

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 27, 2022

Report recommends Oregon invest in higher education for greater prosperity and equity

SALEM, Ore. — The Oregon Council of Presidents and the Oregon Community College Association released a new report by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) that highlights the vital role of Oregon’s higher education institutions in energizing the state’s economy and accelerating social mobility. The report emphasizes that significant investments in higher education are needed to increase student access, degree completion, and diversity in Oregon’s workforce.

In Fall 2021, the presidents of the state’s seven public universities and 17 community colleges came together in partnership to commission a report to recommend a course for higher education in Oregon. The comprehensive study offers an opportunity for Oregon’s public postsecondary institutions to understand and center students of today and tomorrow to increase affordability, access, and completion. Focus and investments are necessary to ensure that Oregon can nurture the high-quality workforce necessary for a thriving and diversified economy.

The report centered on three themes in higher education that are crucial for the future of Oregon.

Affordability

By ensuring access to postsecondary education for students from all backgrounds, Oregon can foster future prosperity and an equitable, attractive state.

“The high reliance on tuition to fund the state’s higher education enterprise makes maintaining affordability for students a key state priority — it is in the state’s best interest to make sure that students of all types can afford to go to college and stay in college long enough to complete a program of study,” the report states.

The report goes on to state, “New state investments in public postsecondary education in Oregon are needed; in addition to being aligned with state goals and complement other funding streams, any such investment should appropriately account for differences in institutional mission, incentivize collaborative activity, yield improvements in equitable access and success, and reduce the funding burden now being borne by resident students.”

Equity

Oregon’s higher education institutions need to continue to prioritize equity in education to support students and a diverse future workforce.

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“Social justice demands that the playing field be leveled and that students from marginalized populations be given the assistance they need to reap the benefits accorded to their more advantaged peers,” the report states.

A focus on equity and social mobility is imperative for Oregon’s quickly aging workforce that will require an infusion of new skilled workers who reflect the state’s changing demographics.

Higher Education is an Economic Engine

The report clearly speaks to the importance of a statewide economic development plan, and that community colleges and public universities can create the workforce for the jobs of the future and increase the number of workers in the state who have higher-paying jobs.

“Colleges and universities are the state’s greatest assets upon which to build the new and better Oregon. But, it will take more investment – and more targeted investments than the state has heretofore been willing to make,” says the report.

“The study clearly demonstrates that colleges and universities are integral to creating a prosperous and equitable economy that would be advanced by targeted and bold state investments in our students and higher education, in general. As we develop strategies in moving forward with the report’s recommendations, we are committed to advancing impact and creating efficiencies. In addition, we are committed to increased collaboration with each other and with other key state stakeholders to build a Better Oregon with focused attention to affordability, equity, and prosperity of our state and all Oregonians,” said Nagi Naganathan President of the Oregon Institute of Technology and Chair of the Oregon Council of Presidents.

“The NCHEMS report highlights the need to keep higher education affordable so that individuals across the state have access to relevant workforce training that leads to family wage jobs. The 17 community colleges were designed and stand ready to offer accessible workforce education throughout Oregon,” said Tim Cook, President of Clackamas Community College and Chair of the Oregon President’s Council.

The community colleges and public universities that commissioned the NCHEMS report collectively agree that key themes identified by the NCHEMS report and highlighted above identify a vital and urgent pathway to advancing Oregon. Building partnerships around these recommendations with business and community leaders, state agencies, and the Legislature will be instrumental in setting a course over the next year and beyond.

The report was commissioned by The Oregon Council of Presidents, representing the state’s seven public university presidents, and the Oregon Community College Association, which represents the state’s 17 community colleges. The full report is available for download at <https://oregoncouncilofpresidents.com/>.

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