

Eastern Oregon welcomes students back to campus

By ANDREW CUTLER
The Observer

LA GRANDE — After spending more than a year dealing with in-person and hybrid learning schedules, officials with Eastern Oregon University are excited at the prospect of life resuming a more normal look on campus in 2021-22.

Classes are set to begin on campus Monday, Sept. 27. The school started its 93rd academic year on Sept. 20 with the annual Convocation, while students started moving back into residence halls on Sept. 22.

“This fall we are planning to be 100% in-person, in the classroom,” said Tim Seydel, Eastern’s vice president for university advancement. “Students in the classes, being taught directly in-person with faculty? You bet.”

Despite the seemingly return to normal appearance of things on campus, it doesn’t mean Eastern isn’t taking the continuing pandemic seriously.

“We’re following all the state and federal guidance. The big things that people would notice on campus is that we are continuing to wear face masks inside and in classes,” he said. “Students would be required to wear a face mask in class, and then outside where physical distancing is not really possible.”

In June, the school announced that it would require all students and employees to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Seydel said response to that mandate was, overall, fairly positive.

“Everybody was expecting something like that to come, especially when we were seeing requirements other institutions,” he said. “Ours was unique in that we were requiring the vaccination, or an exemption, contingent upon FDA full approval of the vaccine. That kicked in late last month, and now people have until Oct. 22 to complete either getting their vaccinations or having an exemption on file.”

Seydel said students made it clear they wanted to get the on-campus, in-person experience.

“Everybody wants to get to that place where we can have a safe, healthy, active campus environment,” he said. “Because really what we’re here for is the students.”

Handling exemptions

Seydel said handling vaccine exemptions is not new for the university. For years, schools have been required to have vaccine exemptions for students as it relates to other vaccines. Eastern has been following that same process for COVID exemptions.

“The university makes



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Incoming freshman to Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, line up for gear during the university's annual Week of Welcome event Thursday, Sept. 23, 2021.

that decision, but we follow state and federal guidelines,” Seydel said. “So the exemptions we’re currently allowing are medical and nonmedical exemptions, including religious exemptions. Those have to meet federal standards.”

Seydel students seeking exemptions go through Student Affairs and employee cases are handled by the school’s Human Resources department.

“With nonmedical exemptions, there’s an education module they need to take part in and gather some more information from them,” he said. “And then they either have an exemption on file or they’re vaccinated.”

Seydel said there’s plenty of ongoing conversations on campus about the potential impact Gov. Kate Brown’s vaccination mandate might have on the university. Brown announced in August that

health care workers and educators, support staff and volunteers needed to be fully vaccinated by Oct. 18 or six weeks after full FDA approval, whichever is later.

“A lot of people assume that means you must be vaccinated,” he said. “And it’s really you either need to be vaccinated or have an exemption on file. And if you go through the exemption process and you’re denied there are some guidelines.”

Fall enrollment

Early projections on fall enrollment have the school flat or possibly down 1%, numbers, Seydel said, the school is pleased with.

“We’re feeling pretty good about that given all the things we’re working with and dealing with,” he said.

Seydel said Eastern Oregon received money from the state’s Strong Start Program to help provide support services for students who experienced gaps in their education during 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic.

“You didn’t have that regular contact with students at the high school level (during distance learning). So those students struggled,” he said. “And then of course they struggled with getting simple things, like did they have a

EOU offers a ‘bridge’ for students

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon university is now offering a new, free class to incoming freshmen at Eastern Oregon University as a way to help students from abroad get acclimated to university life.

Summer Bridge, which is financed by the university, allows students to earn up to two credits over the course of less than two weeks before classes begin at the university. Students get together in a small group — the cohort in the inaugural class numbered just 23 students — and do team building exercises and activities. The program was something that the university had wanted to get rolling for the past few years.

“The summer bridge program was created so that we could give students a kind of a kick start into the year,” said Kathleen Brown, student success coordinator at Eastern Oregon University. “They actually can get two credits during this week and a half, and then they can get an additional credit during the fall term, and all of that will be paid for. And also we pay to house them and feed them.”

The Summer Bridge program is modeled after other universities’ similar programs — a way for freshmen to test the waters before they jump into the full campus experience. It also comes only a week ahead of

the annual Week of Welcome event at the university.

“We know that it’s beneficial to already have that experience before day one so that you can acclimate a little bit quicker,” Brown said.

Likewise, Brown said that the program isn’t just a one-and-done deal; the university plans on working closely with the students throughout their time at the university, starting with that first day experience.

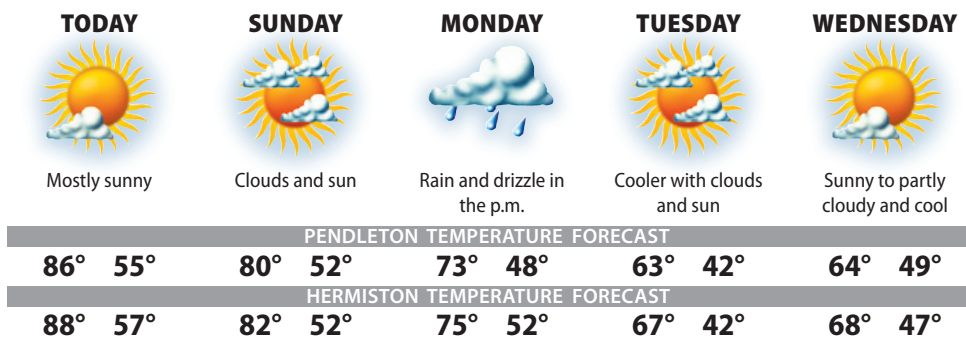
“One of the things that we’re doing is not just having two weeks of academics,” Brown said. “We’re going to actually follow them throughout the entire year. So me as the student success coordinator for the school will tag team with the faculty that are already developing relationships with them right now, which we know is so important.”

Part of that acclimation process is adapting to new peer groups and finding new friends — often a challenge for international students.

“We also have some multicultural students that are coming in from Palau and different places like that that we also need to acclimate because they’re from their international reality. And so this allows us to do that with them,” Brown said.

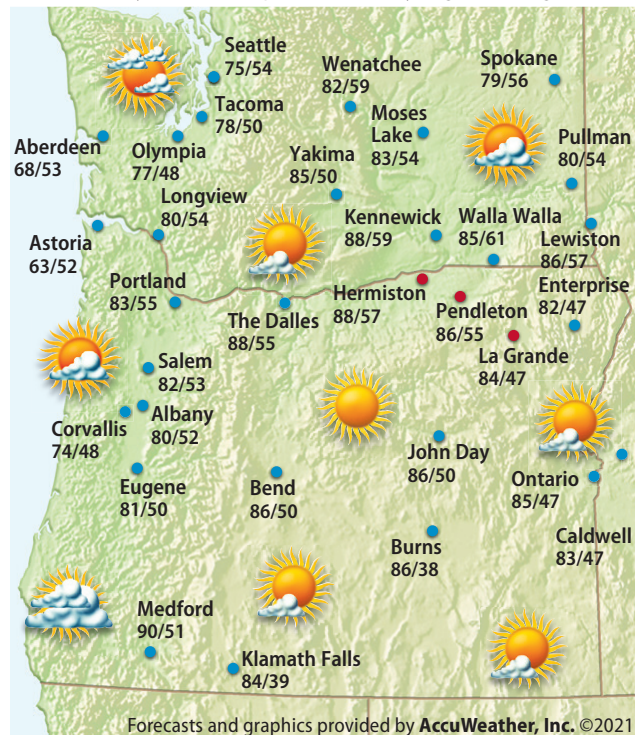
— Alex Wittwer, EO Media Group

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



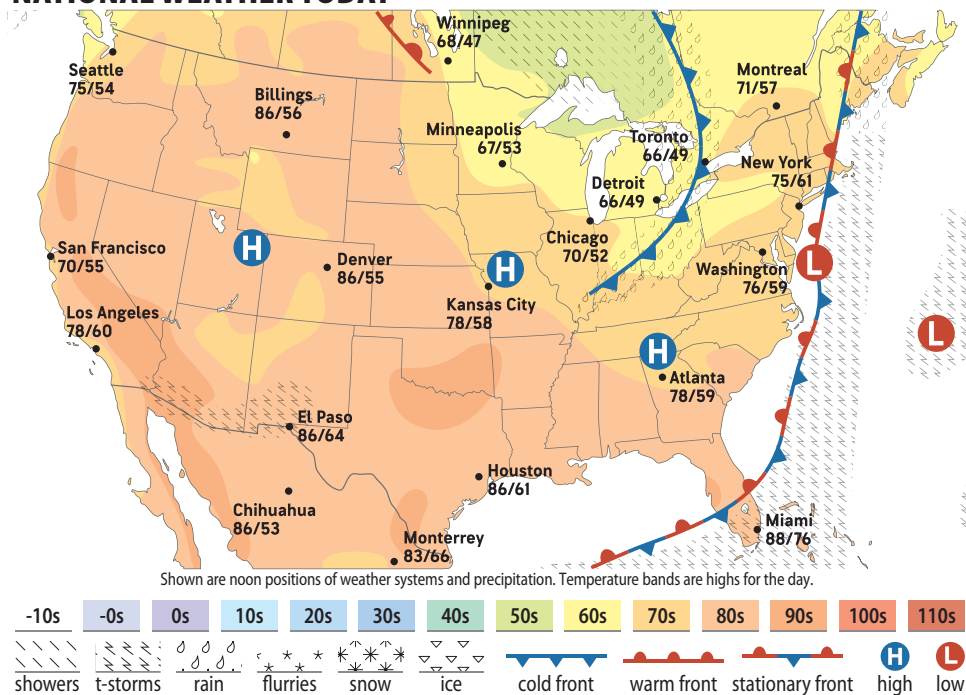
ALMANAC

Table with weather data for Pendleton and Hermiston, including temperature, precipitation, and moon phases.

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 100° in Ukiah, Calif. Low 22° in Bodie State Park, Calif.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



School board reschedules meeting when attendee refuses to wear mask

By JEREMY BURNHAM
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

WALLA WALLA — Police were called to the most recent Walla Walla School Board meeting when a man refused to wear a mask and disrupted the proceedings.

The Tuesday, Sept. 21, meeting was eventually halted and will resume in a virtual format at 5:30 p.m. Sept. 28. Before the meeting started, attendees were reminded that masks were required. One man, who was not named, refused to comply.

According to a statement from the school district, he was offered accommodation via watching the meeting online, but the man still refused to leave.

Police were called, and the man left with a Walla Walla police officer and the meeting began. But he came back, and district officials decided to stop the meeting and move to a virtual continuation later.

According to district staff, the man claimed an exemption from the mask requirement. “With a lack of clarity regarding the overlapping Washington state public health orders and governor’s proclamations, officials from WWPS and WWPB agreed to deescalate the situation by continuing the meeting virtually at another time, with proper public notification,” the district’s statement said.

Gov. Jay Inslee’s Proclamation 20-25.15 regarding masks states, “I further prohibit any

laptop that could actually work? Did they have decent internet access where they could do their classes at home? What was the environment like?”

Seydel also said some students struggled with parents who lost jobs, forcing the student to find work or help

care for siblings.

“So they’re going to go to college, how do we help them when they get here and provide support services for them,” he said. “We’re starting in on that right now. It’s been exciting to help keep students engaged and recreate those pathways to college.”

MORE INFORMATION

To read Gov. Jay Inslee’s most recent proclamation on masking in public, visit ubne.ws/inslee20-2515.

ing the police at that time.”

In Swanson’s video, a woman can be heard objecting that the meeting was ending before she was able to speak. The public comment period was up first on the agenda, but the meeting was halted before that portion was over. She said she had four children and had opinions she wanted to share.

“Thanks a lot,” she is heard saying while turning toward the man disrupting the meeting.

Others came to the man’s defense and said if the woman is angry she didn’t get to speak, she should blame the board.

Sarley told the U-B that all but two people scheduled to speak were able to before the meeting was ended. He said the other two, including the woman heard in the video, will be given the opportunity during the Sept. 28 virtual meeting.

Superintendent Smith provided the U-B with a document from the Washington State School Directors Association that offers guidance on how to handle such a situation.

The document acknowledges Proclamation 20-25.15 requires masks to be worn in meetings and lists some recommended steps to take if someone refuses.

One such recommendation is the meeting be adjourned to another place or time. It also notes, “Currently, all open public meetings can be held in an entirely virtual format.”

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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