Classified Staff Incremental Appropriation for OUS

Background

The Oregon University System (OUS) and Service Employees International Union, Local 503 (SEIU) jointly seek legislative approval of a $1.15 million incremental appropriation in State General Funds, to be allocated to OUS’s four technical and regional universities (TRUs) — Eastern Oregon University, Oregon Institute of Technology, Southern Oregon University, and Western Oregon University — to assist them in accelerating step increases for classified employees. If approved, the delayed step increases will also be accelerated at the other three OUS universities — Oregon State University, Portland State University, and University of Oregon.

In September 2013, OUS and SEIU settled on a new collective bargaining agreement (CBA) for a two-year period, 2013-2015. As part of the settlement, the parties agreed that step increases for classified staff at all OUS universities would be delayed from the employees’ salary eligibility date to July 1, 2014 and July 1, 2015, unless the Legislature approved in its February Session an incremental appropriation of $1.15 million in State General Funds for the OUS TRUs. If the appropriation is approved, the parties agreed that OUS would accelerate the step increases in both years to the employee’s salary eligibility date. If partial funding is approved, the acceleration of the step increases would be prorated accordingly.

Equity across the Campuses

The stipulation in the CBA recognizes that each of the OUS campuses comes to the table with a different set of resources. As the state’s “Access Campuses,” the TRUs educate a higher percentage of Oregonians and receive less tuition revenue from out-of-state and international students. The TRUs don’t have the economies of scale that the large campuses do, and have large populations of low-income and first-generation Oregonians who need a variety of student support services and financial assistance.

To meet agreed-upon salary requirements in the CBA, the TRU campuses must increase revenues. In periods when enrollment is flat-to-down for most campuses, and state funds remain low, increasing revenues means increasing tuition. For campuses educating low-and moderate-income Oregonians, raising tuition for students means, at best, more borrowing, more working and other tough choices for students trying hard to complete a degree, and at worst, makes college unaffordable and out of reach. Thus, providing salary increases is a much more difficult proposition for Oregon’s TRUs. It requires a balance between fair compensation to employees and fair, affordable tuition levels for students.

Being able to accelerate step increases for our hard-working, skilled classified employees would help adjust for past furloughs and lower than normal salary adjustments. All of OUS’ classified employees are instrumental in supporting our students throughout their time on our campuses. Receiving this incremental appropriation would go far in helping us achieve greater equity in resources across the system.