

# Oregon Council of Presidents



April 18, 2017

Representative Jeff Reardon, Chair  
House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Representative Reardon and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 2998. The Oregon Statewide Provosts Council is comprised of the provosts—Chief Academic Officers—from each of Oregon’s public universities. The Provosts Council unequivocally supports student transfer from Oregon community colleges to a public university and recognizes the connection between transferability and student affordability. Improving transfer student completion while minimizing excess credits is a state-level goal that must be prioritized and incentivized accordingly. The provosts are committed to achieving this goal and look forward to engaging with our postsecondary education partners to meet this challenge. We offer our thanks to Representatives Johnson and Alonso Leon and the transfer workgroup for incorporating our feedback into the amendments for HB 2998.

Oregon’s postsecondary institutions have a long history of working together on transfer issues and there is significant good work to build upon. The Oregon Transfer Module (OTM) and associate transfer degrees (AAOT and ASOT) are demonstrative of the collaborative work that we’ve successfully completed in the past. We understand that HB 2998 will build on this history and draws in part on the valuable lessons learned through implementation of the OTM, AAOT, and ASOT. Renewing the “foundational curricula” of a student’s first-year of coursework and establishing new pathways that better align to the requirements of top degree majors are important steps towards improving transferability, but those steps alone are inadequate.

We know that identifying a program of study early and aligning course selection to the specific degree requirements of the desired major maximizes transferability and minimizes excess credits. We also know that many degree paths contain curricular barriers in the form of key gateway courses with high non-complete rates, especially in mathematics and sciences. These facts require that we identify and engage baccalaureate degree-seeking students in community colleges at the earliest point possible to provide them with the academic, career, and financial aid advising that they need to make informed choices. HB 2998-2 acknowledges this challenge, encouraging self-identified bachelor’s degree seeking students to select a “course of study” or “unified statewide transfer agreement.” There is more that institutions can do, however, to lessen the onus on students such as providing high-touch advising and academic support that helps students make these difficult but important choices and succeed in their chosen pathways.

We also believe that defining the scope of the problem to be fixed is tantamount. Despite many years of work, the State still doesn’t have a fully functioning longitudinal data system that allows us to track students across the various education sectors. This is especially problematic between the community college and university data

systems. To that end, the Provosts Council supported a 2017-2019 HECC policy option package aimed at aligning these two important data sets and allowing us to track the flow of transfer students between institutions, the application of earned credits, and the degree majors awarded. Without these important data, we inevitably continue to pursue universal, statewide solutions to a problem that may be better addressed through targeted interventions.

Oregon's seven public universities are distinct with different missions, varying resources, unique student populations, and following decades of limitations on "duplicate academic programs," (ORS 352.089 (2)(b)) distinct curriculums. This uniqueness is also true of the seventeen community colleges with varying resources and curricula available. The notion of standardizing programming to allow 90 credits from any Oregon community college to seamlessly transfer and apply to any degree major at seven different public universities is not feasible and not in the best interest of students or the State. A diverse portfolio of programs is an asset to the State and promotes a diverse statewide economy. We are pleased that HB 2998-2 acknowledges that not all university degree majors can align to a 90+90 model and appreciate the addition of language encouraging each degree major pathway to identify the "optimal number of academic credits" for transferring to a public university. Provosts are also very supportive of aligning efforts to targeting "major courses of study with the most workforce demand; and the most common major courses of study among students who transfer from a community college to a public university" (Section 3 (3)(c)(A-B)).

Finally, it's important to note that the work associated with implementing HB 2998 successfully has a fiscal impact and will require new resources. The bill clearly calls for HECC to "regularly convene" representatives from universities and community colleges on an ongoing basis requiring faculty release time and travel expenses for participants. In addition to the explicit costs, successful implementation will require additional resources for advising, academic support, data collection, curricular redesign, and marketing the core curricula and transfer pathways.

Oregon's public universities are committed to student success for all of our students. We stand ready to work with the legislature, the HECC, and Oregon community colleges to continue to improve transfer student pathways, use data to target the specific problem, minimize costs for students and institutions, and establish achievable outcomes.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 2998-2.