

LBCC Position on Free Tuition

We applaud any effort to mitigate the financial barriers that separate many from realizing the truly life-transforming capacity of post-secondary education. And, while we see “free tuition” as one such effort, we maintain that these efforts must be structured so as to support not just access but also the completion that is necessary for us as a State to achieve 40-40-20 and for us here at LBCC to achieve our three strategic goals. As such:

1. It must support student Productivity. If free tuition were structured as an incentive (ex: it’s free when you complete) or had eligibility requirements (ex: a student selects a major, develops an education plan, and exhibits solid academic progress as a condition of getting free tuition), it is more likely to support our efforts to increase our completion rates by 50 percent.
2. It must support student Equity. Not every student starts in the same place. Ethnicity, gender, age, income, and family history with higher education are all currently significant factors in achieving student success. Any “free tuition” policy needs to support strategic efforts to eliminate the correlation between where students start and their rates of success.
3. It must support student Quality. If the funding level for our community colleges does not cover the costs for the increases in enrollment that a “free tuition” policy is intended to create, then we’ll struggle to gain ground on our goal of structuring our programs so more students successfully transfer or enter the workforce with the skills to measurably better their lives and communities. Getting students into our schools without giving us the resources to serve them is a false promise that will only contribute to the public’s growing doubts about the value of education.

As many studies of this and other “free tuition” policies conclude, there may be more effective means of applying limited resources to the goal of increased post-secondary degree and certificate completion, and we would encourage educational leaders and the Legislature to give serious consideration to these other approaches before putting significant resources into “free tuition.” We believe that a fully funded Oregon Opportunity Grant with specific provisions for community college bound applicants would be just one of these other options worth consideration.