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**►TO: Members of the Joint Task Force on Student Success
for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education:**

I am writing in support of underrepresented and diverse students in higher education. I teach nursing at the OHSU School of Nursing on the Oregon Institute of Technology(OIT) campus in rural, southern Oregon. I have been the faculty diversity coordinator in the HealthE steps program (Advancing Health Equity through Student Empowerment & Professional Success) for five years. It has been the highlight of my nursing career, and the most challenging.

As a first-generation student to graduate from college, I can clearly recall all the challenges I experienced. They still exist for many underrepresented students. I worked throughout nursing school and received several scholarships and loans to be able to attend college. In doing so, it was still difficult to do well. I knew that I could do better academically if I did not have to work as much as I did. What I also experienced was not feeling like I belonged in college. I see this with many of our students, especially with our students of color. Decades later, it seems even more challenging to secure financial aid to remain in school. Students continue to work while in a challenging nursing program. For many, they are putting themselves through school. Their parents and families are unable to support them financially.

In addition to financial aid, the most challenging is providing underrepresented students resources to succeed academically. Although academic services such as “Student Success Programs” exist, they may be virtual. OHSU (Portland) extends their services to our regional campus in southern Oregon through virtual methods. On our rural campus, students are able to access our host campus’ (OIT) academic services for writing, math, time management, study skills and tutoring in person, but they may not be relevant or not enough. The underrepresented students that I work with need someone who understands the nursing classes and program to sit side-by-side with

them. Due to financial constraints of OHSU's and OIT's academic services, there is a lack of time and continuity for students to receive assistance from a designated person. What I have seen are students who need to build trust that someone really wants to help them – someone who knows them and their specific needs. It is frustrating to refer students for help and find that it isn't enough.

The most disheartening of all is for underrepresented students – especially students of color-- who are challenged by instructors who do not understand the breadth of their struggles to be academically successful. I am angered and frustrated by how some students were treated unfairly. It is also frustrating to hear that diverse students should not get special treatment or belong in the program if they can't "get it together". I referred several students to AAEO, Student Affairs, and other programs in our institution that address discrimination. The emotional toll it took on students has been enormous. The fear of failing (and failing out) of the program traumatized them. The unconscious bias trainings and other directives from administration have not changed situations for students of color. There do not appear to be repercussions for faculty who discriminate nor to correct the students' grievances. From what I see, the power of faculty overrides the students' concerns. I do not have a solution for this since you can't change others' behaviors unless they want to change. What can happen is to provide someone that students trust and who will advocate for them – someone who is physically there, knows the people and the program.

In the HealthE STEPS program for underrepresented students, students receiving the HealthE STEPS scholarship also had a diversity faculty advisor and a diversity coordinator for additional support. They went beyond academics and addressed other issues necessary for student success. In addition to the tangible needs such as finances, food and child care, belonging is important for student access. Having someone listen to them fostered their belief that they did belong in school. I saw firsthand how underrepresented students trusted an instructor with the title of "faculty diversity coordinator" and "staff diversity coordinator". Having a faculty diversity coordinator also enhanced trust that there was a faculty person dedicated to them. Not only did students receiving the HealthE STEPS scholarship utilize the faculty and staff diversity coordinators, other underrepresented students sought out help from them. This says a lot about underrepresented students need for assistance and belonging. This is especially true for students of color and those identifying as LGBTQ. Belonging is essential for student success.

If I could make one tangible recommendation (along with more financial aid) for underrepresented students, it would be to provide a dedicated instructor and staff assistant to work directly with underrepresented students, particularly those I mentioned above. The HealthE STEPS model worked but was temporary. Academic institutions should look at the success of this model. The parts that provide direct

support should be implemented. If institutions are truly committed to the success of underrepresented students, money should be directed to serving students directly now. Providing more financial aid is essential. It is the ongoing care and support throughout nursing school that enhances success. Changing the culture of an institution with diversity trainings and initiatives takes a long time. Providing support to students can happen now.

If I can be assistance, please contact me. Thank you for your consideration.

Marilyn Gran-Moravec, MSN, RN