

**Testimony on House Bill 3335-A
Senate Committee on Education
May 7, 2015**

Chair Roblan and Members of the Committee:

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

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. Among its findings and recommendations, the Commission set the aspiration for education achievement known as 40-40-20.¹ That goal was subsequently codified in Oregon statutes.

I believe HB 3335-A will aid the continuing effort to recognize educational achievement among Oregonians. It will offer an option for a student who leaves a university before degree completion, but with recognition of a level of accomplishment.

Four-year degree completion is a concern. 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 a university.²

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.

Unfortunately, the gap between enrollments and completion is commonly considered a failure.

While improving the undergraduate degree completion rates is a continuing goal, 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.

Whatever the reason for ending their undergraduate enrollment, I believe there are among them those who completed the course work and credits that meet 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.

Their academic work encompasses an education attainment level that should be recognized as accomplishing a level of higher education that in the same attainment in a community college would have been fully recognized with a credential. HB 3335-A is an opportunity to recognize the accomplishment rather than considering those not achieving the university degree a failure because they go no further.

¹ By 2025 the goal is 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.

² 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.

The HB 3335-A 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-A interfere with or change a program known as "Reverse Transfer." HB 3335-A 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 foundations³ "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.⁴ 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-A is quite different. It applies to students who have successfully completed course work meeting undergraduate degree requirements but who are not continuing toward a degree. That recognition signals a higher education accomplishment and likely improves employment opportunities. Even though not completing a four-year degree, the recognition offers value for the individual's investment in their education, and value as an educational outcome. At the same time, the recognition contributes to Oregon's 40-40-20 objectives, instead being counted as an education failure.

The recognition is neither a new degree nor an associate degree.⁵ 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.

³ Lumina Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Helios Education Foundation, USA Funds and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. <http://www.luminafoundation.org/credit-when-its-due>.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.