

# Richard H. Schwarz

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## Testimony on HB 3335-A Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education June 11, 2015

Co-Chair Komp, Co-Chair Monroe and Members of the Committee:

My name is Richard Schwarz. I am here today in support HB 3335-A and ask the same of the committee.

By way of background I am the retired Executive Director of AFT-Oregon. During my 24 years in that position I also served as a member of the Post-Secondary Quality Education Commission from which came Oregon's 40-40-20 education attainment goal.<sup>1</sup>

Four-year degree completion continues as a concern for our higher education schools. 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.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, this gap between enrollments and completion is generally viewed a failure.

There are many reasons why students abandon and do not complete their undergraduate degree effort. They 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 to the rigors of campus or academic life.

However, I believe there are among those students, those who have successfully completed the course work and credits meeting basic degree requirements. Basic degree requirements are those numbers of credits, for example, in social studies, humanities, science, math, foreign languages and so on that, regardless of major, are necessary to obtain a degree.

Their academic work is parallel to and at an attainment level that had they been enrolled in a community college would have been fully recognized with a credential. HB 3335-A is an opportunity to recognize that accomplishment rather than considering those not finishing the university degree a failure.

Improving undergraduate degree completion rates is an ongoing objective and should get continuous attention in our higher education institutions.

HB 3335-A does not interfere with or detract from any of those efforts. It does not intrude in or change in any way a university's degree offerings, course credits, course offerings, or grade or graduation requirements for an undergraduate degree. Neither does HB 3335-A interfere with or change any credit or college transfer programs, such as "Reverse Transfer." The recognition

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</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.

contemplated by HB 3335-A is neither a new degree nor an associate degree.<sup>3</sup> And, it does not compete with the community colleges.

What it does do is to recognize in students a measure of accomplishment for successfully completing course work meeting undergraduate degree requirements for those not continuing -- for whatever may be their personal circumstances -- toward a degree. Such 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.

Much of the focus in education is on movement into higher education programs, dual credit, simultaneous enrollment, transfer and more. This bill is an opportunity to work with what already is in place. I believe HB 3335-A will aid the continuing effort to recognize educational achievement among Oregonians. I hope that the committee will support it and the small one-time sum estimated to support the bill's objective.

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>3</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.