



March 23, 2015

To the Members of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education:

We are pleased to introduce the 2015-17 budget presentation for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission.

This is our first such presentation, reflecting our start-up as a state agency and our ongoing efforts to build an effective center for coordinating our newly-decentralized system of post-secondary education in Oregon. In our first two years, we have come to appreciate the strengths of greater autonomy and community involvement in our colleges and universities and, at our level, the importance of a consistent focus on student success across the multiple pathways that comprise our post-secondary landscape.

As you know, we are a coordinating commission, not a governing board. As such, we seek to “steer and cheer,” rather than regulate and manage the operations of our colleges and universities. By steering well, we can enable our institutions to do their best work and our students to make their way most efficiently to rewarding careers and productive citizenship. Our cheering, in turn, will celebrate the success of our students and institutions and, we hope, build public support for greater investment in education beyond high school.

To these ends, we are pleased to be able to say that what you have put in place is working. We have made great progress in our first two years in developing a short-term action plan and framing long-term strategies to advance student access and success and improve institutional capacity and efficiency. Notably, we have not found it necessary to come back to you in this session for any new authorities or any major modifications of the tools you have given us.

Our work is guided by two major policy goals that this Assembly established over the past decade: The 40-40-20 goals for high school and college completion and the Shared Responsibility Model for financial aid, by which we seek to provide access to a fully affordable education beyond high school for all Oregonians. Think of these as our goal posts.

We are not interested in moving these goal posts, nor are we interested in treating them as distant aspirations. For us, they are compelling imperatives. But we also want to remind you that we now have the most ambitious college completion goals of any state in the U.S. combined with some of the lowest levels of funding for our institutions and financial aid for our students. In this context, we appreciate the Co-Chairs framework for the community colleges and university support funds and the Oregon Opportunity Grant program, and we want to share with you our plans for maximizing what we can achieve with these investments.

We begin with a realistic picture of where we are today. We recently concluded an analysis of the college-going experience of Oregon’s high school class of 2006. By 2013, 82% of these students had



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graduated from high school or secured a GED. Of these, 80% pursued some form of post-secondary education. But only 33% of these students completed a two-year or four-year degree. Clearly, the greater challenge we face in attempting to attain our ambitious college completion goals is not getting more students to show up but getting more of them to stay, persist and complete.

What we have learned in our focus on the student experience is that it takes more than access and affordability to achieve success, just as it takes more than well-funded institutions to enable more students to complete their programs of study and achieve their goals. The missing ingredients for student success are all too often the information and guidance needed to navigate the post-secondary world with clarity and foresight and the availability of support to stay on track and get to the finish line. That support includes coaching and mentoring as well as academic tutoring to enable students to overcome obstacles, build confidence in their abilities and motivate them to persist and succeed in their pursuit of an education beyond high school.

Even the full affordability promised by the Shared Responsibility Model will be insufficient to achieve our ambitious goals for college attainment between now and 2025. Demographics will challenge us to do better with the resources we have, since we will have to serve – and serve successfully – increasing numbers of first-generation college students from previously under-served populations.

To meet this challenge, we want to ensure that our funding streams encourage and reward the practices that promote success for an increasingly diverse student population. We tend to think of financial aid as one funding stream and institutional support as another. But resources for student support are just as important. Accordingly, you will hear in our presentations an emphasis on equity as a guiding principle and student support as a guiding hand in the design and use of the resources that the state applies to both financial aid and institutional capacity.

Our Executive Director, Ben Cannon, and his team will share with you our strategies for making the best use of the state's investments in post-secondary education in 2015-17 and beyond – investments that can put us on a trajectory to attaining our 40-40-20 goals over the next five budget periods and, most importantly, ensuring opportunity for our people and advancing the economy and civic well-being of our state.

Tim Nesbitt, Chair
Higher Education Coordinating Commission