Board President Lorenzen, members of the Board, institution presidents, and guests, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Adam Petkun, and I am the student body president at the University of Oregon and the Board Chair of the Oregon Student Association, a group representing 80,000 students in the Oregon University System, Lane Community College, and Oregon Health & Science University. Today I would like to speak with you about two issues, tuition in Oregon, and the new student ID cards at Portland State University.

First, I would like to thank the hard work of the State Board of Higher Education in the three Working Groups: Access and Affordability, Excellence in Delivery and Productivity and Academic Excellence and Economic Development. While the work of these groups might not benefit me directly, as I’m graduating this year, it is heartening to see that the plight of higher education in Oregon is being taken seriously and that new and innovative solutions may become realities.

It is the work of the Access and Affordability Working Group that I would like to speak with you about first. Access to a quality, affordable education is central to the mission of the Oregon Student Association and important to thousands of college and high school students across the state. In the recent report, Measuring Up, by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education Oregon received an F in affordability. This may not be news to anyone in this room but it is important to realize that we have a lot of work to do to reinvest in Oregon’s higher education system.

Monday, at the Access and Affordability Working Group a presentation was given on financial aid in the state and I would like to add to that conversation. When talking about the price of college in the abstract it would seem that the net price (or price after all grant aid is taken into consideration) would be what matters and in many ways it is. However, this is not the price that a student sees when they are in high school trying to decide if a four year, or two year college is in their future, and it is not the price that I saw when I was choosing schools. Information in college bulletins does not say, “Please adjust for grant aid” and for many middle and low-income students uncertainty about actual qualification for grants is a reality.

In short, “sticker shock” is real, as this Board moved toward acknowledging with modest tuition mitigation. Oregon’s tuition cannot continue to increase along current trends, far outpacing median family income growth, the only solution to go far enough in the short term is for the state to stop the increases and invest in a tuition freeze.
The next, and final, topic of my presentation today is the new student ID cards at Portland State University. Early in September, the student government was invited to a Marketing Meeting to kick-off the new student ID cards. It was at this meeting that representatives from the Associated Students of Portland State University learned that the new student ID card would carry a MasterCard symbol and could also potentially serve as a debit card.

Shared governance has been an issue addressed by this Board in the past, and while not instituted in statute there are important principles that should be upheld when making major decisions that directly affect students on our campuses. After 18 months of negotiations between Higher One Inc., a small four-year-old financial services company located in Connecticut, and Portland State University, the University signed a contract that will affect every PSU student. The small company will handle financial aid disbursement and potentially capture 27,000 new customers for its debit card service. PSU students have concerns about the companies fee structure, which appear more costly to students than comparable debit accounts, but also that they were left out of the process. PSU has acknowledged, and in fact apologized for, the lack of process, but it is the position of the OSA board that such decisions should include, at the very least, consultation with the elected student governments. Higher One has contacted other Oregon universities and we strongly urge they work with the students before making major changes that may have both positive and negative consequences.

Allowing students in the process before signing the contract would have allowed PSU students to ask question such as:

1. Would students have chosen to receive their financial aid from a financial services center with only four branches located in Texas?

2. Would students have chosen to have their student ID card turned into a debit card?

3. Would students have chosen this option instead of a non-profit or other existing local bank?

The Associated Students of Portland State University is currently conducting research, and negotiating with administrators and Higher One representatives to work for some student input into a contract that has already been signed.

When processes such as these do not include students, we all become distracted by the process and lose sight of the issues we must all work for together. The students of PSU, and all the OSA schools, acknowledge that we must and will look forward to cooperative efforts so we may all further the cause of higher education in Oregon. Again, I thank you for the opportunity to speak today and to bring these important issues forward to you and other higher education leaders in the state.