



American Association of University Professors

Academic Freedom for a Free Society

February 4, 2026

House Committee on Education
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Hudson, Vice-Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the more than 3,000 members of the American Association of University Professors in Oregon, our collective bargaining chapters at the University of Oregon, Portland State University, Oregon State University, and Oregon Institute of Technology, and our faculty members in advocacy chapters across Oregon, we urge careful consideration as you discuss HB 4124.

We recognize that the study commissioned by this legislation can provide necessary recommendations to improve access to and affordability of Oregon's higher education system. Such analysis is welcome, as many staff and faculty in the organized higher education workforce can tell you that the dismantling of the Oregon University System (OUS) has not yielded the benefits that its proponents believed would materialize after its dissolution. Therefore, we recognize that this study could result in better coordination of higher educational needs across our state and ensure that more Oregonians can pursue their educational and professional goals at our community colleges and public universities.

However, we are also concerned about ways that this report could be misused to harm the quality of education that our students receive. After all, our members' working conditions directly impact our students' learning conditions, and recent HECC reporting has shown that our public universities use the funds they receive from our state responsibly. This means that when we contend with the financial viability of our public universities, we must warn against recommendations that attempt to keep asking faculty and staff to do more with less.

Everyone in higher education and the legislature knows what is negatively impacting the financial viability of our institutions: **anemic state funding**. Oregon invests less in public university funding than all states in our region and most states in our nation, which has created a financial crisis for many of our public institutions. Though it is true that the demographics of our state is changing, there will always be a need for higher education, and better state funding could preserve jobs, lower tuition, and improve both class sizes and student support.

Most importantly, we want to caution and ask that this report not be used to further narrow our institutions' course offerings to focus primarily on workforce development, which would serve to further degrade the quality of academic freedom and shared governance at our public

institutions. While coordination for the development of new programs could certainly ensure that each institution develops unique offerings that will help differentiate each institution and create less competition between them, this report should not be used as a premise to cut existing programs, particularly humanities programs, in order to favor only workforce development goals while undercutting higher education as a whole. Such an intrusion on the academic freedom of Oregon's academic workforce and the shared governance of our institutions would only serve to create further harm for our members and our students.

For more than 100 years, the AAUP has held that all curricular decisions must be made by faculty. This is because our members, with their expertise and dedication to both our students and our institutions, are the foremost authority on their fields and the course of study necessary for others to develop a commensurate expertise. As such, rather than imposing priorities on our faculty, it is crucial that the legislature and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission collaborate with educators on the future of our higher education system.

Thank you for your consideration.

Victor Reyes
Executive Director, AAUP Oregon