



Testimony to the Oregon Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education,  
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Welcome to Southern Oregon University! It's ironic that we are sitting in a facility named after President Elmo Stevenson, who was hired to close Southern Oregon University (then Oregon State College) if he could not boost enrollments. After arriving at SOU he believed this to be a very special-unique place, and instead of moving forward with a closure he got out and spoke to all who would listen---by touring Oregon. His mission shifted to educating Oregonians about the exceptional SOU. It is not being purposed that SOU be closed; however, one cannot project what the final outcomes will be for this institution, along with other Oregon University Systems campuses, if we have to make the 30% budget cuts for 2009-2011 biennium. Will anyone recognize us in the aftermath of such devastation?

The fabric of education is once again being separated into Head Start, K-12, community colleges, and universities. If we are ever to reach the vision for 2025, of 40-40-20, which translates into 40 percent of Oregon adults with a college degree or higher; 40 percent of Oregon adults with an Associate degree, professional certificate or equivalent; and the remaining 20 percent of Oregon adults with at least a high school diploma or equivalent how can we continue to fragment the educational continuum? If this is the dream, how do we make it a reality with our current economic crisis and budget constraints?

It takes years to build universities, but it does not take nearly as long to destroy them! Cuts have been noted in various shapes and forms to include, but not limited to: layoffs, furloughs days and salary recovery of 4.6%, elimination of programs, limited course offerings, increased class sizes - all of this is occurring as our students are being forced to pay more in tuition and fees!

Many are leaving the institution owing so much in student loans that upon departure from the university the monthly payment looks more like a mortgage ...only this is a 10 year loan that does not provide shelter on cold nights!

One cannot talk about SOU without noting the various partnerships and connections woven into our fabric with high schools, community colleges and access to those beyond our Region. In our high schools this year, 1987 students took advantage of earning college credit for classes completed at the high school---please note this does not include multiple courses taken by the same student. Our RCC/SOU Medford Higher Education Center reports record enrollments with multiple articulation agreements in

place for seamless transition for both SOU and RCC students. There are many other articulation agreements in place across the state and beyond and one only needs to visit our transfer page online at SOU for a course-by-course equivalence transfer breakdown by institution. Distance Education continues to grow with several online degree completion programs and course offerings that serve other institutions such as Eastern Oregon Universities Bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts, through the minor in Criminology & Criminal Justice...all available without ever stepping onto this campus! As we continue to serve more creatively, using the resources provided from the state and other funding sources, and even with the expanded partnerships we still face the fact that we cannot continue to do what we are doing with the projected funding cuts.

How frustrating it can be as an advisor to hear students talk about choosing to work an extra shift over attending a class, studying for an exam, or working on a homework assignments. "I just need the money!" As we move into an era of sustainability, we are urged to remember that sustainability for Oregon Higher Education needs the same attention as Pre-K - 12. Without all the pieces leading to the whole what are we preparing students for? Is sustainability going to be the pursuit of a mirage? Let's not enter into a period as we did following the recession of the late 1980s and early 90s . According to Jennifer Wheary, a senior fellow at Demos, a public policy organization in Manhattan, "Struggling to pay for school is nothing new. College costs have risen more than 400 percent since the 1980s, and the stats about skyrocketing tuition and fees are cited so often that we barely take notice anymore. So what if the average student graduated with more than \$20,000 in loans in 2008? So what if the amount of unregulated private student loans families have taken on has more than tripled in five years, and nearly one in 10 college students now has loans with interest rates that can hover near 20 percent?" So what!?

With the promise of the new high school diploma bridging the gap after graduation, articulation agreements in place from community colleges to the universities, and the 40-40-20 goal, we must remain focused on the fact that a highly educated populace is essential to the future of Oregon. We are working hard to do all we can to enable more Oregonians to obtain a quality higher education. The Oregon University System is truly a System, and as described above has created numerous partnerships and opportunities across the educational continuum -- the universities, community colleges and K-12. We know these are difficult economic times and there are many calls and pleas to you --with very limited resources available. Still, Higher Education is one of the investments with a positive outcome- where the monetary return to the State, over the long run, far exceeds the monetary input today.

In the words of Robert F. Kennedy, "Our choice is not whether change will come, but whether we can guide that change in the service of our ideals and toward a social order shaped to the needs of all our people."

Lee Ayers