

My name is Brendan Crowe and I study Multimedia at Portland Community College. I've lived here in Oregon for nearly a decade. In addition to being a student, I'm currently working full time as an Online Learning Manager for a non-profit. I am using my education and service position at PCC to create access and opportunities for underrepresented groups.

I am a non-traditional student in the community college system: I have a Bachelor's Degree. In my former career as a caregiver and an early childhood educator, my low income meant that I never thought twice about returning to grad school, much less to school at all. I had the desire and the foundation to pursue it, but not the income, time, or resources.

Unfortunately, much of the financial support I received to return to school did not come from employment opportunities in Oregon. Finding work opportunities outside of the fields of caregiving and education here proved too difficult, so I found a job working remotely for an employer in California before the pandemic.

I am fortunate to earn a salary and receive professional development funds from my employer, but my salary alone isn't sufficient to cover the current cost of higher education, even at community college. On top of my employer's contributions, I have had to pursue financial aid through student loans and work study programs, and I live in reduced cost student housing to balance the cost of living.

Many people who I study and work with are full time students, and receive their only livelihood through a combination of work study, scholarships, and grants. With increased funding for student aid in the form of the Oregon Opportunity Grant, these opportunities could reach more students, particularly students from low-income families.

I have much in common with my fellow students at PCC, as well as undergrads in any 4-year program in Oregon. I would like the opportunity to transfer to a graduate program here, but I hesitate because of how much I know I have to do in order to balance the cost of higher education with the cost of living.

Oregon's two financial aid programs, the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG) and Oregon Promise, delivered \$657 per full-time student in 2020. That's well below the U.S. average of \$830, and less than half of the \$1,489 provided in Washington State.

To further my education and career, I reckon with the possibility of having to leave the community I love, and the state where I have recently registered my first small business as an education consultant. A massive injection of financial aid through the Oregon Opportunity Grant would go a long way to ensuring that me and my cohort are able to continue pursuing and building opportunity in the great state of Oregon.

Sincerely,
Brendan Crowe
Student Senator, Associated Students of Portland Community College