

April 14, 2017

Representative Jeff Reardon, Chair
Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Representative Reardon and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 207. The Oregon Statewide Provosts Council is opposed to SB 207 as currently drafted. The Provosts Council—comprised of the Chief Academic Officers of each of Oregon’s public universities—collectively supports awarding university credit to high school students who earn successful grades on advanced placement (AP) tests. While we share the legislature’s goal of expanding access to higher education and improving alternative pathways for students, we have several significant concerns with the notion of embedding a specific AP score into statute.

Current statutes place the authority for determining the applicability of credit squarely with the institutions and their faculty. This basic tenet of university academics undergirds our commitment to shared governance and our faculty’s central role in curricular matters. University faculty are responsible for establishing and maintaining curriculum, programmatic requirements, and academic quality. Faculty determination of the applicability of credits is intended to maximize the likelihood that students succeed after matriculating to a public university. SB 207 inappropriately removes this faculty oversight—a key facet of university academic freedom—and statutorily requires universities to accept AP credits with test scores over 3. Requiring universities to accept AP credits, regardless of how AP curriculum changes over time or how longitudinal data supports student success usurps academic freedom long reserved for universities and their shared governance with their faculty.

Another concerning aspect of SB 207 is the potential conflict with accreditation standards established by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). All of Oregon’s public institutions are accredited by the NWCCU and accreditation is a requirement for a postsecondary institution to receive federal funds like financial aid. NWCCU Standard 2.C.7 requires, in part, that credit be awarded “only for documented student achievement equivalent to expected learning achievement for courses within the institution’s regular curricular offerings” and “only upon the recommendation of appropriately qualified teaching faculty.” NWCCU Standard 2.C.8 also provides that the final judgment in accepting transfer credit should reside with the receiving institution, and that the receiving institution must review the transfer course for “high academic quality” and to ensure that “credit accepted is appropriate for its programs and comparable in nature, content, academic quality, and level to credit it offers.” Forcing universities to accept AP credits without careful review of academic quality and alignment to curriculum is short-sighted in terms of facilitating student success and potentially places our institutions at odds with our own accreditation requirements.

Finally, it's unclear what SB 207 is attempting to address. Oregon public universities and community colleges have a long, successful history of collaboration in evaluating the equivalency of advanced high school courses. Oregon's Statewide Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate (AP/IB) policies were established over a decade ago and updated by the AP/IB workgroup as recently as February 22, 2016. The policies are readily available on the Higher Education Coordinating Commission website and university institutional websites, and clearly list the AP exam name, corresponding exam score, and number or range of credits as recommended minimums. In collaboration with our community college partners, we evaluate each exam and assign appropriate ranges of credits for each exam score, ensuring that high school students advance as quickly as possible, do not repeat college courses unnecessarily but enter adequately-prepared to succeed in more advanced college courses. We believe our efforts achieve a solid agreement between universities and community colleges regarding the transferability of AP credits in Oregon's public postsecondary institutions.

The Oregon Statewide Provosts Council does not support SB 207 and believes that academic quality decisions belong to the faculty, in compliance with NWCCU accreditation standards, and in support of Oregon students.