

## Higher Education Union Opening Statement 2019

Higher Education in Oregon is facing unprecedented challenges. Tuition rates are climbing, the student loan crisis is soaring, and our public universities are seeing less investment with each passing year. Clearly, we can all agree, the legislature needs to increase their investment in higher education. We are working in partnership with the University Presidents to make student success and support a priority in this legislative session.

Our members are dealing with this on a personal level. Though the economy is in a stronger place than during any contract negotiation in a decade, classified staff are falling further behind. The cost of basic necessities like food and utilities are soaring. The cost of rent and home ownership are creeping steadily out of reach for classified staff. Our wages have not kept up with these rising costs and we are at a breaking point. Classified staff should not have to make a choice between paying the bills or putting food on the table. But these are choices that many of us have to make everyday.

We need a contract that will improve the economic security for all our membership. Our top economic priority is to increase our wages and total compensation. We are not interested in any proposal that divides our membership by campus. Inflation affects every worker from Portland to Klamath Falls; we are united as one bargaining unit in our desire to negotiate one compensation package for all our members. Our membership is resolute and we will fight to secure a meaningful increase in our total compensation that moves classified staff forward together.

Not all of our proposals will be tied to the universities budgets. An overwhelming number of members who filled out our bargaining survey indicated their desire to have greater flexibility at work. Our top non-economic priority is improving university sustainability and member work-life balance by expanding access to flexibility in our work schedules and allowing more telecommuting for our membership.

We also have as a non-economic priority to improve our access to represented workers both in the workplace and through our new employee orientation process. We want to break down the barriers that exist today preventing us from communicating with our membership in the workplace. To settle a contract we need to see improvements in this area.

Regardless of the outcome of the legislative session for higher education funding we will settle for nothing less than a contract that moves our members forward. For our membership our contract is really a question of priorities. I can tell you all here today, classified staff do not feel prioritized. In fact many of our members feel like the universities are prioritizing everyone else on campus above us.

These negotiations are an opportunity to change this perception. You can show us at the bargaining table how each campus values and respects classified staff. To be clear, we are not

asking you to prioritize us above of anyone else on campus. Instead we ask you to acknowledge and support the essential work we do everyday to ensure students' success.

Classified staff came together in union because we care about higher education in Oregon. We didn't join together in union because workers were angry with administration. Many of us have been students in Oregon's public universities and we found success in our education because classified staff, just like us, were there to help us be successful. We know that students who are supported are more likely to achieve a degree. We play a critical role in providing this support. We matter for student success.

We ask that you remember this context for these negotiations. We are a part of the larger campus community that includes administrators, faculty, students and classified staff. In order for universities to be successful every part of this community must thrive. We are not always going to agree but when you look at our proposals remember we all want the same thing. We want higher education in Oregon to thrive. Let's continue working together to reach this goal by taking proposals seriously and working toward agreements that resolve the issues raised. We can give you our commitment to navigate this challenging environment together in order to negotiate a contract that both parties can be proud of.