



OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

March 25, 2019

Oregon Legislative Assembly
Joint Committee on Ways and Means
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chair Senator Johnson, Co-Chair Senator Steiner Hayward, Co-Chair Representative Rayfield, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of Southern Oregon University (SOU), in the interest of all Oregon Public Universities (OPU) and especially, the students we serve, **we strongly urge the adoption of a budget that invests in higher education at the \$923M level as well as full funding of the Sports Lottery and Engineering Technology Sustaining Fund (ETSF).**

As regional and statewide leaders who devote significant time and resources to ensuring students' equitable access to higher education we see, first-hand, the devastating impact that decreasing state investment has on increasing student debt loads. **With few exceptions, the state's disinvestment in higher education over more than two decades has created a statewide environment where the cost of a public university education has shifted from the state to students and their families, often in the form of debt. Please, stop the shift.** Technical and Regional Universities (TRUs) fulfill the needs of a high number of first-generation and under-represented students who are well-served by small, supportive campus environments. For our students, the *worst* possible outcome is acquiring student debt without completing a degree. Stable funding ensures the continuity of academic and support programs that ensure success and completion for these students.

We know legislators are concerned about sustainability over the next several biennia. We share that concern, which is why we urge you to consider education funding, holistically. **Our great state values education and has set ambitious goals for education statewide, culminating in increased higher education degree attainment.** We applaud the attention the legislature is giving to pre-K through 12, and we ask that you also ensure higher education is funded at the \$923M level, as an important part of the education continuum—*from cradle through career.*

Churchill Hall, Room 107 • 1250 Siskiyou Boulevard • Ashland, Oregon 97520-5015

(541) 552-8055 • governance.sou.edu • trustees@sou.edu

Finally, beyond the Public University Support Fund, higher education funding includes the Sports Lottery and ETSF. Although these programs require far fewer dollars to sustain, as a TRU, the smaller amounts that flow to our campus have an outsized impact on Southern Oregon University's students. Full funding of the Sports Lottery helps SOU fund athletics and comply with federal Title IX requirements. Additionally, SOU's athletes have some of the highest retention rates on campus, have nearly double the average graduation rate, account for a significant portion of the diversity on SOU's campus and local community, and as a group, maintain GPA's above the campus average. In support of the state's ambitious goals for degree attainment, funding athletics is paramount.

Similarly, ETSF dollars are critical to supporting our STEM Programs. At this very moment, SOU is undertaking great efforts to hire Computer Science faculty. SOU relies on ETSF funding to offer a competitive salary to only the most talented faculty in this highly technical area. The funding also ensures we can make STEM courses available to our students, and bring STEM expertise to the region, which helps address employer needs.

We all recognize the significant challenges presented to legislators over the 2019-21 biennium budget and the difficult decisions they undoubtedly involve. On behalf of the SOU Board of Trustees, **I urge you to help students and their families, our communities and our state, by increasing Oregon's investment in the PUSF, State Lottery, and ETSF programs.** By doing so, you can ensure greater affordability and access to high-quality education and supportive programs and services for students.

Sincerely,



Lyn Hennion
Chair

Cc: Representative David Gomberg
Representative Greg Smith
Senator Lee Beyer
Senator Lew Frederick
Senator Fred Girod
Senator Bill Hansell
Senator Dallas Heard
Senator James Manning Jr.
Senator Arnie Roblan
Senator Chuck Thomsen

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Representative Duane Stark
SOU Board of Trustees