



# Briefing on Access and Affordability Working Group (AAWG)

## Background on AAWG

A higher level of educational attainment for all Oregonians is critical to positioning the state as a leader in the information age and global economy. Postsecondary education has become the gateway to economic opportunity, just as a high school diploma used to be. Many of the best-paying jobs with the brightest future for career advancement require training beyond high school or a college degree. Yet, the rapid rise of college tuition and fees without a corresponding increase in student financial assistance has created an opportunity and affordability gap in Oregon. This “gap” is the difference between what a student **can** pay and what a student **must pay** to go to college.

Action is needed to reduce the financial barriers to getting a college education for those who aspire to go. The Access and Affordability Working Group (AAWG) intends to make and keep a promise to every qualified Oregonian: you will have a spot in a community college or university in Oregon. Because a college education is a major investment, Oregonians share the responsibility for providing the resources needed for students to complete a degree or certificate program. This responsibility involves appropriate contributions by various partners—the student, the family, state and federal governments, employers, and philanthropic organizations.

## Increasing College Affordability in Oregon

The AAWG has developed a short-term proposal, working with the Oregon Student Assistance Commission, for increasing need-based financial aid through the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG). This would positively affect college affordability for students entering postsecondary education for a first undergraduate degree or certificate. Working with a broad group of stakeholders, including Oregon’s community colleges, private colleges, student groups, community groups, and outside experts, the AAWG based these recommendations on the \$91.6 million in the Governor’s Recommend Budget for the OOG, a doubling of the current allocation.

## Opportunity Grant Recommendations and Impacts

- In total, these changes would **serve a total of 66,200 students in 2005-2007, or 24,700 new students.**
- The proposal to **extend coverage year-round** to lower-income students, would increase the number of recipients served in 2005-2007 to 57,700 from the current 41,500.
- Fully fund students who are eligible at **55% of median family income** for dependent students; 50% of median family income for independent students with dependents; and 30% of median family income for single, independent students. This would increase the number of eligible students by 16,200.
- The proposed 2005-2007 **grant award levels** maintain current efforts, providing \$1,500 at public community colleges; \$1,800 at Oregon University System institutions; and \$3,600 at eligible private/independent institutions.

### AAWG Goals and Objectives

- To expand access and make postsecondary education more affordable for all Oregonians.
- To increase the number of Oregonians who are successful in achieving their individual postsecondary goals.
- To ensure the well-educated workforce required by Oregon's current and potential employers

- To encourage high school students to take rigorous courses, a one-time **flat-grant bonus of \$500** would be provided to students who meet academic standards on the Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) exams. This would help approximately 4,000 students receiving the Grant in 2005-2007.
- **Extending eligibility to part-time students** is also part of the proposal, for those enrolled for a minimum of 6 credits but less than 12 credits, at half the grant amount of full-time students. This would help approximately 8,500 students with grant aid. The current OOG program has never had sufficient funds to fund part-time students.

### **Approval of Proposal**

After working since early 2004 on structuring changes to the OOG, on February 3, 2005, the AAWG voted to endorse the policy proposal of the Oregon Student Assistance Commission outlined above. The Group is also focused on a longer-term proposal for increasing affordability of postsecondary education in Oregon, pending the availability of additional resources.

### **AAWG Membership**

The members of the AAWG were appointed to provide diverse perspectives. Tim Nesbitt, OSBHE Director, and Nan Poppe, Interim President, Portland Community College, Cascade Campus, are serving as co-chairs (see box for other voting members). Non-voting “Resource Experts” participate in and contribute to the meetings. These experts include Cam Preus-Braly, Commissioner, OCCED; Julie Suchanek, Oregon Community College Assn; Gary Andeen, Oregon Independent Colleges Assn.; John Wykoff, Oregon Student Assn.; Brian Clem and Jeff Svjecar, Oregon Student Assistance Commission; and Mardilyn Saathoff and James Sager, the Governor’s Policy Advisors for Higher Education.

Rev. 2-21-05\_dls