

DRAFT Summary Points
Southern Oregon University Evaluation
February 2022

ORS 352.061 requires the HECC to conduct annual evaluations of public universities in Oregon according to specific statutory criteria. Overall, the HECC's approach is to assess the university's contributions to statewide goals for higher education. We do not purport to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the university against its own mission. A summary of key findings follows:

1. **Accreditation:** SOU is accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). In February 2017, NWCCU reaffirmed SOU for accreditation following its Year 7 Self-Evaluation. Five recommendations resulted from the NWCCU evaluation, and SOU has responded and fulfilled all five NWCCU continuous improvement reporting requirements between 2018 and 2021. In July 2021, the NWCCU accepted SOU's fall 2019 Mid-Cycle Evaluation Report and the spring 2021 Ad Hoc Report. The spring 2021 Ad Hoc Report detailed the wide-ranging impacts of SOU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the switch from in-person to remote learning, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted nearly every aspect of the institution. SOU's next NWCCU evaluation will be at Year 6 report that focuses on Standard 2-Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review. That report is due in the fall of 2022. This will be followed by the Year 7 evaluation of institutional effectiveness in 2023.
1. **Economic impact:** A 2019 Economic Impact Statement conducted by ECONorthwest estimates the economic impact of SOU in 2017-18 was \$282 million, up 19 percent since a similar study was conducted in 2013-14. There has not been any additional economic impact analysis conducted since this ECONorthwest analysis.
3. **Student access and student success:** SOU's Fall 2021 enrollment of 5,056 students reflected a sharp decline (15.3 percent) since the HECC's last evaluation in 2019, although the entirety of this drop occurred in the first year and enrollment grew very slightly from 2020 to 2021. Total headcount enrollment has fallen 22.0 percent over the last 10 years. The majority of SOU students are Oregon residents (68.8 percent) and the majority attend full-time (57.7 percent). SOU's enrollment of underrepresented students has decreased over the last four years, but still represents an increase of 21.7 percent over the last decade. The number of degrees SOU awards annually has increased by 2.6 percent since its 2019 evaluation. The most recent six-year graduation rate is xx.x percent for Pell Grant recipients, 51.0 percent for underrepresented minority students, and 52.9 percent for all students.
4. **Affordability:** Partly as a result of state funding cuts, resident (in-state) undergraduate tuition and fees at SOU have increased 64.3 percent in the last 10 years, including increases of 5.5 percent and 2.3 percent for 2020-21 and 2021-22, respectively. Total undergraduate, resident tuition and fees for 2021-22 is \$11,166. Resident graduate students have faced similar increases. The total cost of attendance for students includes significant expenses associated with housing, food, transportation, and textbooks. Southern Oregon University estimates the average student budget for living expenses annually is \$18,465 for 2021-22. The average debt among SOU graduates is \$21,000, compared to a statewide average of \$21,402, and 39 percent of SOU students had federally supported loans.
5. **Academic Quality and Research:** SOU maintains good standing with its regional accreditor. In 2019-20, SOU reported total research expenditures of approximately \$553,310, an increase from the previous year. For 2020-21, SOU reported total research expenditures of approximately \$621,673.
6. **Collaboration:** SOU continues to maintain strong partnerships across institutions. In 2019-2020, SOU hosted a Title IX training at the Ashland campus for the Southern Oregon Higher Education Consortium (SOHEC) faculty and staff. In July 2020, leaders from SOU and Rogue Community College (RCC) partnered with State Rep. Pam Marsh, K-12 superintendents, and leaders in the business community and the Rogue Workforce Partnership to form the Southern Oregon Education Leadership Council (SOELC) with the goal of establishing an integrated, student-centered system of education that supports each student from kindergarten through adulthood, including the appropriate higher education and career pathways. The primary focus of the group's work is developing flexible dual enrollment and equitable transfer policies, and accessibility to education and career pathways. Lastly, SOU's ongoing collaborations with RCC and Klamath Community College (KCC) are well documented in the full evaluation report.
7. **Shared administrative services:** SOU participates in all of the appropriate services offered by the University Shared Services Enterprise (USSE).

8. **Financial Condition Analysis:** Overall, although SOU still faces a challenging financial future, it appears that the institution is taking steps to improve. Given declining enrollment and increasing expenses, the need remains clear to continue to reengineer the institution to identify opportunities while preserving academic quality. SOU leadership has made strides in the past couple years demonstrating they understand the financial position they are in, and are working to turn it around.
9. **Board of Trustees:** In 2021, the SOU Board of Trustees met its legal responsibilities for providing public notice, accessibility, and records. In 2021 the Board exercised many of the powers reserved for it under law, including presidential oversight, budget adoption, tuition adoption, debt issuance, and program approval (for HECC consideration). Lastly, the SOU Board of Trustees selected Richard Bailey, Jr., Ph.D. to serve as its new president. Dr. Bailey joined SOU in January 2022.