

CHAPTER V: THE EVOLVING ROLE OF COASTAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES

In addition to the mission usually ascribed to institutions of higher learning, community colleges on the Oregon coast have a key role to play as skill training centers for coastal residents and coastal businesses. On the Oregon coast, we are fortunate to have five community colleges serving our communities. From north to south the colleges are:

The Oregon Coast's Community Colleges

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| ◦ Clatsop Community College | www.clatsopcc.edu |
| ◦ Tillamook Bay Community College | www.tbcc.cc.or.us |
| ◦ Oregon Coast Community College | www.occc.cc.or.us |
| ◦ Lane Community College | www.lanecc.edu/florence |
| ◦ Southwestern Oregon Community College | www.socc.edu/ |

Check out the web sites of these Oregon community colleges to learn more about their course offerings, faculty, and campus facilities.

Important Ties with Other Colleges

In the last few years each of these community colleges formed important alliances through Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with 4-year colleges and public universities such as: Oregon State University (OSU), the University of Oregon (UO), Eastern Oregon University (EOU), Southern Oregon University (SOU), Portland State University (PSU). As a result of



these alliances, students enrolling in the coastal community colleges can, after completing a 2-year associates degree, go on to these 4-year schools and have all their community college credits count toward their 4-year degree. These alliances allow community college students on the Oregon coast to access classes at these 4-year colleges.

In addition, the community colleges on the Oregon coast have established important ties with other community colleges. The most significant connection is with Chemeketa Community

College in Salem, Oregon, which is a major distance-learning center. Several years ago the federal government and the State of Oregon invested significant resources in Chemeketa's on-line or distance learning programs. The concept was (and remains) that Chemeketa will serve as a distance learning hub for other community colleges in Oregon. And that is what happened. Today, on the Oregon coast, a significant number of students enrolled in the coastal community colleges take on-line classes at Chemeketa. These students rely upon support services from their local or "host" community college to ensure success with their program of study.

Because of these new alliances, students on the Oregon coast (K through 12 students and community college students) have a wealth of educational opportunities that were unimaginable just several years ago.

Knowledge-Based Businesses Need a Skilled Workforce

The prime motivation behind the Oregon Coast Telecommunications Economic Development Strategy is to create new employment opportunities for coastal residents by helping existing coastal businesses grow and by attracting a select group of knowledge-based businesses.



An existing business on the coast or a business contemplating a move to the Oregon coast must have a skilled workforce. Today, all over America, community colleges are providing people with the skills training they need to participate in the New Economy. In fact, some community colleges in the country have made information technology (IT) training—training the workforce of the 21st Century—their primary focus. Other community colleges established new departments to provide courses in this area. These programs are relevant to young people

graduating from high school and older students re-entering the workforce at a later stage of their lives.

The range of IT training opportunities, are, of course, very broad. It begins with basic office skill training in word processing (e.g., Microsoft certifications), spreadsheets, data base management, and basic Internet skills. The field then advances to sophisticated IT training applications such as web site development and web hosting, network development and network administration. More advanced technical programs enable people to eventually serve as in-house IT professionals for businesses, schools, libraries, and the health care sector (clinics and hospitals). But, even the acquisition of basic office skills can help many people on the coast raise their standard of living. This is especially true if these people combine office skill training with a modicum of “soft skills” (paying attention to their appearance, being reliable employees, and having good customer relations skills).

Experience in other regions suggests that when knowledge-based businesses move to a region, they often bring several skilled employees with them. Charles Brunetti, an experienced telecommunications entrepreneur from Denver, explained how this works. Charles said, “We saw in Colorado that when these businesses moved here, they often brought a core of about four or five people with



them. But, right after they arrived, they started looking for local talent. Many times companies paid local people to attend community college to give them the skills the company needed. It was a real win-win situation.”

Such a circumstance would, of course, be ideal. Firms could bring new, year-round family wage jobs to the Oregon coast. And, then they would directly support local people—their new employees—to get skills their firms need at the local community college. This investment in people occurs because knowledge-based companies must have access to skilled people to compete and grow. Bill Gillis, the Administrator of Washington State University’s Center to Bridge the Digital Divide (CBDD), explained the implications for rural communities. Bill said, “A growing number of employers are beginning to understand that people in rural areas have a tendency to stay in their community. They are less likely to move away because they have an emotional connection to the community through family and friends. That is a big advantage for employers in rural communities. Once a trained workforce is in place in a rural community, that workforce is likely to stay there.”

A Looming National Shortage of Information Technology Workers?

Evidence is mounting that people who receive technology training will have ready access to employment in the future. People with those skills are in demand. The August 8, 2005 edition of Networkworld.com—a respected on-line technology magazine—ran a timely story entitled, “IT Staff Shortage Looming” by Lauren Gibbons Paul. The article stated that by 2010, a wave of baby boom retirements will cause 10% to 15% of America’s IT workforce to permanently leave the workforce. The author warns that these upcoming retirements create a “clouded future” for the U.S. economy. And, the article documents that U.S. colleges are witnessing a steep decline in students seeking careers in computer science. What is going on? The recent dot.com crash several years ago and media accounts about IT workers becoming unemployed due to outsourcing of IT jobs to overseas countries, have led many people to view careers in technology as unstable. The article offers alarming statistics about IT training from reliable sources. For example, the number of students in computer science programs in the U.S. dropped 7% in each of the last two years, 34% lower than in the fall of 2000.

At present, the technology sector is staging a come back after the dot.com crash. Many new jobs in this sector are being created. And, thankfully, today, the technology sector is on a firmer footing because the wild speculative period of the late 1990s has passed. Most observers agree that the United States and the world are at the threshold of a bold new information age, an epoch of rapid, intense globalization and change anchored in telecommunications.

Networkworld.com informs readers that not all commentators predict an acute shortage of IT workers. Computer science degree programs are only one way to begin a career in technology. Today, technology training takes place in many different settings and is more tailored to meet the needs of students and employers. These days, businesses are doing a lot of in-house training, the community colleges are providing IT training, and, vocational schools are preparing people for IT careers. So, people are finding ways to get the skills they need, and, companies are moving to secure the workforce they need. There is a new career track known as “non-technical professionals” filling this niche. And, Networkworld.com reports that if shortages of IT workers

become a real problem, the federal government is likely to increase the number of visas for foreign IT workers.

This potential shortfall in IT workers, however, represents a huge opportunity for coastal residents and the coastal community colleges. Networkworld.com offers important advice for companies. And, these observations need to be shared with people making career choices:

“Companies need to come up with a workforce plan that details how they can continue to meet their own changing needs,” says Andy Walker, research Director for Gartner. The skills inventory will immediately spotlight the most pressing skills now and in the near term. Networks are still a hot area, and for most organizations finding someone who combines technical savvy with soft skills is an ongoing challenge. People with management experience and the ability to thrive working in virtual global teams are in desperately short supply. “Companies need both business and technical skills but the business skills are harder to find,” Berry says (Diane Berry, managing vice-president for Gartner’s Human Capital Management Practice). (Page 3, IT Staff Shortage Looming)

Networkworld.com, 10/8/05)

Key Questions for Coastal Community Colleges

During the course of this project, we posed a set of related questions to leaders involved with the community colleges on the Oregon coast. We asked:

- If we retain and attract knowledge-based businesses to the Oregon coast, are the five community colleges prepared to train the workforce needed by these businesses?
- If, through public education, demand for IT courses and office-skill courses increases, are the community colleges on the Oregon coast ready to meet this demand?
- How much skill training for the New Economy training can be accomplished on-line through distance learning?
- Can the five community colleges on the Oregon coast collaborate to meet these needs?

Community college leaders responded that they believe they can expand their course offerings to meet any increase in demand. But, some of them need an upgrade in their facilities to ensure that they can meet this future demand. On the North coast, for instance, the leaders of the Tillamook Bay Community College (TBCC) and the Clatsop Community College (CCC) are focusing on generating local support to build new campus facilities. In May 2004, the voters of Lincoln County passed a \$23.5 million bond to build three new campuses. The Administrators and the Board at the Oregon Coast Community College (OCCC) are working hard to get those three new campuses designed and built. Lane Community College (LCC) has been active in distance learning for quite some time, because unlike the other community colleges on the coast, the Florence campus of LCC is a satellite campus (its main campus is in Eugene, Oregon). Finally, Southwestern Oregon Community College (SOCC) has just completed the first phase of a major study of the opportunities for distance learning. This timely study, which is highly relevant for

all educators on the Oregon coast, is posted on SOCC's web site and it can also be found on J. Irwin Community Informatics Consulting Service's web site at www.callineb.com.

People in Education Circles Understand These Opportunities

People teaching and working at the community colleges on the Oregon coast and many educators and administrators in the K-12 system already "understand" how important IT training is and how promising distance learning opportunities are for their students. Indeed, one can find stirring examples up and down the Oregon coast of school officials reaching out to the private sector to provide young people exposure to the modern workplace.

Therefore, the findings in this chapter about community colleges and reforming high school are primarily directed to community and business leaders and state and federal legislators. These critically important leaders are not professional educators. We want to underscore to those leaders how important the community colleges on the Oregon coast are to the community. Without affordable and fully functional community colleges, people and businesses in coastal communities cannot take full advantage of these emerging trends and opportunities.

It should be noted, however, that during the 2005 session of the Oregon Legislature, SB 1071 was passed which directed the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to establish a "Virtual School District." The Virtual School District would provide an overlapping or parallel cyber-school that school districts in Oregon can tap into to augment local traditional course offerings. The Oregon Legislature provided \$2 million to fund the effort, so a year from now, the Virtual School District will be in place.

Heading in the Wrong Direction: Tuition Increases Drive Enrollments Down at Some Coastal Community Colleges

Even though, nationally, community college attendance is rising rapidly, on the Oregon coast, enrollment numbers in community college programs are declining. Why is this happening? Community college leaders point out that declining financial support from the state of Oregon has forced them to raise tuition at the community colleges. Community colleges are now receiving less support from the state than they did in 2000. And, this summer, the Florence branch of LCC was forced to close its doors for the summer. Because of this financial squeeze, there has been declining enrollment in many of the community college programs (with the major exception of nursing programs). A president of a community college on the coast explained the situation. He said, "I had no idea how price sensitive our students would be to the tuition increases. In retrospect, it makes sense. Many of our students do not have discretionary income. The fee increases proved that."

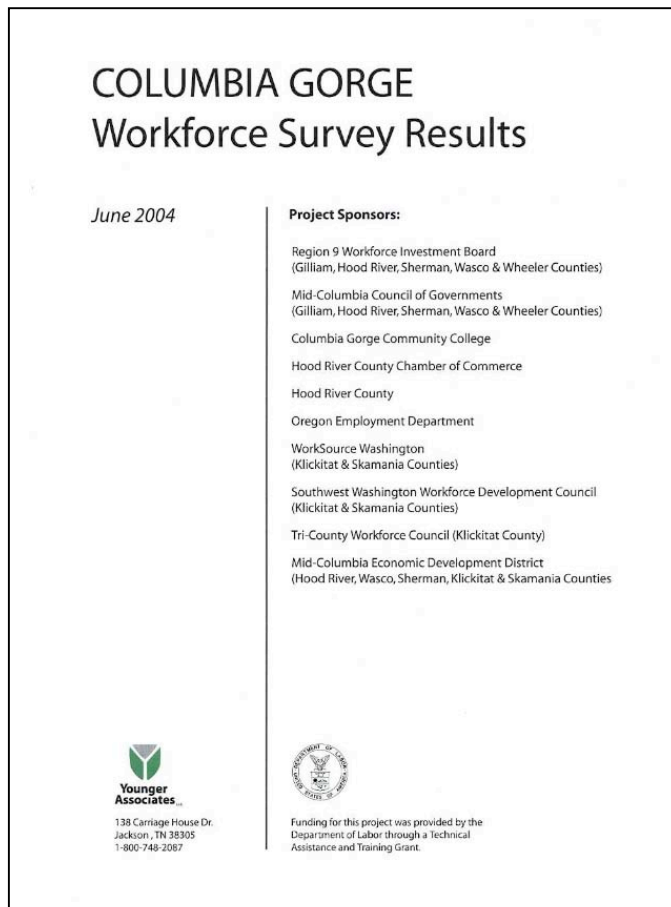
Why are community colleges so important? Community colleges have open enrollment policies. Anyone can attend. And, in general, the tuition costs at community colleges are significantly lower than at most 4-year institutions. And, because community colleges are local institutions, working people can earn degrees and develop skills over time while they support themselves and their families. Community colleges are vitally important gateway institutions, ladders to success that people can climb to enter and stay in the middle class. Community colleges are the place many people who did not graduate high school can earn their General

Educational Development diplomas (GEDs). And, moreover, community colleges offer remedial education for people who did not learn fundamental verbal and math skills in high school (if they attended high school). Sadly, many people entering college today (not just community colleges) need remedial training before they can tackle college-level curricula.

So, if community colleges become inaccessible to people of limited means, the damage to our entire society and the nation's competitiveness will be incalculable.

Taking a Fresh Look at Workforce Development on the Oregon Coast

A thorough evaluation of the preparedness of the community colleges on the coast to take on this skills training role requires the expertise of workforce specialists. On the Oregon coast, there are a number of different Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs). Most of these WIB regions combine one coastal county with several other inland counties that are located along the 1-5 corridor.



A number of people interviewed during this project believe a coastwide regional workforce analysis should be initiated in the near future. Here is why. Several years ago a regional workforce survey was prepared in the Columbia River Gorge region. That bi-state and multi-county, multi-workforce board effort was spearheaded by the Mid Columbia Economic District (MCEDD). A report, *Columbia Gorge Workforce Survey Results* (funded by EDA and prepared by Younger Associates of Jackson, Tennessee issued in June 2004) is credited with greatly enhancing cross-jurisdictional collaboration on workforce development and economic development planning in the Mid Columbia Region. People involved in the region-wide workforce survey report that having current and reliable information about their region's labor and workforce needs helped Google decide to site a major new facility in The Dalles, Oregon in 2005. They also report that the process fostered a deep understanding among local leaders that if

something good economically happens in The Dalles, that is also good for Hood River and Stevenson and other communities in the Columbia River Gorge.

We recommend a dialogue begin at the WIBs that encompasses parts of the coast and elsewhere about preparing a coastwide workforce survey and analysis similar to the one prepared for the Gorge. The findings should, of course, be shared with the five coastal community colleges. The

information would serve as a backdrop for future discussions about community college curriculum. Introductory discussions have begun about this opportunity with the Oregon Employment Department (OED) and Claire Berger, Governor Ted Kulongoski's Workforce Policy Coordinator. There is enthusiasm to continue this discussion and, of course, broaden the dialogue to include coastal leaders.

However, not everyone is enthusiastic about doing a coastwide workforce study. Some experienced and respected individuals believe the real underlying problem is many coastal residents have a poor work ethic. They also note that many people on the Oregon coast will not submit themselves to drug testing. Many of today's quality employers require drug testing. So, not everyone agrees that undertaking a coastwide regional workforce study is worth the effort. And, in all candor, the weakest link of this Oregon Coast Telecommunications Economic Development Strategy is the workforce issue.

Others, again, see an updated coastwide regional workforce study as being a critical component of a larger regional strategy to retain and attract knowledge-based businesses. Charles Brunetti, a telecommunications entrepreneur from Denver (who has experience in regional economic development) was asked to comment about the importance of workforce information. Charles said, "Developing a current, accurate understanding of your regional workforce, its strengths and weaknesses, is absolutely critical. Firms from outside the region will demand that information. Plus, that information helps you understand your weaknesses. You take that information and work with the community colleges to address those needs." Charles Brunetti reacted strongly when informed that some experienced people on the Oregon coast believe the main cause of poverty on the Oregon coast is the poor work ethic. He said, "That is baloney! For every kid who does not want to work there are two others who are leaving the coast to seek employment opportunities somewhere else."

Bill Gillis of CBDD (Washington State University) stated that having updated workforce information is critically important documentation. Gillis stressed workforce data is the kind of documentation needed to convince urban business leaders that they can move their business to a rural area and still function. In Washington State, the CBDD learned to delay major recruiting efforts to bring urban businesses to rural areas until local and regional workforce information and training issues have been addressed.

For these reasons, we recommend that coastal leaders take a second look at coastwide workforce development issues during the implementation phase of this economic diversification strategy. Of course, the people at our community colleges, the Oregon Employment Department, leaders in the private sector, and, the WIBs must play a key role in the discussions.

Reforming High School: The New Three "Rs"

On May 5, 2005, Melinda French Gates, co-founder of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, delivered a speech in which she estimated that only one-third of the students graduating from high school in America today are ready for college, work and citizenship. If that is true, the public education system in America is not close to meeting the nation's workforce needs in the 21st Century. Few people in education circles doubt that major education reforms are needed. And, there is a growing recognition that we must reach down into the middle schools and the

high schools and engage students to help them establish “career pathways.” Letting young people— and their parents—know about career opportunities in technology should be a priority.

Students Respond to Personalized Attention

The Gates Foundation is at the forefront of an effort to reform what they consider “outdated high schools” in the United States. The Gates Foundation offers examples of high-performing American high schools. They have identified a common thread for success. Smaller schools that provide more personalized attention to students are much better learning environments than larger schools that cannot provide this attention.

The Gates Foundation is offering a new version of the classic “three R’s” in education. Instead of, “**R**eading, **R**iting, and **R**ithmetic” they suggest:

- The first R is **Rigor**—making sure all students are given a challenging curriculum that prepares them for college or work;
- The second R is **Relevance**—making sure students have courses and projects that clearly relate to their lives and their goals;
- The third R is **Relationships**—making sure students have a number of adults who know them, look out for them, and push them to achieve.

Parental involvement is key to student success for these reasons. And, finding opportunities to give young people exposure to work environments is important. Up and down the Oregon coast, there are programs in the high schools that are doing this. The Oregon coast is fortunate because many accomplished retired professionals have recently moved to the Oregon coast. Many more outstanding people are making their way to our region. The in-migration of talented people provides a reservoir of potential mentors for students. These mentors are uniquely qualified to engage our young people about their future, and help them broaden their horizons.

As stated above, many education professionals on the Oregon coast recognize these opportunities. But, they struggle with tight fiscal budgets to make these linkages occur. Perhaps a key task of local telecommunication committees should be, over time, to work with coastal educators to reach young people to get them excited about starting careers in technology. The “work ethic” issue on the coast is directly related to the fact that many people on the Oregon coast are disenchanted or discouraged. Many coastal people view the world as a place that offers low wages and few opportunities. This is a national and a regional problem. The downturn in natural resource industries on the Oregon coast in the last twenty years hurt a lot of families. Efforts to mitigate that difficult transition were too little too late. When the future appears so bleak—where only outsiders to the coast can afford homes and nice cars—why would we expect these people to develop a good work ethic?

Reaching 21st Century Learners

Who are Today's Learners?

Southwestern Oregon Community College (SOCC) just completed a Distance Learning Project funded by the U.S. Department of Commerce. John Irwin, a member of the OCZMA Technical Team, was hired by SOCC to carry out the study. John Irwin spent two months traveling on the southern Oregon coast, meeting with education leaders to explore how to enhance partnerships between all levels of education from Reedsport to Brookings.

John Irwin made the following points about the challenges of the 21st Century Education project (SOCC Distance Learning Project). First, John asks, "Who are the learners?" Nearly half of the students in community college are "Nontraditional Learners." Many of these students are older. For these students, campus life and interacting in person are far less important than the convenience of being able to set their own schedules and incrementally achieving their education goals while still meeting their other commitments.

Understanding the "Net Generation"

John Irwin recommends that the people in charge of education today—the Baby Boom Generation—take the time to learn more about the Net Generation, today's generation of students. They need to find out what motivates them and gain insights into who they are so learning environments can be established to optimize the experience for the Net Generation.

John Irwin writes that Net Generation people, today's students, are most successful when they are doing "experiential learning." The lecture format is not the optimal method to instruct these people. And, having peer-to-peer experiences or team projects may be preferable to individual activity. People in the Net Generation favor more graphics, a rapid pace, and immediate responses. Customized learning experiences will boost relevancy. But, of course, this kind of learning environment is time-intensive for faculty. It is a laudable goal and we need to recognize how difficult it is to achieve. At least you can achieve some economy of scale through these team experiences.

This new generation is accustomed to using technology in their lives. They tend to belong to large packs of friends. They are all tied by cell phone and text messages, and laptops and PDAs. When they research, they use the Internet as their major source of information. Their class schedules and university information are all available through Wi-Fi systems found on many campuses.

But, interestingly, for this group, the Internet is viewed as just a tool to get information. They want to be on campus. They want the stimulation of dealing with university faculty and other peers. In contrast, typically, the older Nontraditional students are more concerned about convenient on-line learning courses so they can get the skills they need as quickly as possible.

