

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

“The Oregon Education Association, with the full involvement of the Community College Council, will support Oregon’s community colleges. [OEA will work to] ensure that the appropriation for community colleges be sufficient to maintain existing programs, including growth and additional programs mandated by the Legislative Assembly; ensure that the distribution of community college funding be determined at the administrative level, following input from the involved local colleges; retain locally elected college boards as the primary decision-makers for community college districts; ensure that community college employees be involved with the board, committees or commissions that are charged with community college decision making.”

--OEA Legislative Objectives

Oregon’s community colleges – their faculty and staff – serve as our state’s economic first-responders. Over 380,000 Oregonians are enrolled at 17 community colleges around the state. By providing professional training and serving as an affordable bridge to a 4-year degree, Oregon’s community college system is a driver of business development and job creation needed to get Oregon’s economy moving again.

Community colleges deliver Oregon businesses with skilled workers necessary for them to compete in the global economy. Over 500 Oregon companies benefit directly from over 124 specialized training programs based in our local community colleges -- programs that provide direct skills training in sectors ranging from manufacturing, technology, and renewable energy to health care, finance, small business and agriculture. It is in these sectors that the lion’s share of Oregon jobs will be created in the next decade.

Community colleges strengthen our social safety net as the affordable pathway for many Oregonians to receive the training and education needed to obtain a family wage job. For many adults currently in the workforce or those seeking employment, that process begins with improving basic literacy. For others, it means learning new skills or obtaining specialized training. Oregonians rely on their community colleges to provide these diverse educational opportunities, to stay current and advance in their profession or to pursue a new career in the face of job dislocation and layoffs forced by economic downturn.

Community Colleges provide a sound educational footing for Oregon’s next generation to compete in the global economy. For Oregon’s current and future high school graduates – especially from lower income families -- community colleges provide a pathway to educational advancement and a four-year degree. This is especially critical at a time when the high cost of tuition at universities is increasingly putting a college education out of reach for many Oregon families.

Investment in Oregon's Community Colleges has not kept pace with student demand. Enrollment at Oregon's community colleges has skyrocketed in the midst of the state's economic recession. This increase in student enrollment often correlates with the rates of unemployment in many parts of our state.

As enrollment has reached record-highs, the state's budget shortfall has led to dramatically reduced state funding. Current state support is less than what community colleges were funded at in 1999. The result has been cuts in academic programs, cuts to student support services and staff, and the steady erosion of full-time faculty.

The Governor's recommended budget calls for an investment of \$410 million for the coming biennium. This is a major improvement over 25% across the board cuts to the Community College Support Fund that have been contemplated in the current biennium. This demonstrates Governor Kitzhaber's stated commitment to prioritizing investment in post-secondary education. However, \$410 million is still 14% below the investment needed to maintain existing services at Oregon's community colleges. The non-partisan Legislative Fiscal Office analysis shows that close to \$480 million is necessary to support the current service level. Without additional funding from the Legislature or additional support from voter-approved local levies, many colleges may be forced to make further cuts to student support services, reduce course offerings, limit student enrollment or raise student tuition, in addition to laying-off direct service providers -- college faculty and staff.

Realigning Oregon's Pre-K-12 and Higher Education System

The 2011 Legislative Session promises to be a starting point for a broader conversation about the alignment of the state's K-12 system, postsecondary institutions and universities. Governor Kitzhaber recently issued an executive order establishing an Education Investment Board to design a seamless service delivery system from grades 0 to 20. The Governor's goal is to reduce interventions for students in the early grades, improve high school graduation rates and reduce the number of students requiring remedial education after high school. He would also like to see more collaboration between K-12 schools and community colleges in providing expanded learning options for high school students.

In addition to the Governor's efforts, a higher education task force led by Sen. Mark Hass (D-Beaverton) and Representatives Michael Dembrow (D-Portland) and Tobias Read (D-Beaverton) has recommended changes to the statewide governance structure for higher education. Under their plan, introduced as Senate Bill 242, the state's community colleges would be placed under a new Community College Coordinating Council that would report directly to a new Higher Education Policy Commission.

While community colleges would still be governed by local community college boards and funded using the existing funding formula under the Community College Support Fund, the new coordinating council would seek to guide statewide planning and collaboration among the colleges. The Higher Education Policy Commission would help to coordinate regional collaboration among community colleges and the Oregon University System. Both of these governance boards would be charged with helping the state to meet the standards set forth for high school, community college and four-year university completion rates under the Shared Responsibility Model (also known as 40-40-20).

OEA believes job #1 is investing in our community colleges to ensure equitable access to a high-quality education for all Oregonians. We will continue to participate in conversations about higher education

alignment with the goals of promoting educational quality, local control and the voice of community college faculty and staff in academic decision-making, local college and system-wide governance.

TALKING POINTS

- As faculty and staff at my community college, I'm an economic first-responder. By providing professional training and skills development degree, we are helping to drive business development and job creation needed to get Oregon's economy moving again.
- Community colleges strengthen our social safety net as the affordable pathway for many Oregonians to receive the training and education needed to obtain a family wage job.
- For Oregon's current and future high school graduates – especially from lower income families - community colleges provide a pathway to educational advancement and a four-year degree. This is especially critical at a time when the high cost of tuition at universities is increasingly putting a college education out of reach for many Oregon families.
- Community college faculty and staff have been sharing in the sacrifice through these difficult fiscal times. We are doing more with less, but budget cuts ultimately hurt our students by undermining the quality of our academic programs and the availability of critical student support services.
- Without additional investment from the Legislature in our community colleges, we will continue to see layoffs for instructional and support staff, caps on student enrollment and increases in tuition. We can do better for our students and our future.