

916 Glengrove Ave
Central Point, OR, 97502
December 22nd, 2017

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

Dear Members of the Higher Education Coordinating Commission,

I am writing to you to discuss the Innovation and Leadership (INL) Bachelor's Degree completion program currently offered at Southern Oregon University. I am a senior in this program and I am on track to graduate after the completion of summer term, 2018. If it were not for this amazing program it would have been difficult for me to ever return to school and complete my degree. Southern Oregon University saw an opportunity to help working individuals complete their degree and this program is a shining example of how universities can leverage their resources to attract a wider range of people to return to school.

This program was built with the intention of attracting full-time employed individuals that were seeking to advance their career by obtaining their Bachelor's Degree. Classes are held once a week, after regular work hours and is supplemented by online attendance and activities. The classes are also given in an accelerated 5-week curriculum that allows us to attend 8 credits worth of classes every term, all while taking only one class at a time.

I am a 33-year old non-traditional College Student. I completed my Associate's Degree at Lane Community College shortly after I was married in 2007. It has always been a dream of mine to continue my education, but shortly after being married, my wife and I began a family. I felt the obligation to them that many others in that situation do, I needed to provide for them and college would not be logistically possible right away. I moved into a career in the financial industry working for a local Credit Union and have progressed into a Corporate Training role. I do not have the ability to leave my job mid-day and attend classes at the Monday-Friday 8am – 5pm offerings that many universities have. Though many universities offer online-based degree programs, I feel that I learn so much more when I am in a classroom. I knew that it would be important to me to have that classroom experience, if and when I returned to school.

Fast forward to 2015, I discovered the INL program through my employer. Upon a review of the curriculum, I was astounded because the classes looked like they were hand-picked for me. They offer a blend of Business, Communication and Psychology classes which is an ideal mix for someone working in an organization like myself. Add the fact they are built around a one-night-a-week, one-class-at-a-time schedule that allows me to not have to make sacrifices at my job, and still be present with my young family (Wife, 8-year and 4-year old daughters). This is a blessing I never thought possible.

Finally, the classes are built in a cohort learning fashion, where everyone accepted to the program starts in a two-year rotation of classes together. This was not important to me when I sought out the program, but after attending, it has been my favorite part. I have built relationships with so many other people in the same situation as myself, trying to navigate obtaining college degrees while balancing their family and career lives. We have bonded together since beginning and learning from the real-world, practical experience they have all brought to the table has been beyond extraordinary. I expect many relationships formed in this program to last my lifetime.

It is my understanding that SOU will be presenting a new mission and strategic focus at the January 11th HECC meeting. I believe this program is a demonstration of how SOU is transforming pedagogy and offering to enhance the success of many individuals like myself. Bringing education to me, at a time I could attend, with topics that were right for me, was the encouragement I needed to jump back in. Doing so has already begun to open doors in my career, and I expect will have changed my life for the positive in ways I have not yet discovered.

Thank you so much for your time,

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