



Date: Nov 7, 2023

To: Interim Committee on House Education

From: John Wykoff, OCCA Deputy Director

Subject: Oregon Opportunity Grant

As the committee is hearing testimony today on the Oregon Opportunity Grant, I wanted to quickly summarize OCCA's concerns about the current financial aid framework used by OSAC. The new framework only considers tuition, fees, books, and supplies, ignoring other crucial costs like housing, food, and transportation, which can be significant barriers for students, especially those attending low-cost institutions like community colleges.

A 2019 survey of 8,100 Oregon community college students conducted by the HOPE Center found the following (also see attached report):

- 41 percent of students reported being food insecure in the last 30 days.
- 52 percent of students were housing insecure in the last year.
- 20 percent of respondents were homeless in the last year.

The average age of an Oregon Community College student is 26 years old, and ongoing living expenses such as housing, food, transportation and childcare are often the most significant barriers for community college students getting post-secondary education in training.

Under the current tuition-based model and funding levels, community college students face a modest 2 percent disparity in the percentage of their cost of attendance covered by financial aid compared to their university counterparts. If fully implemented, the gap grows with the framework funding approximately 60 percent of the cost of attendance for university students and only 49 percent for most community college students who don't receive the Oregon Promise Grant. This excludes the majority of community college students, as only a small percentage are eligible for the Oregon Promise Grant.

Additionally, the framework eliminates the financial benefit students receive from the Pell Grant, as it tracks awards solely to institution-related costs without considering living expenses. The Pell Grant is the same amount for community college and university students. By contrast, an Oregon Opportunity Grant is almost twice as much for university students.

Community colleges continue to support additional Opportunity Grant funding but are concerned that the current OSAC framework does not serve all students equitably, especially adult learners.

To address these issues, we urge the HECC to:

- Consider the full cost of attendance when determining sector award levels.
- Ensure equitable cost-of-attendance funding for students at lower-cost institutions.
- Maintain the availability of the Opportunity Grant for winter and spring terms.