



BREAKTHROUGH MOMENTS



Meeting Students — and Principals — Where They Are

Southwestern Oregon Community College (SWOCC) used interactions with high school principals and a close look at data to find new ways to connect with students and improve interactions with high schools.

Pre-Apprenticeship Programs Lower Barriers to Entry

“As we participated in the Rural Guided Pathways Project, a big breakthrough moment for us was learning how much dual credit programs in our area had been affected by the pandemic,” says Patricia Scott, president. “We look at data all the time, but sometimes that data is blended in for the whole district. We needed to look at our campuses separately to really understand what was happening at our high schools.”

SWOCC’s two campuses — the main campus in Coos Bay and the even more rural Curry campus — cover a large geographic area with small numbers of people.

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“Only 18 percent of the population for the Curry campus is under 18, and 35 percent is over 65,” Scott explains. “Many people there want a robust community education program because they are retired people with means. That is great, and we want to offer that, but to meet our mission, we have to figure out how to bring high school students to us or get them involved in dual credit.”



The Rural Guided Pathways Project helps a national cohort of rural community colleges implement evidence-based, institution-wide reforms grounded in the guided pathways framework. College teams include community partners in their regions, and they receive support from coaches, subject matter experts, and other colleges that are part of the project. The National Center for Inquiry & Improvement leads the project.

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She adds, “And then we have to try to reach out to the big group of people in the middle —the working people who need economic mobility — and those adults are the hardest population to access.”

SWOCC is starting to engage those populations with pre-apprenticeship programs. A few years ago, the state provided some starter money that the college used to purchase heavy equipment simulators, and the college started a pre-apprenticeship program in construction.

“A lot of these folks don’t come out of a college-going culture. A traditional career path of one or two years is kind of scary for them versus a pre-apprenticeship noncredit program,” Scott explains. “With a pre-apprenticeship program, the students learn skills and can demonstrate them, and they get some workforce training.”

The training teaches the basics and generates the points students need to be admitted to an apprenticeship program.

“A lot of the people in our service area have been told that they’re not college material, and they don’t need college, or they can’t do math,” Scott adds. “We’re trying to meet them where they are. But it’s a battle because it’s generational.”

High School Partnership Committee Coordinates Efforts

SWOCC leaders learned that multiple employees might be visiting one of their 10 high school campuses on any given day, and these efforts were not coordinated.

“Oftentimes, more than one SWOCC employee would arrive at a high school, and they wouldn’t even know each other,” Scott says. “For a small campus like ours, this was not an efficient way to align our work. And of course it was also problematic for the high schools.”

SWOCC formed the High School Partnership Committee. This committee is part of the Student Success Committee, which oversees all of the college’s pathways work. The college now has one person who is responsible for coordinating all work with high schools.

“It’s better for the schools and the students,” Scott says. “The teachers know that people from SWOCC will be there so they can be more prepared with space for gathering, and they can prepare the students.”

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The High School Partnership Committee also set goals for working with high schools:

1. Collaborate, communicate, and consolidate internal work around middle school and high school partnerships.
2. Better understand the challenges districts face, and collaborate with them to help students in equitable ways.
3. Host events for partner schools that cultivate a college-going mindset and career awareness across the college district.
4. Monitor dual credit and expand options to increase enrollment.

SWOCC Provides a Gathering Place — and Support — for Principals

SWOCC recently held a summit for high school principals in its service area. This practice helps position SWOCC as a resource to help principals do their jobs better — and to better serve students.

“The principals found value in getting together in this way, and they asked us to do more convening on their behalf,” Scott says.

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Looking ahead, SWOCC is working with other area colleges to ensure that high schools have teachers who are qualified to teach dual enrollment classes.

“A high school might have a teacher who is qualified to teach dual credit in their discipline, but what happens when they retire?” Scott asks. “The high school often brings in a new teacher who costs less money and may not be prepared to teach dual credit.”

The group of colleges is looking at offering an applied baccalaureate in teaching secondary education. And as part of that curriculum, teachers would get the training they need to teach dual credit.