

Interest flourishes in Bend for four-year degree option

By Scott McFetridge
Of the Emerald

A winter drive across the Cascade Range can be difficult, but it's a drive hundreds of Central Oregon students attending Willamette Valley colleges and universities must make every time they want to drive home. Although there are eight state colleges and universities in the State System of Higher Education, none of them are located in Central Oregon.

A group comprised of Central Oregon political, education and business leaders are working to change this situation, and they are confident that eventually a four-year college will be built in their area, said Frederick Boyle, president of Central Oregon Community College in Bend.

"The time is coming when this part of the state needs the opportunities and services of a four-year college," Boyle said in a telephone interview Wednesday.

Backers of the proposed state college have assured that it would be built on the existing COCC campus.

Since coming to Bend 18 years ago, Boyle said he has seen the area transform from almost total dependence on logging and farming to an area with a much wider range of interests. But without a bachelor-degree-granting college, the region has a difficult time attracting new businesses, he said.

Backers of a new Central Oregon college don't want to have an adverse effect on the current state system institutions, yet no one should

overlook the need for the college, Boyle said.

"I think the four-year colleges and universities will look with favor on this idea," Boyle said. But it will take a "quantum leap" before the state system agrees to spend the substantial funds necessary for a new college, he said.

Frank MacMurray, a Redmond attorney and member of Central Oregon Citizens Group for Higher Education, said it could be years before a college is built, but eventually it must happen. Before any construction can begin, studies must be commissioned to look at the feasibility, funding, and financing of a college, he said.

"We want to do what's really in the region's best interest," MacMurray said. "We want to add something to the education system or not do it at all."

Although a new college could be years in the future, Boyle said he hopes a consortium with state colleges and universities could be formed that would bring bachelor degree programs to COCC. This would mean that students could attend the Bend community college but receive certain degrees from one of the state colleges.

Because it is currently against state law to switch to a four-year college from a community college, the COCC Board of Directors must get the approval of the state Legislature before making any changes.

Backers of the proposed college spoke to legislators last month in Salem, but it was too late in the current session to do anything more than lay groundwork for the next session.

Ex-convict talks of prison: Conflicts with socialization

By Paul Ertelt
Of the Emerald

Humans are creatures of habit, says Arturo Zamudio, and breaking the chains of habit can free ex-convicts from the cycle that returns many of them to prison.

Zamudio, prison project coordinator for the Eugene Chicano Affairs Center, has had firsthand experience with the problem of readjusting to life outside of prison walls. Zamudio, 42, estimates he has spent a total of 15 years behind bars in California and Oregon.

Providing economic opportunity and raising convicts' self esteem are key elements in changing habits of thinking and living, he says. The project attempts to do this through counseling and by helping convicts find jobs and adequate housing.

"Some people, with the kind of support we give, won't make it," he says. "But some will."

Life and attitudes are so different between prison and the outside that newly released prisoners experience a form of "culture shock," Zamudio says. Inside, prisoners must maintain a tough, defensive facade to protect themselves, but the same behavior could cause problems on the outside, he says.

"The mental change is very difficult, because you're working with two types of attitudes — how you're expected to act inside of the walls of the house and how society expects you to act once you're released," he says.

The penal system does little to help the newly released prisoners fend for themselves, Zamudio says. When a prisoner is released from the Oregon State Penitentiary, he is given a one-way bus ticket and a promise of \$76 worth of food stamps, he says, but most have never received the training needed to survive in a competitive job market.

Ruben Sholander, director of the center, says most crimes have economic roots.

"We feel that most people, if given economic opportunities and educational opportunities, won't go the way of jails and prisons," he says. "We don't think that jails and prisons are necessary, except for the most violent and dangerous offenders."

The project becomes involved with inmates before they are released, and project members make monthly visits to OSP to talk with soon-to-be released inmates. This allows inmates to establish goals for themselves, which is important in building their self esteem, Zamudio says.

The project also serves as a liaison between ex-convicts and the community and helps educate the public about the needs of individuals who have been locked up, Zamudio says.

"The public doesn't give any acknowledgment to the penitentiary system at all," he says. "They act as though they just want to stick their heads in the sand and hope it goes away at some time, not realizing that 90 percent of everyone that goes into prison will someday be released, some perhaps in much worse shape than when they went in."

But keeping ex-convicts from returning to prison is in the public's best interest, Zamudio says. He estimates that keeping a person in prison for a year costs taxpayers about \$25,000.

Zamudio says the Eugene-based project, which is funded by a grant from the McKenzie River Gathering, is a model he hopes will be emulated in other parts of the state. Zamudio, Sholander, and Paul Armendarez, OSP inmate and president of the Chicano Culture Club at OSP, will talk about the prison problem at a forum tonight sponsored by Clergy and Laity Concerned.

"Getting Out and Staying Out: Obstacles to Breaking the Prison Cycle" will be presented at the Central Presbyterian Church, 1475 Ferry St., at 7 p.m.

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