



Office of the President

November 10, 2020

Ben Cannon
Executive Director
Higher Education Coordinating Commission
3225 25th Street SE
Salem, OR 97302

Dear Ben,

My primary objection to the current proposal is the significant change in funding that supports the unique mission of Eastern Oregon University. For decades, the State of Oregon has designated enhanced investment in EOU's mission of providing access to higher education for rural students. Shifting mission critical funding without adequate conversation about the history of this mission, the students served by this funding, and how it impacts statewide priorities, is not prudent.

This proposal represents a major policy shift that has been in place for many decades for EOU to support rural access to higher education for students in the eastern part of Oregon. I am eager to engage in conversation about how we all may serve students better, and if part of that is reevaluating the value of targeted investment in rural access, we should indeed have that conversation. But to make a change of this magnitude and with this significant impact to students in our region today, which is among the fastest growing in diversity in the state, is short-sighted and sends a clear message to the students and people in Eastern Oregon that their education is not important.

In addition to the policy concerns, there are technical concerns that also have serious implications to EOU and other universities. We have shared the outlined concerns below with the HECC:

- **Adverse Impact on Stability:** Significant changes are being proposed at a time of continued uncertainty in our economy and without adequate information or modeling on other potential policy and budget changes that could occur in the next legislative session.
- **Other Program Add-backs:** How will that funding occur? We understand there are commitments to fund some programs that currently are not included in the proposed model. To date, we have not seen any codification of how these programs will be funded, nor a model that shows the overall impact of this to the other universities.

- Implementation Timeline: There is no definitive language around how the model changes will be phased in. For some universities, including EOU, the proposed changes have a significant adverse impact and it's unclear when and how the redistribution would occur.
- Mission Differential: In a downside funding scenario, changes in the MD portion to the SSCM have a disproportionate impact on the technical and regional universities. In an upside scenario, the MD only grows at “lessor of inflation or the overall growth in the SSCM.” For the TRU campuses that rely on the MD funding significantly, they are negatively impacted in a downside scenario, and there is then no mechanism for those campuses to catch up in funding in an upside scenario.

EOU has served students for over 90 years and has been designated by the legislature as Oregon’s Rural University, an identity that embodies everything we do. In the recent past, EOU experienced a number of financial challenges but after five years of prudent management and making difficult choices, EOU has made significant progress in maintaining financial stability while better serving our region and students. EOU has grown access and essentially eliminated the attainment gap for our culturally and ethnically diverse population. We have focused on improving access to both traditional and adult students who seek access to education and the opportunities that a university education at EOU provides. In fact, 62 percent of our students are rural and nearly 30 percent are culturally and ethnically diverse—underserved populations that are a priority for the state.

As we have stated throughout this process, EOU remains committed to a principles-based approach to these discussions. Changes to a funding model that mark a shift in policy priority for the state and impact students directly, and our ability to serve them, deserves a more deliberate and public discussion.

Sincerely,



Thomas A. Insko
President

cc: David Rives, Chair
cc: Duncan Wyse, Chair, Funding and Achievement Committee