

HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING COMMISSION - 2019 BUDGET PRIORITIES

Funding Student Outcomes

While Oregon has moved up in national rankings recently, it still remains among the bottom ten states in both state support per capita for higher education institutions and for state-funded grant aid. This puts Oregon in the unenviable classification of a “High Tuition/Low Aid” state. Many Oregon learners are significantly financially challenged to even attempt higher education, and many that begin cannot afford to complete their desired degree or certification. Underrepresented learners are often hardest hit. Addressing this “affordability gap” remains an ongoing, primary concern of HECC. In addition, Oregon’s community college and public university sectors graduate just 47% and 63% of their students, respectively. Increased state funding for public institutions should be focused on improving these rates.

- Oregon Opportunity Grant - Oregon’s need-based grant has been expanded and more specifically targeted to serve more traditionally underrepresented students, but still serves only a fraction of eligible applicants.
- The enrollment-focused Community College Support Fund has not yet returned to pre-recession levels. New investments should be focused on certificate and degree completion in high-demand, high-need areas (eg CTE and STEM fields).
- The outcomes-focused Public University Support Fund has not yet returned to pre-recession levels.
- Oregon Promise stability and expansion
- Increase research and analysis capacity to quantify results and recommend areas for improvement.

Outreach

Beyond the equity issues that surround higher education access, the data is clear that Oregon is not going to come anywhere near reaching its 40-40-20 benchmark unless we make significant improvements in enrolling and graduating students who have been traditionally underserved. HECC will need to step up our efforts by collaborating across the P-20 continuum and across traditional institutional divides to bring more students into the higher education pipeline and see to it that appropriate critical supports are provided for their success.

- Expand Student Child Care Grant program to serve more student-parents
- Provide ongoing support for the Minority Teaching Scholarship Program and Network, as part of the Educator Advancement Council
- Create a Native Student Tuition Grant/Waiver program
- Close service gaps in the ASPIRE mentoring program by building collaborations among programs providing similar services across the state, identify service gaps, and develop plans to address them.
- Provide outreach materials and programming in multiple languages and across multiple platforms (printed, social media, direct texting, and traditional media).

Student Pathways

Students are accessing higher education in more ways than ever before. They are beginning college while in high school, completing high school in college, transferring between community college, private universities and public universities and back again, and accessing coursework online, on campus, and both in combination. HECC is uniquely situated to provide structure and tools to smooth and facilitate these pathways. Some key projects may include:

- Return and Complete - an initiative to help adult learners return to college to complete the degree journey they began earlier in life and realize the financial benefits of that credential.
- Accelerated college credit reporting
- Educational opportunities for incarcerated persons (GED, Adult high school, Degrees/certificates)
- A common format for electronic high school transcripts (eTranscripts)

Developing Oregon's Workforce

If Oregon is to be "Future Ready," we will need to provide opportunities for working-aged Oregonians to access skilled, family-wage jobs through information and career-track training programs, and for younger Oregonians to gain critical job skills so they are ready to join the workforce. Fortunately, Oregon can magnify the impact of its General Fund support of many of these programs by pairing that investment with appropriate federal funding. Some potential initiatives include:

- Innovation Grants to fund connecting business to talent efforts, apprenticeship programs, and adult credentialing efforts.
- Youth employment program to support youth job-skills development
- Targeting skill-growth opportunities in rural and economically disadvantaged populations and areas.
- Supporting post-secondary education pathways for early childhood educators.
- Career College Collaborative - bringing together business, non-profit sector, schools, and government to share knowledge and create local capacity-building networks focused on work and higher education opportunities across the state.

Campus Capital Investments

The Governor has directed the HECC to establish a long-term plan for capital investment in Oregon's public universities based on shared vision for higher education and analysis of trends across statewide and regional institutions with distinct missions and master plans. The campuses of Oregon's public colleges and universities continue to need to expand, modernize, and otherwise adapt to the changing needs of their students, the economy, and technology. As always, their capital needs will exceed available resources, however public universities will again work with the HECC staff and Commission to prioritize their requests to meet multiple, objective criteria. Due to the unique statutes that restrict their capital project capacity and access to bond funding, we expect only one community college to request a capital project this budget cycle.



Agency Capacity and Infrastructure

The HECC agency in its current form is barely one biennium old and, as we integrate our functional area and take on new responsibilities, it is becoming apparent where we have work-capacity shortages and technological opportunities. A recent audit determined we were understaffed in our procurement and internal audit functions, but similar staffing gaps have appeared across the agency as new programs (such as the Oregon Promise, Oregon Volunteers, and several smaller programs) have been brought into the agency with limited direct staffing support, while the aggregate impact on supporting staff (HR, accounting, budgeting, etc.) has not been addressed.

Likewise, modern technologies exist that could drastically improve efficiency and reduce the need to add staff over time. Some of these will be proposed in the upcoming budget cycle.