



STRATEGIC ROADMAP

Oregon Postsecondary Education and Workforce Training

August, 2021



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BACKGROUND AND FINDINGS (Fall 2019 – Fall 2020)

In August 2019, the HECC launched the development of a new strategic plan for meeting the State’s postsecondary goals, consistent with its responsibilities under ORS 350.075 (d). The Commission expressed that this plan should help generate a new consensus among legislators, institutions, stakeholders, and the Commission about an ambitious path forward for postsecondary education that expands opportunity, equity, and success for Oregonians through increasing levels of public investment, public accountability, coordination, and responsiveness to student and workforce needs.

The Commission determined that a new Strategic Plan should be developed in conjunction with partners, take a holistic view of Oregon’s postsecondary system, be grounded in the [Oregon Equity Lens](#), and anticipate the changes that will be required in order to meet state goals for increased access, affordability, attainment, and equity. It indicated that the completed Plan should not be regarded as a “*HECC Strategic Plan*”, but rather as a roadmap for postsecondary education and training in Oregon generally, with implications not only for the HECC but also for its many partners including the Legislature, Governor, public and private colleges and universities, other education and training partners, as well as faculty, students, and staff.

Between October 2019 and March 2020, HECC and its consulting partner Coraggio Group conducted large-scale public and stakeholder outreach and published key findings in an [Insights Report](#).

Key Findings from Insights Report:

Oregonians do not have positive perceptions of higher education, with concerns ranging from its perceived inefficiency to concerns about declining return on individual and state investment. As a result, Oregon’s education leaders need to forge a compelling “rallying cry” that establishes clarity, focus, and purpose for postsecondary education.

Many stakeholders perceive competition and duplication among higher education institutions, and are confused about who is leading the system’s education and training vision for the future. They seek more cooperation, collaboration, and alignment.

As postsecondary education in Oregon has shifted from a state-funded model to a primarily student-funded model, affordability has diminished. Oregon should simultaneously address both the rising costs of higher education and the insufficient level of public investment.

To meet the needs of Oregon’s increasingly diverse population, higher education must focus resources, including wrap-around services and other supports, on traditionally underserved groups.

Different parts of the state have different needs based on their cultural, geographic, and industry-related uniqueness. While a strategic plan should look holistically, it must contain enough flexibility to respond to unique needs, trends, and opportunities at the regional level with tailored solutions.

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With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the HECC began to reassess the Strategic Roadmap to take into account the pandemic's profound economic and educational disruptions and the country's simultaneous reckoning with racial injustice. The Commission's [COVID-19 issue brief](#) noted the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) Oregonians, perpetuating racial/ethnic educational equity gaps, severe enrollment declines, and that the majority of pandemic-related unemployment claims were filed by those with a high school diploma or less. It concluded:

“The pandemic has exposed new weaknesses and exacerbated weaknesses in Oregon’s higher education and workforce systems, from the college affordability crisis, to the deep disparities in access and student success for historically underserved populations, to the longstanding funding challenges institutions and programs face. At a time when postsecondary education is more important than ever to help Oregonians recover from the recession, Oregon is losing out on the talents of many students who have chosen not to or are unable to enroll this fall. In addition, unprecedented fiscal uncertainty facing higher education institutions limits their ability to be resilient and to respond flexibly to learner needs. Multiple complementary strategies are necessary to abate the most harmful impacts of the pandemic and to position Oregon for a strong recovery.”

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VISION

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission envisions a future in which all Oregonians—and especially those whom our systems have underserved and marginalized—benefit from the transformational power of high-quality postsecondary education and training. It is a future where innovative public and private colleges, universities, and training providers help Oregonians to reach their highest potentials, build trajectories to family-wage careers, foster a more just society, and break patterns of intergenerational poverty. It is a future where postsecondary education fuels a resilient economy by anticipating workforce needs and by fostering innovation, research, and knowledge. In the future we envision, all Oregonians enjoy well-lived lives thanks to the myriad benefits of postsecondary education and training: higher earnings, lower unemployment rates, self-sufficiency, civic involvement, better health, and more. Our communities thrive as a result.

ROADMAP PREAMBLE

To achieve our ambitious vision for postsecondary education will require no less than to ensure that every Oregonian who enters a college, university, or training program feels like they belong and receives the support they need to achieve their goals.

This strategic roadmap reflects the Commission’s perspective that postsecondary education in Oregon and nationally must undergo fundamental transformation to heal a society riven by wealth and ideology gaps that higher education has helped to create. To equitably serve all learners and prepare them for lifelong success, Oregonians must upend centuries of tradition that equate excellence with exclusion. We must replace our habit of asking, “Are students ready for college?” with a different question: “Are colleges ready for students?” We must insist that those whom our systems have collectively failed to serve well – including emerging bilingual Oregonians, members of Indigenous communities, immigrants, and others from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds – represent the State’s greatest potential and deserve its focus. We must recognize that the way prestige is often defined and measured in postsecondary education is fraught with systemic barriers for underserved populations. Instead, we should reward schools based on how well they foster the talents and contributions of underserved individuals and communities. We should channel institutional competition towards cooperation. We should celebrate the progress that Oregon has made in providing equitable access to postsecondary education, while recognizing that for all students to succeed requires additional transformation. Finally, to promote new discoveries, better problem-solving, and more inclusive communities, we must embrace alternative traditions of learning and knowing, while also sharpening longstanding methods of research and scholarship.

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ROADMAP FOR ACTION



1. Transform and innovate to serve students and learners best:

Support education and training institutions in continuing to transform, expand, and redesign their outreach and delivery models to engage today's learners.

- Support outreach and flexibility of programming to reach communities of color; adults, parents, and other non-traditional students; low-income populations; and other marginalized communities.
- Ensure student support services are available widely, including remotely when online education is the primary delivery channel.
- Promote strategies, centers, curricula, and programs that foster inclusive environments and communities of belonging for every student.
- Support educational innovations that promote resiliency in employment.
- Invest in the infrastructure, educational technology, and faculty training necessary that makes online education a quality option for students of all backgrounds to choose from— including those in the remote and rural areas of our state.
- Improve access to college courses, especially for remote and rural students and others attending small institutions.
- Expand the role of credit for prior learning and competency-based education in supporting learner pathways.
- Streamline the pathway from high school to postsecondary education by reducing barriers associated with admissions and financial aid.
- Equitably increase opportunities for high school students to earn college credit through high quality, engaging dual credit and other accelerated learning partnerships.
- Ensure that Oregon students have comprehensive and easily sharable records of their learning.



2. Center higher education and workforce training capacity on current and future state needs:

Focus postsecondary education and training resources to serve Oregonians where they are and who they are, with a priority on communities and populations that have been historically underserved.

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- Align postsecondary education opportunities statewide to enrollment trends and the needs of Oregon’s diverse population.
 - Lead with racial justice and equity in making policy/funding choices.
 - Coordinate with K-12 partners to ensure that college and CTE opportunities for high school students are delivered equitably and efficiently, and are aligned with postsecondary and career pathways.
 - Expand education and training to meet Oregon’s highest workforce needs, including for bilingual educators and educators of color, as well as other in-demand fields.
 - Encourage partnership between higher education institutions and communities—including through workforce partners, families, businesses, and community-based organizations—to better connect Oregon’s diverse populations with postsecondary education and workforce opportunities.
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3. Ensure that postsecondary learners can afford to meet their basic needs:

Improve college affordability for Oregonians and ensure that fewer students struggle with homelessness, housing insecurity, and food insecurity.

- Increase state financial aid and drive those resources to our highest-need students.
 - Redesign and increase the flexibility of financial aid to better serve non-traditional students.
 - Improve financial aid outreach to non-traditional and underrepresented students and prospective students.
 - Leverage federal investment and/or flexibility to improve affordability for Oregonians.
 - Encourage innovative institutional strategies to keep college accessible and affordable for those struggling most with college costs, including mitigation of tuition increases, institutional aid for high-need students, outreach to underserved populations about aid programs, affordable quality housing options, and more.
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4. Create and support a continuum of pathways from education and training to career:

Ensure that all learners have access to a full range of education and training options beyond high school, including apprenticeships, career certificates, and college degrees.

- Invest state resources to support learners with work-based learning, apprenticeships, career-connected learning, and high-value, short-term certificate programs.

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- Support collaboration between educators, training organizations, and employers to create bridges from school to work, including for reskilling and upskilling.
 - Improve access to postsecondary education and training for Oregonians in correctional institutions, preparing them to successfully re-enter their communities.
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5. Increase public investment to meet Oregon's postsecondary goals:

Through adequate and sustained levels of public investments, minimize tuition increases and build programs and services to equitably serve learners.

- Build a common understanding among legislators, legislative and gubernatorial staff, and stakeholders about how to project the impacts of varying levels of public investment in postsecondary education.
- Broaden understanding of the significant return on investment in higher education and training for individuals and the state at large.
- Advocate for levels of public investment that improve outcomes, close equity gaps, and increase the quality of postsecondary education

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THE ROLE OF THE HECC

Since launching this process in 2019, the Commission has envisioned that the Strategic Roadmap should constitute a set of activities for Oregon postsecondary education and training to collectively undertake. The Commission may play a leadership role in some of these activities and a facilitator role in others.

To support the Commission and its staff in clarifying HECC's specific role and responsibility in the work that is to come, HECC staff recommends that the Commission recommit itself to the **four areas of strategic action** that it adopted in its 2017-21 Strategic Framework; namely:

- **REPORTING** to steer progress
- **FUNDING** for success;
- streamlining learner **PATHWAYS**; and
- expanding opportunity through **OUTREACH**.

Staff recommends that these remain the primary avenues through which the HECC will conduct its work.

Action in these areas should be designed to reach HECC goals for **STUDENT SUCCESS, EQUITY, AFFORDABILITY,** and **ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY IMPACT**, as measured by the HECC's KPMs and other measures.

NEXT STEPS (August-December, 2021):

The Commission and its staff will work with partners and the public to further identify specific actions within each category, and determine which entities are responsible for execution as leaders, as facilitators, or as other participants.