

Scott D'Amato, COSC Student

Good evening Senator Kissel, Representative Hall, and members of the Appropriations Committee.

After high school, many years ago, I joined the working world. I did not understand or value the need for a college education at the time. After working in a few different industries in my early twenties, I was hired by a large local health care company where I began what became my career in project and program management. As I started to navigate through my career path, I faced some real barriers that limited my growth potential, and always felt insecure when someone asked, "Where did you go to college?" I dreaded that question during interviews, networking with managers or leadership, and even just shooting the breeze with my co-workers. I often felt inadequate because I did not have a college education. My options to pursue alternative positions were limited to those that did not require a degree, and I missed out on opportunities because my application was dismissed early in the assessment process. Although I had experience and certifications in my field, I was passed over in preference of similarly qualified applicants with college educations. I often lamented my choice not to go to college when I was younger, and considered that to be the biggest personal regret of my adult life.

I heard of COSC through a co-worker who was close to my own age and had started taking courses to finish her degree. This raised my interest, but as a full time worker I was intimidated by the potential commitment and financial implications of college. I wondered how I might balance school with work and life's other obligations. I certainly could not spend several hours in a classroom each week. I contacted COSC, and an advisor helped me get started with a job related certification program in Project Management –through three online courses. When I started the program, I wasn't expecting to start a nine-year academic and personal journey that would bring me before you all this evening. Achieving my certification in Project Management felt good, and I was inspired to continue learning. I enrolled in a Bachelor's degree program. Experiencing incremental academic success was more rewarding than I ever imagined it could be, giving me an improved sense of self-value and purpose. The flexibility of the online learning environment, tools like Black Board and electronic Library resources, and the Academic Advisory staff enable students to complete course work generally at their convenience (in context of certain deadlines of course!). This approach allowed me to balance my academic journey with work, family, and home life obligations – sometimes were easier than others... The relative costs of attending COSC made it much more affordable than other online options. As I speak to you today, I am enrolled in the final course of my degree program, and will graduate with a Bachelor's degree in just a few weeks.

Thanks to COSC I learned critical thinking skills, and expanded my understanding of a broad range of topics in my major, Healthcare Administration. This included classes in Psychology, Communications, and Science, just to name a few. I apply my learning each and every day at work and in my personal life. Please provide the necessary funding critical for COSC to continue offering these academic opportunities to adult learners like me. Let us expand our horizons, experience the sense of accomplishment, and gain the confidence and self-worth that comes through the educational process supported by this institution. When I graduate I will feel that I resolved the one regret of my adult life. Please allow others to do the same and much more, through your support of COSC.