



January 16, 2026

Wolves:

You may have seen recent media coverage about the Higher Education Coordinating Commission's recent report, [Spending and Efficiency in Oregon Public Universities](#) that I shared with you back in December. The report was developed after a legislative budget note last year directed the HECC to assess spending and cost efficiency across Oregon's public universities over the past decade.

WOU's fiscal responsibility is evident in this report; we've kept operating expense growth to 3.1%, below state and national averages. We also boast the lowest tuition growth in Oregon at 3.2%, with overall attendance costs rising just 1.5% and net price of attendance increasing by only 0.4% (both the lowest in Oregon). We are also an economic engine for Polk and Marion counties, providing essential opportunities and producing workforce-ready graduates. Over the last decade, we have also increased degree completions per \$100,000 in spending by 71.4%.

However, Oregon cannot continue to demand low-cost education and accessibility without ensuring that universities can operate effectively. Universities face significant challenges, including lost grants due to federal policy changes, rising costs, declining enrollment, and increasing employee benefit obligations, all while current funding computations fail to consider rising wages and benefits.

Last week, the HECC voted to approve the report's recommendations and have submitted them to the Oregon Legislature. The report itself does not enact policy for any of Oregon's public universities, and any significant changes would require actions of universities themselves and/or the legislature. If the legislature enacts the recommendations, HECC would develop a plan over the next year that would articulate how universities might become even more efficient.

Though we do not yet know what will result from the exploration of "targeted integration" for universities, I will work to make sure Western is in a stronger position, not a weaker one. Oregon needs this university to thrive, and the legislature has clear evidence that we have performed quite well, especially considering that Oregon is 46th in the nation in funding for higher education. I would hope that any plan developed by HECC would also consider increased funding and revenue generation for higher education in Oregon.



As we look to the future, we will remain actively engaged in the Oregon Legislature's policy discussions. Western remains committed to serving all Oregonians while advancing solutions that enhance efficiency and revenue, fostering financial resilience and opportunity. We will continue to protect academic quality, uphold academic freedom, and support shared governance. Our focus will also be on recognizing the unique missions of Oregon's institutions while enhancing affordability and improving outcomes for our students. And we will continue our work towards belonging and empowerment for all of our community.

Investing in Western is investing in Oregon. Thriving states have thriving universities. So please join me in making sure everyone knows that.

We. Are. Wolves.

Jesse Peters, President
Western Oregon University