

To the Members of the House Committee on Education:

I read House Bill 4124 with an open mind and an inclination to support its call for a study of Oregon's higher education system. I agree that reforms are needed. At the University of Oregon, where I have worked as a professor for ten years, many faculty and students have doubts about the priorities of our trustees and upper administration. We believe considerable administrative bloat has been concealed by a lack of financial transparency. To the extent that our administrators and trustees manage our university as a business, sidestepping shared governance structures and prioritizing financial gain over public educational mission, it is critical for the HECC and the state legislature to provide checks and balances and hold our university leaders accountable.

With all this in mind, **I was alarmed by HB 4124's overwhelming emphasis on economic interests alone.** The bill speaks of our state's colleges and universities as "a vital source of economic development and employment opportunities" and as "engines of economic growth" that "should be aligned to meet regional and state economic needs." It calls for HECC to recommend a new institutional framework that would better "fuel regional and statewide economic development and employment opportunities," "support current and emerging regional and state economic development and workforce needs," and "connect students and graduates to employers and employment opportunities."

Colleges and universities are not just training grounds for workers. They are places where students learn to think critically and creatively, encounter diverse histories and cultures, communicate effectively, develop moral sensibilities, and build relationships. In the words of UO's mission statement, public universities ought to educate "the whole person"—not just their capacity to get jobs and contribute to the economy. Moreover, in the words of the "Oregon Compact on Higher Education" drafted by United Academics of the University of Oregon, "institutions of higher education should serve as training grounds in the history, values, aspirations, and challenges of democratic life." Yes, colleges and universities provide students career skills, but they also enable students to grow into well-rounded human beings and well-informed citizens.

Any call for reform of Oregon's higher education system ought to highlight these broader purposes of higher education. I cannot help but interpret HB 4124 as a misguided effort to shift our higher education system away from holistic liberal arts education toward an exclusive emphasis on workforce training. Thus, I urge Oregon legislators to reject--or substantially amend--this bill, and to rethink what kinds of educational reforms are needed. To understand the educational reforms sought by students, faculty, and staff at the University of Oregon—and across the state—I also urge you to learn about and read the ["Oregon Compact on Higher Education."](#)

Thank you,

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