



**Testimony of Dr. Jesse Peters, Western Oregon University President
Informational Hearing on Regional University Athletics
House Committee on Higher Education
January 11th, 2024**

Chair Lively and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to bring to your attention the significant contributions athletic programs add to regional universities and their students. I also want you to be aware of the current needs of the Western Oregon University (WOU) Athletics program. Our university proudly competes at the Division II level of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), primarily in the Great Northwest Athletic Conference (GNAC). We field 14 intercollegiate varsity teams, including men's and women's basketball, cross country, soccer, track & field, baseball, football, softball, and volleyball. We have over 400 student athletes actively engaged in seeking their college degrees while engaged in high level intercollegiate competition.

Last year, we won our second GNAC baseball championship in a row, won championships in both men and women's indoor track and field, came in second in the conference in Men's soccer (only the second year of the program), went to the playoffs in Women's soccer, and had two GNAC coaches of the year (baseball and men's soccer). This year, volleyball had the most wins in years, and the women's basketball team is on a six game winning streak.

Our athletic programs have not only enhanced the visibility of Western Oregon University but have also greatly contributed to the holistic development and success of our student-athletes. The Wolves have demonstrated remarkable sportsmanship and excellence. In the 2022-23 academic year, our athletes achieved significant academic accolades: 39 student-athletes earned the GNAC Faculty Athletic Representative Award with a GPA of 3.85 or higher, and 85 student-athletes earned the GNAC Academic All-Conference Award. Furthermore, 173 student-athletes were named to the WOU honor roll list, showcasing the academic prowess of our athletes.

In terms of retention and graduation, our athletic programs have shown impressive results: We maintain an 82% first to second year retention rate and an 80% Academic Success Rate. In the Fiscal Year 2023, 71 student-athletes graduated, reflecting our commitment to academic and athletic excellence. The average GPAs for our women's and men's teams are 3.44 and 3.09, respectively, underscoring our focus on academic achievement.

As of FY24, we have 442 student-athletes (161 female, 281 male), with a significant number of in-state students (53% from Oregon). Our student-athlete body is also ethnically diverse, aligning with our commitment to inclusivity and representation.

Additionally, our athletic programs contribute to the local community's economy, engage in numerous volunteer activities, run youth sports camps, and enhance the student life experience for all of our students.

However, to continue fostering these high standards and to further enhance our athletic facilities and programs, additional funding is essential. We do not have revenue streams from large donors or TV revenues. As enrollments have been declining, so have student fees that support a portion of athletic programs. Additionally, increased costs because of inflation have led to increased expenses. We need more support directly from the state and also through the sports lottery. Enhanced financial support will allow us to:

1. **Improve Athletic Facilities:** Upgrading our training and competition facilities to match the evolving standards of NCAA Division II athletics.
2. **Support Student-Athlete Development:** Providing more scholarships, better equipment, and enhanced medical and training support for our student-athletes. Western currently only provides 50% of the scholarship support we could based on NCAA guidelines, and only 85% of those are funded through the sports lottery. The rest comes through donation.
3. **Enhance Overall Campus Sustainability:** While we need operational budget support for athletics, these programs also produce significant enrollment and revenue for our academic and student support programs through student tuition and fees. The elimination of athletic programming, if it comes to that, will lead to adverse impacts on non-athletic budgets and damage the culture of the institution and local community

Investing in our athletic programs is not just an investment in sports; it is an investment in our youth, our community, and the future leaders of Oregon. Our commitment to excellence in athletics goes hand-in-hand with our academic mission, fostering an environment where young men and women can thrive both on and off the field.

Thank you for your time and consideration.