

# Oregon Student Association



My name is Vanessa Robles and I am a freshman at the University of Oregon planning to double-major in International Studies and Spanish with a minor in Computer Information Technology(CIT). I am writing to thank the committee for seizing this generational opportunity to invest in education. I am so excited to see the K-12 investments put forth and am confident that these long overdue investments will do amazing things for students in Oregon. I also urge you all to include funding to expand Oregon Opportunity Grant which fundamentally aids students seeking to pursue higher education in Oregon.

If not for the Oregon Opportunity Grant, I would be in unsustainable student-loan debt or otherwise not present at this university. Inflated and increasing tuition/housing fees are an obstacle for people like me who are first generation low-income students as most of our parents cannot provide sufficient financial resources. Providing more aid through the Oregon Opportunity Grant is crucial for students who are first generation low-income as monetary awards like these are often determining factors in students' futures. In other words, grants like the Oregon Opportunity Grant can significantly impact a students' life because it has the power to determine if that student can continue attending their university.

Last February I attended the Stanford FLI Conference at Stanford University where I learned two important concepts. First I learned that "FLI" means "first generation low-income" which is an identity I identify with. Second, I realized that there is a difference between being first generation high-income versus being first generation low-income. After returning to my

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The Oregon Student Association (OSA) is a statewide, student-led advocacy and organizing non-profit established in 1975 to represent, serve, and protect the collective interests of students in postsecondary education in Oregon

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campus, I examined my financial aid award and came to a conclusion that if it was not for the scholarships I received, among those the Oregon Opportunity Grant, I would not be attending this institution.

I remember the first week of school, I went into the financial aid office on various occasions with doubts and concerns about my student bill. My institution was billing my account more than I had calculated. I must confess that I cried while I consulted with the financial aid counselor because I felt confused, frustrated, and extremely discouraged about not being able to pay for my education. Fearing that I could only financially survive the first (out of three) terms of college, I suddenly noticed that the Oregon Opportunity Grant was not being displayed in my financial aid award. Over the summer, I had received an email that confirmed my award for the Oregon Opportunity Grant yet my award was not being applied to my award package which caused my school to bill me more than expected. I panicked because not only am I FLI, but I am also the daughter of undocumented immigrants which means that I could not possibly qualify for the Parent PLUS loan. I was employed before arriving to college, and with my personal savings I planned to pay the portion of my bill that was not covered by scholarships and grants -- a process that I planned out so that I would not have to take out student loans. When I realized that the Oregon Opportunity Grant was not applied to my bill, I dreaded the thought of being unable to continue my academic career because of my financial circumstances.

Fortunately, I was able to work with the financial aid counselors to sort out my situation to apply the Oregon Opportunity Grant to my award package. After doing so, my bill

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significantly reduced and I was able to successfully pay the expenses that were not covered by scholarships and grants.

Stories and identities like mine are not unique. Oregon, as well as other states are composed first generation low-income students that have ambitious goals of pursuing higher education and a sincere passion for their helping their communities. I urge you all to invest in FLI students as they are leaders that will lead our country with strong work ethic, intuition, and humility. As detailed in my case, the amount of financial aid provided by the Oregon Opportunity Grant can be a determining factor for the continuation of a students' academic career and success at a university. For that reason, I strongly encourage you to support and invest in expanded funding for the Oregon Opportunity Grant.

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