

November 15, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Casey White-Zollman, Communications Director
casey@occa17.com | 503-502-5642

Oregon community colleges see enrollment surge

SALEM, Ore. – Oregon’s community colleges are celebrating a promising increase in enrollment as the fourth-week enrollment reports from the state’s Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) reveals significant growth in overall headcount and Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) enrollment at the majority of community colleges statewide.

According to the HECC, the overall college headcount during the fourth week of the fall term was 4.3 percent higher this year than in 2023 (90,961 students). This is the same as the national trend in headcount enrollment for community colleges. The number of FTE students is also higher in 2024 at 21,897 students, a 7 percent increase over this time in 2023. Though enrollment has continued on an upward trend since 2023, it remains lower than pre-pandemic levels. Headcount is 17.6 percent lower than in fall 2019, and FTE is 14.2 percent lower.

It's important to note, however, that the decrease in FTE for 2024 occurs at two of the smallest Oregon community colleges for a total of just under 6 students, whereas statewide the increase to FTE was 1,437 students.

According to the colleges, the enrollment boost is especially notable in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, which prepare students for well-paid careers in fields such as healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, and skilled trades. The increased enrollment in CTE programs reflects a growing demand for job-ready training as Oregon’s economy continues to evolve, requiring skilled workers across a wide range of high-demand industries. These programs, while among the most impactful in terms of job placement and salary potential for graduates, are also some of the costliest for colleges to operate due to the need for specialized equipment, labs, and materials. Despite these financial challenges, Oregon’s community colleges remain committed to meeting the demand for CTE programs and supporting the state’s workforce needs.

“This enrollment surge underscores the vital role community colleges play in strengthening Oregon’s workforce,” said Dr. Abby Lee, Executive Director of the Oregon Community College Association (OCCA). “The growth in enrollment demonstrates that students are eager to pursue career paths with strong job prospects and high earning potential. Our community colleges are dedicated to providing accessible, high-quality education that leads to meaningful careers.”

As enrollment continues to trend upward, Oregon’s community colleges are adapting and expanding their offerings to support students’ goals and the state’s economic future. The colleges are also working closely with industry partners to provide hands-on training and internship opportunities, further enhancing students’ readiness for the workforce upon program completion. They’re also working closely with K-12 partners to improve the college-going culture for high school students in Oregon.



260 13th Street NE
Salem, OR 97301
503.399.9912
<https://www.occa17.com>

OCCA remains committed to advocating for the necessary resources to support this enrollment growth and ensure that community colleges can continue to offer high-quality, career-focused education and transfer programs to all Oregonians. For more information about Oregon community colleges, please visit <https://www.occa17.com>.

###

The Oregon Community College Association (OCCA) 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 policy-makers and partners whose actions affect the well-being of community colleges across the state.