



Statement of Commitments Regarding Tuition Increases at Public Universities

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As members of the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC), we have brought different lenses to the issue of resident tuition and mandatory fees charged by Oregon public universities. Those lenses reflect our personal experiences, our work and relationships, our own and our community's values, and the way that we have individually analyzed the tradeoff between raising tuition and cutting university budgets. This has not been an easy process, and we have not always agreed. In undergoing this experience together, however, we have gained information and perspective that deepens our unified commitment to the following:

- **Increased State Funding.** The single greatest factor driving tuition levels is state funding for higher education. That relationship gives the Legislature the opportunity to directly impact 2017-18 and 2018-19 tuition levels through a new investment in higher education. In the final weeks of the 2017 session, we urge the Legislature to increase funding for public higher education above current proposals, thereby triggering the automatic reduction of tuition rates at every university that today is planning for greater than a 5% increase.
- **Support for Underrepresented Students.** Expanding access, affordability, and success for underrepresented students – including for students of color, non-traditional students, LGBTQ students, and students with disabilities -- should be at the center of state and institutional budgets. We have observed disconnect between the ways that universities believe they are making this commitment and how some students perceive those commitments. We encourage universities to ensure that their tuition proposals, now and in the future, are detailed, specific, and comprehensive in their approach to preserving and expanding access, affordability, and success for underrepresented students.
- **Student Engagement in Tuition-Setting.** University Boards and administrators are sincere in their desire to engage students in the tuition-setting process, and their submissions to the HECC demonstrated the lengths that they went this year to do so. University students are sincere in their desire to see their university thrive without requiring major tuition increases, and we applaud their advocacy and efforts at productive problem solving. Going forward, university leaders have the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to meaningful and authentic student engagement by including student leaders from the very outset of the tuition-setting process and in planning for outreach to other students. We encourage universities to deepen their partnerships with leaders of student government as well as other student leaders on campus, including representatives of multicultural groups that help bring underrepresented student voices to table.
- **2018-19 Tuition.** Barring some unprecedented change in circumstances, we do not expect that the five universities that sought HECC approval for tuition and fees increases in 2017 will seek HECC approval again in 2018-19. As a result, we expect tuition and fees increases in the second year of the biennium will be less than 5%, and hopefully markedly lower than that threshold.

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- **Continued Efforts at Containing Costs.** While public universities are already making extensive efforts to reduce cost increases, we remain concerned that structural issues will continue to place unsustainable pressure on tuition. We believe there is an opportunity in 2017-18 for the HECC to work with the universities to clearly model for legislators and other decision-makers the impact that cost pressures outside universities' direct control have on budgets and tuition. At the same time, we want to support and accelerate the efforts universities are making to rethink their models to adapt to an environment where state funding may not keep pace with projected cost increases.
- **Improving the Process.** We are committed to ensuring that HECC decision-making processes are fair, transparent, timely, and inclusive. In the future, universities deserve to know from the outset of their own tuition-setting process the criteria and approach that the HECC would take to considering requests for increases greater than 5%. As a Commission, we will be re-examining the role and structure of our subcommittees to ensure that we more clearly incorporate and convey Commissioners' expectations throughout our process. Moreover, this year's process has illustrated the significant challenges that arise when a coordinating commission becomes responsible for decisions about a fundamental matter of university governance. The responsible exercise of our authority will benefit from developing closer working relationships between our Commission and the Boards of Trustees that hold the full range of tools available for the governance of university strategies and budgets.