



April 21, 2020

Governor Kate Brown
Office of the Governor
900 Court Street NE, Suite 254
Salem, OR 97301-4047

Governor Brown:

On behalf of Oregon's 17 community colleges, we would first like to thank you for your leadership through this unprecedented public health crisis. We greatly appreciate the partnership with you, your office, and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) as we work together to guide the state and our institutions through this pandemic.

During this national public health emergency, our community colleges have implemented the protocols laid out in Executive Orders 20-09 and 20-17. Colleges have responded quickly taking measures for the safety of our students, employees, and communities, and have continued teaching and learning activities through remote learning.

Community colleges play a unique role in our communities delivering education and workforce training to all regardless of their education or skill level. However, we know the hardships created by COVID-19 now facing our students, employees and institutions are shared by educational, non-profit, business, and governmental sectors across the state. We look forward to the continuation of partnerships across these sectors to help get our state through this crisis and rebuild the workforce needed for a strong recovery. In the spirit of this ongoing collaboration we have highlighted some key issues on which colleges are focused and that we hope will be useful as you continue to provide direction through this pandemic.

1. Community Colleges Are Working Hard to Contribute to the Fight Against COVID-19

Our community colleges are partnering with local and state government as well as health care providers and non-profits such as the Oregon Food Bank. We are working to inform our students and communities of the wide variety of services that are available from state and federal agencies to individuals who have been impacted by this crisis.

Colleges are working within their communities to donate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) from programs that utilize these products and are using 3D printers to produce items like face shields which they are donating to local health care providers in their communities. Colleges are also donating other needed medical supplies they have access to from health care related programs. In some cases, nursing and other health professions faculty have been loaned to hospitals for patient care needs.

Colleges have also made available space on many campuses to be used for various activities ranging from overflow hospital space to overflow space to process unemployment insurance claims.

Social media platforms utilized by the colleges are also now being used to provide timely information to our local communities related to COVID-19 and the “Stay Home. Save Lives” campaign.

2. Colleges Have Made the Transition to Online Courses to the Greatest Degree Possible

Our colleges have transitioned to online classes to the greatest degree possible. In many cases the transition has gone smoothly, however making the transition to remote learning in a 10-day timeframe have left many faculty members exhausted as they begin the spring term. While many collegiate transfer programs are now being offered online, most Career and Technical Education (CTE) and lab-based science courses are not being offered for the spring term putting many students’ educations on hold. This could also have significant workforce pipeline ramifications especially in critical health professions needed to fight the virus such as nursing along with other critical areas such as transportation.

The move to all remote learning also has the potential to exacerbate equity gaps as students without access to broadband internet or computers struggle to make the transition to exclusive online instruction. To help students bridge this gap colleges have supplied lower cost laptops, opened parking lots for Wi-Fi access, and offered services such as tutoring online.

3. Colleges Have Continued Vital Services for Students but Have Canceled Events

Community colleges play a unique role in their communities as a fundamental, and often primary, access point for post-secondary education and workforce training but also as a major center for community events and activities.

Just as coursework has shifted to online platforms, vital college services such as academic advising, financial aid, career counseling and tutoring are no longer provided face-to-face. Colleges have also continued critical work helping students through the often confusing and complex process of applying for federal benefits such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) and others. This work connects students to the benefits they need to support themselves and their families and has the added benefit of bringing additional federal matching dollars to Oregon. Colleges are also offering emergency grants to students and providing take away food boxes and other subsistence-level services.

Many other services and events requiring face-to-face contact have been put on hold, modified, or canceled. Some are campus services and events such as commencement which are being done virtually or in other formats. Other activities such as athletics have been canceled for spring term. Community events that would take place on the campuses have been canceled in nearly all cases. Colleges are waiting for further guidance for summer when summer academic camps and other activities take place.

4. We Are Taking Steps to Help Students Graduate Ontime

Due to disruptions caused by the pandemic, students face additional barriers to completing their course of study. In many CTE-related courses students may face delays until many face-to-face courses are able to be offered. Should face-to-face instruction be possible over the summer, colleges are attempting to offer CTE courses students would need to makeup.

In other areas, colleges are making strenuous efforts to help students continue on their educational path by pro-actively reaching out to students to ensure they continue and complete their education. This means taking steps such as providing individualized course scheduling or instruction to meet requirements for graduation, waiving or replacing requirements if allowable, and other measures intended to give students greatly enhanced flexibility through this crisis.

5. Colleges Are Trying to Minimize Employee Reduction Despite Significant Enrollment Declines

The move to online-only learning has meant many CTE and lab-based programs cannot be offered. Colleges with more robust CTE offering are seeing some of the steepest declines in enrollment which appear to be in the 20-percent decrease range at this point. This has required significant employee furloughs across the state. Where possible colleges are offering “closure pay” for employees who cannot work due to the crisis, but these types of hold-harmless measure are in no way sustainable over the coming months. Loss of enrollment has already led to significant reductions in the number of part-time faculty who are hired on term-by-term contracts. Several colleges have already made targeted layoffs due to COVID-19 related financial pressures. Colleges with corrections education programs have been particularly hard hit with the 2-month suspension of their contracts with the Department of Corrections and have had to furlough many instructional faculty as a result.

With few people on campuses colleges are also facing loss of revenue from auxiliary services such as food services, parking and, on a few campuses, college housing. This loss of revenue adds to the significant financial pressure already caused by dropping enrollment and the corresponding tuition revenue.

While our students, institutions and communities we serve face profound new challenges brought on by COVID-19 we are committed to partnering with state government, employers, labor unions, high schools, four-year colleges and universities, and community-based organizations to respond to this crisis.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that Oregon responds to and recovers from this public health and economic crisis. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or need any additional information.

We are here to help.

Sincerely,



Cam Preus
Executive Director