

Oregon Public University Council

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December 10, 2015

Higher Education Coordinating Commission
775 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Commissioners:

The Oregon Public University Council provided written feedback on the draft outline of the HECC Strategic Plan on November 5, 2015 followed by in-person testimony from UO Provost Scott Coltrane at the November 12, 2015 Commission meeting. Among a variety of concerns raised, the feedback clearly notes the absence of any articulated strategies for graduate education or research. The Public University Council requests adding these important university contributions to the 2016-20 strategic plan and offers the following suggestions for your consideration.

Part 1: The state's higher education goals and our progress towards them.

1. A 40-40-20 update

Explicitly recognize graduate education as a part of 40-40-20 and articulate a goal to increase the number of Oregonians with a graduate degree in the state's postsecondary education plan. In many career fields, a master's degree has become a new minimum standard and in fields where it is not required, it often leads to greater career advancement and financial success. This supports each of the four "ultimate" goals for higher education listed in #2 of this section.

Part 2: Key understandings about the current higher education landscape

The current statement, "7. Higher education is a critical tool for Oregon industry and the economy through...(b) research and innovation that responds to and drives the Oregon economy" fails to recognize the national and global impact of university research. Oregon's research universities compete nationally for federal funding and contribute research and innovation to the global economy. Strong research universities attract top-performing faculty, students, and serve as a catalyst for industry growth. Our postsecondary education plan should recognize this value and develop strategies and incentives to promote these activities.

Part 3: The HECC's roles and responsibilities

Within HECC's "limited" roles and responsibilities in Oregon's new postsecondary system, graduate education and university research should be clearly incorporated into:

- a. State strategic plan for higher education
- b. State budget development/recommendations
- c. State funding allocations
- d. Mission approvals and annual evaluations

Part 4: HECC Strategies 2016-2020: Goal-setting; Student Supports; Pathways; Affordability*1. Goal-setting. Sharpen our state goals*

c. Our strategies: i. Propose to the Legislature a new adult educational attainment goal and iii. Develop interim 40-40-20 targets

Oregon's 40-40-20 goal calls on the state to "ensure that at least 40 percent of adult Oregonians have earned a bachelor's degree **or higher**" (SB253 2011), yet too often discussions focus exclusively on undergraduate education. Graduate education must be recognized in any "new adult educational attainment goal" and within any proposed 40-40-20 targets.

2. Student Support.

a. Background/data/context: iv. "funding pressures have forced institutions to rely increasingly on adjunct faculty."

A university's decision to use non-tenure track faculty for instructional purposes is clearly a governance issue and not "coordination." Still, it should be noted that university graduate students, specifically PhD students, often play a key role in undergraduate instruction and can also reduce the use of "adjunct faculty." The HECC should consider how additional investments in PhD students can impact student support goals. This can be addressed in part through "increased state investments in institutional capacity" as suggested in "d. our strategies, vi."

3. Pathways

This section specifically calls out "P-20" in several places. As HECC begins to draft language for the 2016-20 plan, we request that graduate education be specifically recognized as a part of any successful comprehensive "P-20" education system. Within "our strategies," acknowledge master's degrees as an important tool for "adult learners" and a strategic asset for Oregon's workforce. The HECC 2015 Legislative Issue Brief on equity cites "direct state costs and estimated returns to the state" data indicating that a "direct state investment" of \$150,615 per master's degree yields a 67% return of \$251,427 for each degree produced.

Missing elements

The September 25, 2015 draft strategic plan outline, notes “strategies for research, innovation, and economic development” as “missing elements.” To assist in fleshing out this section, we offer the following outline. Related progress measures should focus on HECC’s contributions to these activities rather than reporting on institutional performance.

Research, Innovation, and economic development

- a. Background/data/context
 - i. University research enhances the learning experience of students – both undergraduate and graduate
 - ii. University research requires graduate education and the work of graduate students to be successful.
 - ii. Research and innovation contributes positively to local, regional, state, national, and global economies
 - iii. Research is an integral part of a university mission and cannot be separated out from instruction and service
 - iv. Oregon’s public university faculty are competitively awarded hundreds of millions of federal dollars which are spent in our state each year
- b. How we will measure progress
 - i. New sponsored research expenditures incentivized through allocations/investments
 - ii. Increase in proposal submissions due to matching fund program
 - iii. Increase in tech transfer activities resulting from investments
- c. A discussion of HECC levers
 - i. Recommendations to the Legislature and Governor
 - ii. Funding allocations to public institutions
 - iii. Strategic funding to encourage research and development
- d. Our strategies
 - i. Evaluate and adjust the “research” component of the funding allocation formula to provide incentives for new research and to reward research productivity
 - ii. Consider the creation of a strategic fund – outside of the Public University Support Fund – to provide seed funding for pre-proposal projects and to match federal research awards
 - iii. Consider enhancing existing measures or developing new programs in support of early innovations moving from the university to the marketplace

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these suggestions for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission 2016-20 Strategic Plan. We welcome any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

University Presidents



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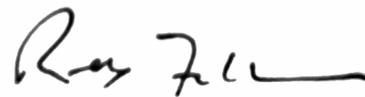
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