

# *Promises to Keep:*

*A Qualitative Analysis of the First Year of Oregon Promise*

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	2
INTRODUCTION.....	4
RESEARCH APPROACH.....	4
FINDINGS.....	6
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	11
LIMITATIONS.....	13
FUTURE RESEARCH.....	14
APPENDIX A. DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS.....	15
APPENDIX B. METHODOLOGY.....	25
APPENDIX C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS .....	29
APPENDIX D. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	34
APPENDIX E. TABLES.....	41
APPENDIX F. REFERENCES & WORKS CITED.....	42

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Oregon Promise seeks to help newly graduated high school students and recent GED recipients pursue higher education by covering up to the average tuition cost of a community college in the state of Oregon. The grant was approved by the Oregon State Legislature in 2015 and first became available to students in Fall 2016. The grant is expected to have served upwards of 6,700 students in the first year with a minimum of \$1,000 and a maximum of \$3,397 being awarded to each student who qualified for the grant (minus a \$50 co-pay per term).<sup>1</sup> Oregon Promise is administered by Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC).

This analysis explores the role that Oregon Promise has played in the lives of the first cohort of students, advisors and administrators to utilize the program. Since its conception, this study has been guided by two main research questions: 1) did Oregon Promise expand enrollment, especially for specific demographics, among students who would have otherwise not gone to college; and 2) how have outreach, messaging, and specific supporting programs, impacted student experiences? In an attempt to answer these questions, our study relied on a combination of focus groups and interviews (both in person and over the phone) with Oregon Promise recipients as well as administrators and advisors from various community colleges throughout the state of Oregon. Additionally, this study builds on the work of Education Northwest's 2016 study *Fulfilling the Promise? Early Findings on Oregon's New College Grant Program*.

## FINDINGS:

These key findings were uncovered during our study:

1. Oregon Promise shaped perceptions and decision making of attending college.
  - a. Students chose not to take a 'gap' year.
  - b. It motivated some to finish high school.
  - c. Almost a third of the students we interviewed said they would be attending a four-year university or institution (possibly out of state) if not for Oregon Promise.
  - d. Pell recipients frequently thought Oregon Promise was responsible for more of their grant money than it was.
2. Oregon Promise improved financial stability for recipients. Without it, many students would:
  - a. Be working more hours at their job;
  - b. Have more student debt (by way of school loans); and/or
  - c. Have taken a year off of school to earn money before beginning college.
3. According to administrators and advisors, no overall change in enrollment, but trends varied between campuses.
  - a. Rural colleges experienced decreased enrollment of recent high school graduates, possibly due to increased student mobility.
  - b. No real change in racial and ethnic diversity on college campuses.

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<sup>1</sup> Higher Education Coordinating Commission (2016). *Oregon Promise: What we know thus far about Senate Bill 81*.

4. Students appreciated the support they received through the First Year Experience.
  - a. Success coaches played a particularly important role.
5. College-Student communication standards varied across campuses.
6. Most students first learn about Oregon Promise on their high school campus.
7. Inconsistent or inaccurate messaging left students confused, ill-informed and sometimes frustrated.
8. Roll-out of the program was frustrating for students, advisors, and administrators.
9. Credit caps and other factors limit Oregon Promise's ability to pay for a complete associate's degree.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

To strengthen the role of Oregon Promise in promoting higher education, we recommend reviewing the recommendations set forth by Education Northwest, which include:

- “Mention the 12-credit limit and include information on award notification and the disbursement timeline in outreach materials.”
- “Continue to invest in targeted outreach to increase awareness and participation.”
- “Stabilize funding and review requirements to ensure they are meeting the legislative intent of the program.”

In addition, we offer the following additional recommendations:

1. Clarify eligibility criteria, requirements & grant amounts.
  - a. Dispel the myth of Oregon Promise as “free community college.”
  - b. Get rid of the \$50 co-pay; reduce grant amounts by \$150/year if necessary.
2. Decrease the credit minimum to four credits per term.
  - a. Most classes are four credits, so this would let students take a single class.
3. Provide a system for students to take a term off in cases of emergency.
4. Promote community college networking to establish best practices for First Year Experience and high school outreach.
5. Focus energy on strengthening communication between OSAC, administrators, advisors, and students.
6. Keep funding Oregon Promise and its supporting programs.
  - a. Implement a threshold on EFC before cutting supporting programs

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## INTRODUCTION:

There is little debate among social scientists as to the role that educational attainment plays in social, political, and economic stability. Those with greater access to education are more likely to live healthier lives, obtain quality employment, have job satisfaction and possess all around greater social mobility than those who are less educated.<sup>2</sup> However, despite this reality, access to higher education remains woefully unbalanced. Low income, and to an increasing amount, middle income individuals are being squeezed out of college campuses as the cost of food, housing, school supplies and tuition continues to rise.<sup>3</sup>

In response to the seemingly endless increases in tuition cost, there has been growing support for state and federal legislation aimed at lowering the cost of higher education for low- and middle-income students. Some states now offer grant programs that make higher education nearly free to those who qualify for the grant. The State of Oregon's "free college" grant program is called Oregon Promise. This grant covers most of the cost of tuition for a full-time student who attends a community college within the state. This report examines the role Oregon Promise and its supporting programs play in the affordability of higher education and their influence on students' decisions to pursue higher education.

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## RESEARCH APPROACH:

Our study collects the lived experiences of students, advisors, and faculty interacting with the Oregon Promise program. Too frequently the voices of those most affected by a decision are left out of the decision making process. With this in mind, we incorporated the thoughts, feelings and concerns of Oregon Promise recipients into our analysis of the program.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS & DATA COLLECTION:

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of Oregon Promise on students' decision to attend community college. Specifically, our research has been guided by the following questions:

1. Did Oregon Promise expand enrollment, especially for specific demographics, among students who would have otherwise not gone to college; and
2. How has outreach, messaging, and specific supporting programs, impacted student experiences?

In an attempt to answer these questions, we acquired information from 32 Oregon Promise recipients, administrators and advisors across various community colleges throughout the State of Oregon. One-on-one student interviews as well as student focus groups were conducted in person

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<sup>2</sup> Baum, S., Ma, J., & Payea, K. (2013). *Education Pays 2013: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society*. New York, NY: College Board.

<sup>3</sup> Ozturk, I. (2001). "The Role of Education in Economic Development: A Theoretical Perspective." *Journal of Rural Development and Administration*, 33:1.

at the student’s respective campus, whereas advisor and administrator interviews were conducted via phone. We took notes during each interview and recorded audio to ensure accuracy in our findings and quotations. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes, and each focus group totaled no more than one hour (for specific information regarding research questions see appendix C).

We provided a demographics questionnaire to each of the student participants. The two-sided form asked for their gender, race/ethnicity, income, employment status, parents’ college experience, living situation, GED status, GPA, major, and number of credits taken (for demographic questionnaire summary see appendix A).

**Figure I. Sample Population Demographics**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>% of Oregon 12th Graders, 2015-16</b>	<b>% of Oregon Promise recipients</b>	<b>% in Our interviews</b>
White	64.6	65.7	61.3
Black	2.7	1.4	0.0
Asian	4.1	4.1	9.7
Native American / American Indian	1.6	1.0	6.5
Latinx	21.3	18.9	16.1

Of the 42 total study respondents:

- 21 were with students through a one-on-one session
- 2 were focus groups (11 students)
- 6 were with advisors
- 7 were with administrators

We interviewed students and faculty members from five different community colleges around the state. We selected community colleges based on a number of different factors including: location (rural vs. urban as well as proximity to a four-year institution); overall college enrollment; diversity of the student body; and the amount of interest college administrators have shown in engaging with the Oregon Promise program.

The five Oregon community colleges were:

- Portland Community College, SW Portland-Sylvania (urban)
- Lane Community College, Eugene (urban)
- Central Oregon Community College, Bend (urban)
- Rogue Community College, Medford (rural)
- Klamath Community College, Klamath Falls (rural)

To analyze our data, each group member listened to the audio recording of an interview conducted by someone else, as well as reviewed the hand written notes. We used this twofold analysis method to identify and cross-check shared patterns and themes amongst the different participants. Each researcher listened closely for recurring themes and noted, not only the common stories, but the unique experiences as well. We did not audio record interviews with administrators or advisors, but we took extensive notes and then analyzed them to identify common themes, success stories, and failures regarding the Oregon Promise program.

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## FINDINGS:

### IMPACT OF GRANT ON DECISION-MAKING:

#### *Finding #1: Oregon Promise shaped perceptions and decision making of attending college*

It appears Oregon Promise has positively impacted the lives of grant recipients; every student that we talked to felt gratitude towards the program. For many, receiving Oregon Promise changed their perception about attending college. It helped students (including those with GEDs) decide to go straight to college rather than take a year off. The grant even motivated some students to graduate high school so they could take advantage of it – not knowing how long the program would be available. Students were averse to taking out loans and felt that Oregon Promise made college a realistic option.

In students' words:

- "I wouldn't be here [in college] if it weren't for Oregon Promise."
- "If not for Oregon Promise, I would not have my GED and much less gone to college."

Interestingly, nearly 30% of the participants said that without Oregon Promise they would have gone directly to a four-year institution, of which some would have gone out of state.

**Table II. If not for Oregon Promise, I would be:**

Not in school	at CC	at University	Working	Out of State	Not sure
7	14	10	8	2	5

Many Oregon Promise students who also received Pell grants (and Oregon Opportunity grants) thought Oregon Promise was responsible for more grant money than it was. Rather than viewing each grant received as its own entity, most Pell grant Oregon Promise students lumped every grant that they received into one, which was often referred to as "Oregon Promise."

*Finding #2: Oregon Promise improved financial stability for recipients*

When asked what they would be doing if the Oregon Promise grant did not exist, we frequently heard from students that although they would still be in school, most would have to work more hours at their jobs or else have to take on student debt as a way to pay for their education. Some said that they would have had to take time off from school (a year or more) in order to save up enough money to go to college.

Regardless of the amount received, virtually every student said that the money received from Oregon Promise made them feel more financially secure.

Student quotes about Oregon Promise's impact on their finances:

- "If not for Oregon Promise, I would probably be working 2 jobs until I could afford to go to college
- "I feel financially stable. If Oregon Promise didn't exist, I would still be at school but would be working more."

In an advisor's words, "It's awesome to be part of a program that is trailblazing the way... for students to have funding and access to higher education."

*Finding #3: No real overall change in enrollment, but trends varied between campuses*

Our study found that enrollment trends for the 2016-2017 school year varied widely by college; some reported a change from previous years while others did not. Though anecdotal, rurally located colleges reported an enrollment decrease, which they hypothesize stemmed from local students going to out-of-the-area colleges. They felt this resulted from Oregon Promise increasing student mobility. Additionally, urban locations reported seeing an increase in enrollment for those in the Oregon Promise age group – 20 percent for Portland Community College.

Likewise, although 31 percent of students reported that they would have attended a four-year institution had they not received the Oregon Promise grant, it is difficult to determine if any change in enrollment at four-year institutions is a result of Oregon Promise. Lastly, not a single administrator reported an increase in racial diversity on their campus. Portland Community College reported a decrease in African-American enrollment, but an increase in undocumented students. Central Oregon saw a decrease in undocumented students. Some advisors and administrators reported the ORSA application for undocumented students as "clunky," and were concerned students may have started but not finished it.

Most administrators reported higher retention rates for Oregon Promise recipients. Despite these anecdotal accounts of enrollment changes, it is currently unclear if any change in enrollment was due to the implementation of the Oregon Promise program.

#### IMPACT OF SUPPORTING PROGRAMS:

##### *Finding #4: Most students appreciated the support they received through First Year Experience*

Advisors were often the ones who made students aware of the resources they had at their disposal. Additionally, a majority of students found the college success class (that most campuses included as a portion of their Oregon Promise Students' First Year Experience) very helpful, both in the form of learning key college and life skills, and as a tool for building community and making friends.

Generally, both students and administrators considered success coaches helpful, saying they “keep students connected.” We noted that students assigned specific Oregon Promise advisors felt much more supported than those who had advisors without specific expertise regarding Oregon Promise. Some quotes from administrators about the success coaches hired via HB 4076 include:

- “Success Coaches are the glue. They help connect students to existing resources in a meaningful and timely way.”
- “Coaches offer students encouragement and strategies for succeeding in college, and point to resources.”
- “More advisors mean more student interaction. A key indicator for college success is having an advocate. Advisors can provide this connection.”
- “Retention strategies are important, and better than just giving money. Wrap around services offered by advisors keep students in school and help them succeed.”

In a student participant's words, “[Success coaches] help us utilize places and resources we might not have known were even there - like the career center.”

##### *Finding #5: College-Student communication standards varied across campuses*

The nature and quality of communication between advisors and students differed greatly between campuses. Some advising programs utilize text and email communication to great effect, while others did not. Likewise, in-person interactions with success coaches and advisors were frequently characterized by students as “super open, comfortable, and professional,” while on other campuses, students sometimes felt that they had no one to talk to when they had questions, or that their advisors were not knowledgeable about Oregon Promise. At colleges that had a designated Oregon Promise office, students were more likely to connect in person. A nice environment and space to hang out make advisors and success coaches more approachable.

#### IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION, OUTREACH & MESSAGING:

##### *Finding #6: Most students first learn about Oregon Promise on their high school campus*

Our research indicates that most students heard about Oregon Promise while on their high school campus. The accuracy of the messaging varied greatly and typically depended largely upon the individual high schools; some counselors had heard of Oregon Promise but had no information about it to pass on to students, while others held workshops to help guide students through the

FAFSA and OSAC application process. The most effective method of outreach came from well-informed counselors and teachers.

Advisors said they saw a disproportionate number of students from high schools that facilitated all of their students applying for FAFSA and Oregon Promise. Students who came from high schools that conducted workshops and trainings were less likely to report the application and reapplication process as confusing and/or difficult. Many students specifically praised TRIO program counselors.

Advisors were generally not involved in initial Oregon Promise outreach for the first cohort of recipients, but some are now acting as resources for interested high school students.

Students who earned their General Educational Development (GED) certificate usually heard about Oregon Promise in their GED class.

*Finding #7: Inconsistent messaging left students confused, ill-informed & frustrated at times*

We found that frequently, student's first impressions about Oregon Promise were either vague or full of misconception. Many felt that the initial Oregon Promise pitch was lacking in crucial information about GPA requirements, term credit limits, or even the requirements for their school's First Year Experience. Disbursement procedures and award amounts still confuse some students.

Importantly, a large majority of the students we spoke to thought Oregon Promise was literally "free college" when they first engaged with the program. Most were unaware that it is actually a grant that covers most of their tuition; only a few students we spoke to had accurate and comprehensive knowledge of the program from the start. This issue specifically affects the slight majority of Oregon Promise students who do not qualify for a Pell or Oregon Opportunity grant, who end up paying for a portion of the fees and tuition each term even with the grant. Once those students were confronted with bills and it became apparent that they would have to pay for their books, fees, and school supplies they quickly realized that Oregon Promise was not free college. The unexpected expenses that many students faced frequently left them feeling disappointed and frustrated with the program.

These were commonly echoed comments about initial confusion from students:

- "...it was marketed as free college, everything paid for."
- "I was told it was two free years of community college,"
- "My counselor thought the program meant free college."
- "Oregon Promise is a little confusing. What is free tuition? Why is that separate from books?"
- "I thought Oregon Promise would cover everything, but I have to pay for books, and anything above 12 credits."

One advisor even reported some students believing that Oregon Promise would cover housing.

Furthermore, there was continued confusion around the specifics of disbursement procedures and exact award amounts, and desire for these to be communicated more clearly. Specifically, many had negative feelings about the \$50 per term copay, which was perceived as “just another fee” that was taken out of their grant. Many students still were even unaware of the \$50 per term copay, as those who received Pell and Oregon Opportunity grant had the fee deducted from their award amount automatically.

Even advisors felt confusion about their role in interpreting Oregon Promise requirements. For instance, one advisor said this about a First Year Experience requirement:

“The students are required to enroll in a college-success course. But that did not make sense for students who took college courses in high school. We made adjustments for those students but it wasn’t seamless.”

*Finding #8: Roll-out of the program was frustrating for students, advisors, and administrators*

The accelerated roll-out of Oregon Promise was frustrating for administrators as well as advisors. Many of the administrators described the roll-out process as “a scramble,” “bumpy,” and “disorganized.” Administrators regularly struggled with uncertainty regarding the additional program criteria that was supposed to be implemented (such as the First Year Experience). Additionally, many administrators report having poor guidance as to how credit limits influenced grant awarding; the requirements of the First Year Experience program; who was eligible for the grant and who was not; as well as whether or not undocumented students or their families could apply for Oregon Promise or not. Further, it was unclear for administrators how to handle situations where students had to take terms off due to medical illnesses or emergencies. This was made especially clear in a conversation with a student who was forced to take a term off due to a brain surgery, and was unsure whether he would still have access to the program next year. He suggested that “people who have big life hiccups should still have access” to Oregon Promise.

Additionally, many administrators reported that the information disseminated from HECC to students was inconsistent and inaccurate at times. The lack of clarity around the reapplication process meant colleges sent out texts and emails urging people to re-apply only to find out shortly after that renewing the FAFSA would suffice. The roll-out process left a number of administrators feeling irritated and frustrated with the Oregon Promise program. Students reported these and similar issues:

- “I had a lot of issues with actually receiving the money. I thought I had to set up a special bank account. No one here knows anything about the disbursement.”
- “I don’t know how to withdraw the money.”
- “I was expecting more money and am still confused about how the credits I’m taking translate to award amount.”

*Finding # 9: Students may have difficulty completing a program given the following constraints*

1. Most AA degrees require more than 90 credits, but Oregon Promise only covers 90 credits.
2. The 12-credit limit means students have to pay out of pocket to graduate in 2 years – as they have to take 15 credits a term to graduate in 2 years without summers (Oregon Promise does not currently cover summer tuition). Some AA degrees have specific programs that require more than 12 credits a term.
3. Students placed in remedial classes will not have enough Oregon Promise covered credits to obtain an AA degree.
4. The 6-credit term minimum adversely affects students who work full time and want to take one class.
5. It is unclear what happens to a student’s grant status if they have to take time off.
6. Students, administrators, and advisors are worried that the program will not be funded in the future.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS:

### EDUCATION NORTHWEST:

Considering the information that we have gathered, we echo a number of the same recommendations proposed by Education Northwest in their 2016 study *Fulfilling the Promise? Early Findings on Oregon’s New College Grant Program*. Those recommendations include:

**#1. “Mention the 12-credit limit and include information on award notification and the disbursement timeline in outreach materials.”** OSAC has clarified the grant amounts and initial eligibility criteria on the Oregon Promise website, but we reiterate this recommendation to ensure OSAC has updated outreach materials that reflect crucial grant criteria. Additionally, we recommend providing colleges and Oregon Promise recipients with a clearer timeline regarding grant awards, amounts, and disbursement schedules. As it stands currently, the Oregon Promise website says “Oregon Promise award amounts for 2017-18 will be available by August 2017 in the OSAC Student Portal” and that “you should frequently check your award status in the OSAC Student Portal. OSAC will also notify you by email once you have been awarded.”<sup>4</sup> The lack of transparency as to how much an individual will be getting as well as when the funds will come in can confuse and frustrate people.

**#2. “Continue to invest in targeted outreach to increase awareness and participation.”** By targeting outreach to high school to increase awareness and participation, Oregon Promise may be able to boost its presence on high school campuses and act as an onsite liaison for graduation high school students. Our research indicates that students receive most of their information about

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<sup>4</sup> Office of Student Access and Completion (OSAC) Website

Oregon Promise from their high school counselors and educators. As reported by students and advisors, schools that facilitated their students' engagement with FAFSA and Oregon Promise succeeded in obtaining Oregon Promise for a large portion of their graduating students. As such, it may behoove Oregon Promise officials to utilize the high school campus and its administrators more often.

**#3. “Stabilize funding and review requirements to ensure they are meeting the legislative intent of the program.”** Our research indicates that Oregon Promise must stabilize its funding source to alleviate some of the stress and worry that students and administrators may feel about the program. Both students and administrators reported an uneasiness regarding the availability of Oregon Promise going into the future. Many of the students depend on Oregon Promise to fund their education and the uncertainty of future funding does not allow them to properly plan out their future financially as well as educationally.

#### OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

In addition to the recommendations set forth by the Education Northwest study, we recommend that Oregon Promise make the following changes:

**#1. Clarify eligibility criteria, requirements & grant amounts.** Try to dispel the myth of Oregon Promise as “free community college.” The label “free college” is misleading, especially for students who do not qualify for Pell grants. It places a burden on the student and family who encounter unexpected fees. This unnecessarily taints the experiences of recipients who should feel most grateful towards Oregon Promise.

Ideally, remove the \$50 co-pay. The philosophy behind a co-pay is that students who pay a small amount as a “buy-in” will have more motivation to follow through with their commitment to higher education. This does not seem to apply in the Oregon Promise scenario. Students who receive Pell and Oregon Opportunity grants in addition to Oregon Promise do not engage in the “buy in” because their grant money covers the \$50 co-pay. The \$50 is deducted from their account, and then the school disperses the remaining money to the student. Those who receive Oregon Promise but not Pell do not get enough money to cover their school fees. For them, the \$50 co-pay acts as one more fee, which may or may not increase their “buy-in.” If necessary, reduce Oregon Promise grant amounts by \$150 per student per year to maintain costs.

**#2. Decrease the credit minimum to four credits per term.** Our research indicates that most college courses are four credits. The current six credit minimum requires students to take more than one class, and will usually result in students taking a two-credit class they may not need. As a result, the student is eating up some of the 90 credit limit unnecessarily – a problem avoided by decreasing the credit limit to four.

**#3. Provide a system for students to take a term off in cases of emergency.** There is not a formal system in place regarding what to do if a term has to be missed due to a medical illness or unavoidable circumstances. We recommend that OSAC develop a system that allows students to take time off in instances of emergencies without the threat of losing their Oregon Promise funding. Students should not have to worry about losing Oregon Promise due to a medical emergency.

**#4. Promote community college networking to establish best practices for First Year Experience and high school outreach.** Currently, each campus has its own requirements and standards for the First Year Experience, and consequently, the effectiveness of the First Year Experience varies between campuses. By working together, community colleges across the state could develop a model of best practices that campuses can emulate and tailor to their college's specific needs.

**#5. Focus energy on strengthening communication between OSAC, administrators, advisors, and students.** Advisors need support from OSAC to optimize their impact on students. Perhaps designate a specific contact person in OSAC and HECC for questions from advisors and success coaches. Advisors also want more clarity about expectations and requirements around the First Year Experience. For instance, some administrators and advisors are unsure how to report completion of First Year Experience requirements. We repeatedly heard (and experienced first hand) that texting is a better mode to communicate with students than email.

**#6. Keep funding Oregon Promise and its supporting programs.** The supporting programs are a critical aspect of Oregon Promise. In the case of insufficient funding for Oregon Promise, we suggest implementing a threshold on participant income and/or estimated family contribution. We do not recommend increasing the GPA requirement, in part because literature shows grants with GPA requirements reduce racial diversity.<sup>5</sup> As one advisor put it, "The 2.5 GPA requirement is right on target. Free college is a good motivator and the goal is not out of reach."

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## LIMITATIONS:

We only interviewed 45 students, administrators, and advisors-- a relatively small sample size. We also only interviewed students who, for some unknown reason, made themselves available for our study. Their motivation to participate in the study is unclear; perhaps they had more time on their hands; or perhaps they had a good relationship with an advisor and were doing them a favor; it is also possible that those who participated had particularly strong bias (whether good or bad) about Oregon Promise they wanted to share. Further, we only spoke to students who took advantage of Oregon Promise – we did not interview Oregonians who did not participate in the Oregon Promise grant program.

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<sup>5</sup> Heller, D. E., & Marin, P. (2004). State merit scholarship programs and racial inequality. *Civil Rights Project at Harvard University (The)*.

Despite having a racially representative sample of the student population in Oregon (see appendix D, table I) this study is not intended to be generalizable beyond Oregon Promise. This study should be taken in conjunction with other studies, like Education Northwest’s<sup>6</sup> 2016 *Fulfilling The Promise? Early Findings on Oregon’s New College Grant Program*, to better understand the impact of Oregon Promise on students.

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## FUTURE RESEARCH:

Given the number of limitations that were present in our study it is important that future research should focus on addressing some of the areas that were outside the scope of our project. One such area of focus that needs further study is retention rates among Oregon Promise recipients. Given that the program is only a year old it was difficult for our study to determine how Oregon Promise influences retention and graduation/transfer rates. However, retention and graduation rates must be an area of interest for further research if we are to determine the true effect that Oregon Promise has on higher education accessibility.

Additionally, future research should focus on determining the educational trajectories for those both those who receive and those who do not receive the Oregon Promise grant. It is not unreasonable to surmise that if Oregon Promise is positively influencing higher educational attainment than those who receive the grant *should* have higher retention and graduation rates than those who do not. However, answers to these questions can only come with further research.

Lastly, it would be valuable to gain the perspectives of those students who did not receive Oregon Promise: why they didn’t apply for it, accept it, or qualify for it – and what their outcomes are.

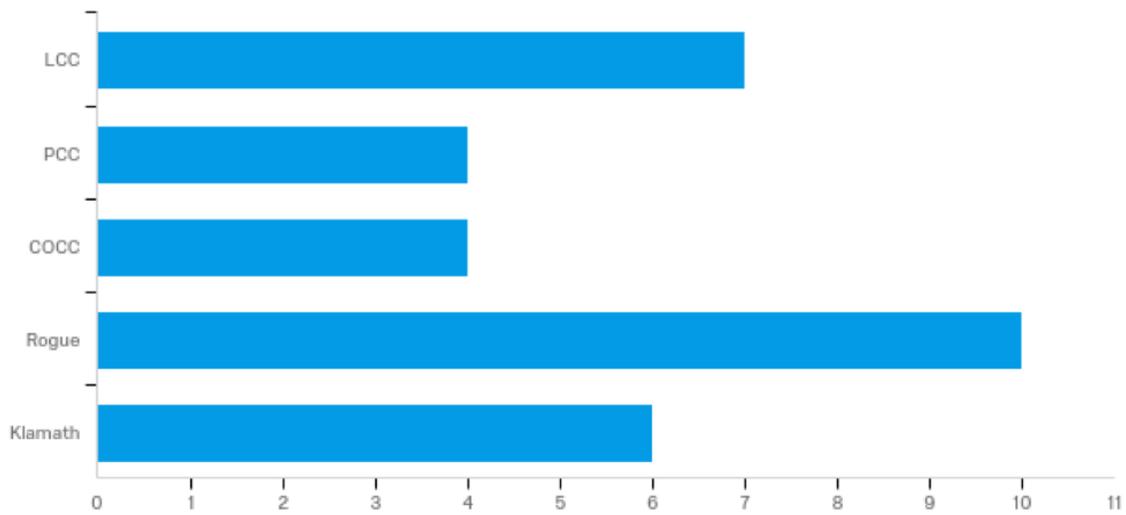
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<sup>6</sup> An “educational laboratory,” Education Northwest specializes in applied research and development. They work with schools, districts, and communities in Montana, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska.

Appendix A. Demographics Questionnaire Results:

**Percentage of Community College Representation in the Study:**

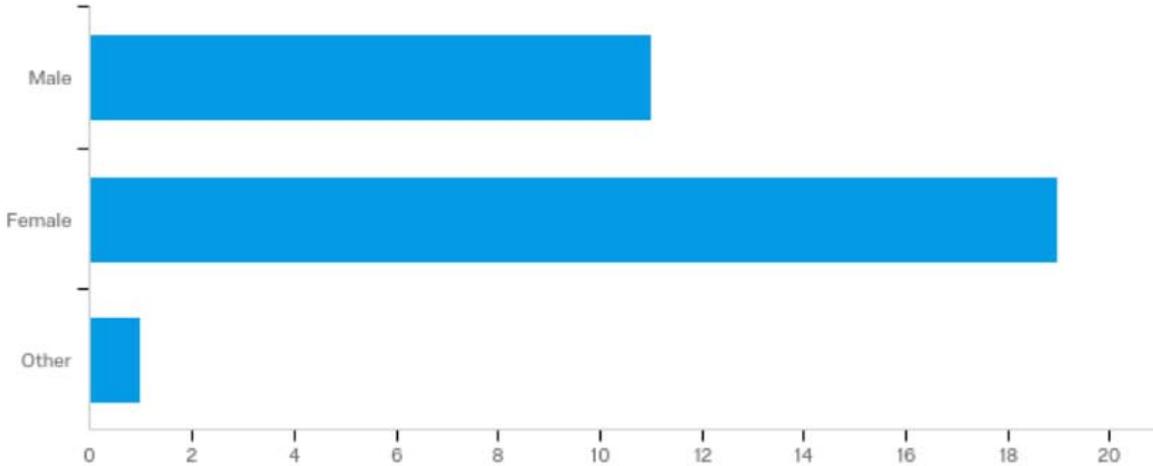
Community College Student Interviews	%
LCC	22.6%
PCC	12.9%
COCC	12.9%
Rogue	32.3%
Klamath	19.4%



**Breakdown of Student Sample Group by Gender Identification:**

Gender	%
Male	35.5%
Female	61.3%
Other	3.2%

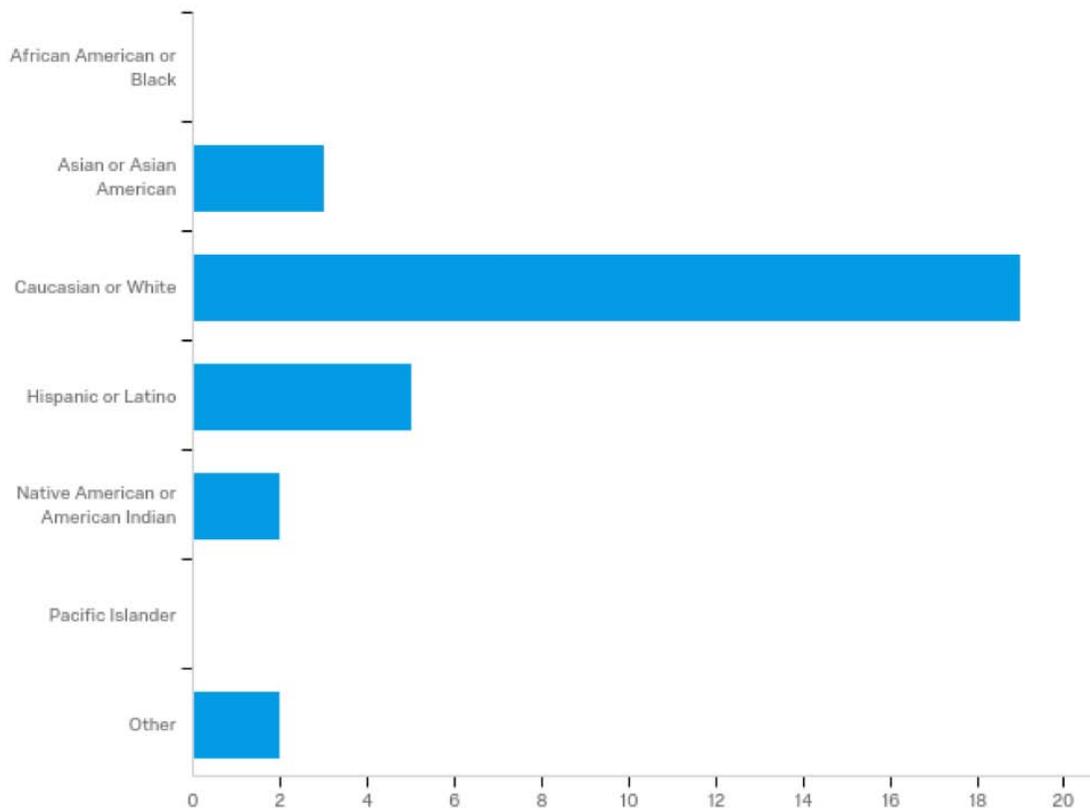
**Gender of Students Interviewed**



## Breakdown of Student Sample Group by Race and/or Ethnicity:

Race/Ethnicity	%
African American or Black	0%
Asian or Asian American	9.7%
Caucasian or White	61.3%
Hispanic or Latino	16.1%
Native American or American Indian	6.5%
Pacific Islander	0%
Other	6.5%

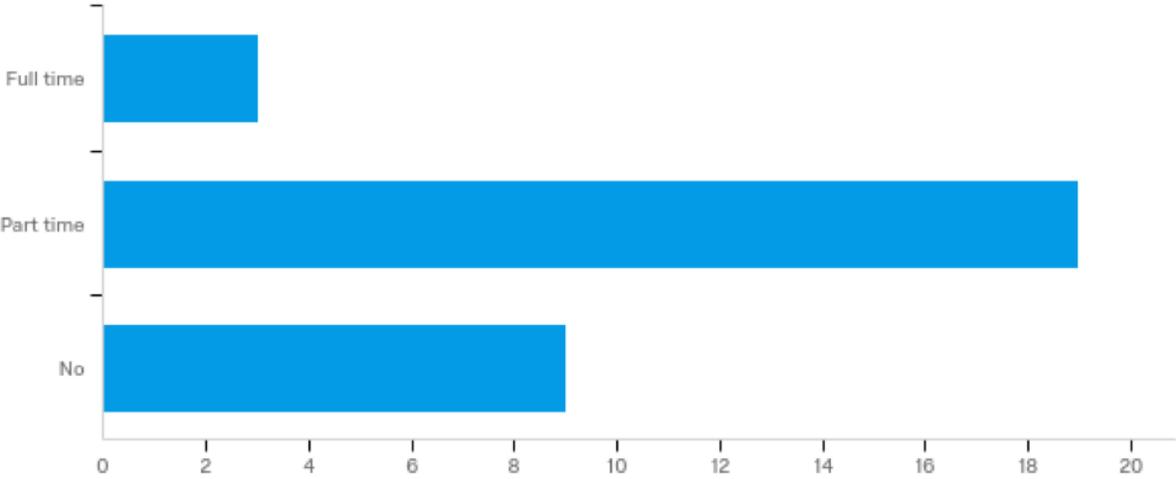
### Race/Ethnicity of Students Interviewed



**Breakdown of Student Sample Group by Employment Status:**

Employment Status	%
Full time	9.7%
Part time	61.3%
No	29.0%

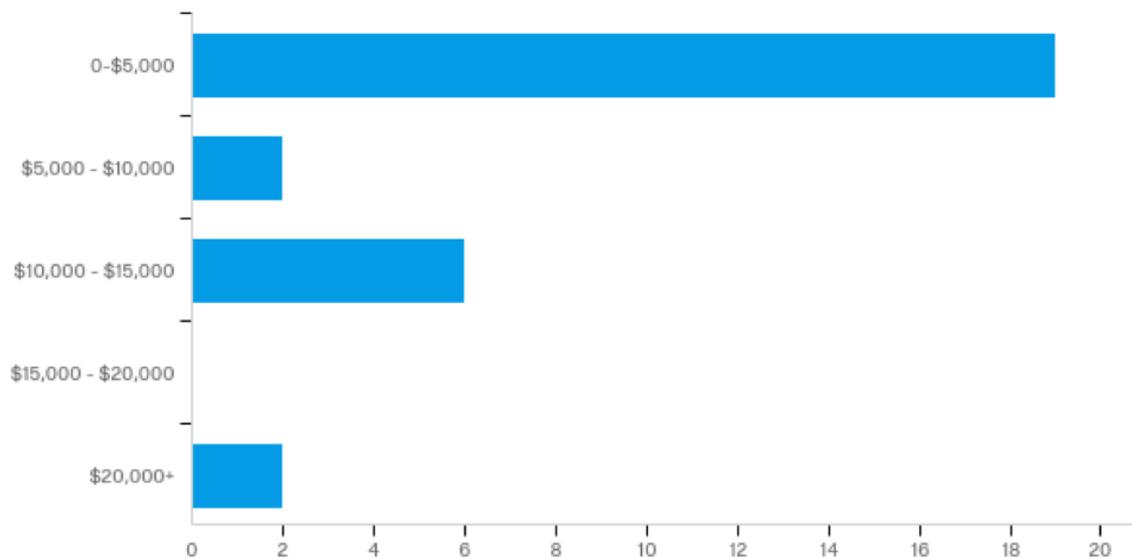
**Employment Status of Students Interviewed**



## Breakdown of Student Sample Group by Student Yearly Income:

Students' Estimated Yearly Income	%
0 - \$5,000	65.5%
\$5,000 - \$10,000	6.9%
\$10,000 - \$15,000	20.7%
\$15,000 - \$20,000	0%
\$20,000+	6.9%

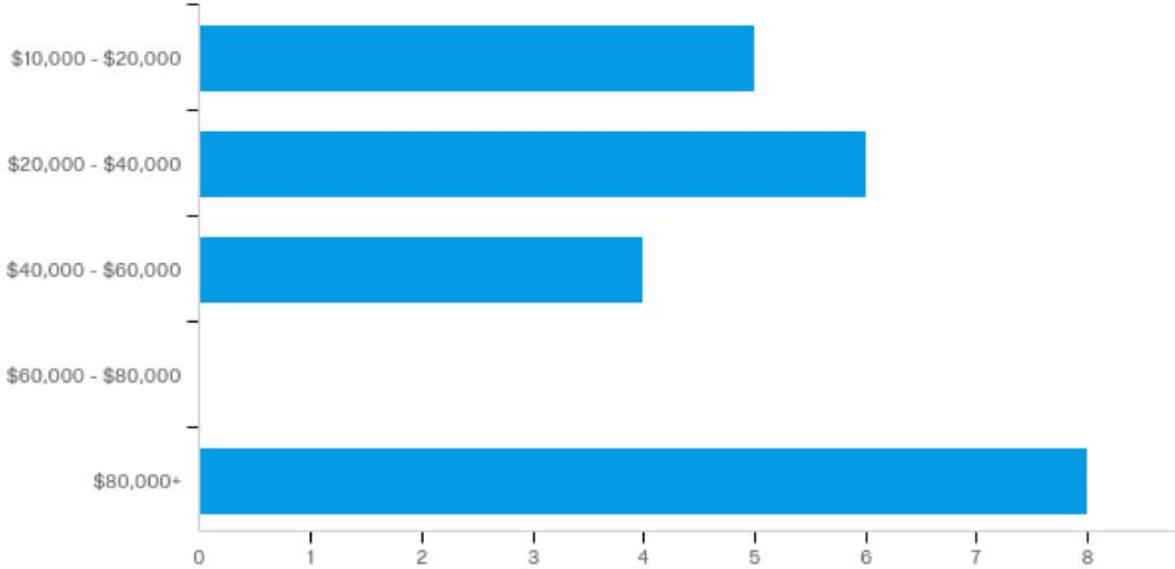
Students' Estimated Yearly Income



**Breakdown of Student Sample Group by Student Family Yearly Income:**

<b>Family's Estimated Yearly Income</b>	<b>%</b>
\$10,000 - \$20,000	21.7%
\$20,000 - \$40,000	26.1%
\$40,000 - \$60,000	17.4%
\$60,000 - \$80,000	0%
\$80,000+	34.8%

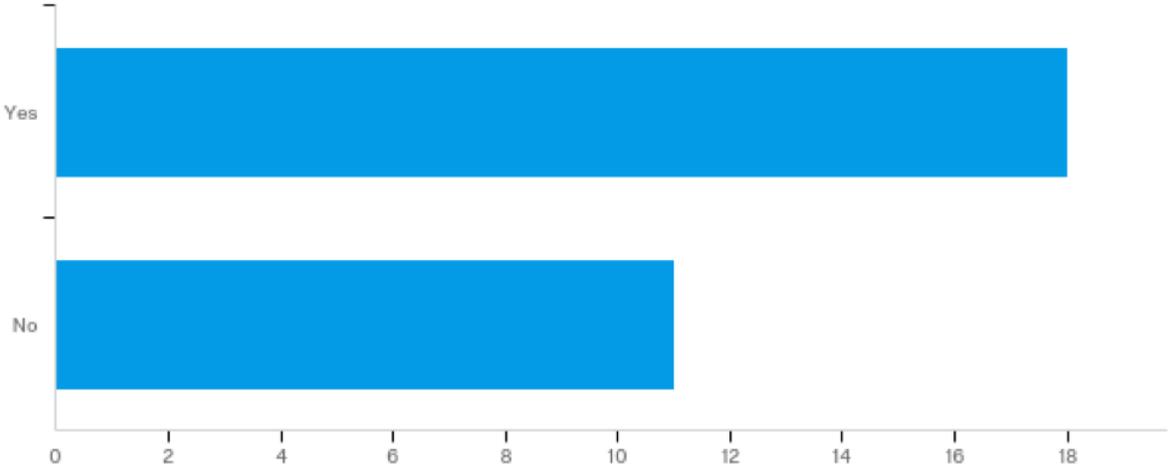
**Family's Estimated Yearly Income**



**Breakdown of Student Sample Group who had Parents that Attended College:**

<b>Did Parent's Attend College</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	62.1%
No	37.9%

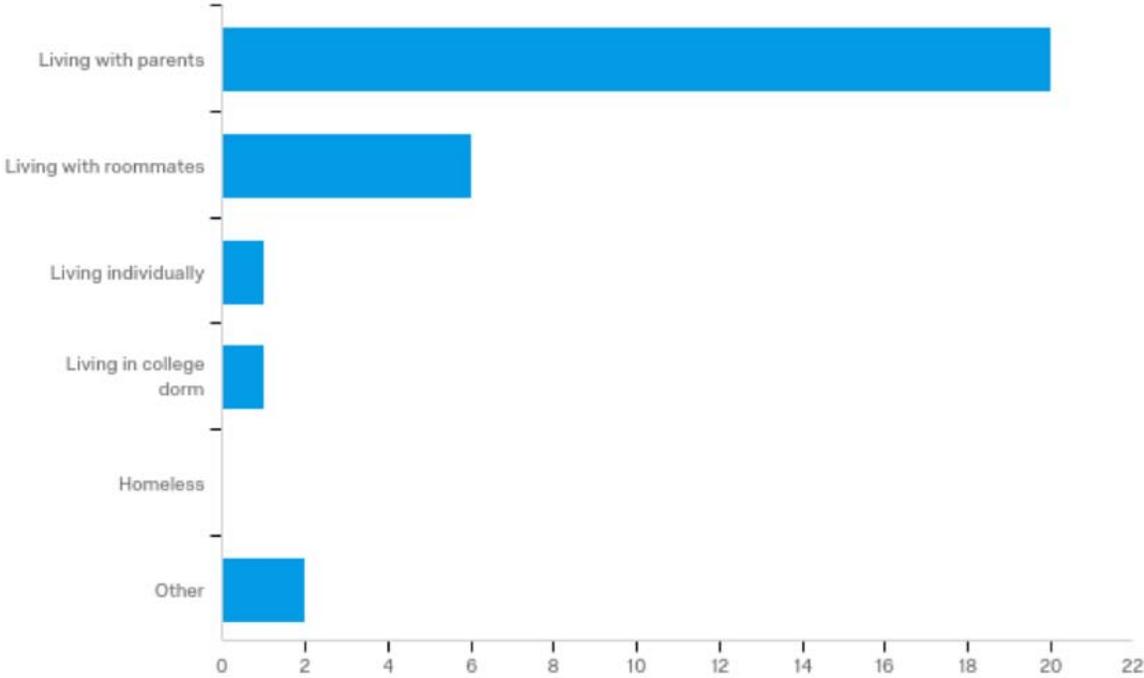
**Did Parents Attend College**



**Breakdown of Student Sample Group Current Living Situation:**

<b>Current Living Situation</b>	<b>%</b>
Living with parents	66.7%
Living with roommates	20.0%
Living individually	3.3%
Living in college dorm	3.3%
Homeless	0.0%
Other	6.7%

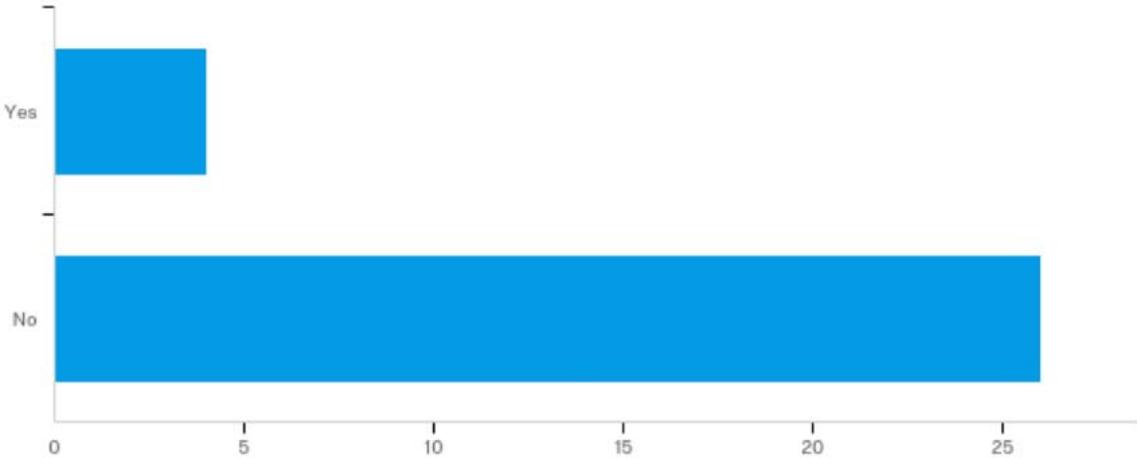
**Current Living Situation of Students Interviewed**



**Breakdown of Student Sample Group Who Received a GED:**

<b>Did Student Earn a GED</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	13.3%
No	86.7%

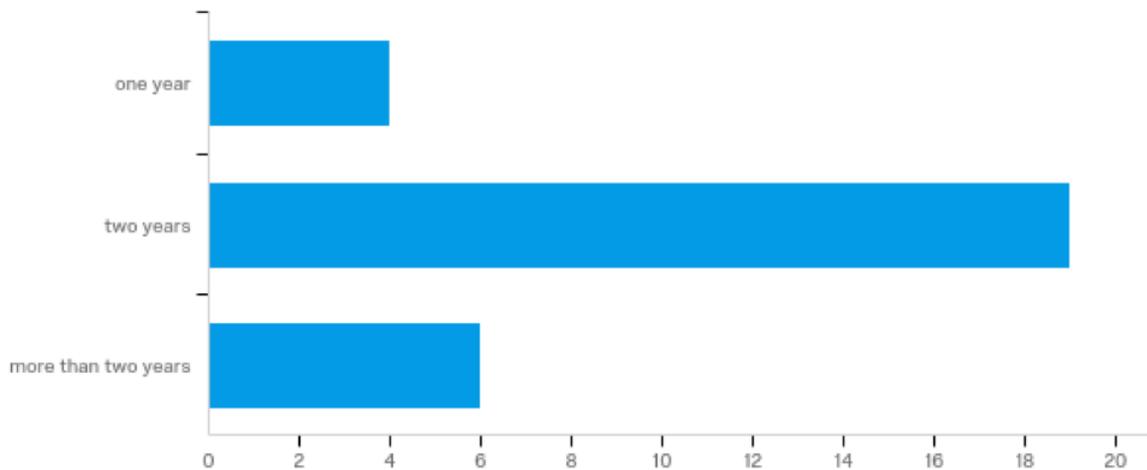
Did Student Earn a GED



## Breakdown of Estimated Time to Complete Community College Coursework:

Estimated Time to Complete CC	%
one year	13.8%
two years	65.5%
more than two years	20.7%

## Estimated Time to Complete CC Program



## Breakdown of Student Sample Group GPA:

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Count
High School GPA	2.50	3.96	3.50	25

## Breakdown of Student Sample Group Per Term Credits Taken:

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Count
Credits Typically Taken Each Term	6.0	16.0	12.4	30

## Appendix B. Methodology:

### **Research questions:**

In order to meet the goals of this project we took a qualitative, exploratory research approach that was informed by program evaluation standards. We used semi-structured interviews and focus groups as a way to collect a diverse set of stories and narratives in order to give meaningful insights into our two core research questions:

1. *Did Oregon Promise expand enrollment, especially for specific demographics, among students who would have otherwise not gone to college; and*
2. *How has outreach, messaging, and specific supporting programs, impacted student experiences?*

### **Sample population:**

Our participant pool was a sample of students who received the Oregon Promise grant, as well as administrators and academic advisors employed by community colleges. Due to time and resource constraints, we strategically selected five different locations around Oregon. We chose the five colleges based on: urban vs. rural location, co-location with universities, geographic dispersal throughout Oregon, overall enrollment, diversity of student body, and the amount of interest college administrators have shown in engaging with the Oregon Promise program.

The five Oregon community colleges we chose were:

- Portland Community College, Sylvania campus (urban)
- Lane Community College, Eugene (urban)
- Central Oregon Community College, Bend (urban)
- Rogue Community College, Medford (rural)
- Klamath Community College, Klamath Falls (rural)

Our clients at HECC provided the initial contact information for administrators from each selected college. From the administrator contacts, we utilized a snowballing technique to recruit Oregon Promise recipients as well as other advisors at each site. We hoped to interview students with a diversity of backgrounds, including race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, GED status, and high school alma mater – but were dependent on the snowballing technique which left recruitment decisions largely out of our control. For the purpose of recruiting students to interviews and focus groups we used small incentives: Starbucks gift cards for interviews; and pizza for focus groups.

We made contact with four to eleven students at each college, and one to three college employees at each site. The interviews and focus groups were undertaken during a two-month period spanning April and May of 2017. Most of the data collection happened on-site at the different colleges, with the exception of most of the interviews with college administrators and advisors, which were conducted over the phone prior to each site visit. Interviews averaged 30 minutes, and focus groups took no longer than one hour, including the preamble with informed consent and demographic questionnaires. All four researchers working on this project were involved in the data collection

process. While the interviews were semi-structured, we used Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved introduction scripts and interview question guides to ensure an adequate level of homogeneity throughout the data collection.

### **Interviews:**

We conducted phone interviews with administrators and advisors as well as on-site, in-person interviews with students (and two advisors). When more than one of us was present for the interview, we assigned someone as the primary interviewer; they held responsible for asking the interview questions and interacting with the participant. The other team members were considered secondary interviewers; in addition to asking follow-up questions, they focused on recording the conversation through note taking.

### **Student Interview Process:**

Our primary method for reaching out to Oregon Promise students was to have our advisor-contacts send out a promotion email to their Oregon Promise listserv on our behalf. We offered a \$5.00 Starbucks gift card to any Oregon Promise student willing to participate in a one-on-one interview, assuring them that the study would not last longer than 30 minutes. Likewise, we offered free pizza to participants as an incentive to participate in one of the two focus groups we conducted. We interviewed students on their respective community college campuses to minimize the burden of travel on the individual students. Given our group's limited time frame, all student interviews at a given community college were scheduled for the same day. We talked to between four and eleven students during each campus visit.

Each interview began with an explanation of the study and the overall purpose of our research. Additionally, informed consent forms were handed out and collected once they had been signed by the participant. Audio recordings and handwritten notes were used to document each in-person student interviews.

Furthermore, we collected demographic data using a short, two-sided questionnaire that asked for information regarding the participant's gender, race/ethnicity, income, employment status, parents' college experience, living situation, GED status, GPA, major, and number of credits taken (see Appendix C). We chose to collect the demographic data with a questionnaire rather than through interview for an array of reasons; it is more time efficient, it allows for the interview to be more of a conversation, and some questions that could be considered personal (e.g. income) may get a better response rate in questionnaire form.

### **Individual interviews:**

Each individual interviews lasted no more than 30 minutes and had one to three team members present. The questions in our interview guide for students centered around four themes related to different parts of our research questions:

- experience of the application process,
- impact of grant money on decision-making,

- impact of information and messaging on decision-making; and,
- impact of Oregon Promise supporting programs in place at the college.

**Focus groups:**

Each focus group lasted no more than one hour and had two or three team members present. In the focus groups we used the same demographics questionnaire as in the interviews, and the prompts and questions are centered on the same themes as listed above under individual interviews. The only difference however was that the focus group prompts were considerably more open-ended, which allowed for a greater range of responses from the participants. Our role as facilitators and interviewers was to guide the discussion and keep it on topic to provide meaningful insight into our research questions.

We chose to include focus groups in our methodology for two reasons; (1) the context of focus groups can generate different kinds of information and different perspectives than one-on-one interviews because participants are inspired by the ideas of their peers; (2) it is a time-efficient way to include more voices in our study; this is especially beneficial given our time constraint, and that we only have the ability to visit each community college for one day.

**Administrator and Advisors Interviews:**

Patrick Crane, Director of the Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development at HECC, directed us to initial administrator contacts at each selected college. These administrator contacts were exclusively assistant deans and vice presidents. The administrators put us in contact with the college advisor they deemed most appropriate to discuss Oregon Promise activities on their respective campus. Our phone interviews with both of these populations lasted no more than 30 minutes and had two or three team members present for each one. Before the interviews began, we obtained verbal, informed consent. The questions in our interview guide for administrators and advisors centered around five themes:

1. program outreach and messaging;
2. supporting programs on campus;
3. impact on enrollment and student demographics;
4. administrative impact; and,
5. the application and reapplication process.

During our interviews with administrators and advisors, we tried to gain an understanding of their professional experience with, and observations of, the Oregon Promise program. We took extensive notes during the interviews and combined our observations to minimize the chance of missing or misconstruing comments.

**Method of Analysis:**

We analyzed the student interview and focus group data by listening to the audio recordings and identifying patterns and themes, especially those related to our research questions. We listened closely for recurring themes and noted, not only the common stories, but also the unique experiences. Due to the time constraints of the project, we made guiding notes during the interview and transcribed meaningful quotes that illustrated a theme particularly well. In the absence of transcription, we ensured rigor in our analysis through triangulation—at least two researchers listened to, and analyzed, each audio recording and then compared their results. This helped us recognize subjectivities in the interpretation of data stemming from each researcher’s social location.

**Institutional Review Board:**

In all our interviews and focus groups, participants were provided with an informed consent form and introduction scripts, which explained the project prior to the start of the interview/focus group. All materials and procedures were approved through the University of Oregon’s Office of Research Compliance vetting process.

## Appendix C. Research Questions for Administrators, Advisors and Students:

### **Interview Questions for Administrators**

#### General professional experiences of the program:

1. What has your experience been like with the roll-out of the Oregon Promise program?
  - a. Has it been positive? Negative? Difficult? Smooth?
2. Has there been a particularly effective method for disseminating information about the program to students and/or their parents?
3. In general, how knowledgeable do Oregon Promise recipients appear to be regarding the program, its application process or its requirements?
4. In your opinion, what is working with Oregon Promise?
5. Do you have any suggestions for how the Oregon Promise program could be improved?

#### Support Programs:

6. Can you tell me about your level of contact with Oregon Promise Recipients?
7. How often, would you say, that you interact with Oregon Promise recipients?
8. Could you tell me about the types of questions you typically receive from Oregon promise recipients and their families?
9. Could you tell me about the programs in place at your college for first year students generally?
10. Can you tell me about the programs in place for first year Oregon Promise students specifically?

#### Administrative Function:

11. What are the responsibilities of advisors at this college?
12. Have you used additional state resources in the last two years to hire additional advisors?
13. If so, do the newly hired advisors have a unique or specific purpose?
14. What has been the effect of having new or additional advisors?

#### Impact on Enrollment:

15. What impact did Oregon Promise have on your 2016 enrollment?
16. In your opinion, what has been the effect of Oregon Promise in terms of the demographics of first year students?
  - a. Does there appear to be an increase in ethnic or racial diversity on campus?
  - b. Or students from underprivileged and underserved communities in general?

### **Interview Questions for Advisors**

1. Can you tell me about your interactions with Oregon Promise recipients; do you have much one on one, or personal contact with them?

2. From your experience, can you tell me about how recipients are learning about the Oregon Promise program?
  - a. What is your experience of the overall messaging and outreach around Oregon Promise? Are students coming to you already knowledgeable about the program? What sources did they get their information from?
  - b. What information about Oregon Promise are you and your school giving to students?
  - c. Where is that information coming from?
3. Tell me about the First Year Experience at this school...
4. Could you tell me about any issues or concerns Oregon Promise students may have raised regarding the Program?
  - a. What types of concerns/issues are arising?
  - b. Are you able to address concerns Oregon Promise students are having?
5. Have any students voiced opinions about the 12 credit limit?
6. Can you explain the Oregon Promise reapplication process for me/us?
  - a. Are you involved with the reapplication process?
7. Do you think Oregon Promise has increased enrollment at your school?
  - a. Do you think Oregon Promise has had an impact on the demographics of first year students?
  - b. Do you think anything else could have impacted the demographics of first year students?
8. What is working w/OP?
9. Do you have any suggestions for how the Oregon Promise program could be improved?

### **Interview Questions for Students:**

#### Impact of information and messaging on decision-making:

1. Can you tell me about how you learned about Oregon Promise?
  - a. (did you read about it; were you told about it; who told you about it?)
2. When you first heard about Oregon Promise, what did you think it did?
3. Did knowing about Oregon Promise affect your decision to attend college after high school?
4. Did qualifying for Oregon Promise affect your decision to attend community college?
5. Did you consider other colleges/universities besides this one?
  - a. Did you apply to other colleges/universities?

#### Application Process:

6. What was your experience filling out the FAFSA?
7. Did the FAFSA results/grant amounts surprise you?
8. Did the FAFSA results/grant amounts change your perceptions about the feasibility of attending college?
9. Do you plan on re-applying for Oregon Promise?

10. Do you feel like there are adequate resources on this campus to help you understand the reapplication process?
11. Can you tell me about how your perception of Oregon Promise has changed since having experienced it?

Impact of grant money on decision-making:

12. How has Oregon Promise change, if at all, your feelings of financial stability?
13. Where do you think you would be now if Oregon Promise did not exist?
14. Do you have any suggestions for how the Oregon Promise program could be improved?

Impact of supporting programs:

15. Why did you decide to attend this school in particular?
16. Do you plan on earning an associate's degree?
17. What do you plan on using your community college degree for?
18. What are your short term goals?
19. What are your long term goals?
20. Are you familiar with e-mentoring services?
21. Do you know what the First Year Experience (or the name the CC uses for the set of supportive services they offer using HB 4057) is?
  - a. Can you tell me about your First Year Experience?
22. Do you feel you are receiving enough academic support to be successful?

**Focus Group Questions**

Application Process:

1. How did you learn about Oregon Promise?
2. How would you describe your experience applying for the Oregon Promise grant?

Impact of information/marketing on decision-making:

3. Did the information or marketing of the program influence your decision to apply for Oregon Promise?
4. Did the information or marketing of the program influence your decision to go to community college?

Impact of grant money on decision-making:

5. Where do you think you would be now if Oregon Promise did not exist?

Impact of supporting programs:

6. Have you been engaged in the 1st year experience? If so, what has that experience been like for you?

7. Do you have any suggestions on how your experience with Oregon Promise could be improved?

### Demographic Questionnaire

- 1) What is your gender identification?: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) What race or ethnicity do you identify as?:
  - a) African American or Black
  - b) Asian or Asian American
  - c) Caucasian or White
  - d) Hispanic or Latino
  - e) Native American or American Indian
  - f) Pacific Islander
  - g) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Are you currently employed?:
  - a) Yes
    - i) Full-time
    - ii) Part-time
  - b) No
- 4) What is your estimated yearly income?:
  - a) \$0 - \$5,000
  - b) \$5,000 - \$10,000
  - c) \$10,000 - \$15,000
  - d) \$15,000 - \$20,000
  - e) \$20,000+
- 5) What is your family's yearly income?:
  - a) \$10,000 - \$20,000
  - b) \$20,000 - \$40,000
  - c) \$40,000 - \$60,000
  - d) \$60,000 - \$80,000
  - e) \$80,000+
- 6) Did your parents attend college?:
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
- 7) What is your current living situation?:
  - a) Living with parents
  - b) Living with roommates
  - c) Living individually
  - d) Living in college dorms
  - e) Homeless
  - f) Other

- 8) Did you earn a GED?:
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
- 9) What high school did you attend?:
- 10) Did you receive a high school diploma?:
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
- 11) What was your high school GPA?:
- 12) What is your current major, minor, or area of study?:
- 13) How many credits do you typically take each term?:
- 14) How long will it take you to complete your Community College program (degree, transfer, or other)?:
- 15) Is there anything else you would like us to know?

## Appendix D. Literature Review:

### **Introduction:**

There is little debate among social scientists as to the role that education plays in economic stability; in fact, research has consistently shown a positive correlation between educational attainment and economic prosperity.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, increased access to education benefits not just the individual but society as a whole.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, individual academic success in higher education can be viewed as a conduit for increasing societal well-being. Although *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka (1954)* formally ended the practice of racial segregation in the public school system, widespread inequality in regards to accessing quality education remains. This is particularly true when it comes to accessing higher education. The cost of relocation, food, housing, school supplies, and the seemingly endless rise in tuition continues to make higher education inaccessible to many.

Unequal access to higher education is problematic because the *de facto* exclusion of ethnic minorities and low-income individuals reduces their ability to build economic stability and generate greater human capital.<sup>9</sup> Human Capital, the collection of positive traits and experience found among individuals in a population, is vital for achieving sustainable economic growth.<sup>10</sup> Society's collective human capital can spur increased economic production and improve the quality of life for the population as a whole.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it is beneficial to the individual and the whole population to allow as much participation in higher education by ethnic minorities and low-income individuals as possible. Many localities, as well as state and federal agencies, have attempted to address this problem by advocating for greater enrollment at community colleges as well as career and technical education as a way to build a “pathways to prosperity.”<sup>12</sup> The hope is that access to higher education will become more equitable and attainable.

### **(Dis)Investment in Education:**

To be competitive in the current and future global economy, workers must attain increasingly sophisticated career and technical skills. Education has a high return on investment: people who have earned at least a two-year degree have substantially lower jobless rates than high school dropouts, and the growth in wage differences are directly attributable to higher education and cognitive ability.<sup>13,14</sup> However, the threat of student debt is often a deterrent for many high school

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<sup>7</sup> Ozturk, I. 2001. "The Role of Education in Economic Development: A Theoretical Perspective," *Journal of Rural Development and Administration*, Volume XXXIII, No.1, pp. 39-47.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Becker, G. 1962. "Investment in Human Capital - a Theoretical Analysis." *The Journal of Political Economy*. 70 (5): 9-49.

<sup>11</sup> Salgür, S.A. 2013. "The Importance of Education in Economic Growth." *Euromentor Journal*; Bucharest 4.4 (Dec 2013): 50-57.

<sup>12</sup> Symonds, W. 2012. "Pathways to Prosperity." *Educational Leadership*. Vol. 69 Issue 7, p35-39.

<sup>13</sup> \*\*\*Holder of an associate's degree earns 51% more each year than a someone with only a high-school diploma.

<sup>14</sup> Leonhardt, D. 2014. "The Jobless Rate for Community-College Graduates Is Also Low." *The New York Times*, 5/29.

graduates from pursuing higher education.<sup>15</sup> Federal student aid is a significant contributor to making college affordable but it has not keep up with rising tuition and living costs.<sup>16</sup>

A 2012 report found that from 1990 to 2010, states disinvested from public higher education by more than 25% while the price (after adjusting for inflation) of two-year colleges climbed by 71%.<sup>17</sup> The report notes that while college prices have risen, incomes for most households has remained stagnant. Students are borrowing more money to cover the gap between college cost and financial aid, increasing total student loan debt by “a factor of 4.5 since 1999.”<sup>18</sup>

The report recommended that, in order to support education as a bridge to the middle class, state leaders should:

1. invest more in higher education;
2. reform their tax system to ensure that higher education funding does not get reduced;
3. prioritize funding for institutions that educate the most college students, and maintain flexibility in addressing changing financial aid needs of new student bodies;
4. recognize that reductions in state aid result in higher tuition costs – costs that price low- and moderate-income students out of higher education;
5. fund programs that aid in college completion;
6. reorient their financial aid policies back toward need-based aid; and,
7. encourage students to explore affordable debt sources such as the federal student loan program.

### **Rise of “Free” Community College:**

Researchers Sara Goldrick-Rab and Nancy Kendall (2014) proposed a broad and inclusive effort to increase the numbers of students pursuing higher education. They argued that two-years of college should be free and could be funded through existing resources. Their goal was to increase access while not compromising education quality.

Their proposal set out the following provisions:

1. Eligible students can attend any public college or university (2 or 4 year) free for two years.
2. By redirecting current federal financial aid funding, the federal government could pay two years of tuition for all students. It would provide additional performance-based funding to institutions serving low-income students.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Burdman, P., 2005. The student debt dilemma: Debt aversion as a barrier to college access. *Center for Studies in Higher Education*.

<sup>16</sup> Goldrick-Rab, S. & Kendall, N. 2014. Redefining College Affordability: Securing America’s Future with a Free Two Year College Option. The EduOptimists.

<sup>17</sup> Quinterno, J. 2012. *The Great Cost Shift: How Higher Education Cuts Undermine the Future*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

<sup>19</sup> \*\*\*Goldrick-Rab and Kendall (2014) estimated annual per-student funding in this model to be slightly lower than the average tuition at four-year institutions.

3. Participating institutions would not charge tuition or additional fees to students.
4. States would redirect their higher education funding to cover books and supplies for all students.
5. Student living expenses would be covered through work study.

President Obama, in concert with a number of states, proposed legislation that would make community college free to all attendees. Although legislators did not adopt America's College Promise, it included many of the provisions modeled in the Goldrick-Rab & Kendall proposal, such as:

1. Free community college to all students who were enrolled at least half-time, maintained a 2.5 GPA while in college, and made steady progress toward completing their program.
2. Community colleges would offer programs that either fully transfer to local public four-year colleges and universities, or lead to degrees and certificates in demand among employers.
3. Using the federal aid to fund three-quarters of the average cost of community college while leaving participating states responsible for covering the remaining tuition costs.

With his proposal, Obama attempted to revive higher education as the driving force behind economic growth. The thought behind America's College Promise, as well as other federal and state funding programs, was to reinvest in higher education in order to incentivize greater educational attainment which would increase economic growth for decades. Relative to other ways of strengthening growth, investment in community college increases the likelihood the middle class will share the benefits. Although America's College Promise was ultimately unsuccessful, individual states and cities have begun to shoulder the responsibility for creating greater access to higher education. Tennessee, Chicago, New York and Oregon are but a few of the individual states and cities that have begun implementing affordable higher education policies akin to President Obama's America's College Promise legislation.

### **Existing Community Colleges Funding Programs:**

#### ***Tennessee:***

Tennessee has bipartisan support for increasing the number of residents who complete a college education. A package of legislated policies, called "Drive to 55," seeks to increase the number of Tennesseans who hold college degrees from about 33% in 2014 to 55% by 2025.<sup>20</sup> A cornerstone of this effort is called "Tennessee Promise." Tennessee Promise guarantees free tuition at any of the state's 40 community and technical colleges<sup>21</sup> for Tennessee high school graduates who fulfill these requirements:

1. Apply for and accept state and federal grant funds;
2. Attend mandatory mentorship meetings;
3. Complete eight hours of community service per term enrolled;
4. Maintain satisfactory academic progress.

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<sup>20</sup> FAIN, P. 2014. "AGGRESSIVE PRAGMATISM." *INSIDE HIGHER ED*, AUGUST 26.

<sup>21</sup> \*\*\* or any other institution in Tennessee that offers an Associate's Degree

A key challenge to implementing the Tennessee Promise program was ensuring that students were ready for college-level math – those who enroll in college without the appropriate math skills take longer to complete college, thus costing the state additional funds. They addressed this by introducing college level math labs in high schools. Prior to attending college, 67% of students passed remedial math classes. In addition, those taking higher level math courses offered in high school received college credit for doing so. Four-year institutions have viewed Tennessee Promise with caution because it signals a shift away from programs that reserve funding for four-year colleges, such as the HOPE grant. Administrators at four-year institutions do not like the idea of increased competition with community colleges for funding and student enrollment.<sup>22</sup>

Although no one has conducted a program evaluation of Tennessee Promise, Carruthers and Fox (2016) evaluated its predecessor, Knox Achieves, which originated in Knox county in 2009. They found that 17.6% of eligible students chose to participate in the program during their senior year of high school, despite that it provided no additional financial aid to half of them.<sup>23</sup> Compared to similar students in the same metro area, the program increased students' immediate college enrollment rate by about 4%.<sup>24</sup> High achieving and high income students in Knox county chose to attend community college instead of four year colleges slightly more often after the implementation of Knox Achieves.

Knox Achieves, and subsequently Tennessee Promise, included mandatory mentorship and volunteering, and participants were matched with a mentor during their senior year of high school.<sup>25</sup> These mentors and Knox Achieves staff helped participants file for federal financial aid, which some students used to attend four year universities in and out of state. To retain eligibility, participants had to maintain contact with their mentor and complete an eight-hour community service project every term of college.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Chicago:***

In 2014, the City of Chicago initiated the Chicago Star Scholarship. The Scholarship, solely intended for Chicago public high school school graduates, covers tuition, fees, and books at Chicago City Colleges for up to three years beyond what state and federal grants the student receives.<sup>27</sup>

The Scholarship determines eligibility based on:

1. students having at least a 3.0 GPA;
2. being academically ready for college-level math and English classes;
3. prior application for state and federal grants; and,

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<sup>22</sup> Fain, P. 2014. "Aggressive Pragmatism." *Inside Higher Ed*, August 26.

<sup>23</sup> Carruthers, C. K., & Fox, W. F. (2016). Aid for All: College Coaching, Financial Aid, and Post-Secondary Persistence in Tennessee. *Economics of Education Review*, 51, 97-112.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*

<sup>27</sup> Perez Jr, J. & Byrne, J. 2015. "Obama's Plan for Free Community College Has Seed in Chicago." *Chicago Tribune*, Jan 9.

#### 4. enrollment in an area of study “pathway.”

The required “pathway” program helps students focus on future career path and navigate the educational system to achieve their goals. Notably, the scholarship is not based on financial need. The champion of the program, Mayor Rahm Emanuel, said that he initiated the program in order to “open more doors of opportunity for more students” and that “every student who is willing to work hard should have access to a quality education, regardless of whether they can afford it or not.”<sup>28</sup> He hopes that the scholarship will remove financial barriers to college so students can build a pathway to the middle class.

#### ***New York:***

In 2017, the governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, proposed the “Excelsior Scholarship” which covers four years of tuition for students accepted by a state or city college or university – provided they or their families earn less than \$125,000 per year.<sup>29</sup> Once enacted, this plan will cover tuition for students enrolled full-time in community colleges in New York state, as well as four-year universities. Eligible students would still apply for and receive applicable state and federal grants, with additional state funds covering the remaining tuition costs eligible students.<sup>30</sup> It is estimated that nearly one million people could qualify for the tuition waiver but that only around 200,000 students would take advantage of the program by the full program roll-out in 2019.<sup>31</sup> Although New York community college tuition is one of the lowest in the nation, it is predicted that the program would increase college enrollment by 10 percent by 2019.<sup>32</sup>

When unveiling his plan, Governor Cuomo said, “A college education is not a luxury – it is an absolute necessity for any chance at economic mobility, and with these first-in-the-nation Excelsior Scholarships, we’re providing the opportunity for New Yorkers to succeed, no matter what zip code they come from and without the anchor of student debt weighing them down.”<sup>33</sup>

#### ***Oregon:***

The Oregon Legislature approved Oregon Promise in July 2015, and tasked The Office of Student Access and Completion (OSAC) of the Oregon Department of Education’s Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) with administering the program. The first awards for students were given in fall 2016. Oregon Promise covers the average cost of 12 credits at an Oregon community college after applying other state and federal grant aid. To be eligible, students must have

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<sup>28</sup> City of Chicago. 2014. “Press Release: Mayor Emanuel and Chancellor Hyman Announce Chicago Star Scholarship for Chicago Public High School Students.” *City of Chicago Official Website*, October 1.

<sup>29</sup> New York State. 2017. “Governor Cuomo Presents 1st Proposal of 2017 State of the State: Making College Tuition-Free for New York’s Middle Class Families.” *New York State Government Website*, January 3.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid*

<sup>32</sup> McKinley, J. 2017. “Cuomo Proposes Free Tuition at New York State Colleges for Eligible Students.” *New York Times*, January 3.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*

graduated high school with a 2.5 GPA, earned their GED, or finished homeschooling within 6 months of attending a community college.<sup>34</sup>

HECC found that, assuming full-time enrollment, 25% of Oregon Promise recipients met eligibility requirements for the full Pell grant amount, and 21.7% met requirements for a moderate-to-low Pell grant.<sup>35</sup> Grant amounts for Oregon Promise range from \$1,000 to \$3,248 per academic year, with larger grants going to higher income students who did not qualify for income based grants.<sup>36</sup> Oregon Promise served 6,745 students in its first term, or 5.4% of all community college students in fall 2016.<sup>37</sup>

Education Northwest sent a survey to all Oregon FAFSA filers age 18 or 19 and Oregon Promise GED recipients, of whom 1,442 individuals completed the survey. They also conducted focus groups and interviews with “27 high school counselors, administrators, and college access professionals across the state.”<sup>38</sup> Their survey found that most students felt Oregon Promise helped them see college as affordable and made them “think more about going to college.”<sup>39</sup> High school staff members felt Oregon Promise influenced students to attend college who otherwise would not have done so.<sup>40</sup>

Students found aspects of Oregon Promise and the application process confusing.<sup>41</sup> Education Northwest recommended that stakeholders should clarify Oregon Promise covers a maximum of 12 credits; provide a timeline of award notification and grant disbursement; continue targeted outreach to high school and college staff; stabilize funding; and ask recipients about their experiences to understand the program’s impact.<sup>42</sup>

### **Further Research:**

To conclude their analysis of Oregon Promise, Hodara et al. (2017) suggested that further research should focus on a number of questions that their study could not address. Some of those areas of study include studying: the extent to which the program influenced postsecondary enrollment decisions; student experiences during the application process; student perspectives on campus support levels; experiences with and knowledge of the community college-to-university transfer

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<sup>34</sup> Hodara, M., Petrokubi, J., A. P., M. V., & Yoon, S. Y. (2017). *Fulfilling the Promise? Early Findings on Oregon’s New College Grant Program*. Portland, OR: Education Northwest.

<sup>35</sup> Oregon Governor’s Office. 2015. “Oregon Newsroom: Governor Brown Delivers ‘Oregon Promise’ of Free Community College for Eligible Students.” *Oregon.gov*, July 17.

<sup>36</sup> HECC 2016 Legislative Summary: Key Postsecondary Education Budget and Policy Bills. Higher Education Coordinating Commission. 2016. Retrieved March 7, 2017.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*

<sup>38</sup> Hodara, M., et al. (2017). *Fulfilling the Promise? Early Findings on Oregon’s New College Grant Program*. Portland, OR: Education Northwest.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*

process; perspectives on the program’s impact on difficult to measure skills such as motivation, sense of belonging in college, goal setting, and major choice.”<sup>43</sup>

The recommendations provided by the Education Northwest study served as the impetus for our current evaluation of the Oregon Promise program. Our evaluation seeks to address some of the lingering questions that Hodara and her team could not. In order to discover the contribution of Oregon Promise toward state goals of increasing college enrollment, our research was guided by the following research questions:

1. *Did Oregon Promise expand enrollment, especially for specific demographics, among students who would have otherwise not gone to college; and*
2. *How has outreach, messaging, and specific supporting programs, impacted student experiences?*

Our goal was to find the most effective methods for the Oregon Promise program to pull students into higher education, particularly those who come from underserved and underprivileged backgrounds. We believe that by telling the stories of students and administrators we provided a better understanding of what is working, as well as what elements of the program can be improved so higher education can continue to become more accessible, more affordable, and more inclusive to Oregonians all over the state.

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid*

[Appendix E. Tables:](#)

**Table I. Demographics**

Ethnicity	% of Oregon 12th Graders, 2015-16	% of Oregon Promise recipients	% in Our interviews
White	64.6	65.7	61.3
Black	2.7	1.4	0.0
Asian	4.1	4.1	9.7
Native American / American Indian	1.6	1.0	6.5
Latinx	21.3	18.9	16.1

**Table II. If not for Oregon Promise, I would be:**

at CC	at University	Not in School	Not Sure	Working	Out of State
14	10	7	5	8	2

**Table III. I am planning to:**

Get AA	Transfer	Take break	Not sure
4	13	1	2

**Table IV. Tuition and fees by community college**

College	Per credit hour**	For 12 credit hours**	Fees for 12 credits
Portland CC	\$93.00	\$1160.00	\$114.80
Lane CC	\$102.5	\$1230.00	\$143.00
Central Oregon CC	\$93.00	\$1116.00	\$93.00
Rogue CC	\$99.00	\$1188.00	\$200.00
Klamath CC	\$89.50	\$1074.00	\$145.80

\*\*<http://www.oregon.gov/higbered/research/Documents/Tuition-Fee/CC-%202016-17-Fall-Tuition-Summary-Final.pdf>

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