



## **OP-ED: Community colleges worth the investment**

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Oregon's community colleges are a cornerstone of our state's economic landscape. A comprehensive economic analysis released in August, conducted by independent labor market analytics firm Lightcast, highlights the substantial contributions of Oregon's community colleges, and the findings are nothing short of astounding. You may have recently received your annual tax statement in the mail and noted the amount of your tax dollars allocated to your local community college. Considering this, it's crucial to understand the often overlooked but profound impact our community colleges have on our state's financial well-being.

The report, spanning Fiscal Year (FY) 2021-2022, reveals that Oregon's 17 community colleges collectively generate a staggering \$9.6 billion annual economic impact. To put this into perspective, this represents 3.3% of Oregon's gross state product and supports an impressive 117,970 jobs across the state. In essence, our community colleges are the backbone of Oregon's economic health, supporting livelihoods, and propelling our state forward.

What's even more exciting is the net impact of former students (our alumni) currently working in Oregon's job market, which amounted to an additional \$8.6 billion in income during the same fiscal year. This is equivalent to the economic boost of hosting the Super Bowl 24 times!

In FY 2021-22, taxpayers strategically invested \$834.3 million in these colleges, and this investment is poised to yield substantial returns. This includes heightened tax revenue from students' increased lifetime earnings and business output, which adds up to an estimated \$1 billion. Additionally, reduced reliance on government-funded services is expected to save taxpayers an extra \$89 million.

The analysis also underscores a fact that should resonate deeply with all taxpayers: for every dollar of public money invested in Oregon's community colleges, taxpayers will receive \$1.30 in return over the course of students' working lives.

The economic benefits extend beyond mere numbers; they translate into real opportunities for Oregonians. With each dollar invested, community colleges empower students to receive top-notch education, offering a 21% return on their investment. This doesn't merely foster personal growth; it's a commitment in our shared future, enhancing our workforce and bolstering our communities.

Furthermore, an Oregon community college graduate earns \$9,100 more annually than those with only a high school diploma, and students gain a return of \$5.20 in higher future earnings for every dollar they invest in their community college education. The impact of our community colleges extends beyond the classroom as they stimulate Oregon's economy through operations and construction spending, contributing hundreds of millions of dollars to our state's income.



The economic significance of Oregon's community colleges cannot be overstated. They are the driving force behind our state's prosperity, offering opportunities for our students and wise investments for our taxpayers.

As you review your recent tax statements, consider this: the dollars you contribute to support our community colleges are catalysts for positive change. They fuel an engine of progress, creating a ripple effect that touches every corner of our state. By investing in our community colleges, you are investing in a brighter, more prosperous Oregon for all.

Learn more at <https://www.occa17.com/economic-impact/>.

*Jane Reid is the President of the Board of Directors for the Oregon Community College Association, represents the 17 publicly chartered community colleges and their locally elected board members in Oregon. Founded in 1962, OCCA's purpose is to support the colleges before policymakers and partners whose actions affect the well-being of community colleges across the state.*