Chair Nesbitt, Executive Director Cannon and Members of the Commission-

For the record my name is Jeff Dense, Professor of Political Science at Eastern Oregon University and President of the Interinstitutional Faculty Senate.

As we enter the Brave New World of higher education governance in Oregon, the need for collaboration between Oregon public universities has never been greater. In order to protect the best interests of our most valuable resource-our students- we must find innovative opportunities to leverage our collaborative knowledge and expertise. This endeavor will require the participation of a broad range of stakeholders from across the higher education spectrum. The Outcomes-Based Technical Work Group illustrates HECC’s keen understanding of the need for collaborative solutions to the linchpins of access and affordability. Formulating an equitable and sustainable funding formula based on mission fulfillment, attainment of equity goals and other key factors is a structural necessity. We look forward to participating in discussions relative to university funding model proposals. Meeting the needs of increased enrollments and providing quality instruction are integral to all of our missions, and funding models that ensure our ability to maintain academic standards are essential to attainment of the state’s ambitious 40/40/20 goals.

There are a myriad of factors impinging on student’s ability to complete their degree, and ultimately, their long term contributions to communities throughout Oregon. To wit, HECC has previously heard from the Oregon Student Association about the vexing issue of textbook affordability. As a long-time classroom teacher, this impassioned testimony gave me pause to reflect on how this fiscal challenge impacts a wide range of institutional performance measures, including retention and graduation rates that may be part and parcel of the future funding model for higher education in Oregon. While formulating a cogent and logical funding formula must be a priority for HECC, textbook affordability is a key variable that should be considered as part of the funding, access and affordability troika.

Given the centrality of this issue to the future of higher education in Oregon, I have been in consultation with Commissioner Ayers and Donna Lewelling of HECC to jointly develop a concept for a convening of stakeholders to analyze the options available to promote a culture of textbook affordability throughout the Oregon higher education community. This body should consist of a wide range of stakeholders from across the higher education spectrum-students, bookstore representatives, financial aid officers, and most importantly, faculty members whose ‘front line’ views of this key issue can inform a solution that ultimately benefits future generations of students. Members should be drawn from both public and private universities, along with community colleges in order to ensure robust pathways of degree completion for students. Commissioner Ayers will speak to this proposal and textbook affordability in general, at your June meeting in Ashland. In the end, I would urge HECC to utilize its rulemaking authority to concretize lasting solutions to the textbook affordability issue and incentive institutions adopting measures that protect the fiscal interests of students.

Thank you for your time, and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.