

Steep fall in community college enrollment could prolong Oregon's worker shortage

By MIKE ROGOWAY
The Oregonian

PORTLAND — Community colleges provide essential training for many fields where Oregon workers are now in short supply, among them nurses, truck drivers, electricians, carpenters and the technicians who run the state's computer chip factories.

As Oregon endures an unprecedented labor shortage in the aftermath of the pandemic recession, these jobs — which require schooling for specialized skills — are some of the most persistently hard to fill.

The pipeline for these trained workers suggests that may not change anytime soon.

Oregon community college enrollment fell by 23% during the pandemic's first year and didn't rebound a bit this fall. The steep fall exacerbates an extended decline — enrollment is down by 40% over the past decade.

(Enrollment at Oregon's four-year universities didn't



East Oregonian, File

Community colleges, including Blue Mountain Community College, Pendleton, provide essential training for many fields where Oregon workers are now in short supply, among them nurses, truck drivers, electricians, carpenters and the technicians who run the state's computer chip factories.

bounce back this fall, either, but fell only 5% in the pandemic's first year.)

The decline may reflect improved job prospects, and higher wages, during the pandemic. Oregon's average private-sector hourly wage

was \$31.76 last month, up 15% since COVID-19 hit the state early in 2020.

Good wages and good jobs might make a couple years of community college less attractive. And in the short run, it makes it easier

to fill positions at restaurants, hotels and in other fields that don't require additional education.

That may just kick the can down the road, though, prolonging Oregon's worker shortage by reducing the

pool of workers with two-year degrees and certificates that specialized jobs require.

"We need workers trained in these fields," Oregon Employment Department economist Jessica Nelson wrote in an

analysis last month. "An interruption in such training will be felt in increased difficulty filling jobs in a couple of years' time, as these programs can take two to four years to result in a fully trained worker."

It's not just employers who may feel the impact, Nelson warns. She notes that the average starting wage for an Oregon worker in jobs that require just a high-school diploma was \$15.78. Jobs that require a two-year degree, or similar training, start at \$25.39 on average.

Some fields pay even better — trained technicians working in a computer chip factory typically start around \$60,000.

"Workers completing certificates and associate degrees go on to earn more money than their high school graduate counterparts, and have lower unemployment rates as well," Nelson wrote. "These workers, and their skills and experience, will continue to be in demand."



Davi Parker/Contributed Photo

Davi Parker's doe goat Mocha stands with her kids. Parker makes goat milk soap at her Wallowa home.

SOAP

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"Then fragrance and color are added depending on the design I am trying to achieve," Parker said. "The soap batter is then poured into molds, where it goes through the saponification process."

That process is where the distribution of unsaturated and saturated fatty acid determines the hardness, aroma, cleansing, lather and moisturizing abilities of soaps.

"The batter heats up — it can get quite hot — and goes through what is called a gel phase," she said. "Here, the batter begins to solidify and gets gel-like. It doesn't have to go through gel to become soap, but the gel phase makes colors brighter and the bar ends up a bit creamier, in my opinion."

She said not all people who make soap prefer to gel their soaps and others try to prevent it.

"I like mine to gel," she said.

Parker said that after the soap has been in a mold for as much as 24 hours it can be removed and sliced into bars, which then must cure for up to six weeks for any excess water to evaporate and the bars to harden fully and become more mild. She said that some soaps, such as castile soap, are cured for an entire year.



Davi Parker/Contributed Photo

Davi Parker's cinnamon vanilla soap cupcakes look good enough to eat, but she advises against it since they are, after all, soap.

The soaps

While she doesn't claim her soap does more than get a person clean, she recommends users research the benefits of goat milk for their skin.

"All of my soaps are special," Parker said. "I have designed my recipe, through much trial and error, to be very cleansing without being drying and to add enough moisture back to your skin without leaving a greasy or residue feel."

As for the scents she adds, that's a bit random. "I make to me at the time, whatever makes me happy," she said. "I have in the past, and plan to continue in the future, (used) some odd fragrances, such as bacon and dill pickle.

Those make me laugh, so I like to make them."

Marketing

At present, Parker has no storefront and sells her products online. She can be reached via email and the products viewed on her website, www.spiltmilksoaps.com, and Facebook page.

Some of her products are available at shops in the county, such as the Flannel Lantern in Joseph.

"When I can, I also sell at various markets and at various shows," she said. "I sell mainly online. I offer free local delivery to most of Wallowa County. I also offer free shipping on orders over \$40. Sadly, that keeps going up with the increase in postage rates."



EO Media Group, File

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality alleges the Port of Morrow has applied excessive amounts of nitrate-containing water to area farmland. The port disputes the massive fine, claiming its wastewater violations were "unintentional" and had minor effects on human health and the environment.

Port of Morrow appeals \$1.3 million fine for groundwater contamination

By MONICA SAMAYOA
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — The Port of Morrow has filed an appeal to contest a nearly \$1.3 million fine it received from state regulators for repeated wastewater violations that contaminated groundwater in the area.

Earlier this month, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality fined the Port of Morrow, an industrial park outside of Boardman, for over-applying wastewater containing nitrogen to agriculture fields and failing to monitor the resulting nitrate contamination.

According to DEQ, the port violated its water quality permit more than a thousand times in four years. The port exceeded its nitrogen limits by approximately 165 tons during that time, further contaminating groundwater that is used for drinking water in an area that DEQ says is already burdened with pollution.

In the appeal filed last

week, the port disputed its fine, claiming the violations were "unintentional" and were a result of things that were out of the port's control. The port said it believed it had enough land available to absorb the excess nitrate but there was "an unexpected combination of less acreage available and unusually high winter precipitation" that forced the port to exceed its nitrate limits.

Despite the overapplication of nitrogen in these areas, the port claims it had no "adverse effect" on groundwater nitrate levels and therefore had minor effects on human health and the environment.

But the port also admits it was not monitoring and recording nitrate levels in plant tissue as required in its water quality permit because there was no standardized method for monitoring and "DEQ provided no useful guidance," the appeal letter states.

Nitrogen is a beneficial plant nutrient when used in appropriate amounts. When overapplied,

nitrogen can lead to high levels of nitrate, which is already found in the soil, water and air. It then leaks into the soil and into the groundwater.

Groundwater is the primary source of drinking water for residents in Morrow and Umatilla counties, and drinking high levels of nitrate can cause health problems.

DEQ and the Port of Morrow will now schedule an informal meeting to come to an agreement. The port says it should not be held liable for the full \$1.29 million fine. If a settlement cannot be reached, DEQ will request a hearing before a judge.

The port previously violated its water quality permit in November 2015. It received a \$279,000 fine from DEQ for exceeding its nitrogen application limits. DEQ and the port settled the case with a \$129,000 fine and a corrective action schedule that required the port to add additional acreage to absorb the extra nitrogen in its wastewater.

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