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NEW STUDY: OREGON COMMUNITY COLLEGES GENERATE $11 BILLION IN ANNUAL ECONOMIC IMPACT

Lightcast analysis finds colleges support 120,140 jobs and deliver strong returns for students, taxpayers and communities

SALEM, Ore. - Oregon's 17 community colleges generate $11.0 billion in annual economic impact and support 120,140 jobs across the state, according to a new economic impact study released today by the Oregon Community College Association (OCCA). The analysis, conducted by Lightcast using fiscal year 2023-24 data, found that one out of every 23 jobs in Oregon is supported by the activities of the colleges and their students.

"Community colleges work for Oregon every day - preparing people for family-wage careers, helping employers find skilled workers and strengthening communities in every region of our state," said OCCA Executive Director Abby Lee. "This study puts a clear value on that work. Oregon's investment in community colleges returns benefits to students, taxpayers, businesses and the broader economy."

The $11.0 billion total includes $9.9 billion generated by community college alumni through their higher earnings and increased workplace productivity, $858.1 million from college operations, $216.8 million from student spending and $41.0 million from construction activity. The total impact is equal to approximately 3.7% of Oregon's gross state product and is larger than the state's entire accommodation and food services industry.

The study also found:

- **Students receive $4.70 in benefits for every $1 they invest** through higher lifetime earnings. The average associate degree graduate earns about $9,800 more each year than a worker with only a high school diploma or equivalent.
- **Taxpayers receive $1.40 in benefits for every $1 of public funding invested** through increased tax revenue and reduced demand for health care, justice system and income-assistance services.
- **Oregon society receives $6.50 in benefits for every $1 invested** through added student income, increased business income, college activities and social savings.
- **The colleges served 125,399 credit students and 77,494 non-credit students** during the study year, and an estimated 73% of students were employed while attending college.

The findings offer new evidence of the role Oregon's community colleges play in preparing workers, supporting businesses and strengthening communities across the state. They serve Oregonians at every starting point, including students pursuing GEDs, English-language learning, short-term

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credentials, career and technical education certificates and degrees, transfer degrees and applied bachelor's degrees.

Community colleges are also central to Oregon's workforce pipeline. Enrollment is growing, particularly in career and technical education (CTE) programs that prepare students for high-demand fields such as health care, advanced manufacturing, construction, transportation, public safety and other essential industries. The study's strong return on investment reflects, in part, the value created when community colleges connect Oregonians with the skills employers need and help businesses remain competitive.

"Career and technical education is one of the clearest examples of how community colleges work for Oregon," Lee said. "These programs lead directly to good jobs, strengthen local employers and generate lasting economic benefits. They are also among the most costly programs colleges provide because they require specialized faculty, modern equipment, laboratories, technology, safety systems and often smaller class sizes. Sustained public investment is necessary to keep that workforce pipeline strong and ensure students in every region can access these opportunities."

The findings underscore that investing in community colleges is an investment in Oregon's workforce and economic future. Continued state support helps colleges respond to employer demand, maintain high-cost CTE programs, keep education affordable and provide the advising, financial aid, tutoring, technology and other services students need to complete their education and enter the workforce.

The Lightcast study evaluates both the colleges' direct economic activity and the long-term benefits generated for students, taxpayers and society. It uses academic and financial data from Oregon's community colleges, federal industry and employment data, Lightcast's economic modeling and established research connecting education with earnings and social outcomes.

The executive summary and full report are available from OCCA at www.occa17.com.

About the Oregon Community College Association

The Oregon Community College Association was founded in 1962 to support Oregon's community colleges before policymakers and partners whose actions affect their well-being. OCCA represents the state's 17 publicly chartered community colleges and their locally elected board members. Leading with racial equity, OCCA advocates, communicates and collaborates to strengthen community colleges for the benefit of Oregonians, particularly those historically underserved or systemically marginalized in higher education.

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