

Higher Education Coordinating Commission
255 Capitol Street NE, Third Floor
Salem, OR 97310

May 11th, 2017

Dear Commission Chair Bryant and members of the Higher Education Coordinating Commission:

Good morning. First and foremost, I want to thank you for allowing me to present my testimony today. My name is Ricardo Lujan-Valerio and I am currently a first-generation senior student at Southern Oregon University. I will be graduating next month with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a focus in Management and a Certificate in Nonprofit Management. My experience at Southern Oregon University has been stupendous. I have experienced higher education in ways that I would have never imagined. As a junior at Southern Oregon University, I served in student government as the Business, Communication, and Environmental Studies Senator. Now, I hold a position in our judicial branch as an Associate Justice. This year, I also had the opportunity to be a part of our university's Tuition Advisory Council with the hopes of participating in a process that would define the future of upcoming students and their accessibility to higher education.

It saddens me to state that my experience with the Tuition Advisory Council was not as expected. There are complaints regarding the process from multiple students within the Tuition Advisory Council, including myself. The first is the process and number of meetings we held. As a full-time student, employee, and appointed student government officer, it was difficult for me to digest the information presented to me in a timely manner. On February 23rd, 2017, I was confirmed as a member of the body. By April 21st, 2017, I received the final tuition recommendation document pending my signature. I do not believe that two months suffices the amount necessary to address a topic so crucial to the financial future of students at Southern Oregon University. Most importantly, I did not feel as though I had much of an advisory position in these conversations.

I found it difficult to give an accurate recommendation and full engagement to the process when an article in a local newspaper published on March 1st, 2017 stated that our university president had already endorsed a 12% tuition increase prior to our recommendation. Not to mention, all the materials (including the pro-forma) presented to the advisory council strongly influenced a 12% increase without truly acknowledging alternative methods to alleviate

tuition spikes, regardless of their realistic possibilities of being implemented. As an advisor, I would have felt more comfortable making this tuition recommendation having all the specific possibilities backed with evidence rather than hypotheticals. I felt compelled to sign the document approving a 12% tuition increase recommendation. I signed the document with the belief that this percentage would re-adjust contingent to the level of funding available from the state, but most importantly, with a promise that administration would present to the student body the available financial relief that the most at-risk students would have due to this drastic decision. This presentation has yet to be thoroughly presented to the student body and their student leaders.

I acknowledge the financial struggles our institution goes through every year. State allocation of funds towards our university, along with our retrenchment history, is one that damages our institution to this day. I understand the level of importance by the administration when presenting their request. Nonetheless, this is no excuse for decision-making bodies to further burden students financially and argue that proper student input was sought. Southern Oregon University will request a 12% tuition increase from this body. This decision will determine whether students will afford next Fall Term's tuition. As an undocumented student, education has been my number one priority. I understand the struggle of not qualifying for in-state tuition or financial aid and having to work full-time to afford higher education on a term-by-term basis. If a 12% tuition spike had happened in prior years at Southern Oregon University, I am not sure that I would be able to celebrate my soon-to-be graduation milestone with you today. If the 12% tuition increase request is found to be warranted by this body, I trust that you will conclude your decision in a way that promotes accessibility to higher education to all students. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ricardo Lujan-Valerio

ASSOU Associate Justice - Member of the Tuition Advisory Council