

## PUBLIC POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IN OREGON: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In 2013, the League of Women Voters of Oregon voted to update their position on Postsecondary Education in Oregon. This study provides information on the current organization of education in Oregon.

Today, three-quarters of the fastest-growing occupations require education and training beyond a high school diploma. Yet nearly half the students who begin college in this country don't finish within six years. And tuition continues to rise, putting college out of reach for the very families that need it most to join the middle class.<sup>1</sup>

Today Oregon has seven public universities and two centers and affiliates. These institutions include Eastern Oregon University, Oregon Institute of Technology, Oregon State University, Portland State University, Southern Oregon University, University of Oregon, and Western Oregon University. The centers and affiliates are Southwest Oregon University in Coos Bay and Oregon Health and Science University. In addition, Oregon has 17 separate community college districts with independent governing boards and with campuses throughout the state. The state also has many private universities and over 208 private career schools.

### RECENT CHANGES IN ORGANIZATION OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IN OREGON

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Since 2011, in recognition of the need for more advanced education for future employment and community well-being, the Oregon legislature has set educational goals and reorganized the higher education landscape. In 2011, the 40-40-20 goal (SB 252) called for a population in 2025 of which 40% of Oregonians achieve a bachelor's degree or higher, 40% achieve an associate's degree, technical degree or certificate, and the remaining 20% have a high school diploma. Many see the goal as aspirational. Others emphasize that that the goal drives the push to improve access to higher education and provide support for successful completion.

SB 242 established the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC), consisting of 14 volunteer members appointed by the Governor. The commission appoints an executive officer. Currently HECC is an independent education unit answering directly to the governor and legislature, coordinating with other state education units. Legislative action transferred administrative authority of the Oregon Student Access Committee to the Office of Student Access and Completion under HECC, and moved authority over community colleges (Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Development) from the Department of Education to HECC.

In 2013, (ORS 352) the Legislature authorized independent boards for the University of Oregon and Portland State University. By 2015 all the universities had independent boards

nominated by the Governor and approved by the Senate. The Oregon University System, Office of Chancellor, and the Board of Higher Education were abolished, and their responsibilities were divided by the Legislature between the independent boards and HECC. The new boards were given the power to manage the affairs of the University, such as choosing a president, fund raising, budgeting, and managing tuition and fees. The Boards must work with HECC, including submitting mission statements, annual evaluations, and budget requests. Substantial academic changes must be reviewed by HECC. The individual budget requests are submitted to HECC, which, in turn, compiles a combined budget request. This is then sent to the Governor to be considered as part of the Governor's budget for recommendation to the Legislature.

HECC duties touch on all aspects of higher education, including public and private universities, colleges, career schools, community colleges, and student financial aid.

### THE EQUITY LENS AND THE 40-40-20 GOAL

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The disparity of student opportunity in higher education is a major focus in discussions of public postsecondary education in Oregon. Oregon's *Equity Lens* was established to focus on these issues at all levels of education, recognizing the achievement gap between populations of communities of color, immigrants, migrants, and low income rural students, when compared to the majority population. All public higher education institutions are being asked to address these issues in their programs and supply support to allow these underrepresented groups to progress.

To meet the 40-40-20 goal, HECC is working with the universities, community colleges, and career schools to design educational programs. To meet the goal and honor the Equity Lens, the state, through HECC, the Legislature, and postsecondary institutions, is developing programs both to encourage pursuit of postsecondary education and to improve student outcomes.

A variety of programs to speed student progress and achieve better outcomes are in the early stages of implementation. These including Accelerated Learning programs beginning in high school, dual credit programs that allow the transfer of credits between institutions, credit for prior learning (allowing credit for appropriate experience and other training), Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs, and better transitions between community colleges and universities.

### DECREASED FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND ITS IMPACT ON TUITION

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One major challenge for the achieving the 40-40-20 goal is the cost of higher education. State support for higher education has decreased significantly. In the 1980s, state support accounted for approximately 15% of general fund, but had dropped to about 5% by 2014. Institutions have made up for this loss of state funding through increases in tuition, which now provides approximately 60%. Although the state has increased higher education funding in recent years, state support still falls well below past levels.

Increased tuition rates provide an even greater challenge to meeting the goals of the Equity Lens. The Office of Student Access and Completion (OSAC) under HECC administers numerous grants, scholarships, mentoring, and financial outreach programs for students. Funding support for low-income students is provided on a federal level through Federal Student Aid and the Pell Grant program. Oregon has a number of programs that build on the federal programs, including the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG), the largest state grant program, which has operated in various forms since 1972, and currently is funded through the general fund. This grant can be used in any Oregon higher education institution, public or private.

In the 2016-17 academic year, high school students attending a community college within six months of graduation are eligible for a new program, Oregon Promise. This “last dollar” award is currently serving 6000 students. Students must first accept all federal and state (OOG) funding. The 2015 Legislative budget provided \$10 million for this program. Additional funding will be required to extend the program for the future.

Individual universities also have developed programs to support students, such as the PathwayOregon program at the University of Oregon, Western Tuition Promise at Western Oregon University, Bridge to Success at Oregon State University, and a new “Four Year Free Program” at Portland State University.

## OUTCOMES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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HECC is responsible for measuring the effectiveness of state funding for public higher education institutions. Under ORS 251, HECC is given direct responsibility for determining the distribution of funding from the Legislature to community colleges, public universities, and student access programs. Prior to 2015-16, funding for the seven universities relied heavily on enrollment (70%). In 2014, HECC initiated a new approach, the Student Success and Completion Model (SSCM). The model has three major components: Mission Differentiation Funding, supporting regional, research and public service mission; Activity Based Funding, investing in credit hour enrollment of Oregon resident students; and Completion Funding, focusing on program completion for Oregon residents with emphasis on underrepresented populations. Community college funding continues under the Resource Allocation model. The complex nature of community college roles has made development of a SSCM model for the community colleges much more difficult.

A number of high-profile activities, including STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) programs, online education, research, and athletic programs, are among the complex aspects that HECC will continue to revise and coordinate.

In addition, HECC, in its Strategic Plan: 2016-2020, continues to monitor progress toward the 40-40-20 goal and plans to present modifications to the Legislature that better reflect needs not originally covered by the original goal. For example, HECC plans to propose a modification of the goal for Oregon’s adult population. Goals for research and graduate level education may also be addressed.

## IMPLICATION AND CONCERNS FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

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Funding is a major issue. With the state providing a lower level of funding, institutions must seek alternate sources of revenue. One major source is increased tuition. Also, institutions are recruiting out of state students to take advantage of higher tuitions for non-residents. Funding needs for faculty and facilities may redirect university educational priorities.

College preparedness is also a concern. Numerous programs have been developed to offer students opportunities to gain college credits in high school. However, postsecondary institutions have found that many students are inadequately prepared for college, particularly in math and written work. The need for remedial courses leads to greater expense and time to completion. Often, this leads to a student dropping out of college. Educators see a need for a support network of mentors and advisors to identify problems for students before they enter or early in their college experience and help them to progress.

The Internet is impacting the academic and social structure of colleges. Students' expectations and communications are changing with the increased access. The technology age will change the classroom both physically and conceptually, with more online course and degree offerings. Institutions are also facing campus security challenges that may require different levels of staffing and reduce campus flexibility.

Oregon is facing the challenge of making our higher education institutions the best possible at reasonable cost and with maximum diversity. The level of state support will reflect the commitment of Oregonians to move forward towards goals of a better-educated population.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education, College Affordability and Completion: Ensuring a Pathway to Opportunity, <http://www.ed.gov/college> accessed 9/19/16