OSU’s branch campus in Bend will change Oregon’s higher education landscape

Oregon State University—Cascades Campus

When Joe Cox, chancellor of the Oregon University System, asked the state’s universities to submit proposals for creating a branch campus in Central Oregon, a leadership team from OSU responded in a dramatic fashion, proposing a 21st-Century Learning Community.

The OSU plan? Work with Central Oregon Community College, Eastern Oregon University, Oregon Institute of Technology, and other partners to create a university by throwing out the existing models and starting from scratch.

Cox and the Oregon State Board of Higher Education liked the concept. Thus OSU—which already operates numerous Extension offices, Experiment Station facilities and research centers throughout the state—will open its first branch campus. Headquartered on the campus of Central Oregon Community College, classes will begin as early as the fall of 2001.

This will be no ordinary university. For one thing, there are no academic departments planned; rather, an interdisciplinary cadre of full-time resident faculty will collaborate on a program to offer 25 complete bachelor degree programs and 11 master’s degree programs in a full range of liberal arts, science, education, health, business and engineering.

Another hallmark of the OSU branch campus will be its connectivity to the community. OSU’s 21st-Century Learning Community will feature the Academy for the Third Age, a new program to serve the region’s growing senior and retired life-span learners. A Community Link program will combine the forces of OSU Extension and research, Central Oregon Community College and the Small Business Development Center to provide a needs assessment, training and community development aimed at strengthening the rural economy.

And there will be a wide range of intellectual and cultural events, as OSU creates a Summer Arts Institute and partners with The High Desert Museum and the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, the Medgar Evers Institute, and other organizations on a series of lectures, music and arts programs, and other learning events.

“In all my years in higher education, it is one of the most exciting proposals I have seen,” said OSU President Paul Risser. “It ventures far beyond the usual boundaries of academic institutions to respond to real needs, real opportunities, and real aspirations of Central Oregonians.”

Funding for the branch campus will begin with a two-year legislative commitment of $7.2 million—an amount that will be supplemented by student tuition dollars and private giving.

Central Oregon Community College will continue to provide education for the lower division classes, while OSU will focus on upper division curriculum. A “seamless student experience” will ease the transition for students from COCC to the new university, minimizing red tape and facilitating registration, financial aid, student services and other needs.
By its fifth year of operation, this new branch campus is expected to enroll several hundred students, create 400 new jobs, and have a positive economic impact of more than $26 million in Central Oregon.

OSU’s history in Central Oregon is extensive and dates back to at least 1911, when the first Extension faculty was appointed to Deschutes County. Today the university and its partners invest more than $6 million annually in the region for instructional and research activities. More than a hundred faculty and staff conduct scientific studies in the area. And the university’s sophisticated distance learning program is well-established and turning out graduates.

Tim White, OSU’s provost and executive vice president, said the university’s history in the region was important in the decision process.

“Oregon State has been a visible and important part of the Central Oregon community for a long time and people remember that,” White said. “The university will be even more heavily involved in years to come. It is a growing, dynamic region with unique needs and aspirations. It will be fun and rewarding for us to grow together.”

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Areas of Study for the 25 bachelor’s degrees to be provided by OSU or other participating universities:

- Humanities
- Biological Science
- Computer Science
- Early Childhood Development and Education
- Child, Youth and Family Services
- Industrial Engineering
- Museum Studies
- Outdoor Recreation Leadership and Tourism
- Social Science
- Business Administration
- Applied Health
- Information Technology
- Discourse Studies
- Environmental Science
- General Agriculture
- Natural Resources
- Liberal Studies
- Elementary and Secondary Education
- Nursing
- Social Science
- General Science
- Accounting
- Information Systems
- International Business Management

21st-Century University
Si Se Puede

Christina Rodriguez grew up in a family of migrant farm workers, moving constantly throughout the western United States. Along the way she learned a valuable lesson—in almost every community, there were people or programs available to help her family with language, education, health and other needs.

Now Christina, who in June 2001 became the first member of her family to graduate from college, wants to repay those kindnesses. Her goal: to attend graduate school and receive a master’s in social work so that she can work with Latino families to help them connect with community resources.

“I didn’t have a place I could call home until I came to Oregon,” Christina said. “Most of my childhood, people put me down because they didn’t believe in me. I was told that I would end up working in a shed, or be pregnant and barefoot at home. As a child, hearing this really does make you believe that is all your life is going to amount to.”

What changed her mind was a SMILE.

The Science and Math Investigative Learning Experience (SMILE) program at OSU encourages rural and minority youths in middle school to begin thinking about higher education. Christina joined the program in Nyssa, stayed with it through high school, and used SMILE as a springboard to go to college. And she has blossomed at OSU—Christina was selected to become a McNair Scholar, a program that provides rigorous academic preparation for graduate education for low income and first generation college students.

“There is a saying I learned years ago in leadership camp that is just three little words,” Christina said, “but to me they are so powerful. It’s ‘Si Se Puede!’ It means ‘Yes, you can do it!’ And it’s true. If you believe in yourself, you can do anything.”
Anyone who has ever surfed the Web knows the problem. You are searching for information on a topic—and instead of a neat, comprehensive list of credible resources, what comes up is an amalgam of personal Websites, outdated data with no citations, and sites with links that don’t work.

Oregon State University is taking a small, but important step toward addressing those Web woes. Last year, anonymous donors established a $2 million endowment with the Oregon Community Foundation to benefit OSU libraries. Support generated from the Gray Family Chair for Innovative Library Services at Oregon State University Fund allows OSU to create an endowed chair for its libraries that focuses on public access to research data and other 21st century information needs.

Karyle Butcher, director of OSU Libraries, said funds generated by the endowment will be used to bring to campus a series of loaned executives from industry to provide expertise in managing massive data collections and similar information technology projects.

“The idea is to create a chair for innovative library services with a rolling definition that will change as the years go by,” Butcher said. “Today it might be access to digital information. In five or six years, it may be something we cannot now anticipate. That kind of flexibility is so attractive, we don’t have any intention of filling this with a permanent chair holder.”

OSU is looking for new ways to handle large collections of data and to coordinate data from different sources. What is needed, Butcher says, are creative Web interfaces that can integrate many different components, yet be accessible to multiple users.

“There needs to be flexibility based on the users’ sophistication and the level of detail they want,” Butcher said. “There also needs to be some kind of quality control for the data—similar to the concept of a peer-reviewed journal article.”

Another need is coordinating information on similar topics from myriad sources. Reports on the Oregon environment, for example, have been developed by OSU, the Oregon Department of Forestry, the Department of Environmental Quality, the Oregon Progress Board and by dozens of other organizations. The different locations, technologies, and levels of sophistication create a nightmare for users trying to coordinate such data.

Butcher said the first project using OSU’s new endowment may be an assessment of Oregon’s natural resource data to determine their scope and accessibility. Such a project would dovetail nicely with OSU’s goal of creating a Natural Resources Institute on campus to manage such information.

“We’re looking at real work in real world settings that affects the public,” Butcher said. “This is pretty interesting and exciting stuff.”