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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

OCCA celebrates National Community College Month in April

SALEM, Ore. – The Oregon Community College Association (OCCA) is proud to celebrate April as National Community College Month, highlighting the vital role that Oregon’s 17 community colleges play in providing affordable, accessible, and high-quality education to students across the state.

Community colleges **WORK** for Oregon by **W**idening access to higher education, **O**pening doors to career opportunities, **R**einforcing local economies, and **K**eeping Oregon’s workforce competitive. From career and technical education (CTE) programs and transfer pathways to workforce training and lifelong learning, Oregon’s community colleges are at the forefront of preparing students for success.

Research from New America’s 2024 *Varying Degrees* study shows that most Americans hold community colleges in the highest regard among all higher education institutions. Community colleges are viewed as the best value in higher education in terms of cost, tax dollar investment, and resource efficiency.

“Oregon’s community colleges are the backbone of our state’s workforce and economy,” said Abby Lee, Executive Director of OCCA. “They provide high-quality education and career training that is both affordable and accessible, ensuring that all Oregonians — regardless of background or situation — have the opportunity to succeed. The data confirms what we already know: community colleges are an excellent investment for students, families, and the state.”

According to a 2023 economic impact study by Lightcast, Oregon’s community colleges have a total economic impact of \$9.6 billion statewide, supporting 117,970 jobs in FY2021-22. That means one out of every 22 jobs in Oregon is supported by community colleges. In addition, the study found that 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 – an average annual rate of return of 1.9%. Oregon community college students earn an average return on their educational investment of 21%, and students gain a return of \$5.20 in higher future earnings for every dollar they invest in their community college education.

Community colleges serve more than 200,000 students each year in Oregon, offering programs that align with local industry needs, support economic mobility, and prepare students for both immediate employment and university transfer.

“As we celebrate National Community College Month, we want to emphasize the critical role our colleges play in strengthening communities, businesses, and the entire state,” said Austin Fohnagy, OCCA Board President. “Oregon’s community colleges are the key to a skilled workforce, economic development, and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Community colleges really work for Oregon.”

OCCA recommends all Oregonians take this opportunity to learn more about the impact of community colleges and to support efforts to expand access to these essential institutions. Oregon’s 17 community colleges will highlight programs, services and community connections throughout the month on their social media pages, so Oregonians are encouraged to follow their local college and share out their stories.

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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.