

Submitter: Kathleen Connolly
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Higher Education
Measure: HB4125

To the House Committee on Higher Education:

I am a faculty member in the Spanish program. I teach all levels of Spanish-language, in addition to classes that combine literature, film and history to engage with various Hispanic cultures. I love languages and sharing that with my students-many of whom will go on to also become educators in the state of Oregon.

The new system created 10 years ago has resulted in a small school like WOU, which is teaching-focused and student-success focused, having to compete with the highly visible and financially flush flagships like U of O and OSU. We are truly dedicated to the success and learning of first-generation and BIPOC college students, but we don't have the resources or support to dominate the media and consciousness of the public. The loss of enrollment and funding has meant that programs are being squeezed or eliminated, and faculty laid off. We play an essential role in the future of our state and region, and we need more support and funding to continue to do so.

WOU faculty, staff, and administration are dedicated to serving our students. I interact with many colleagues who are energetic, creative, and want to innovate. However, there is a lack of state investment in our institution such that we can do so when enrollment is declining. I see that admins feel pressure to cut low-enrolled courses, even if those courses are necessary for majors, for example. The cuts have put our NTT faculty in an even more unstable employment position. This, in turn, puts our ability to deliver our program and effectively advise and educate students in a more precarious position, because our NTTs now teach about half of our classes. Working in an environment of precarity is very damaging to morale and collegiality. An environment of competition and "every man for himself" is not one that will help us better educate our students.

I support this bill so that we can assess what is working, what is not working, and find ways to work together so that our public university system is collaborative, shares important functions together, and does not operate in competition or controversy.

Thank you.