

Oregon's free community college may be template for U.S.

By SOPHIA TAREEN
Associated Press

CHICAGO — An economic engine. A jumpstart for lower-income students. A partnership with businesses to grow a workforce. The idea of free community college has been touted as all these, by President Barack Obama, Democratic presidential candidates, and some Republicans.

The idea is to curb student debt and boost employment by removing cost barriers. Educators are split on its merits, with some worrying the push could divert students away from four-year schools. And some proposals could cost taxpayers tens of billions of dollars, and may still leave students with debt.

But thousands of high school graduates have just started community college for free, with the first batch enrolled in independent first-year programs in Tennessee, Chicago and soon Oregon doing so under different price tags and philosophies — offering templates of how a federal program might look and potential glitches.

"My family wasn't going to be able to support me financially," said 19-year-old aspiring doctor Michelle Rodriguez, who's taking classes for free in Chicago after concluding that even with in-state tuition and a scholarship a state university would be tough. "I'm the oldest. I'm the first generation to go to college."

Tennessee is at the forefront, with over 15,000 students enrolled in what's characterized as a jobs program. Chicago has just under 1,000 recent graduates in its City Colleges plan, with a push toward getting students into four-year schools at a discount. Oregon is accepting applications for next fall, with as many as 10,000 applicants expected. Other states are watching and considering their own programs.

Cost is bound to be a contentious issue, especially with strapped state and municipal budgets.

The Chicago's Star Scholarship — a signature Mayor Rahm Emanuel initiative — is the most generous. Beyond tuition, it picks up books and transportation. "All I have to worry about is ordering my books on time, getting my homework on time and studying," Rodriguez said. The price tops \$3 million for the inaugural class.

Tennessee, which this year relies on roughly \$12 million from lottery funds, is a "last dollar program" — paying what federal aid doesn't cover, with an average of \$1,165 a person.

Related costs are up to students. For now, Oregon has set aside \$10 million, and will cover up to the



In this Nov. 2, 2015, photo Octavia Coaks poses for a portrait at the Olive-Harvey College library in Chicago.



In this Nov. 3, 2015, photo, Michelle Rodriguez poses for a portrait at the Malcolm X Community College in Chicago.

average tuition of \$3,500 annually per student.

Obama has floated a \$60 billion nationwide plan calling for two years of free community college available to most anyone with a family income under \$200,000 who can keep a 2.5 grade point average.

Republicans criticized the cost, and at least one presidential candidate, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, has said it's a bad concept. But Republican Jeb Bush likes the general idea and has supported Tennessee Promise.

Democrats Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders both have proposed affordable college plans, and Sanders has introduced legislation to

make four-year public universities free.

Using public dollars for such programs is relatively new. Organizers studied plans utilizing private dollars as a model. Graduates from Kalamazoo, Michigan, have had free tuition available at some public colleges for a decade. Philanthropists have run a similar Knoxville, Tennessee, fund since 2008.

Still, Democratic state Sen. Mark Hass, who pushed the Oregon Promise, had a hard time convincing his own party of benefits. He went to the economics.

"To make a business case out of it, you look at the social costs that some of those people would likely incur on the way to poverty," he said. "A year of community college is a lot less than a lifetime on food stamps."

GOP-led Tennessee, which has all 13 of its community colleges participating, saw an 18 percent enrollment bump at technical colleges, according to Mike Krause, executive director of Tennessee Promise.

"This is a jobs conversation," he said.

With most students in Tennessee and Chicago just finishing their first semester, it's early for data on dropouts, higher degrees or job placement. Education experts, though, say the Tennessee and Oregon models could still leave students with debt.

"Students from low-income families, even when getting their tuition paid for, still have substantial shares of their cost of attendance to cover," said Debbie Cochrane, research director at the nonprofit Institute for

"A year of community college is a lot less than a lifetime on food stamps."

— Mark Hass,
Oregon State Senator
representing Beaverton

College Access & Success. "They're not borrowing for tuition. They're borrowing for costs beyond tuition."

That organization says 69 percent of 2014 college graduates left school with outstanding student loans, which averaged \$28,950.

Octavia Coaks, an 18-year-old in Chicago, said she feels lucky that her parents, a nursing assistant and railroad engineer, don't have to borrow more.

"I have a sister in college, they're (already) taking out loans. I don't want to put that kind of burden on them," said Coaks, who wants to study forensic science.

Setting the qualification parameters is one way to define the program. Unlike Obama's plan, the state and Chicago programs are limited to recent graduates.

Tennessee has no grade requirement. Oregon will require a 2.5 average. Chicago requires a 3.0 GPA.

City Colleges of Chicago Chancellor Cheryl Hyman said that level is a signal students "have the persistence and dedication to their studies needed to succeed in college."

Some researchers worry the program could divert students, at least initially, from four-year schools.

"Typically, students who have a 3.0 are already going to go to college," said Sara Goldrick-Rab, a University of Wisconsin-Madison professor who studies such programs. "It doesn't usually change who goes to college, it might change where they go."

But many in the Chicago program say they're trying to complete general requirements and then transfer. A dozen Chicago-area colleges say they'll offer scholarships to Star Scholars. Chicago graduate Oscar Sanchez, 18, says he's inspired by his older classmates in community college.

"If they're putting that much effort, why can't I?" he said.

BRIEFLY

Group on track to get term limits in Union County on May ballot

UNION (AP) — A group in Union County says it is on track to meet the Feb. 17 deadline to collect more than 627 signatures supporting a ballot measure to limit commissioners' terms.

The *La Grande Observer* reports that Union County Citizens for Good Government chief petitioner Jim Mollerstrom says the group is working to get the ballot measure in the May primaries to limit a commissioner's term to two terms, or no more than eight years.

The group successfully led a campaign that was passed by voters that made commissioner positions not-partisan in 2014.

Oregon firefighters rescue owl tangled in fishing line

GRANTS PASS (AP) — Wildlife rehabilitation workers say a great horned owl that was tangled in fishing line is resting after being rescued by Oregon firefighters.

The *Grants Pass Daily Courier* reports that a resident in Shady Cove saw the adult male owl flapping its wings erratically while high up a tree on Sunday.

Jackson County Fire District No. 4 Captain Rick Mendenhall says the owl was "stuck big time."

Firefighters were able to rescue the bird, which had fishing line wrapped tightly around one wing. They removed the line and put the bird on the ground, but it was too tired to fly.

So they wrapped the owl in a blanket and took it to rehabilitation center Wildlife Images.

Marketing coordinator Devan Ferrell says the owl will be released if and when it regains its wing strength.

Corrections

The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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AccuWeather.com Forecast

TODAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
Freezing fog this morning	Freezing fog in the morning	Mostly cloudy with freezing fog	Some sun; ice at night	Cloudy and chilly; a p.m. shower

PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST
26° 18° 28° 15° 31° 19° 36° 23° 36° 28°

HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST
29° 17° 29° 18° 30° 21° 35° 23° 37° 27°

ALMANAC

PENDLETON
through 3 p.m. yesterday
TEMPERATURE
HIGH LOW
Yesterday 27° 10°
Normals 43° 30°
Records 69° (1892) -11° (1896)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"
Month to date 1.18"
Normal month to date 1.30"
Year to date 7.81"
Last year to date 10.36"
Normal year to date 11.29"

HERMISTON
through 3 p.m. yesterday
TEMPERATURE
HIGH LOW
Yesterday 32° 13°
Normals 45° 30°
Records 68° (1949) 0° (1993)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"
Month to date 0.81"
Normal month to date 1.06"
Year to date 5.39"
Last year to date 6.25"
Normal year to date 8.34"

SUN AND MOON
Sunrise today 7:11 a.m.
Sunset tonight 4:14 p.m.
Moonrise today 7:25 p.m.
Moonset today 9:35 a.m.

Last	New	First	Full
Dec 2	Dec 11	Dec 18	Dec 25

REGIONAL FORECAST

Coastal Oregon: Mostly sunny today. Clear tonight. Sunny much of the time tomorrow.

Eastern Washington: Mostly sunny today. Mainly clear tonight. Partly sunny tomorrow.

Eastern and Central Oregon: Freezing fog in the morning; otherwise, partly sunny and cold today.

Western Washington: Plenty of sunshine today. Clear tonight. Sunny to partly cloudy tomorrow.

Cascades: Mostly sunny and chilly today. Mainly clear tonight; cold. Mostly sunny tomorrow.

Northern California: Partly sunny today; very cold in the interior mountains. Clear and cold tonight.

REGIONAL CITIES

	Today			Sun.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Astoria	50	32	s	50	36	s
Baker City	26	5	s	28	6	pc
Bend	29	9	s	37	15	s
Brookings	53	35	s	53	39	s
Burns	24	-1	s	27	-4	pc
Enterprise	31	8	s	30	7	pc
Eugene	40	23	s	44	24	s
Heppner	26	14	s	29	11	pc
Hermiston	29	17	s	29	18	pc
John Day	36	11	s	39	8	pc
Klamath Falls	33	8	s	35	10	s
La Grande	32	10	s	34	12	pc
Meacham	34	12	s	35	14	pc
Medford	42	21	s	43	23	s
Newport	48	34	s	49	37	s
North Bend	54	34	s	54	39	s
Ontario	29	11	pc	31	11	pc
Pasco	27	19	s	28	15	pc
Pendleton	26	18	s	28	15	pc
Portland	45	26	s	44	27	s
Redmond	29	8	s	38	13	s
Salem	42	24	s	43	25	s
Spokane	32	13	s	28	15	pc
Ukiah	29	9	s	33	8	pc
Vancouver	44	24	s	42	23	s
Walla Walla	22	18	s	25	18	pc
Yakima	36	17	s	34	16	s

WORLD CITIES

	Today			Sun.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Beijing	33	20	s	37	19	s
Hong Kong	78	70	s	81	69	s
Jerusalem	69	53	pc	67	50	s
London	49	47	r	56	46	sh
Mexico City	75	51	pc	74	47	pc
Moscow	28	16	s	25	23	pc
Paris	48	45	pc	55	50	c
Rome	56	40	pc	57	40	s
Seoul	38	27	c	43	34	sh
Sydney	76	66	sh	80	67	sh
Tokyo	58	48	s	57	49	c

WINDS

(in mph)	Today	Sunday
Boardman	VAR 2-4	VAR 3-6
Pendleton	VAR 3-6	VAR 3-6

UV INDEX TODAY

0 1 1 1 0 0

8 a.m. 10 a.m. Noon 2 p.m. 4 p.m. 6 p.m.

0-2, Low 3-5, Moderate 6-7, High; 8-10, Very High; 11+, Extreme

The higher the AccuWeather.com UV Index™ number, the greater the need for eye and skin protection.

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NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.

National Summary: Rain will drench areas from Texas to the Ohio Valley today. An ice storm will wind over the southern Plains as snow dwindles over the southern and central Rockies. Most other areas will be dry.

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 86° in Brownsville, Texas Low -23° in Old Faithful, Wyo.

NATIONAL CITIES

	Today			Sun.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Albuquerque	52	38	c	54	28	pc
Atlanta	72	53	pc	72	57	pc
Baltimore	66	47	c	52	41	r
Birmingham	31	16	pc	30	15	pc
Boise	26	14	pc	29	15	sh
Boston	52	36	sh	48	32	pc
Charleston, SC	74	50	pc	75	54	pc
Chicago, IL	65	50	r	57	45	sh
Cleveland	42	29	c	44	32	pc
Dallas	46	42	r	48	30	pc
Denver	29	16	sf	32	16	sf
Detroit	43	28	c	44	30	pc
El Paso	56	46	c	62	40	pc
Fairbanks	20	8	pc	12	0	pc
Fargo	33	12	s	35	19	pc
Honolulu	84	73	s	84	73	s
Houston	69	53	c	64	54	sh
Indianapolis	45	34	r	47	34	sh
Jacksonville	74	56	pc	76	55	pc
Kansas City	36	30	i	40	33	sh
Las Vegas	52	33	s	52	32	s
Little Rock	56	47	r	52	47	r
Los Angeles	66	43	pc	67	44	pc
Louisville	62	47	r	51	45	r
Memphis	65	49	r	54	50	r
Miami	81	68	pc	82	71	sh
Minneapolis	39	25	pc	42	31	pc
Nashville	67	54	r	67	47	pc
New Orleans	78	63	pc	77	61	pc
New York City	59	43	sh	51	37	pc
Oklahoma City	37	31	i	43	37	c
Omaha	34	26	c	38	29	i
Philadelphia	67	47	c	53	37	r
Phoenix	65	43	s	63	39	s
Portland, ME	46	26	c	45	20	s
Providence	54	36	sh	50	29	pc
Raleigh	72	49	pc	68	51	pc
Rapid City	30	9	pc	31	16	pc
Reno	33	11	sn	37	12	sf
Sacramento	55	27	s	55	28	s
St. Louis	45	38	r	47	38	r
Salt Lake City	33	20	c	33	22	sf
San Diego	66	49	pc	67	47	sh
San Francisco	56	37	s	57	40	sh
Seattle	42	29	s	43	31	s
Tucson	68	37	s	67	35	s
Washington, DC	67	49	c	54	40	r
Wichita	33	30	i	39	32	i

Weather (W): s-sunny, pc-partly cloudy, c-cloudy, sh-showers, t-thunderstorms, r-rain, sf-snow flurries, sn-snow, i-ice.