

**Testimony on House Bill 3335  
House Committee on Higher Education,  
Innovation and Workforce Development  
March 16, 2015**

Chair Read and Members of the Committee:

My name is Richard Schwarz. I am here today to urge the committee's support and recommendation for passage of House Bill 3335.

By way of background I am now retired from my position of 24 years as Executive Director of AFT-Oregon. Along the way, I served as a member of the Post-Secondary Quality Education Commission established by Governor Kulongoski. Among the commission's findings and recommendations, the Commission set an achievement goal known as 40-40-20. It strives to reach by 2025 the goal that 20 percent of the adult population shall have attained at least a high school diploma, or equivalent; that 40 percent shall have attained a two-year Associate Degree, or certificate or other similar credential beyond high school; and 40 percent shall have attained a university four-year degree or higher. It was subsequently codified in Oregon statutes.

With the 40-40-20 a statutory objective it is appropriate to continue reviewing education achievement by Oregonians and state progress toward the goal.

I believe HB 3335 will aid that effort.

Four-year degree completion is an ongoing concern, especially. The Oregon University System Fact Book reports that the completion rate, within a six-year time frame, is 55.7 percent for entering Freshmen who continue through their original school of enrollment. The rate is slightly higher at 69.5 percent for students transferring into the university.<sup>1</sup>

Improving the undergraduate degree completion rates is an ongoing effort. The gap between enrollments and completion is commonly considered a failure. It occurred to me that there may be among those not completing an undergraduate degree within six years some number who may nonetheless have achieved a measurable goal. Their work may still encompass an education attainment level that can be counted at least within the middle 40.

There are many reasons why students do not complete or abandon their undergraduate degree effort. Reasons include personal issues such as health problems, death in the family or family commitments, unplanned pregnancy, work schedule conflicts, lack or loss of financial support, or difficulty in adjusting the rigors of campus or academic life.

Whatever the reason, I believe there are among those who leave, some who completed the course work and credits amounting to basic degree requirements. Basic degree requirements are those numbers of credits in, for example, social studies, humanities, science, writing, foreign language and so on that, regardless of major, are necessary to obtain a degree.

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<sup>1</sup> OUS Board and State of Oregon Performance Measures, Oregon University Fact Book 2013. The report is produced every two years. Data is for 2011-2012.

It seems that in our 40-40-20 world such achievement should not be ignored. HB 3335 is an opportunity to recognize the accomplishment rather than considering those not achieving the degree a failure.

We know that had such a student been enrolled in a community college, that student would have been eligible to, and would have been awarded an associate degree which would be counted in the middle 40.

The HB 3335 objective does not interfere with or change in any way a university's degree offerings, course credit, course offering, or grade requirements for an undergraduate degree. All of that will remain the same.

Neither does HB 3335 interfere with or change a program known as "Reverse Transfer." HB 3335 is different from and does not duplicate "Reverse Transfer." Briefly, the program began as a pilot under a \$450,000 two-year grant to the Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development. Oregon was among 12 states that received support from October, 2012 through September, 2014 from a group of five foundations<sup>2</sup> "to support partnerships of community colleges/universities that significantly scale-up approaches to awarding associate degrees." Oregon's experiment involved 10 of 17 community colleges and all seven universities. The program covers students who transfer community college credits into a university and who have not been awarded an associate degree. It requires transferring in a minimum number of credits.<sup>3</sup> The student must opt-in. If so, the university will report courses completed back to the community college. The community college evaluates the courses for whether they meet the associate degree course requirements. If so, they are counted toward that school's associate degree graduation requirements. The student must opt-in each term. Some associate degree requirements, such as a health course, are not necessarily offered at the university in which case the student who desires an associate degree must re-enroll back in the community college to take the course, paying the necessary tuition and fees.

Programs are continuing since the pilot but requirements are within each of the partnerships and vary from university to university. There is no state policy on "Reverse Transfer."

HB 3335 is quite different. It applies to students who have completed course work meeting undergraduate degree requirements but who are not continuing toward a degree.

HB 3335 is about recognizing a level of educational attainment consistent with the state's 40-40-20 goals. It is neither a new degree nor an associate degree.<sup>4</sup> It does not compete with the community colleges. It does not disturb university programs, courses, degree requirements or grading systems. It both provides an opportunity for those who leave the university to be recognized for their successful completion of the basic degree required courses; and helps Oregon's progress toward its 40-40-20 goal, all, I believe, at no additional cost.

Thank you for the opportunity to be heard on this bill and I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have of me.

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<sup>2</sup> Lumina Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Helios Education Foundation, USA Funds and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. <http://www.luminafoundation.org/credit-when-its-due>.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Portland State requires a program participant to have transferred in 30 credits Portland Community College or Mt. Hood Community College; while the University of Oregon program requires 24 credits from Lane, Portland, Linn-Benton and/or Mt. Hood.

<sup>4</sup> Eastern Oregon University and Oregon Institute of Technology include programs that award an Associate's Degree. For academic year 2012-13, the total, respectively was 7 and 56, out of more than 16,000 undergraduate degrees awarded by all seven universities.