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May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015

To: Senate Committee on Education  
From: Carolina deMorais  
RE: HB 3308 Cultural Competency

Chair Roblan, Vice-Chair Knopp, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Carolina deMorais I am a second year student at Linn Benton Community College and I am here with the Oregon Student Association to urge your support of HB 3308.

I suffer from a mental illness known as Bipolar Disorder Type 1, as well as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Due to my condition I have encountered obstacles, many times directly from faculty and staff simply not understanding the intricacies of my disorder. My most recent experience was during finals at the end of this past Winter Term, where I suffered severely traumatic flashbacks and debilitating panic attacks, which left me in a disorientated state to be taking finals.

On the eve of my last day of finals, my flashbacks and anxiety levels led to a night of insomnia and exhausting bouts of adrenaline overdrive. My first final the next morning entailed giving a speech in front of a classroom full of my peers; a task I normally revel in. In my current state, however, the thought of standing in front of critiquing eyes left me feeling uncomfortably vulnerable. I felt it would be in my best interest to speak to my professor prior to the session and let them know what was going on. When I attempted to explain the situation, I was met with curt responses of a "just do it" nature, which, in my state, felt accusatory and not the least bit helpful. When my turn arrived, the tears I had stifled finally broke the weak willed barrier I had put up and came flooding to the surface for all to see. This instance could have been prevented if my professor would have had the adequate level of understanding through professional development to support my condition. Without cultural competency continuing education, students feel isolated from faculty and unsafe in the classroom. Lack of cultural competency creates barriers to academic success. It prevents us from seeking help, speaking up, and reaching out.

It has been my experience that faculty with training in Cultural Competency are better able to provide safe space environments and have the tools to ensure students with a mental illness achieve their goals. Without programs to teach cultural competency to faculty and staff, I fear we will continue to see a disproportionate dropout rate among students with mental illnesses, myself being one of them.

This is why I support HB 3308 and encourage this committee to pass it. Please remember my story when voting on this bill. Thank you for letting me speak with you today.

Sincerely,

Carolina deMorais  
Linn Benton CC