

Southern OREGON UNIVERSITY

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

TESTIMONY OFFERED ON SB 786

Offered by Dr. Casey Shillam, Executive Vice President and Provost

Good morning, Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and Members of the Senate Committee on Education:

My name is Casey Shillam. I am the Executive Vice President and Provost for Southern Oregon University, and I also serve as the Chair of the Statewide Provost Council. I am testifying today on behalf of Oregon's Public Universities in opposition to SB 786 and want to share concerns regarding SB 784 and SB 785.

Let me start with sincere gratitude for your commitment to increasing access to higher education for all Oregonians, which is imperative to creating the workforce pipeline that will ultimately drive economic prosperity for our entire state. I recognize that many young people today have deep, rich learning experiences through their high school courses. My own 15-year-old child has an understanding of computer programming and coding that far surpasses anything I could learn taking countless college-level programming courses!

Please know that each and every public university in Oregon is committed to providing various college-credit-granting opportunities. No two high school students have the exact same learning experiences and pathways to attaining a college education. It is imperative that we provide multiple pathways for today's young people to attain the education they seek. However, we have deep concerns about the methods described in Senate Bill 786.

Our public universities already have pathways to award college-level credit and recognize high school experiences and contributions of students who enroll in our institutions. Each institution works closely with local high school teachers to provide this credit in several ways. For example, at Southern Oregon University, we have the Advanced Southern Credit Program in which we partner with local high school teachers throughout the Rogue Valley. Our SOU professors evaluate the course content of proposed courses from high schools, they offer feedback to the teachers to ensure the course meets the regulatory or accreditation standards to which we are held and even help to support the high school teachers in advancing their own teaching knowledge and skills on specialty topics. These are deep, mutually-respected, and long-standing relationships that Oregon universities hold in our communities.

SB 786 would require institutions of public higher education to award academic credit any time an enrolled student completed a select high school class or participated in a select high school program, with no assessment of the course outcomes or learning objectives by the institution being held to accreditation requirements. This legislation would represent a significant shift in lowering

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the qualifications required to award college credit to high school students and could be in direct conflict with existing accreditation and state standards.

In addition to SOU's Advanced Southern Credit program other examples include:

- The Expanded Options program, which allows students to directly enroll in college courses while still being enrolled in their local high school;
- High School Based College Credit Partnerships, which are typically assessment-based learning opportunities or courses taught on a high school campus by a high school teacher and deemed sufficiently similar to enable the student to be described as "taking a course" from the postsecondary institution; and
- International Baccalaureate, or IB, and Advanced Placement, or AP courses.

Colleges and universities adhere to a variety of standards in statute, rule, and through our accrediting bodies when awarding credit to students who participated in high school accelerated learning programs, so as to ensure that learning outcomes and student proficiency is consistent with that of college-level courses. It would be very difficult to assess whether a student's participation in an ungraded extracurricular activity is consistent with completing and passing a college-level course.

This policy could also create challenges regarding the qualifications of club advisors to oversee activities deemed appropriate for college-level academic credit. Furthermore, the provision in the bill to prevent universities from requiring introductory courses is counter to student success and retention best practices. Introductory courses serve important goals in supporting students' learning: ensuring students don't enroll in courses for which they do not have the necessary foundational skills to successfully complete the course, which would negatively impacting their eligibility for financial aid and scholarships to cover the costs of their education by having to repeat courses required for their degree programs. I hope you consider the unintended consequences of SB 786, and the cascading implications this legislation would have on institutions of higher education.

Additionally, thank you for your interest in supporting workforce development and education in agriculture, forestry, and natural resources as referenced in SB 784 and 785. We agree that these fields are important to Oregon's workforce and ultimately our economy. These bills, however, introduce redundant standards that would increase reporting and administrative requirements, further complicating the pathways for high school students to pursue these important career opportunities. We encourage the legislature to continue funding the Public University Support Fund to ensure our universities have a stable funding base, as well as fully fund the Oregon Opportunity Grant, which offers all students a better opportunity to participate in postsecondary education.

Thank you for providing this time for me to express the concerns raised on behalf of Oregon's Public Universities. We appreciate your leadership, service, and interest in furthering postsecondary student success.