

Central Oregon Community College

COCC magazine

2026



COLLABORATIVE CLASSROOMS

Through hand-in-hand teaching partnerships across Central Oregon, from Warm Springs to La Pine, COCC seeks to expand learning journeys

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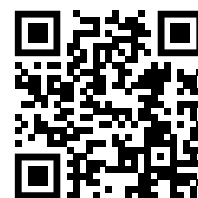
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COCC
 magazine
 2026 Volume 8

MANAGING EDITOR
 Aimee Metcalf

MAGAZINE ADVISORS
 Lucas Alberg, Zak Boone,
 Mark Russell Johnson, Brittany Nichols

WRITERS
 Lucas Alberg, Mark Russell Johnson

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
 Joanna Larsen

PHOTOGRAPHER
 Carson VanBuskirk

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 Erin Foote Morgan (*Ex-officio*)


Central Oregon Community College
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 Bend, Oregon 97703



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& A

MEET COCC'S NEW PRESIDENT

Dr. Greg Pereira, who grew up in Clackamas, Oregon, started with COCC this past July. His path to the College involves leadership posts as vice president of academic affairs and dean of academic affairs and community development at Arizona's Rio Salado College. His background also includes teaching college-level classes and working with community-focused nonprofits. Here, he shares some thoughts and takeaways from his time in Central Oregon so far.

What are some words you live by?

I've always clung to the African proverb, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

Where in Central Oregon do you and your family like to explore or spend time?

Honestly, everywhere. Is there a bad spot in Central Oregon? We want to go everywhere and try everything.

What's an outdoor sport you love doing — what's one that you're giving a go?

I love fishing. Ironically, I don't eat fish, but I enjoy catching them, saying hello, and sending them on their way. Along those same lines, I just bought a fly rod and am going to give fly-fishing a try. If you see me walking around with a Band-Aid on my ear, you'll know the learning process is still ongoing.

What makes COCC different to you?

COCC is a "first-choice" college. Around the country, many community colleges are seen as lower-cost alternatives to universities. But COCC is not an alternative. It is the first choice for students from across the country. Our residence hall has students from California, Alaska, Minnesota and beyond. They receive an outstanding education and student experience. Across multiple cities and counties, we bring that experience directly to the communities we serve, supported by an amazing network of friends, donors and partners. After nearly 20 years working in three different states, I can confidently say COCC is the best college I've encountered.

What's the best part of your job?

The best part of my job is the people. COCC, and Central Oregon as a whole, is filled with incredible people I genuinely enjoy being around: brilliant, good-natured, balanced, funny and deeply kind.

What advice would you give to your 18-year-old self?

At 18, my father had just taken his own life, I was a freshman in college 1,000 miles from home, and I was scared. I would tell that kid to take a deep breath, have faith and trust that seasons pass. What feels overwhelming today will build character for tomorrow, and even the hardest experiences can serve a greater purpose if you're determined to help others and are willing to use your story to connect with those who are struggling.

What's on the horizon for the College?

So many exciting things. Our first bachelor's degree program, in Nursing. Our updated Manufacturing program and learning center in Redmond. Programming to better serve first-generation students. At its core, the future of the College is focused on enhanced support for our students, staff and the communities we serve, ensuring COCC continues to grow its impact and deliver exceptional opportunities for everyone connected to the institution.

Top left and middle: Rosie Day. Right: Eugen Helmbrecht.

A Sporting Nature

Wearing cowboy hats and hauling ski bags, the 18-person team from rural Oregon must have cut quite the image moving through Vermont's Burlington airport, en route to competing in the 1976 National Junior College Athletic Association Ski Championships at Smuggler's Notch. Of the 15 college teams converging on the three-day ski-off that year, they were the only Westerners competing. Soon, they made themselves known.



"Just tell them that we stomped the East Coast!" COCC ski coach Roger Gildersleeve, phoning home, relayed excitedly to his wife after the team won all alpine and Nordic events, in both men's and women's categories. In its first-ever national sporting competition, a small community college from Central Oregon had, in spectacular fashion — and with a Nordic team member unexpectedly filling in for an injured downhill — claimed the national title.

Training on and around Bachelor Butte (renamed Mt. Bachelor in 1982) certainly gave the team strong makings. So did having a college that placed a premium on sports, championing the built-in values of teamwork and commitment. COCC intercollegiate play would grow to field teams in golf, wrestling, track, even rodeo, among other sports.

While ski success would continue — the men's Nordic team won three National Ski Association titles — the expense of travel and coaching forced a tough decision, and, in 1982, COCC would sideline intercollegiate play.

It was reinstated in 1987, then halted again in 1994.

The thrill of victory (and agony of defeat) carried on, from cross-country teams winning the Nike Cup in 1988 to track-and-field athletes filling the top-two podium spots at the 1994 national championships in Odessa, Texas. Bobcat club baseball, currently not fielding a team, ranked 25th in the country in 2015. Impressive for a school that doesn't recruit or have a baseball diamond.

Today's sports offerings at COCC are varied, including a coed intramural basketball league — considered the highest level of competitive hoops in Bend — plus volleyball, pickleball and tennis intramural offerings. All are open to dues-paying community members. Intercollegiate play, in fact, continues at COCC these days, but to a lesser extent, without full eligibility requirements. Clubs include running, tennis, climbing, soccer and, notably, rugby.

Having formed in 2012, rugby goes toe-to-toe with Division III programs like Lewis & Clark and the University of Montana, and rostered 33 student-players this past season. It, too, has made itself known: winning the Northwest College Rugby Conference championship in 2018 and competing in the 2019 National Challenge Cup. Its coach and former player, Max Bennett, who won National Collegiate Rugby "Coach of the Month" honors last fall, has marshaled a strong squad. A women's rugby team is now under discussion.



Community members can get in on sporting traditions too. Long-standing running events like the Jungle Run (May 7) and Storm the Stairs (May 19) turn the hilly, woody Bend campus into memorable fun runs that double as student scholarship fundraisers. **Visit cocc.edu/sports to take part in the action.**





A Choice Worth Making

What it Means to Be a First-Choice College | By Lucas Alberg

Growing up in Las Vegas, Shelby Smith assumed college would eventually take her somewhere else. With extended family in Oregon — and three relatives who attended the University of Oregon — Eugene felt like her calling. She also considered Oregon State University and Everett Community College in Washington, weighing proximity to family, cost and academic pathways.

But when Smith took a closer look, Central Oregon Community College rose to the top. “COCC just made more sense for what I wanted,” she says.

Now in her second year at COCC, Smith is a Criminal Justice major and a community assistant (CA) in Wickiup Residence Hall. She plans to continue her education at Oregon State University-Cascades in Bend upon earning her transfer degree. Looking back, she doesn’t describe her decision as a compromise. She describes it as intentional. “I would choose COCC again, 100%,” she says.

For students like Smith, choosing a college isn’t about prestige — it’s about fit. It’s about finding a school that aligns with real goals, real values and real lives. She wanted a place that offered a quality, affordable education while also allowing her to be outside year-round,

explore new interests and experience something different from home.

“In Vegas, it’s just too hot to be outside for most of the year,” she says. “I wanted to hike, snowboard, be outdoors. I wanted to live in Oregon.”

COCC certainly offered her access to recreational activities. But it also offered her more than she expected from a community college: a residence hall, strong faculty, individualized attention and a campus environment that felt both supportive and independent.

“You get the college experience people want, but it’s more affordable — and it’s more personal,” she says. “Classes are small so you get to connect with faculty in a way that you can’t at a larger university.”

Smith describes faculty who treated her like an adult, advisers who took time to understand her goals and an environment where she felt known.

“They don’t pressure you into one path,” she says. “They listen to what you want and help you figure out how to get there.”

That combination — belonging, rigor and intention — threads through many of the stories emerging from COCC today. It’s also central to a vision President Greg Pereira has articulated since arriving last summer: that COCC is a first-choice college.

For Pereira, the phrase isn’t about rankings or exclusivity. It’s about belief.

“When I think about my own experience coming to COCC,” he says, “I wasn’t looking for a job, wasn’t looking to move. But when they reached out, it was different. It was the kind of opportunity where you drop what you’re doing and make it work.”

He hopes students experience that same pull — that sense that this is the place where they’ll be supported, challenged and seen.

“Historically, community colleges have been treated as a fallback,” Pereira says. “But that’s never really fit COCC. This college has always been a destination.” That destination looks different depending on who you are.

For Ashley DeBiaso, a second-year Nursing student and mother of four, it looks like a two-hour daily commute from outside Warm Springs, carefully coordinated child care and a cohort that feels like family.

“I WOULD CHOOSE COCC AGAIN, 100%”

DeBiaso began working in caregiving nearly two decades ago. Over the years, she became a certified nursing assistant, then a medical assistant, gradually realizing she wanted a role with greater responsibility and advocacy. Nursing felt like the right next step — but choosing where to pursue it wasn’t simple. “Cost was definitely a factor,” she says. “And location. I was a little leery of community college at first.”

What changed her mind was COCC’s reputation. Geographically, she was nearly equidistant from Oregon Health & Science University in Portland, and she seriously considered both options before deciding where to apply. She spoke with nurses who had graduated from the COCC program and heard the same thing repeatedly: strong faculty, high expectations and real support.

“What I’ve noticed in my experience at COCC is there’s care,” DeBiaso says. “We’re treated like people — not just numbers going through a program. The faculty would be enough reason for me to come back.”

What surprised her even more was the culture within the cohort itself. “We’re all in it together,” she says. “Instead of competing, we help each other. It’s not just a class — it’s family.”

That sense of shared purpose is something faculty members recognize — and help cultivate. “Everyone here is pulling in the same direction,” says Hal DeShow, a Geology associate professor now in his eighth year at COCC. “Everybody gets it — we’re here for student success. That’s real. It’s not just lip service. You see it every day.”

DeShow wasn’t actively looking for a new job when several mentors encouraged him to apply for a position at COCC. But the more he learned about the College, the more it stood out — not as a stepping stone, but as a destination. “This was the only place I was interested in,” he says. “I can’t imagine a better place for me to teach.”



ASHLEY DEBIASO

DeShow found something he hadn’t experienced at other institutions: the freedom and trust to teach in ways that put students first. Faculty aren’t handed a rigid script or boxed into a single approach, he says. Instead, they’re encouraged to teach creatively and responsive to the students in front of them — an approach that DeShow says makes all the difference.

“What makes this place special is that teaching is the focus,” DeShow says. “Faculty are here because they care about students and teaching.”

That focus shows up in how classes are structured and how students are treated. DeShow describes a culture where knowing students’ names, checking in after a class, and creating inclusive environments are standard, not the exception. “If a student doesn’t feel welcome, learning doesn’t happen,” he says. “Your brain’s in survival mode. Feeling welcome is the foundation.”

For DeShow, that foundation doesn’t mean lowering expectations. His courses are rigorous, but intentionally designed to be accessible, using multiple ways of learning, hands-on experiences and real-world connections. “You teach challenging material,” he says, “and you make it accessible by delivering it in different ways so different students can engage with it.”

Those foundations matter not just in Bend, but across COCC’s vast district — more than 10,000 square miles of Central Oregon. New investments, including the Madras campus expansion that recently opened, reflect a commitment to meeting students where they are.

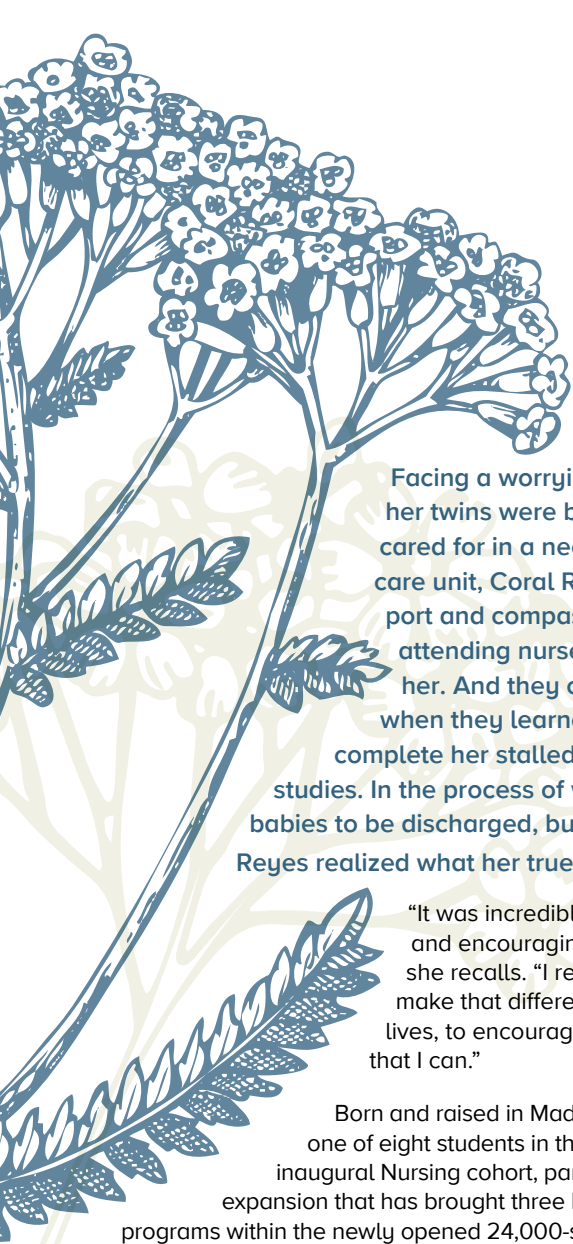
The expansion feels personal for DeBiaso. Her goal is to work in Madras after graduation, serving a community she knows well. “There are so many people with potential who just can’t make the commute,” she says. “Removing that barrier changes everything. It gives people more reasons to go back — and fewer reasons not to.”

For Smith, that same sense of community has shaped her experience on campus — especially as a CA, where she helps support other students navigating college life. “Because the school is small, it kind of forces you to be a community,” she says. “You see the same people every day. You learn how to communicate, how to show up for others.”

Beyond academics, COCC gave Smith space to explore leadership, music and the outdoors — experiences she says helped clarify her future.

“COCC was the right choice for me because it gave me room to figure things out,” she says. “It gave me confidence in what comes next.”





Strongly Rooted

The newly opened learning center at COCC Madras is shaping a new era for careers and community

Facing a worrying time when her twins were born early and cared for in a neonatal intensive care unit, Coral Reyes found support and compassion from the attending nurses. They steadied her. And they cheered her on when they learned of her goal to complete her stalled-out phlebotomy studies. In the process of waiting for her babies to be discharged, buoyed by RNs, Reyes realized what her true calling was.

“It was incredible how impactful and encouraging the nurses were,” she recalls. “I realized I’d like to make that difference in people’s lives, to encourage them in any way that I can.”

Born and raised in Madras, Reyes is now one of eight students in the Madras campus’s inaugural Nursing cohort, part of the recent expansion that has brought three health care programs within the newly opened 24,000-square-foot facility.

“Overall, I would like to keep my mind open to all nursing specialties,” Reyes shares, mentioning that earning a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (now available at COCC) is on her radar. One thing she’s set on: “I would like to be able to work in my community.”

That story of combining hometown nursing training with hometown nursing careers is suddenly becoming realistic for residents of Jefferson County. That’s true, too, for the Nursing Assistant and Medical Assistant programs, also newly offered in Madras, and the expanded Early Childhood Education program, which will integrate some of its learning into an on-site child care center for the community.

Just as Early Childhood Education students will have field-based learning experiences made convenient, health care students will have easy access to the immersive part of their training. A recent Nursing clinical for Reyes, for instance, was in a long-term care facility less than a mile from the campus.

Opened in January after a multi-year fundraising and construction project that began with a major land donation from the Bean Foundation of Madras, the expansion is a two-story, LEED-certified structure that combines learning and community care.

“The space is an amazing work of art,” says longtime Madras business owner Teresa Martin, executive director of The Children’s Learning Center. “I couldn’t have asked for a better partner than COCC.”



Martin is overseeing the child care center — a much-needed resource for the county — comprised of five homerooms, a commercial-grade kitchen and sprawling play zones, that’s serving up to 100 children. “The size of the rooms is perfect to offer lots of opportunities for learning through play while meeting the basic needs of each student.” One-way mirrors provide Early Childhood Education students with an ability to observe methods and see a child care center in motion.

Outside, planted beside an apron of engraved donor bricks, students pass by a towering yarrow that shines in the early spring sun. The 14-foot, steel-and-aluminum sculpture by artist Ken McCall celebrates a native perennial with a deep history of medicinal use by Indigenous peoples. It serves as a welcoming beacon to all, forever in bloom.



JOIN US!
Madras Open House
Thursday, April 30, 4 p.m.



Left: Sofia Stranieri. Right: Carson VanBuskirk.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Catching up with three exceptional Bobcats



Journalist Steve Fisher, Class of ‘08

Long before he reported for the *New York Times* on how disposed American car batteries were sickening workers in Mexico, or, while on assignment for *USA Today*, how he wrote of the Mexican drug cartels’ expansion into the migrant smuggling trade, Steve Fisher was studying communities and cultures as an Anthropology student at COCC.



“I knew that I wanted to work with people and better understand other cultures,” he shares from his home base in Mexico City. Raised in a Mennonite community in Pennsylvania, Fisher was also keen on examining his own culture, particularly the psychological boundaries that came with detaching from his upbringing at age 21. At COCC, Anthropology professor Amy Harper helped him see how widely applicable the field of anthropology could be, to even include one’s own past.

Fisher went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in political science at Evergreen State College and a master’s degree in journalism from the University of California, Berkeley. In addition to reporting for the *Wall Street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times* and other outlets — largely covering beats of organized crime and the environment — he has consulted for filmmaking services like Netflix, HBO and National Geographic. Amazon Studios is currently turning one of his feature reports into a film.

Submitted photos.

Engineer Cathy Phillips Tyler, Class of ‘10

Job searches were proving fruitless. Her friends were moving on. Having postponed college after high school, Cathy Phillips Tyler was quite hesitant about going back to school. But at 22, she was in need of a change. Curiously, her aptitude tests had flagged her strengths in engineering — something that felt beyond reach.



“After four years of forgetting the math and science skills I learned in high school, I was unsure,” she recalls. “But I eventually decided to just go for it.”

Tyler recalls conversing with other students and family members who had a difficult time with chemistry classes in school, but realized she enjoyed it. “It’s the exact opposite of many people,” she says. “This is when I started considering chemical engineering specifically.” An instructor at COCC fostered her interest in chemistry, made the classes fun.

Today, the Oregon State University alum works at Lonza on the manufacturing, science and technology team. Among other roles, she helps lead transfer of technology from product development to clinical manufacturing. “I was fortunate to be heavily involved with commercializing a new oncology medication, the very first fourth-line therapy approved for patients with a particular type of cancer,” she shares. “I tell my child that mommy is going to work to make medicine for very sick people.”

Educator Isaac Shannon, Class of ‘21

The personalized attention and smaller class sizes at COCC made all the difference for Isaac Shannon. “Everything is adapted to your goals,” says the 2021 grad, who focused on pre-law. Still, he recalls feeling uncertain at the outset.

“I was nervous to start COCC because I have learning disabilities. However, my experience in this program was nothing but a positive one,” he adds. “Each professor was approachable, knowledgeable and fun...I wasn’t afraid to raise my hand in class.” That support helped prep him for bigger things.



Shannon went on to California State University-Dominguez Hills to earn a bachelor’s degree in international studies, and recently obtained his master’s in education there. He’s currently an instructor at a nonprofit that works with adults with disabilities, empowering them for jobs and social connection.

“Attending COCC was the best decision I made in my education,” he states. Shannon’s goal is to attend law school and one day work for the Innocence Project, a nonprofit legal organization.

Collaborative Classrooms

Through hand-in-hand teaching partnerships across Central Oregon, from Warm Springs to La Pine, COCC seeks to expand learning journeys



The learning involved a rare, wriggly newt who only calls Crater Lake's shoreline home. And it included discussions about balancing the needs of biodiversity and agriculture. It went high, and wide, on the trails that lace across Smith Rock State Park. Those varied ingredients — and many others — merged together as part of “Confronting Wildness,” a multiday educational series designed by the High Desert Museum to give local college students exposure to different interactions with nature.



For COCC student Noah Koehler, who earned a college credit with the four-class sequence this past fall, the agenda was inspiring. Students met with a land trust director, spoke with a state wolf biologist about species restoration, and toured the museum's private collection of Western art.

“I particularly enjoyed the event in which we investigated what visual media, such as paintings and public service material, can reveal about contemporary concepts of wildness,” shares Koehler, who studied under the supervision of a COCC adviser.

Learning can take many forms at COCC — including when it doesn't even happen on a COCC campus. Independent studies are offered within many degree-track programs at the College, including public health projects with Oregon State University and glacier studies through the University of Oregon. In partnering with other dedicated education missions around the region, from organizations to district schools, COCC is part of a collective force for higher learning.

The museum, for instance, has offered this free learning series, High Desert Project, since 2021; this past year marked the first time content was fashioned specifically for college students. Several from COCC participated. Now plans are underway for similar programming this year and next, and a COCC faculty

liaison is helping to connect students to it. “We're wanting people to come together around issues important to our region,” explains Isabel Engel, program facilitator at the High Desert Museum, on the project's purpose. “To connect people with different opinions and build an understanding. For students, it's about how we can help them with careers and schooling.”

Koehler plans to continue his transfer-degree education at Oregon State University-Cascades, in either natural resources or social science. “I hope to engage in work that aims to heal the fractured relationship between humans and the natural world,” he says.

Learning partnerships might mean giving a college student access to a whole new experience. Or it might mean forging a college-credit program for high schoolers, a gateway to something great.

Learning can take many forms at COCC — including when it doesn't even happen on a COCC campus.



FINDING FLUENCY

Out at the War Pony Training Center on the Warm Springs Reservation, the singe of heat on steel is music to the ears of Helen Wiersma-Koch, Ph.D. Collaborating with the Confederated Tribes and Jefferson County School District 509J, the COCC instructional dean has stewarded a program to launch a new career entry point for area high schoolers. She travels there regularly from Bend.

“The students have set up all the equipment and welding booths, and they’re learning how to weld,” says Wiersma-Koch. “For our first cohort, we had 13 students from 509J Bridges High School in Madras and the Tribes. We expect this high-demand, high-wage program to grow in need and popularity.”

The certificate-based training, encompassing up to five classes in all, is allowing students to enter the workforce with a college credential. Or easily progress into the College’s Automotive program for continued learning. The Tribes upgraded the facility with needed electrical requirements, while the school district is providing transportation and covering tuition; COCC supplies the two instructors, equipment and curriculum. Similar automotive training contracts have recently started with Culver High School and J Bar J Youth Services, and trainings at La Pine High School begin this spring.

For Wiersma-Koch, who grew up in a rural area just beyond the Everglades in Florida, helping bring new opportunities to small communities is crucial work. And taking the learning directly to students, such as at Warm Springs, offers youth a more accessible path while forming a strong commitment. “It’s opened the door to other partnerships with the Tribes,” she says. New college-credit classes being offered on the reservation, and also through nearby Madras High School, include accounting, business and, notably, Native languages.

“I’d say 1% are fluent,” Valerie Switzler, education general manager for the Tribes, says solemnly about the level to which ancient languages of the Warm Springs, Wasco and Northern Paiute people are currently spoken and understood. But the Ichishkin (Warm Springs), Kiksht (Wasco) and Nume (Northern Paiute) languages — each completely distinct — are now returning from the brink of going silent. Held at Madras High School and taught by longtime educator Dallas Winishut of Warm Springs, the language classes are proving popular. More than 70 students are currently enrolled.

“They now know words to songs, to greetings,” says Switzler, beaming. She says the focus on culture has created another benefit: an uptick in overall school testing results. “It’s because of the language and the culture being introduced. Our elders say, ‘If you know who you are, and where you’re from, you’ll be more successful.’” In 2025, five students graduated high school with biliteracy seals — the first time those credentials have been awarded.

BRIDGE TO COLLEGE

In his criminal justice courses at La Pine High School, teacher Lucas Taroli takes his students on a broad tour of the law. They cover topics of due process and citizen rights, unpack current high-profile cases and meet with members of law enforcement. In addition to hearing from visiting speakers like the Deschutes County district attorney, the class even visits Deer Ridge Correctional Institution to interview inmates and tour the facility.

“My goal is to show my students the many career opportunities within the criminal justice world,” says Taroli. It’s a high-level experience for high schoolers, perhaps more aligned with a college-caliber class. Which, in fact, it is.

Taroli’s class is part of COCC’s College Now program, an inexpensive and accessible way for high school students to earn college credit from the comfort of their own classroom. With the same rigor and course outcomes as on-campus college classes, College Now serves to scaffold the connection between high school and higher education, making the step more attainable.

By offering access and helping stoke interests, the College lays tracks for higher learning. Classes are taught by approved high school instructors who receive mentorship from COCC faculty. The cost is \$25 per credit, a fraction of COCC’s current in-district tuition credit rate of \$124.50.

“While saving on tuition costs, they build confidence and get a head start on completing a college certificate or degree.”

College Now is currently connected with 19 high schools across (and beyond) the district, with many schools offering multiple courses. Some are geared toward transfer degree requirements, for bachelor’s degrees and beyond, while others are aligned with career and technical paths. Options this year include U.S. history at Sisters High School, psychology at Summit High School, precalculus at Crook County High School and construction apprenticeship at Redmond High School. Most classes are three or four credits, typically open to both juniors and seniors.

“We currently have 1,330 high school students participating,” says Erika Carman, College Now coordinator. “While saving on tuition costs, they build confidence and get a head start on completing a college certificate or degree.” Current data indicates that some 26% of these students will enroll at COCC after high school.

From his La Pine classroom, Taroli has seen how those early college seeds become career-starters. “Most of my students come to my classes with a simple curiosity,” he says. “But I have many former students who now work for Bend Police Department and the Deschutes County Sheriff’s Office.”

These and other education collaborations — from a GED-prep class taught by COCC at a Warm Springs site to a College-facilitated Nursing Assistant program integrated into Ridgeview High School — are setting students up for success. It’s a hand-in-hand approach to education, linking missions and strengthening the region.



“Our elders say, ‘If you know who you are, and where you’re from, you’ll be more successful.’”



Forward ON THE INSIDE

At Deer Ridge Correctional Institution, a new COCC associate-degree program — sustained by federal Pell Grants — is part of a robust reform-with-education mission

In 2024, 1.8 million people were incarcerated across the U.S., reports the Vera Institute of Justice. And every day, more than 1,000 adults in custody are being released from state and federal prisons, suddenly rejoining society. Some are able to persist on the outside; some aren't.

But recidivism rates plummet when education is part of the equation. The U.S. Bureau of Justice released a report in 2018 that looked at a nine-year window of data and found that some 68% of formerly incarcerated people were arrested within three years. Within six years, that number jumped to 79%. Within nine, it was 83%.

However, if an adult in custody earns their GED that likelihood drops to 50%, reveals an analysis by the RAND Corporation, a global research institute. If they earn an associate degree, it falls to 13.7%.

A new associate degree program has become part of a broader COCC education program at the minimum-security Deer Ridge Correctional Institution, just east of Madras. Unveiled in the spring term of 2024, the small class is the vanguard of a new educational opportunity taking shape. Of the roughly 1,100 adults in custody there, 29 are presently enrolled in COCC's associate degree program.

"These students are motivated, pragmatic and appreciative for the opportunity," conveys Emma Chaput, a Biology professor with the College who has spearheaded its development. "It's an opportunity for these people to redefine themselves."



If an adult in custody earns an associate degree the likelihood of recidivism drops to **13.7%**

Chaput's tenure at COCC earned her a sabbatical which she used, in part, to attend a two-week summer residency in 2022 at Bard College's Prison Initiative in rural New York. She came away inspired, hoping to implement a degree-based prison education program. When Congress lifted a 26-year ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated individuals in 2023, and with accreditation secured later that year for COCC's fledgling prison degree program, Chaput was one of the first in the country to apply for and receive the national grant certification. Most students are able to receive the Pell support.

Recently released from Deer Ridge, Ken was starting over — again. It was his third time doing time, having dealt with a crippling addiction. But now he's helping others heal. "I became certified as a recovery mentor last December," he says proudly, clearly grateful.

Instrumental to his new chapter: the eight college credits he earned behind bars. Combined with the 84 credits he'd already earned, begun long ago, his associate degree suddenly felt within reach. "I don't know if I would have done it without those classes in prison," he shares. "Guys have goals. That's really important when you're in there."

When COCC was invited in 2024 to become a member of the national Bard Prison Initiative Consortium for Liberal Arts in Prison — the first community college in the U.S. to be invited to join this community of practice — it joined prestigious partners like Yale, Boston College and Grinnell. It's a seat at the table in helping other colleges make college-in-prison a reality.

Rosie Day.



Manufacturing Futures

A remodel and major addition this year to the Redmond campus's Manufacturing and Applied Technology Center, originally built in 2001, is expanding capacity and adding upgraded equipment for futures in machining, welding and computer numerical control (CNC) operations. More students will be able to enroll in the COCC Manufacturing certificate and degree programs as industry growth in Redmond and other communities develops. Oregon's welding workforce, for instance, is expected to jump by 15% between 2022-32, estimates the U.S. Department of Labor. Classes and trainings will continue during construction; completion is expected as early as fall term 2027. The estimated \$8 million project will combine \$4 million from COCC general funds and a matching grant from Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Commission. Additionally, a \$2,187,923 grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education — one of just 22 such grants designated for colleges and universities nationwide — will be used to develop short-term certificates for manufacturing technology with regional workforce needs in mind.

Left: Rosie Day. Middle: Michelle Stern.

Deep in Thought, for Decades

With a starry presenter list that has included poet-activist Maya Angelou, astronaut Ellen Ochoa, historian David McCullough and paleoanthropologist Richard Leakey, the Nancy R. Chandler Lecture Series of the COCC Foundation this academic year celebrates 40 years of curating inspiring, fascinating talks. "Both of our parents were intellectually curious and believed in contributing to the community in which they lived," says Peggy Cushman of Bend, on the founding of the program. Her father, the late Robert W. Chandler Sr., former editor and owner of *The Bulletin*, established the series with the COCC Foundation to honor his wife. While the lectures place a focus on exploration, of both literal and intellectual sorts — from summiting Mount Everest to learning about Russia's future with Sergei Khrushchev — they serve another purpose too: bringing people together. Visit cocc.edu/foundation/cls to see what's coming up.



Reaching First

More than 26% of COCC credit students last year identified as first-generation — the first in their family to go to college. In support of these Bobcats, a U.S. Department of Education grant, totaling \$1,361,820, is providing 140 low-income, first-generation COCC students, per year over four years, with specialized supports to help them graduate and transfer to a four-year university. The TRIO Student Support Services grant, which began last fall, is COCC's first-ever such grant. "Selected applicants are assigned a success coach, and then have access to wraparound services, like designated tutors, transfer-degree workshops, tours of universities and other supportive, motivational resources," says grant lead Andrew Davis, dean of student engagement at COCC. Across the state, about 77% of participating students for the 2023-24 year graduated with a bachelor's in six years, reveals an Oregon TRIO Association report.



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