

Southwestern Oregon Community College
Observations from Site Interviews
October 27-28, 2003

Introduction

Southwestern Oregon Community College (SOCC) is a rural community college struggling to serve an economically depressed area on the Oregon coast and trying at the same time to provide leadership for a number of innovative programs created by a state that is one of the nation's leaders in educational reform. Given the added burden of reduced budgets, Southwestern Oregon is doing remarkably well with the challenges and is leveraging the CCTI project as a key element in meeting those challenges.

In 1991, Oregon's state legislature, to raise expectations for education, passed the Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century that set the state on a course of educational reform in K-12 that has had significant impact on the state's community colleges and universities. And it has made Oregon the place to visit for innovative and substantive practices to improve the educational enterprise. The law, strengthened and clarified by the legislature in 1995, calls for rigorous educational standards to evaluate student performance and progress.

Oregon is developing two types of educational standards for secondary school students:

- **Academic Content Standards** define what students are expected to know and be able to do in English, mathematics, science, history, geography, civics, economics, the arts and a second language.
- **Performance Standards** define how well students must perform on classroom assessments and state assessments leading to the Certificate of Initial Mastery.

These standards will be evident in two certificates issued to high school students who meet the standards. The Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM), ideally to be achieved by the 10th grade, is designed to certify the achievement of basic academic skills. CIM is articulated with a set of proficiencies required by the universities for admission through PASS—Proficiency-based Admission Standards System.

The Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM), ideally to be achieved by the 12th grade, is designed to certify the achievement of applied and contextual learning. In the *Oregon Standards* newsletter issued for the 2002-03 school year by the Oregon Department of Education, it is noted that "...many of the cornerstones of the CAM design are aimed at helping students identify their particular aptitudes, use their learning styles to their best advantage, and envision and plan toward a fulfilling future."

All of these initiatives are being piloted in various high schools and are still in development. The framework for these innovations will continue to expand into the

future requiring high school graduates by 2006-07 to develop an education plan and build an education profile, demonstrate extended application through a collection of evidence, demonstrate career-related knowledge and skills, and participate in career-related learning experiences as outlined in the education plan.

There are real challenges in Oregon in achieving the grand design of this reform plan:

1. The legislature keeps tinkering with the overall design.
2. The plan changes to meet the federal requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.
3. There are insufficient funds to implement the special programs of the reform effort, and there are almost no funds for staff development to help teachers and administrators implement the new reforms.
4. Interviews with a few selected educators in Oregon reveal that it is difficult to understand the reform plan and to communicate its various and complex components.

The Oregon Department of Education's website provides detailed information on elements of the reform plan www.ode.state.or.us/cimcam/index.htm

Southwestern Oregon Community College

While Southwestern Oregon is adapting to changes brought about by the state's reform efforts, and indeed playing a key role in the area of information technology programs, it is at the same time coping with profound change in the community it serves.

The College's 2002 Institutional Self Study summarizes the economic and social challenges of this region:

The local economic situation reflects a 20-year long shift from a production economy based upon wood products to a service economy. Family-wage jobs in the wood products industry have been replaced by low-wage service jobs. Since 1976, jobs in lumber and wood products have declined by 82 percent. The loss of jobs continues in the fishing, timber, and cranberry industries. The unemployment rate is one-third to two times higher than state and national percentages. It is only now in the midst of a national recession, with Oregon holding the highest jobless rate in the nation, that the state unemployment level has risen to match the unemployment level South Coast residents have endured for many years.

The economic decline is reflected in social decline: One-fourth of the population of the area is functionally illiterate, 39 percent of children aged 17 and under within Coos and Curry Counties received emergency food assistance in 2001, Coos County ranked first of 36 Oregon counties in child abuse, one in five children under the age of five in Coos County live in poverty, and 22% of the mothers in Coos County have less than 12 years of education.

The declining social and economic conditions are also reflected in the declining student population. From 1999 to 2002 enrollments in K-12 districts served by the college decreased from 13,935 to 12,796—a loss of 1,139 (8.2%) students. The population of the 1st grade in these districts is approximately one-half the population of the current 12th grade—a dramatic illustration of the decline in the school population and an indicator of the challenge faced by Southwestern Oregon Community College in attracting enrollments.

The budget at the College is based on an enrollment-driven formula. For the College to survive it must be very creative in attracting students from a base of declining population. Undaunted by these overwhelming challenges, the leaders of the College understand and accept their crucial role in this community. Southwestern's president, Stephen Kridelbaugh, has responded to the challenge:

One of the goals of the College is to revitalize the economy and the workforce in this area. We do what we have to do to bring family wage jobs into our area. If we don't have a trained workforce we cannot attract industry to move here.

The College is aggressive in pursuing new industries and is unabashedly entrepreneurial in creating arrangements that will attract new students. On-campus housing, unusual for public community colleges, is provided for 300 students and attracts a number of out-of-district students. A Culinary Arts Program with tuition set at \$18,000 enrolls 45 students from around the nation. Through an aggressive recruiting program, one percent of all high school graduates in the state of Alaska (42 in 2003) attend Southwestern Oregon. The College has spent over \$18 million on new facilities in the last 6 to 7 years. At no cost to taxpayers the loans are being paid off with revenue streams from some of the programs cited.

As part of the plan to address the challenges of the region, the College strongly encourages college faculty and staff to pursue grants. The College has a philosophy of supporting the successful and promising programs in the College, and the Department of Computer Information Systems (CIS) is one of the most successful at SOCC.

The Department of Computer Information Systems

The CIS department at SOCC has become a primary source of training in information technology on Oregon's south coast. The program is staffed with a core of very active and innovative IT faculty who collaborate, in a very challenging environment, to create programs and opportunities for students. Although enrollments in the IT programs have not met expectations, the faculty continue to seek grants, design alternative instructional strategies, create models, and play a key role in Oregon's development of IT offerings.

Encouraged and supported by college leaders, the CIS department has been awarded a number of grants which provide the basis for expanded programs. The department has had a partnership with Cisco Systems since 1997 and is a Cisco Networking Academy

and a regional academy for instructor training. There are four corresponding courses in the Advanced Cisco Lab for the Cisco CCNP.

The department was selected in 2000 as one of only eight recipients in the United States for a \$250,000 grant from Microsoft for the *Working Connections* project managed by the American Association of Community Colleges. The grant provided funds for faculty release time to create new curricula to reflect changes in IT. During the first year of the grant Microsoft also provided \$900,000 worth of software; in the second year Microsoft added additional software valued at \$780,000.

There have been nine additional grants from various sources over the past few years for specific programs and services, and the CIS department has meshed and leveraged this grant support to create model programs and services. A hallmark of the programs is that they have been created using national standards from a variety of sources including:

National Center for Emerging Technologies www.nwcet.org
International Society for Technology in Education www.iste.org
Association for Computing Machinery www.acm.org
International Technology Education Association www.iteawww.org
State Educational Technology Directors Association www.setda.org
Oregon Department of Education www.ode.state.or.us/cifs/newspaper/

Using these various standards for reference the CIS department has created four AAS degrees and ten certificates based on a career ladder approach. The four degrees are in Technical Support, Computer Networking, Web Development and Administration, and Software Support. The career ladder is designed for multiple points of entry for students. Courses are modularized, and some, such as the beginning course CS101, are offered in a variety of formats such as lecture, self-paced, challenge test, and skills course.

There is also a computer science transfer program for students who want to complete degrees beyond the community college. Southwestern partners with a number of Oregon universities through the Southwestern University Center and has a dual enrollment agreement with the Computer Science and Engineering departments at Oregon State University. The College is an active member of the Oregon Computer Science Chairs Committee, a statewide group that develops articulation agreements among the various educational institutions.

The CCTI Project at Southwestern Oregon

The CIS department was fortunate to receive two complementary grants at about the same time, and, in their usual fashion, the faculty meshed and leveraged these two grants to form the framework for this CCTI partnership. The CCTI grant from the League for Innovation provides a larger umbrella for the Challenge Grant to create a Careers Pathway for IT awarded in the winter of 2003 by the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and the Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (CCWD). The challenge grants addressed four areas of “great economic and workforce

development need” in the state of Oregon including information technology. The purpose of the project is “to design integrated, articulated, and statewide secondary/postsecondary pathways that provide students with a smooth and seamless transition to further education and employment.” The state purpose could be a page from the national CCTI project purpose.

K-12 partners in this project include the South Coast Education Service District which provides access to the ten school districts in the College’s service area. The primary school partners include the North Bend School District and the Gold Beach High School in the Central Curry School District. Both of these schools are creating charter/magnet technology programs that will play major roles in this CCTI project.

Operational in the fall of 2003, the Gold Beach Technology Charter School is a school-within-a-school concept. The North Bend School District’s program is a magnet school with a new technology building built with local bond levy funds. The new facility, located between the middle and the high school, will house five special classrooms for IT. The first classes were offered in the fall of 2003 for students in the 6th to the 10th grades, and classes for the 11th and 12th grades will be added in the next two years.

In addition to these two key technology schools, local employers will play important roles in the project. ORCA communications is a broadband service provider owned by the Coquille Indian Tribe with a need for networking and technical support workers. The Bay Area Hospital, the largest hospital on the Oregon coast, needs IT workers in all areas in which the College offers programs. Affiliated Computer Services was induced by the College to locate in the Coos Bay area through offers of special training and space. ACS is a worldwide provider of diversified business and IT outsourcing solutions and hires software and technical support workers.

There are other partners in the CCTI project, but the two high schools, the Oregon Department of Education, and the three employers are the primary players to create a Career Pathways that will meet the requirements of both the state grant and the national grant.

To reduce the need for remediation, project leaders will a) administer the College placement exam to high school sophomores, b) administer formative employability assessments to high school sophomores, and c) administer HSSSE to high school students. As a partner in this effort the Department of Education hopes that a crosswalk will be created between the college placement exam and the state assessment exam. Administering three different instruments to these high school students might be overkill considering that they also take other mandated assessments. The challenge to project partners will be to determine what to do with the results of the various assessments given the lack of resources and the limited faculty time available. A key issue is what kind of remediation (if any) will be provided for students with basic skill deficiencies, and who will provide it.

To increase enrollment and persistence, project leaders will a) administer CCSSE to college students, b) develop programs for middle and high school students to increase career awareness of IT options, and c) implement creative instructional strategies for adult students. Although some of these strategies will be supported by related project grant activities, this is a lot of effort for the limited resources available.

To improve academic and skill achievement, project leaders will a) align curriculum in high school, community college, and universities with national standards, b) extend postsecondary curriculum to high schools through a variety of means, and c) implement evidence-based instructional strategies by training high school and college faculty. Again, project leaders will be challenged to implement all these strategies and programs with the limited resources available. Can the IT Educator's Workshops encompass the range of training planned? How will the "evidence-based instructional strategies" be connected to the newly aligned curriculum? Which "evidence-based instructional strategies" will be selected, and how will project leaders ensure that faculty trainers are competent in these strategies to teach them to others?

To increase the number of degrees and certificates, four major activities are planned: a) expand academic and career counseling for college students, b) increase awareness in high school students of dual/concurrent enrollment options, c) follow-up college students who are stop-out, drop-out, or low performers, and d) conduct program and degree audits of college and high school students. Increasing awareness in students is not too difficult, but by itself may not be a powerful motivation for completing degrees and certificates. Creating a retention plan for students who are low performers or stop-outs and drop-outs is a major undertaking probably not within the reach of this effort. It is not entirely clear what project leaders mean by "program and degree audits."

To increase entry into employment and/or further education, three major activities are planned: a) increase college student exposure to business experiences and employment opportunities, b) expand articulation agreements with university programs, and c) develop articulation agreements between high schools and the community college. The plan for exposure calls for six activities for each of the partner schools which might be a bit much depending on the nature of the activities which is not addressed in the Implementation Plan.

The Implementation Plan for this CCTI project is very ambitious for partners already strapped with declining resources and declining enrollments. The number of activities planned may overwhelm the energies and time that faculty can devote, and quality performance on the most significant of the activities may suffer. However, these are spunky leaders who have learned to survive in a very challenging environment. They have learned to mesh and leverage resources, and they are willing to work beyond reasonable expectations to achieve their goals. The project leaders at Southwestern Oregon and their partners are on a mission to better serve and to expand their services to a clientele in great need. It will be interesting to see if, by personal will and grit, they can achieve the high goals they have set for themselves. Even a modest achievement will herald a significant success.