

Oregon Student Association



March 20th, 2019

To: Ways and Means Sub Education Committee
From: Torii Uyehara, Executive Director, Oregon Student Association
RE: Oregon Opportunity Grant Funding

Co-Chairs Senator Fredrick and Senator McClain, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Torii Uyehara, and I am the Executive Director for the Oregon Student Association. The Oregon Student Association is a student-led, student-run organization that represents over 130,000 students statewide. We work to make a more affordable and accessible higher education. I am here to express the importance of the Oregon Opportunity Grant Funding for our Oregon Students.

I would like to share with you a few stories from Oregon students who cannot be here because it is finals week.

First I would like to share Josie's story. Josie is an immigrant attending Portland State University. She couldn't work the hours or find a job to make enough money to pay for all her college expenses. Having access to the Oregon Opportunity Grant made it easier for Josie to actually be able to pursue higher education. Without the grant, Josie probably wouldn't have been able to continue her education. Josie is happy to share that she is able to complete her undergraduate degree this June because of the Oregon Opportunity Grant.

For students like Josie, the Oregon Opportunity Grant made all the difference in being set up to successfully join the workforce. That's how we know funding that has been allocated to the OOG really works. Unfortunately, past funding levels for the grant have not been sufficient to reach all those in need, allowing many to slip through the cracks. Let me tell you about one now.

Cristal attends Western Oregon University, which is one of the more affordable 4-year institutions in Oregon. She was one of the recipients of the grant and it helped her cover some tuition costs. Cristal also counted on the help of her parents and worked part-time to cover other school related costs. Sadly, she lost the grant, and then she had to start working full time to be able to help pay for what she lost. The Spring of 2017 she found out that she lost all of her grants and one third of her loans because her income was "too high." The income difference was 4,000 dollars, but 70% of that income was commissioned and 43% of this was taxed. Her grants were taken away the same year that Western Oregon University was forced to raise tuition for the 2018-2019 year at 6.5% due to the state's divestment in higher education. Cristal worked to be able to cover the amount that was taken away from her and begged her supervisors for a raise. During the summer of 2018, she got another job while taking classes to be able to help her parents with the cost. Cristal highlights that in 2018 alone her and her family had to pay \$11,800 out of pocket for tuition costs and on top of that, she had to cover about \$500 for utilities, textbooks, and other daily expenses like gas because she commutes one hour

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to work. Cristal highlights that she is thankful that WOU is one of the more affordable 4-year institutions in Oregon, otherwise she would have been forced to drop out of school.

Josie and Cristal's story highlight the importance of having access to financial aid funding to be able to pay for school. The Oregon Opportunity Grant relieves stress and allows our students to focus on their education. It's doing a great job for the students who it can reach, but Oregon can do better. Oregon can increase funding to 252 million dollars for the grant, to make sure an additional 16,000 students can access this essential resource. Please support continued and expanded funding for the Oregon Opportunity Grant and continue investing in our low-income students.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Torii Uyehara
Executive Director
Oregon Student Association

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