charity—it is a matter of justice and opportunity. A college degree opens doors to better jobs and higher wages, but when students are preoccupied with concerns about where they will sleep or how they will feed themselves and their families, their academic success is compromised. Ensuring that students have access to basic resources can help level the playing field, allowing them to focus on their education and realize their potential.

At Southern Oregon University, we are unshakeable in our commitment that learning and knowledge be available to everyone, and not just a privileged few.

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By investing in programs that offer food assistance, emergency housing support, childcare services, and other essential resources, we can create an environment where students are empowered to thrive academically and reach their full potential—and ultimately, toward a better, more respectful, and more resilient Oregon.

I urge you to consider expanding our existing support systems for basic needs on campuses and in our communities. Every student deserves the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their financial or personal circumstances, and with the right resources in place, we can help make this a reality.

Ultimately, when we invest in our students, we invest in Oregon.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Marc Overbeck".

Marc Overbeck  
Director of Government Relations