

Choices: 'I'm a little nervous, I'm not going to lie'

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Latino, according to the latest figures from the Oregon Department of Education. Susie Ellis, a secretary in the school's counseling center, said many of them would be the first in their families to go to college.

"There's a lot of that, 'Oh, I can't go to college,'" Ellis said, "Well, no, no you can."

In a report from February, Challenge Success — a school reform nonprofit, in collaboration with the Stanford Graduate School of Education and NBC News — found increased stress among high school students last fall.

The study's findings were based on responses from more than 75,000 high school students between fall 2018 and fall 2020. During fall 2020, the survey was administered to more than 10,000 students with additional questions related to the pandemic.

Of the students surveyed last fall, 59% said their worries about college increased. For Black and Hispanic/Latino students, 63% reported an increase in school-related stress; higher than the 55% of white students reporting greater stress.

Colleges pivot to online recruitment

On the other side of the admissions process, colleges and universities have had to work outside of the box to recruit students during the pandemic.

"The primary way we recruited students was to connect with them in-person. We would go to their high school, to the career center or to the counselor's office and connect with students, or go to a college fair that the school was putting on," Genesis Meaderds, admissions director at Eastern Oregon University, told OPB.

"When COVID hit, our primary way of recruiting was no longer an option."

Meaderds said Oregon's



The Observer, File

Eastern Oregon University in La Grande has had to adjust, like other public and private colleges, in how it has recruited students during the pandemic.

smallest public university had to pivot primarily to virtual events and tours.

Initially when switching to a virtual preview day a year ago, EOU saw double the number of registrants, Meaderds said. But as the pandemic continued, she said students appeared to become less interested in online offerings, leaving them with a dilemma.

"So how do we connect with students on social media? How do we make sure that they are aware of EOU being an option?" Meaderds asked.

Meaderds said EOU's efforts to expand its digital presence have brought some benefits. For the digital preview day this spring, EOU saw students register from all over the world, including Haiti, Mexico and the Pacific Islands.

Addressing the academic gap

Meaderds said recruiting and admitting students is half the battle. Colleges also need to do major work to ensure students are supported when

they get to campus in the fall.

"We're in conversations now about providing students support academically so when they come to campus that gap isn't as large, as we know there will be a gap," Meaderds said.

In the national Challenge Success report, nearly half of surveyed students reported feeling less engaged in their school work last fall compared with before the pandemic. A similar share of students said they were putting in less effort.

In Oregon, state officials scaled back requirements on high school students a year ago to "mitigate negative consequences from any lost learning time due to COVID-19," according to the state education department. Those changes included replacing grades for the end of the 2019-20 school year with "pass-incomplete" marks, and suspending the "essential skills" testing requirement for graduates in both 2020 and 2021.

The instructional disruptions led college administrators to consider stronger



Castillo



Ceja



Martinez



Meaderds



Pereyda



Villagomez

support systems for incoming freshmen.

Meaderds noted EOU already had a "summer bridge" program prior to the pandemic, to specifically serve international students. There are now conversations about expanding some sort of catch-up programming for incoming students who may need it — especially students coming from underrepresented communities.

"EOU is focusing on ensuring that students are successful once they get here," she said. "We get a large portion of our students from Malheur County, Umatilla County areas with high Latinx populations, and a lot of rural students. And we want to ensure that these students coming from their small communities are successful at EOU during the pandemic."

That potential gap in learning is on the mind of Hector Castillo, a classmate of Peryda's at McLoughlin High.

"I just feel like I didn't learn what I was supposed to learn this year because it was way different on the computer than in person," Castillo said. "So that's just a

thing I'm, like, worried about right now."

The first time leaving home

Castillo and other students at McLoughlin said they are anxious about jumping into college-level classes after learning remotely for the majority of last year. But, they are excited about the prospects of new experiences in new places.

Castillo is trying to decide between enrolling at nearby EOU or heading to Chemeketa Community College in the Willamette Valley. He said he wants to play soccer at either school but also is looking into programs in construction or engineering.

Castillo said EOU's soccer coach told him he reached out too late for a sports scholarship. He's still waiting to hear back about other scholarships.

Like many of his other classmates, Castillo has lived in the small city of Milton-Freewater for his whole life.

"I'll probably feel homesick and stuff," Castillo said. "I feel like I will just because I haven't been away from (my parents), so it'll just be like something new."

But he said the upcoming fall brings a lot of excitement too: "meeting new people, this new school and, like, learning new things and stuff, and soccer is a little part of that excitement as well."

That mix of excitement and anxiety also the experience of Andy Ceja, another student at McLoughlin. He's especially concerned about leaving home for the first time because his family relies on him.

"They don't speak English. I'm usually there helping them with anything and everything they need help with — whether that's translating, talking with them about taxes, anything like that," Ceja said about his parents.

Ceja said he's on a waitlist for the Northwest Lineman

College in Meridian, Idaho — roughly a four-hour drive from Milton-Freewater. He wants to start winter term, after he's been able to work, save money and maybe move out of his parents' house.

"That was kind of an issue at first, but they kind of just accepted it," Ceja said. "They knew it was probably the best thing for me to broaden out and do other things. They're sad about it, but they're supportive at the same time."

For some students, the security and affordability of staying close to home and family is competing with the allure and uncertainty of moving away.

Emily Martinez said she's deciding between heading off to University of Portland or attending Walla Walla Community College, 15 miles away in Washington. She said the lower price of staying home and going to community college is part of her decision. But she's also thinking about the emotional pull of staying close to her family.

"When I would talk to them about the University of Portland, they felt, you know, sad because I'm going to leave," Martinez said. "But when I talk to them about (Walla Walla Community College) ... it'll be closer, I'll still be living with them in the house. It won't be as sad."

Leaving Milton-Freewater for new experiences is a goal on many of the students' minds. For Ahtzir Villagomez, college would be just the beginning. She's planning a career of international travel, starting at the International Air Hospitality Academy in Vancouver.

"I'm a little nervous, I'm not going to lie," she said. "I did grow up in a small town and then going from city to city — I am nervous, but I think personally I can do it, because I want the experience and, like I said, this is a small town, and I would like to go into a new, whole different bigger city. It's going to open my eyes more."

Lessons:

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chose the cheapest option.

A few booths down, Candelario Rodriguez was giving students a price for their car insurance, based on the vehicle they had chosen at the transportation booth. He said he was surprised how many students had chosen to drive a used car, even if they were single and making a high salary.

When a girl visited his booth and shared the type of car she had purchased, he talk to her about the importance of purchasing car insurance before letting her know it would be \$85 a month.

While most of the booths caused students to add a new expense to their budget, those who were running out of money could visit the supplemental income booth to find out ways they could increase their revenue.

Lori Spencer went over options with students that ranged from picking up a second job in the evenings to holding a yard sale for a one-time infusion of cash. Some students who visited the booth learned that as a single parent they were entitled to child support. One student decided he was going to have his teenage daughter babysit to help cover rent.

"I'm surprised at seeing some of them with higher income already coming to me," Spencer said after a student making \$77,643 said she was running out of money and still had more booths to visit.

Kaylie Cook, whose scenario sheet said she was making \$65,944 a year as a single nurse practitioner with no children, said she didn't know how some students with lower salaries were going to make it.

"I make a good amount of money but I feel like I'm going to run out by the end of this," she said.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Students meet with volunteers to discuss various facets of budgeting during the FAB Life simulation at Hermiston High School on Wednesday, May 19, 2021.

Stretching dollars

Cook said one thing she had learned from the exercise is that when she is an adult, she'll need to budget carefully so she doesn't run out of money before she is finished paying all her bills for the month.

Giselle Gutierrez and Jose Cortez, who were waiting together in line for the housing booth, were making much less than Cook — about \$34,000 and \$32,000 respectively. When asked what had been the biggest surprise so far, Gutierrez said it was the cost of health insurance.

"I got lucky with insurance, because mine is company sponsored, so it's cheaper," Cortez chimed in.

Gutierrez said the exercise was making her feel bad for her parents, and all the budgeting choices they have to make.

"My husband doesn't even work," she exclaimed, looking at her scenario sheet. "What is he doing?"

Liz Marvin, a counselor at Hermiston High School, said she was glad the high school was able to bring back FAB Life for a second year, despite the pandemic. In 15 years of providing educational opportunities for students at the school, she said, "this is the highest student engagement of anything we've done."

The kit with scenario sheets for students and price sheets for the volunteers was

provided by ECMC Group, a student loan guaranty agency that also teaches financial literacy. It also came with other simulation pieces, such as "crystal ball" cards that teachers walk around and hand students.

"Those are the random things in life — Grandma sent \$50 for your birthday, your car broke down," Marvin said.

She said many students expressed that they hadn't realized how many expenses they would have each month once they moved out on their own. The goal of the exercise was for students to create a balanced budget on their own, but if they needed help, they could turn to an "SOS" advisor to take a look and walk them through some suggestions of where they might cut some expenses.

"In the first group there was a couple whose sheets said they were both single, and they said, 'Can we get married?' and I said sure, and they split their expenses," Marvin said.

She said the high school couldn't have done the FAB Life exercise this year without the support from the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce and the Hermiston Walmart Distribution Center, which provided most of the volunteers for the booths and prizes — including two television sets — for students to enter a drawing after completing their scenario.

BMCC:

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train students for today, but also for tomorrow," Leggett said.

Blue Mountain soon realized that it could help feed the UAS pipeline. Leggett said most of the industry is currently staffed by ex-military, but as it grows, there's only so many veterans to go around. While there are other community college UAS programs in Oregon, Leggett said Pendleton's selling point will be its access to the city's test range.

In Volatus, the college found an associate who could help build the program with its instructors and industry knowledge.

Volatus has been running private classes out of the Pendleton UAS Range since the spring, and Springer said the Blue Mountain classes will be similar to its private offerings, just more spread out due to its 10-week duration.

While students who take BMCC's UAS course won't



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Pendleton City Councilor Dale Primmer, center, cuts the ribbon for a new hangar at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport in Pendleton on Wednesday, May 19, 2021. Also pictured are Pendleton Chamber Ambassadors Tom Kligel, left, and Fred Bradbury.

be able to use it toward a degree, Springer said those that complete the course should be able to obtain jobs after completing it. He said a key point of the program is that it will connect students with internship opportunities, and once they're finished with their coursework, many of those internships will turn into full-time positions.

With the program set to start over the summer, the college is already soliciting donations to help start

a scholarship program for students. Springer said Volatus is sponsoring two scholarships for high school students to join the program.

But BMCC's ambitions for its UAS program lie beyond a noncredit certificate.

Springer and other Blue Mountain staff and UAS officials are a part of an advisory board looking to expand the program to include associate's degree and even bachelor's degree options.

Whisky:

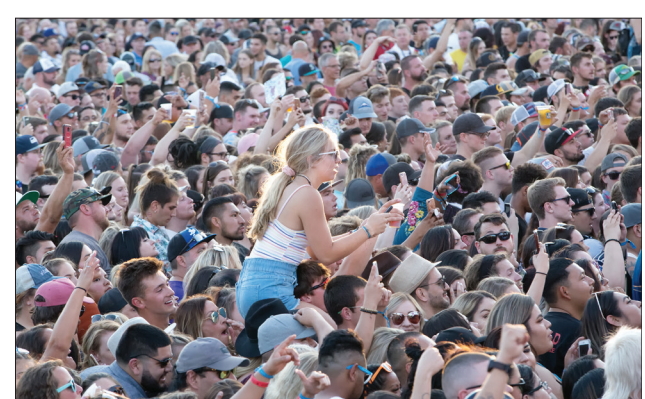
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transfer their tickets to the 2021 event because the seating and mapping of this year's concert is too different.

However, existing ticket holders will get the option of buying tickets to the 2021 show a day early, on June 3. The rest of the general public can begin buying tickets on June 4.

The show will also be different in that it will follow COVID-19 guidelines from the state and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. McAnally outlined some of the measures in his email.

"Social distancing will be



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

A fan sits on someone's shoulders to get a better view while listening to 50 Cent at the Pendleton Whisky Music Fest on July 13, 2019.

in place with limited capacity grandstand seating and extra space in the arena to give patrons an opportunity to social distance," he wrote. "In addition we will have numerous hand sanitation stations around the facilities.

Masks will be available upon entry into the stadium. Also, we have contracted with a national company to clean and sanitize the restrooms, portable restrooms and other high traffic areas throughout the event."