



June 7, 2020

Chair David Rives  
Higher Education Coordinating Commission  
3225 25th Street SE  
Salem, Oregon 97302

Dear Chair Rives:

I am writing on behalf of the Association of Professors of Southern Oregon University. As I am sure you know, students and faculty have struggled to adapt to a new delivery method, our institutions have been bleeding financially from the effects of COVID-19. There is enormous uncertainty in terms of institutional finances and the classroom experience for the year ahead. We urge you to take immediate action to ensure SOU can navigate these challenges.

While all of Oregon's public higher education institutions need adequate funding, the HECC noted in February that Southern Oregon University is especially vulnerable. It is no coincidence that Southern also receives the lowest state support per degree of any campus in the system. We have been cutting for years even when the legislature increased the Public University Support Fund. The lack of Regional Stability funding leaves SOU particularly vulnerable – *short on stability* – in the face of COVID-19.

Nevertheless, our campus community has remained focused because of our faculty and staff's deep commitment to our students. We are producing more bachelor's and master's degrees, and SOU's six-year graduation rate increased from 40.1% (2017-18) to 45.6% (2018-19). Before COVID-19, we were on track fiscally with a thin but balanced budget.

COVID-19 has shaken our financial core, greatly widening the financial cracks we have been managing so diligently. While our staff moved quickly to accept furloughs for May through December, we have less than 2 months of expenses in reserve, tuition already maximized, and little room to cut further after years of cuts. With a COVID-19-driven enrollment decline expected this fall, SOU is much more vulnerable than our sister universities.

Because of the COVID-19 crisis, SOU cannot wait another year for the funding formula review to unfold. The lack of appropriate Regional Stability funding may be a fatal flaw for SOU; you

have the power to fix this. While it is unusual to take action before the final report from the workgroup, these are unusual times and they call for your leadership.

Our campus community has been creative and strategic about adapting to a changing world, and through a series of strategic and diverse hires in recent years, our faculty are ready to help reinvent higher education in the years ahead.

And we are committed to improving the lives and futures of Oregon's students. These are people like Gabe, who started his own non-profit to conduct trail maintenance with teams of students; like Kelley, who grew up in foster care and found her voice as a writer at SOU; like Jenean, who was part of our McNair Scholars program and is now completing a PhD in African American studies. We need your support to ensure SOU's stability through this crisis, so we can continue to serve students and to help the state move forward.

Sincerely,



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