

August 31, 2021

Southern Oregon University
1250 Siskiyou Blvd.
Ashland, OR 97520

To Whom it May Concern,

Travel Oregon's vision is a better life for all Oregonians through strong, sustainable local communities that welcome a diversity of explorers. This includes supporting communities in leveraging the state's \$6.5 billion tourism economy and creating meaningful jobs. Travel Oregon believes that education is fundamental to the future success and sustainability of the tourism industry and its workforce.

Oregon's tourism economy has been greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Employment directly related to travel declined by 22.1% from an average of approximately 118,500 jobs in 2019 to 92,300 jobs in 2020 – in Southern Oregon, nearly 2,000 tourism-related jobs were lost. Travel Oregon is supportive of efforts to regain and foster the tourism workforce as we believe it is essential to ensure statewide economic recovery. Destination management organizations and tourism businesses must reimagine and transform their strategies, and thoughtful workforce development initiatives will be critical in ensuring our industry recovers and evolves.

The proposed program curriculum references many of the most innovative national and international tourism management concepts and case studies to date. The knowledge and skills that graduates of this program possess will prepare them to become critical components of Oregon's statewide tourism ecosystem. Approving this program will ensure that businesses in Southern Oregon and around our state will benefit from and be able to retain and offer rewarding career paths to many of the program graduates.

We strongly support approval of the proposed Sustainable Tourism Management program at Southern Oregon University as it will positively contribute to Oregon's workforce by preparing the next generation of tourism professionals to lead innovative social and environmentally responsible initiatives.

Sincerely,

 TODD DAVIDSON

Todd Davidson
CEO, Travel Oregon