

Submitter: Tina Fuchs  
On Behalf Of: Destination Western  
Committee: Senate Committee On Education  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB604

I am writing to express my support for Senate Bill 604 and the funding for the Strong Start program. Western Oregon University (WOU) was fortunate to receive Strong Start funding from the Oregon Legislature four years ago, which enabled us to create an impactful program called Destination Western.

Over the last four years, Destination Western has provided incoming college students with a critical head start, offering a supportive environment that helps ease their transition into college. Through academic enrichment, mentoring, and the opportunity to build important relationships before the school year begins, Destination Western equips students with the skills and confidence they need to succeed. The program also fosters a sense of belonging, which is crucial for supporting persistence throughout their academic careers.

What stands out most about the Destination Western program is its impressive impact on student retention. Data from the past four years shows that participants in Destination Western have a retention rate that is 5-10% higher than their peers who did not participate in the program. Additionally, these students tend to carry higher credit loads, which helps them graduate on time.

As you consider Senate Bill 604 for Strong Start funding, I urge you to recognize that this investment will not only allow us to expand the reach of our program but also provide more students—particularly those facing barriers to higher education—with the resources and support they need to succeed. Having worked in higher education for nearly 40 years, I have witnessed numerous programs dedicated to supporting student success and retention. However, I can confidently say that Destination Western stands out as one of the most transformative and effective programs I have encountered. Its profound impact on students' sense of belonging and their persistence to graduation is truly remarkable.

I urge you to support SB604 and the funding for the Strong Start program, which will provide Oregon students the opportunities they deserve to thrive. This investment in students' futures is ultimately an investment in Oregon's future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.