Proposed Addition to ASC Policy Option Package
“Creating a College-Going Culture for Underrepresented Students”:
Eastern Oregon University Rural Student Access Program

Description

The Rural Student Access Program works to bridge the gap between rural students and higher education – especially minority students from Latino and American Indian backgrounds. The program was developed specifically to reverse the national trend of declining postsecondary attendance by students from rural communities. Utilizing faculty and academic resources at Eastern Oregon University, staff are working with students through nine different sites throughout eastern Oregon; supporting “embedded” part-time college advisers and a half-time American Indian recruiter/adviser; and developing bilingual marketing materials on college affordability and access.

Need for Policy Option Package

Oregon is one of several states that are witnessing an actual decline in the number of citizens seeking education beyond high school. An educated citizenry returns dividends to the state and nation in the form of higher-paying jobs, new entrepreneurial activities, and economic development, healthier families and children, and growing communities.

Rural Oregon holds 80 percent of the state’s landmass, but only 20 percent of the state’s population. In comparison with the rest of Oregon, rural Oregon is younger, less educated, poorer, and the population numbers are shrinking. Furthermore, the region is severely underserved in higher education and a declining percentage of the population in rural Oregon is pursuing college education. The reasons include access, cost, intimidation, and insufficient incentives. A comprehensive, collaborative, and long-term solution to address this higher education and, therefore, economic problems of rural Oregon is necessary. EOU is proposing an extensive high school outreach program that starts early (ninth grade), involves parents, and promotes college education, not specific institutions. Also included in this program are college courses on high school campuses, joint summer institutes, and increased financial aid.

Expected Outcomes, Benefits, and Value of Approach

Strategy I: Increase college attendance by making college education in rural Oregon more accessible.

Activity A: To encourage more high school graduates to pursue college by establishing a district-based (or high school-based, in large districts) program to mentor high school students as they progress through their secondary education and to monitor their progress. To accomplish this, EOU advisors will be placed in different districts whose sole responsibility will be to advocate for college education.

Activity B: Offer multiple college courses on high school campuses using a combination of traditional and extended residence courses, as well as different modes of distance education
such as Internet. EOU plans to increase the number of credit hours offered every year through the 2011 academic years.

**Activity C:** Create a college-going culture by starting early outreach to mentor students in grades seven through nine on the benefits of college education, leading to a significant increase of additional students enrolling at any four-year institution each year.

**Activity D:** Reinforce the college-education culture by involving and educating parents in the processes and activities surrounding higher education, including financial aid, scholarships, and applying for admission to the college of their choice.

**Activity E:** Host summer institutes for dual credit on university campuses. Three-week institutes began in 2006, offering transferable college credits for 30-40 attendees, and are planned to continue. Increase offerings for summer institutes every year.

**Strategy II:** Increase college attendance by making higher education in rural Oregon more affordable.

**Activity A:** Establish special “Rural Oregon College Scholarships” for the graduates of rural high schools. Anticipated funding sources include private donors, foundations, and state and federal grants.

**Activity B:** Support the creation of partnership agreements between universities and rural high schools to encourage high school graduates to pursue college education and return to rural areas.

**Performance Indicators**

1. Increased number of rural high school graduates applying for college.
2. Increased number of rural high school freshmen attending college.
3. Increased freshman-sophomore persistence rate for students from rural high schools.
4. Increased number of college graduates who came from rural high schools.
5. Increased number of college graduates from rural high schools who continue to graduate school.

**Connection to OUS Board Goals & Strategic Priorities**

This proposal connects directly to the Board’s Academic Strategies Committee, specifically the Student Participation and Completion Subcommittee, which works to “develop analysis and options leading to a statewide effort to improve participation, retention and success of underserved populations in postsecondary education throughout Oregon, through initiatives which directly address declining levels of freshman participation and completion to graduation.”

**Approximate Dollar Amount Requested**

$300,000