
Docket Item:

HECC Strategic Plan 3.0

Background:

One of the HECC's foremost statutory responsibilities is to adopt and implement a strategic plan for achieving the state's postsecondary goals.¹ As a new Commission in early 2014, the HECC adopted its [first Strategic Plan](#), "Pathways to Progress: A Strategy for Steering, Cheering, and Persevering to Achieve Oregon's Higher Education Goals." Nearly two years later, it adopted an updated [2016-2020 Strategic Plan](#) and, in 2017, a [Strategic Framework 2017-2021](#) that concisely summarizes the Commission's updated vision, mission, values, beliefs, and four key areas of strategic action for the Commission.

Given the new challenges and opportunities that have arisen in the three years since the HECC last completed a major strategic planning effort, it is appropriate for the Commission to develop a new Strategic Plan to help guide the future of postsecondary education in Oregon. In particular, the HECC intends for its Strategic Plan 3.0 to contribute to generating a new consensus among legislators, institutions, stakeholders, and the Commission about an ambitious path forward for postsecondary education that expands opportunity and equity for Oregonians through increasing levels of public investment, public accountability, coordination, and responsiveness to student and workforce needs.

The HECC's prior two strategic plans have focused closely on the particular roles, responsibilities, and opportunities for strategic action and influence available to the Commission and its staff. This was appropriate for a new organization that needed to clearly articulate – and thereby help itself and others understand – its unique and limited authorities within Oregon's new system for governing higher education. Today, however, the HECC proposes to develop a Strategic Plan in conjunction with partners that takes a holistic view of Oregon's postsecondary system, including the dynamics it faces from changing demographics, workforce needs, and fiscal conditions, and anticipates the changes that will be required in order to meet state goals for increased access, affordability, attainment, and equity. In describing this imperative for change, the new Plan will remain clear about what tools are available to the HECC as a coordinating commission, versus other actors within the postsecondary landscape including the Legislature, college and university governing boards, students, community partners, and others.

¹ ORS 350.075(d)

Vision:

The HECC's [vision statement](#), updated and adopted in 2016, will represent the Commission's continuing aspirations for a state where our strategic plan has been successfully implemented, our goals have been met, and our learners flourish.

Values, Beliefs, and Principles:

In developing its new Strategic Plan, the HECC will be guided by its bedrock [values](#) and [beliefs](#). Many of these are likely to be unchanged from those adopted by the Commission in 2016, although they will be subject to renewed consideration and potential modification or addition by the 2019-20 Commission. Additionally, the Commission will consider the development and adoption of [principles](#) that it believes should guide the State's approach to planning for postsecondary education. Those could, for example, express the Commission's view of its own role in influencing change within postsecondary education, versus the role(s) played by other entities. Alternately, principles could reflect the Commission's view of the types of approaches that will be necessary in order for postsecondary education to successfully serve more Oregon students.

Commissioners may find former Texas Governor John Connally's 1965 address to the inaugural meeting of the Coordinating Board for the Texas College and University System (attached) surprisingly useful for reflecting on the HECC's values, beliefs, and principles.

Process:

The HECC aims to substantially complete its new Strategic Plan by February, 2020 in order to inform the Commission, partners, and legislators in the development of budget and policy recommendations prior to the 2021 legislative session.

To meet this ambitious timeline, the HECC will dedicate significant time at its remaining 2019 and early 2020 Commission meetings to review outlines and drafts, hear from the public and from partners, and provide guidance to staff. In addition, HECC staff will initiate surveys, one-on-one and small group meetings to engage a wide range of partners and stakeholders including students, faculty, staff, community leaders, employers, accreditors, institutional leaders, partner boards/agencies, and legislators. Finally, HECC staff will identify a small group of advisors, including legislators, who will provide sustained feedback on the plan as it develops.

Context and Big Questions:

Strategic Plan 3.0 will reflect the particular context and circumstances within which Oregon postsecondary education finds itself in 2019-20. This includes, in part, the following:

- While the 2019 Legislature made new investments in community colleges, public universities, and financial aid, postsecondary education appeared to be a low priority for many legislators, with some expressing concerns about its accountability, value, and relevance.
- While the 40-40-20 goal and its corresponding adult education goal remain Oregon’s official legal targets for postsecondary attainment, it is not clear that Oregonians – or their elected representatives – are deeply aware and committed to those targets, or the underlying philosophy of state progress (economic, civic, social, etc.) they represent.
- While the 2011-14 legislative shake-up of postsecondary education substantially changed the governance of public higher education in Oregon, it did not directly tackle issues of affordability, quality, equity, and more.
- There appear to be significant information gaps and eroded trust between the public, including their elected representatives, and public institutions of higher education. Some public officials wonder why despite three biennia of double-digit percentage increases to state investment in colleges and universities, many institutions are continuing to raise tuition, cut budgets, and draw down reserves. Institutional leaders express concern that public officials do not clearly or accurately understand the fiscal pressures they face and seem reluctant to make funding higher education a greater priority.
- Postsecondary education in Oregon, like throughout the country, is challenged by several profound trends: a flat-to-declining expected pipeline of graduating high school seniors that is already producing significant competition for enrollment, the changing nature of work, and the rise of new models for training and credentialing adults for the workforce.
- By definition, substantially increasing Oregon’s rates of postsecondary educational attainment will require serving populations that today face some of the largest barriers to postsecondary access and success, including low-income students, rural students, and students of color. Arguably, our system of postsecondary education and training will require a much more profound transformation than seems already to be occurring in order to serve those disadvantaged populations.

Strategic Plan 3.0 should address some or all of the following questions that have been increasingly raised in connection with the context described above:

1. How do the state’s statutory goals for postsecondary education remain appropriate today?
2. What additional forms of transparency and accountability are necessary to provide the public and lawmakers confidence about the return on public investment in postsecondary education?
3. What additional “system-like” properties does Oregon’s decentralized postsecondary education require in order to improve access, quality, and effectiveness – or are the existing arrangements (including the role played by the HECC and organizations such as the Oregon Council of Presidents and Oregon Community College Association) sufficient?
4. Relatedly, in the context of limited resources and increased competition for enrollment, should the State/HECC play a more assertive role in defining geographic and programmatic niches for its

postsecondary institutions, or should it continue to exert a light touch and, to a large extent, let the market decide? To what extent are state financing mechanisms sufficient for “leveling the playing field” amongst institutions that have incentives to compete for enrollment?

5. Given public and legislative skepticism about the value of postsecondary education in the face of increasing costs and changing workforce needs, what additional role, if any, should the State/HECC play in assuring the quality of postsecondary credentials?
6. What approach to budgets and funding should the Legislature and HECC take in 2021 and beyond in order to improve access, equity, affordability, and outcomes?
7. What forms of innovation in postsecondary access, financing, and delivery will Oregon require in order to meet its goals? At what pace? What strategies should be employed to promote those innovations?
8. What are the State of Oregon’s goals and agenda for the development of new and applied knowledge through research, particularly given the associated benefits for the State’s economy? Whose responsibility is this agenda? How will it be developed, maintained, and implemented?

Staff Recommendation

For discussion only.