



January 28, 2025

Esteemed Chair Hudson, Vice Chairs Fragala and Harbick and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Adrienne Mitchell. I serve as President of Lane Community College Education Association, representing the 475 full-time and part-time faculty at LCC, and as Vice President of the OEA Community College Council, representing more than 4000 academic workers at Oregon community colleges, including classified professionals and faculty. We are your counselors, advisors, financial aid experts, librarians, benefits navigators, IT technicians, custodians, faculty, and more.

The community college system is critical to economic and workforce development, providing students, who would otherwise have no access to higher education, a means to break out of generational poverty, yet the state continues to disinvest, and community colleges and our students are facing a crisis.

We provide an accessible, affordable alternative through our transfer programs to students seeking 4-year degrees. In addition, community colleges are Oregon's primary source for registered nurses, paramedics, dental hygienists, medical assistants, welders, diesel technicians, electricians, and many other skilled professionals and tradespeople. And we fill critical gaps in the education continuum with adult education such as courses for English language learners.

Oregon's community colleges serve nearly 200,000 students per year. Our faculty are leaders in their disciplines and in statewide initiatives to develop open educational resources and create seamless transitions to the universities through common course numbering. Our classified professionals keep our institutions running.

However, when adjusted for inflation, state funding for community colleges in Oregon has **stagnated since 1999**, placing increased burden on students and families. At LCC where I teach writing, state support from the CCSF now accounts for **less than one third of revenue** with a growing portion paid by students.

Due to disinvestment, the vast majority of students must work and attend part-time. The most recent Hope Center survey of Oregon community college students found that **41% of respondents were food insecure** in the prior month, **and 52% were housing insecure** in the previous year. At the same time, regular budget cuts leave students with unmet needs. For instance, at LCC there are **only two mental health counselors to serve more than 6500 students**.

At the same time, the majority of faculty at Oregon community colleges are part-time, contingent workers with term-by-term employment. Part-time faculty face precarity with no job security and are, in effect, part of what higher education researchers have termed the “Gig Academy.”<sup>1</sup> Low salary rates leave some part-time faculty commuting from college to college to make ends meet. In fact, according to our most recent all faculty survey at LCC, **39.5% of part-time faculty** who are not retired and **8.3% of full-time faculty reported having relied on government assistance while working as faculty at LCC**.

A recent review of 2024 part-time faculty salaries by the OEA indicates that part-time faculty working half-time earn average salaries of less than **\$24,000 per year**. This annual salary amount falls below the threshold for SNAP eligibility for a single person. These are poverty wages necessitating government assistance, creating housing and food insecurity for the very faculty upon whom our institutions rely.

Oregon’s future depends on our community colleges, and substantial investment is necessary in order to maintain current service levels without more program and service cuts. We need no less than \$920 million for the next biennium, plus funding for part-time faculty pay parity, and \$150M more for the Oregon Opportunity Grant.

In sum, our community colleges remain undervalued and underfunded in Oregon, leaving both faculty and students alike in precarity. While community colleges promote economic mobility and social justice for our diverse student population, the system is inherently unjust – built upon the exploitation of part-time workers.

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<sup>1</sup> Kezar, Adrianna, et al. *The Gig Academy: Mapping Labor in the Neoliberal University (Reforming Higher Education: Innovation and the Public Good)*. Illustrated, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019.

We ask the legislature to affirm the critical role of community colleges in a vibrant democracy and to invest in the future of our people and our communities.

An investment in community colleges is an investment in Oregon.

Thank you for your consideration.

*Adrienne Mitchell*

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Vice President, Oregon Education Association Community College Council

*representing 4,000+ part- and full-time faculty and staff from 19 community college unions*

President, Lane Community College Education Association,

*representing the 275 part-time and 200 full-time faculty of LCC*