



Submitted photo

Western Oregon University president Jay Kenton and Chemeketa Community College president Jessica Howard sign the Direct Connect agreement in February.

Chemeketa, WOU sign groundbreaking agreement

Chemeketa Community College and Western Oregon University (WOU) announced a new partnership agreement that will provide students completing a transfer degree at Chemeketa with a seamless transition to WOU. The agreement was signed at a special ceremony at the WOU campus on Wednesday, Feb. 23, by presidents Jessica Howard (Chemeketa) and Jay Kenton (WOU).

The new program, named "Direct Connect," will guarantee WOU admission to qualifying Chemeketa graduates who satisfy WOU's transfer admission requirements. Students on this pathway will receive specialized advising and support throughout their educational experience at both institutions, which will provide a clear pathway to completing a bachelor's degree in the equivalent of four years of full-time attendance: two years at Chemeketa and two years at WOU. Further, immediately upon admission, students in designated transfer programs will receive junior status at WOU and credit for completing all lower-division general education requirements.

"We are thrilled to expand our long-standing partnership with Chemeketa thanks to this agreement," said WOU Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Rob Winningham. "The program will ensure that students

have a clear, supported, and affordable path to a bachelor's degree that will prepare them for the work force and the future they choose."

Direct Connect will make the attainment of a bachelor's degree accessible to more students on account of lower tuition costs at the community college for the first two years of instruction. "This landmark articulation agreement smoothes the pathway for individuals in Marion,

Polk, and Yamhill counties who want a bachelor's degree and realize the many benefits of starting their academic journey at Chemeketa," said Jessica Howard, Chemeketa's President and CEO. "For our students for whom time and money is at a premium, this agreement

puts a degree from WOU even more within reach."

Bruce Clemetson, Chemeketa's Vice President of Student Affairs echoed that statement. "We are grateful to have this agreement with like-minded colleagues at WOU who are focused on students maximizing the benefit of a transfer degree from Chemeketa. Ensuring that a transfer degree graduate from Chemeketa will in most cases only need 90 additional credits reflects that commitment to reduce student cost and honor the quality of a Chemeketa graduate's education."

Direct Connect is slated to begin fall term of 2023.

New partnership creates a streamlined and affordable pathway to bachelor's degree.

Employment Dept. releases promising jobs report

The Oregon Employment Department released two new reports this week summarizing details of Oregon's job vacancies. As rapid hiring occurred in 2021 to replace jobs lost in 2020 during the pandemic, Oregon's job vacancies rose to record levels. Oregon employers had 97,000 job openings at any given time in calendar year 2021. The need for workers was especially high in the second half of the year.

With record job openings also came record difficulty filling vacancies. Employers categorized nearly three out of four (72%) of their job openings as hard to fill. Unemployment declined significantly during 2021, and employers reported that their primary hiring challenge for nearly half of all hard-to-fill job openings was a lack of applicants. More job listings were also staying open longer as employers competed for the limited supply of available workers.

Employers raised wages in 2021. The average starting wage offered for job openings was \$19.69 per hour, which was 4% higher than in 2020 after adjusting for inflation.

Overall, the characteristics employers are looking for haven't changed much in the pandemic and recovery; there were just a lot more of them. Most job vacancies offered full-time work

schedules, and employers were mostly looking to fill permanent positions. Job opportunities are plentiful for Oregon workers across all parts of Oregon's economy. Employers reported job openings in more than 430 different occupations.

Report released on potential disparate impacts of identification verification

Last week, the Oregon Employment Department (OED) released an internal assessment to determine if people claiming unemployment insurance were being negatively impacted by the requirement to verify their identity through software provided through ID.me.

"We have a strong commitment to equity and inclusion at OED. We also do everything we can to prevent fraud and ensure people who have legitimate claims can access the benefits they need," said David Gerstenfeld, acting director of the Oregon Employment Department. "When we started using ID.me, we were aware of concerns that the technology may not be as accessible to everyone we serve. We conducted the internal assessment to identify potential groups of people who may need extra support to complete the identity verification process."

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