

Dear Editor,

I was told a story of a young woman who had recently graduated as valedictorian from a Portland area high school and had aspirations of graduating from the University of Oregon. However, due to an Oregon University System (OUS) policy stating that her residency was based on her parents' residency, she was unable to afford the UO because her parents were undocumented citizens. She however, had been born and raised in Oregon and foresaw her future in Oregon. Due to her parents being undocumented, she was required to pay out-of-state tuition, thus pricing her out of her education.

I don't know what happened to that young woman. Best-case scenario, she went to an out-of-state university and Oregon lost another bright mind. More likely, she didn't attend university and is currently working in a job that will pay the bills but won't provide mental stimulation or long-term opportunities. Her story isn't an isolated one.

We are pricing individuals out of an education. These are the very same individuals we have chosen to educate in our K-12 system. The state made the investment in the student and then squanders it by not letting them continue their education. But it gets worse. According to the OUS Access and Affordability Working Group, 87% of all new jobs in Oregon will require a college degree by 2010. That means that after the state has invested in these students, they will have little means to reciprocate because we are denying them the necessary access. However, Oregon legislators can rectify the situation.

Tuition Equity is a piece of legislation that would extend in-state tuition to undocumented students. It requires that the student spend at least three years in an Oregon high school, graduate from an Oregon high school, be accepted into an Oregon university and finally take steps towards residency.

Oregon is not alone in enacting this type of legislation. Ten states have already passed it, including Washington and California, making Oregon the last state on the west coast to continue denying access to hardworking citizens.

I urge Oregon legislators to pass Tuition Equity because the continued educating of young minds is the best way to make Oregon stronger.

Monique Teal