



Testimony on Senate Bill 1521
Senate Education Committee
February 4, 2020

Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and members of the Committee. My name is Kyle Thomas and I am the Director of Legislative and Policy Affairs for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on Senate Bill 1521. This bill deals with four distinct topics and this testimony will address each topic individually.

Transfer of Credit between Community Colleges and Public Universities (Sec. 1-4)

These sections of the bill reintroduce and modify SB 730-A from 2019, which was identical to a bill introduced by HECC in the House the same year. These provisions both perform some necessary clean up and continue to incrementally modify the 2017 transfer legislation to benefit students.

HECC has maintained that in order for transfer pathways to provide the greatest benefit to students, they need to be as simple as possible, provide certainty to students, and clearly communicate to not just students, but parents, advisors, and counselors. This language takes a step toward meeting these goals.

This bill addresses the issue of institutional agreement on the makeup of transfer pathways by insisting that paths contain as little variance between institutions as possible, and that when it is in the benefit of students, those requests come from institutional academic leadership, and are justified and delivered to the Oregon Transfer and Articulation Committee to inform future transfer work. It requires HECC to report these requests to the legislature. It also requires HECC to report disaggregated information on student performance under the developing transfer system. Together, these reporting requirements will provide information that you may find useful in guiding further work in credit transfer. HECC requires one Research Analyst 4 position to support this work.

Importantly, the bill does not exclude the possibility that variance may exist for the benefit of students. For example, institutions offering a quantitatively-focused business degree may insist on calculus as a prerequisite, and institutions offering a management focused business degree view statistics as a more critical skill. Rather than force all business students to take calculus, the better solution may be to split the path at the mathematics requirement.

Lastly, these sections require HECC to begin the work necessary to implement systems to communicate these pathways to students, parents, counselors, advisors and others, and potentially link all institutions together to ensure information on course maps and pathways for

all students, regardless of major or starting institution of choice, are accurate and reliable. When dealing with hundreds of courses from 17 colleges and 7 public universities, the number of course combinations is enormous, and ensuring students are receiving correct information on the front end, and institutions are crediting students in the best possible way on the backend, is critical to the success of the transfer work. This is in part a technological challenge, and in part requires a technological solution. The bill requires HECC to determine how to solve this challenge, and report back to the legislature in advance of the 2021 legislative session. In order to meet this requirement, HECC proposes contracting the services of a firm to work with the agency and institutions to design a potential solution.

Accelerated Learning Credit (Sec. 5-8)

Another principle the Commission has maintained is that once the core and major transfer maps have been developed they can and should guide accelerated credit offerings and offer students in the core and major transfer map courses certainty that when they have earned college credit through an approved accelerated learning program in high school, that credit will count towards their certificate or degree when they transfer that credit to their institution of choice. Conversely, the transfer pathways should help guide the decisions school districts make regarding their accelerated credit offerings, to maximize the benefit to students.

HECC is close to being able to provide this assurance for several courses, due in no small part to the collaborative inter-institutional work that is taking place due to the transfer law. The language in these sections structures this work and provides deadlines and reporting requirements to ensure this work continues.

Awarding Aid to Dependents of Deceased or Disabled Public Safety Officers (Sec. 9)

In 2018, legislators made adjustments to the Deceased or Disabled Public Safety Officers (DDPSO) program operated by HECC. The purpose of this program is to provide grant funding for in-state education costs incurred by individuals who are dependents of those who, in the line of duty, have been severely injured or killed. Among other adjustments, the legislature eliminated a needs-test and provided a dedicated funding stream by directing 10 percent of the proceeds from the state civil asset forfeiture account to the HECC.

This funding stream is not sufficient to cover the cost of awards. Historically, HECC used Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG) funds to cover these awards. However, we determined after a review of the relevant legislative history that we conducted at the time the original bill was passed, HECC no longer has sufficient authority to award OOG funds. This bill allows HECC to keep awarding funds to qualified students with OOG dollars only after we expend all available civil asset forfeiture funds. While this corrects this issue in the short term, the legislature may wish to examine whether additional changes need to be made to ensure sufficient funds exist to award DDPSO students.

Degree Granting Authority at Regional Public Universities (Sec. 10-11)

HECC Executive Director Ben Cannon previously testified during the interim (11/18/2019) regarding these provisions. If these sections were to become law, it would still be the responsibility of institutions to receive approval from HECC prior to operating a professional doctoral degree program.

Historically, we have not conducted an independent analysis to confirm institutional assertions regarding program demand, academic necessity, or financial feasibility. We assume the

institutional boards are well positioned to make these determinations. However, we do very seriously consider the question of program duplication or competition, particularly if a proposed program is objected to by another institution. We also do consider whether the approved program aligns with the mission of the institution as apparent in their mission statement as approved by the institutional board and the HECC.

Today, it is apparent to HECC that these mission statements are too aspirational and general for HECC to make significant determinations about whether a program is within an institutions mission. This point is emphasized by the recent long-term strategic capital plan report we submitted to the legislature at the end of last year. Mission should drive program offerings which should drive capital needs.

If this language, which HECC has worked on in conjunction with the Committee and the institutions, is adopted, HECC will consider individual programs under the current approval process. At the same time, this legislation, the capital report, and our program approval work generally, highlight the need to consider the design of institutional mission statements and how they are used by institutions, the HECC, and the legislature to make significant decisions regarding institutional direction and investment.

Thank you for your time today.