

Dear Committee Chair Lively, Vice-chairs McIntire and Ruiz, and members of the House Committee on Higher Education,

For the record my name is Kristina Beggen. I am a teaching assistant in the Sociology department. I currently lead discussion sections for an introductory Sociology course. I'm currently working on my PhD and I'm doing this work because I love teaching and I love the research I do within my department.

Access to a quality higher education is a public good, and I'm alarmed by encroaching private market forces impacting public universities. I understand that athletics is an important past time at the University of Oregon, but I'm deeply troubled by the University's preoccupation with sports at the expense of education. I am currently teaching high schoolers in my college level course. They were admitted early so that they could play sports for the University of Oregon. I do not doubt their ability to succeed, but I do not think they're ready for college. I'm afraid that admitting students too early will have long term detrimental effects on their GPA and overall academic success. I believe that the relentless push to grow our athletics departments is harming academics, and actively harming young students that aren't ready for college. If this is in fact a university and not just a sports franchise, it should not be admitting students prematurely. The division between sports and academics at public universities is a farce. It was not lost on me that OSU academics had to loan money to the OSU athletics department that it can no longer pay back. Treating universities like money making sports teams is absolutely unacceptable and it is seriously making me reconsider applying for faculty positions at universities.

Class sizes in 2024 are immense-- I assist with a course of almost 300 students. Next term I will be in a course of 500. How will I find the time to help students (still recovering from a pandemic) succeed in their courses? Through the hard work and organizing of my union, GTFF, we won a historic contract for graduate employees like me. I'll be receiving a 16% raise at the end of this month. However, our hard fought and excellent contract still won't get workers like me to a living wage in Eugene. I still need to take on another job to make ends meet. Taking on additional work has seriously impacted my research and my trajectory towards graduation-- but I simply can't make ends meet without it. Additionally, the university is working harder to push out PhD students that take longer than 5 years to complete their degree. What am I to do? We are put in an impossible bind.

House Bill 4125 is absolutely vital to making positive change at public universities in our state. The research will shine a light on unsuitable and irresponsible policies that have led to the unsustainable work environment I have described. I am here at this university to conduct research. Research helps us understand the foundational causes of social issues and can help provide a clear path for change. I urge you to pass HB 4125 so that we can all better understand how our universities have been functioning over the past several years, and redirect resources/funding as needed.