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May 7th, 2015

To: Senate Committee on Education
From: Danita Harris
RE: HB 3308

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

My name is Danita Harris and I am a fourth year nontraditional student at Western Oregon University, and I am here with the Oregon Student Association to urge your support of HB 3308.

My third year at Western Oregon University focused heavily on my major in sociology. As a focus we tackle big social issues past and current. While discussing mechanisms for dehumanization, our lecture focused primarily around language usage. To demonstrate how language can dehumanize an individual this professor used the word nigger with great exaggeration. His point was well made and lessons learned. However this continued for three weeks. Thirty seven times he said nigger, all the while defending his usage as a lesson and justifying his ability to do so because he has black friends.

Before I eventually stopped attending class I had noticed that others from varying ethnic back grounds were no longer in attendance. Though this is my story this instance not only affected me, but the class as a whole. This experience was far from antidotal.

Before attending Western Oregon University I was a high school drop out that felt defined by statistics which analyzed my failure rate, not my possible success. Coming to Western is a step in breaking a cycle of statistical sabotage. When a marginalized student steps through the doors of a university there's a sense of implied safety. When that sense of safety was removed for me I stopped attending class, I made my own safety by creating walls and shutting down. This could have jeopardized my academic success and stifle my future.

Training in cultural competency would have provided this professor with the skills necessary to provide both a critical and heart felt lesson, while also maintaining a safe space. After this experience I felt extremely guarded, the classroom was no longer a safe environment for learning. This is something that no one should have to experience and to make that happen we need to research what cultural competency education could look like. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today and I urge you to support HB 3308.

Sincerely,
Danita Harris
Western Oregon University