



January 11, 2018

Neil Bryant, Chair  
Higher Education Coordinating Commission

Ben Cannon, Executive Director  
Higher Education Coordinating Commission

Dear Chair Bryant, Executive Director Cannon,

I am Stephen Scheck, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Western Oregon University. I wish to thank you for scheduling time on the Commission's docket in December for the engaged conversation regarding Willamette Promise and the challenges some students who have participated in this accelerated learning program have encountered.

An update report on what actions have been taken since the December 14<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting will be presented to you by HECC staff later today; I will not duplicate information in that report here, but I do wish to voice my appreciation to the HECC staff for their support and oversight of accelerated learning programming.

I come before you today to respond to several comments and references made at the December 14<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting or documents submitted in the past to the Commission as public commentary about Willamette Promise.

Point # 1: WOU, in its role of producing coursework to service the Willamette Promise, has crafted course learning outcomes fully aligned with both our traditional, on-campus courses as well as national professional pedagogical standards for the subject being taught. Any claims to the contrary are inaccurate.

Point #2: WOU's role of producing and overseeing Willamette Promise courses is compliant with our campus-based practices and is in good standing with the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. The NWCCU has been kept apprised of our involvement in supporting Willamette Promise programming. Concerns voiced by third parties that WOU's assessment-based learning approaches are out of compliance with our accreditation standing are unfounded.

Point #3: WOU recognizes that each institution has the ultimate responsibility to evaluate transfer credit and ascertain academic fit with the receiving institution's academic programming. The WOU faculty associated with Willamette Promise stand behind the academic integrity of the learning outcomes demonstrated by the students, and are confident in the inter-rater reliability that our professional learning communities create.

Point #4: We understand that the Willamette Promise represents a shift from the more traditional input-side quality assurance metrics (such as instructor credentials) to the more authentic measure of actual student performance matched to national disciplinary subject standards. Understandably, some community colleges view WOU's entrance into accelerated learning as a potential threat to their more traditional dual credit offerings. Willamette Promise was created in response to a Department of Education RFP to *expand* the State's ability to provide accelerated learning opportunities to *more*, and more diverse, students; NOT to compete with currently offered programs and opportunities. Early data suggests that this is the case.

WOU remains ready to provide additional information or otherwise assist in the decision making process to ensure that our students are held harmless, and that our programming continues to advance the State's goal of closing the educational attainment gap for underserved students. We argue that all Willamette Promise courses be articulated as if taken in a classroom at WOU, and the student's performance at the receiving institution be tracked if there are local concerns. Only by tracking performance of students in subsequent courses can the true value of the State's investment in accelerated learning be verified; be it accelerated learning through assessment-based programming such as Willamette Promise or the more traditional accelerated learning options offered by other colleges and universities.

On behalf of the WOU faculty and high school teachers involved in Willamette Promise programming, I wish to convey our appreciation to the Commission for its attention to ensuring that all of Oregon's capable students have the opportunity to participate in accelerated learning and to apply successfully earned credits toward college graduation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Scheck". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Stephen Scheck, Ph.D.

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs