

To: Senate Education Committee  
From: President Mark Mitsui  
Date: June 2nd, 2020  
Re: The Impacts of COVID-19 on Community College Students

Chair Wagner and members of the committee, my name is Mark Mitsui, President of Portland Community College. You have heard from many experts today. Before we adjourn, I'd like to speak to you about distance education at Portland Community College and our job to protect Oregonians who have been left behind by all aspects of COVID-19.

Many colleges, including PCC, have responded to COVID-19 by contributing whatever resources we have - donating PPE and providing space for hospitals, the Oregon food bank, and the Oregon Department of Employment. In 10 days, we moved the vast majority of our courses online, with chemistry instructors taking home kits to teach experiments via zoom. And nursing faculty are leading the sector to use online clinical programs. I'd like to publicly thank our faculty, staff and Administrative Professionals for working so hard to move courses online and respond creatively to a new way of operating.

Some of our students have expressed appreciation for online learning, especially those who commute long distances to get to PCC. Although distance learning can be truly challenging for students who don't have the technical literacy or the hardware to succeed. I am concerned about all our students, and I am most concerned about the people that Oregon already leaves behind.

Community colleges are a primary access point to opportunity. We provide English for Speakers of Other Languages, education and training through career and technical education, college transfer, developmental education, GED courses, and adult basic skills training. Just a reminder that the students who used to be called "non-traditional" ARE our new majority students: students of color, low income, first generation, student parents - We take 100% of the people who come through our doors, and that means we also address the barriers that keep people from graduating. According to a recent statewide survey by Temple University of our Oregon community college students, 20% of respondents experienced homelessness, over 50% experienced housing insecurity and 40% experienced food insecurity. And that was before COVID 19.

While our enrollment is down at PCC, our direct services are maxed out. I'll repeat: for those who could afford to stay, their need for services has skyrocketed. We teach, but we also help Oregonians find work, apply for SNAP, enroll and then un-enroll with employment changes. Online education can be effective if students have the internet, a good computer, nothing distracting them, food in their fridge, no children to watch, etc... and that is not the reality for our students.

As we look for ways to protect vital programs we are planning for significant cuts. At PCC, we have implemented a hiring and spending freeze. I am considering the need to eliminate positions. We will be using reserves, all because we are trying to maintain our affordable,

open door policy for the community. We will make our cuts through an equity lens. There will be deeper cuts in some areas, in order to keep programs like Pathways to Opportunity, a statewide program that brings in millions in federal dollars and signs-up students for benefits who qualify for food, housing, healthcare, childcare, and other resources.

As we plan for the state to recover it is important to remember that in the last recession according to the census bureau: "Although two-year colleges accounted for one-third of undergraduate college enrollment before the recession, they accounted for half of the increase in the number enrolled as the recession hit." Today we make up about 40% of college going students nationally.

Furthermore, to quote one of our nation's leading higher education experts, Dr. Sarah Goldrick-Rab, "Despite the clear evidence that community-college students need relatively more support to succeed (many of them are the first in their family to attend college), states (Oregon included) invest more in institutional resources and financial aid for students attending four-year institutions."

When comparing the level of education for recent unemployment insurance claimants compared with the educational attainment of the entire labor force, it's clear that those with lower levels of education have been hit particularly hard." While those with a HS diploma or less only represent 28% of the labor force, they represent 57% of the UI claims. Whereas AA degree holders 34% of labor force and only 22% of claims...we need pathways to opportunity, with skill development and post-secondary credential access.

While COVID is affecting everyone, in every community, the impact is being disproportionately shouldered by people of color, low income individuals, women, and parents. In Oregon, African American's have a 50% higher rate of unemployment claims than their share of the labor force. For Indigenous/Native Americans, that rate is 100% higher. In comparison, white workers' share of unemployment claims is slightly lower than their representation in the labor force.

This is against the national backdrop that shows a loss of employment income due to COVID for 60% of Latinx and 56% Black/African American versus 44% of white individuals. Low-income individuals are also shouldering a greater burden of economic impact, with 55-57% of the three lowest income brackets (less than 25K to 49,999) experiencing loss of income, whereas only 31% of those in the top income bracket (200K+) did. Similar to Oregon, 59% of those with less than a high school diploma and 51% with a high school diploma had reductions in their income. 55% of households with children versus 45% households without children also see a drop in income. When looking at gender, women are disproportionately impacted across racial lines, with Black and Latinx women facing greater rates of unemployment and income loss. Notably, white women haven't comprised such a low share of the workforce since the 1970's.

If state cuts can be mitigated, or there is another stimulus package, or if Governor Brown doesn't use all of the GEER funding on other sectors, we'd appreciate your leadership to protect the following:

- 1. Help us avoid cuts to critical advising and counseling services**
- 2. Allow for flexibility so students can get what they need.**

For example, it is hard to prove hunger to get CARES dollars - which means we need the flexibility to give out more grocery cards and hire SNAP navigators: Our most vulnerable students are hungry and the emergency grant processes that are informed by the CARES Act ask to display financial need. It is very challenging to display hunger. A student can show a rent bill, but they cannot show proof of food they can't buy. Each college has food banks and systems to buy students grocery cards. Most colleges have a portion of a position that helps students apply for EBT. We think there should be a person on each campus that works with student affairs professionals to get students on the Oregon Trail Card. We know we have to find ways to pay for these programs that are most needed. We have shifted a bit of our support to benefits for the most in-need students as well. We know this summer we are likely to see more students and families seeking benefits from multiple federal and state resources. To that end we are working to hire a single SNAP/ STEP Food benefits coach (via a Meyer Grant) who can help students interested in these supports during this transition for the summer. *Ask: Give colleges flexible dollars to provide grocery cards and support colleges who need to hire benefit navigators.*

- 3. Stop the likely cuts to the 1st Generation Grant program.**

Instead, invest in a program that teaches 1st gen students of color how to succeed in college and provides a dependable coach to get them through to the finish line. Enrollment is declining as high as 25% at some community colleges, and our first-generation students are experiencing ever greater levels of challenges staying in college. In Portland Community College's Future Connect Program, 150 students stopped taking classes for the spring term of a cohort of 800 students in the Future Connect Program – an access program for low-income first-generation students, the vast majority are students of color. It took intrusive advising around the clock to support the 659 students who proceeded to online courses for spring term. We have another 1,000 students who want to start at PCC in the fall from this population. We only have room for 350 students.

- 4. Fund, through federal dollars, a benefits navigator on every campus so that our lowest income students get the food and support they need to continue.**

Pathways to Opportunity: When a student is enrolled at a community college in Oregon they get support for accessing state and federal benefits like childcare, food, and housing. These are not duplicative services; community colleges are a critical part of the social safety net in Oregon. This is who we are: community is our middle name. PTO work that encompasses our STEP--SNAP E and T--and other federal programs brings in over \$4

million next year to the State of Oregon. PTO Our costs went up 40% due to COVID-19 ... cost centered around the number of hours it took to serve students and support services we provide like tuition, tools, transportation

**5. Grant K-12 school districts funding to increase credit recovery programs, those are often in partnership with the local community college so flexibility in how those dollars can be used is vital to this population.**

Colleges are hearing from high school staff that upwards of 40% of seniors are not responding regularly to communication. They are struggling to get students support. We think existing state funds should be flexible enough that high schools can grow their completion partnerships with their local community colleges. If there is funding available credit recovery programs should be prioritized.

Thank you for your time today. There is no doubt that this crisis, which has required students to shift online, as well as the increased and uncertain employment and shrinking resources make this a challenging time for our students. We are in this together, community colleges want to be part of the solution for struggling families. We look forward to your continued partnership. Thank you.