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Oregon Community Colleges and John N. Gardner Institute Team Up to Advance College Success and State Education Goals

The John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education is pleased to announce that the Oregon Community Colleges and Workforce Development (CCWD) department has elected to use the Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year process to create strategic plans for first-year student success for seven of the state's Colleges. During the 2011-12 academic year, Chemeketa, Clackamas, Clatsop, Columbia Gorge, Lane, Linn-Benton, and Tillamook Bay Community Colleges will work with the Gardner Institute to collect and examine evidence on institutional performance with first year students. The efforts will yield institution-specific action plans that the Colleges will respectively implement during the three-to-five years that follow.

“The first year of college is the most critical milepost on the pathway toward student success and, ultimately, degree completion,” said John N. Gardner, the Gardner Institute's President. “During my near four decades of work with the first college year, I have seen thousands of institutions implement all kinds of programs to help first-year students succeed. But programs, while virtuous in their own right, are not enough. The lack of coordination and thoughtful analysis of the comprehensive whole means that institutions by-in-large are not serving their first-year students in an excellent manner and, as a byproduct, the retention needle has not budged.”

“In an era of limited resources and at a time when the difference between have a rewarding career and life is directly tied to the completion of some form of postsecondary degree or certificate, postsecondary education institutions need a plan that ties together all of their disparate programs so that the sum of the parts is greater than the individual pieces,” added Andrew Koch, the Gardner Institute's Executive Vice President. “A plan of this nature maximizes the use of resources and leads to much better outcomes.”

This assertion is supported by a [recently concluded independent study](#) which shows that institutions that complete a Foundations of Excellence self-study and, in turn, implement their action plans to a high degree recorded an 8.2% increase in first-to-second year retention rates over four years. [Another independent study](#) reports meaningful gains in first-to-second year retention rates for even part-time students at community colleges.

“We feel that the Foundations of Excellence work will help us advance both the Oregon Community Colleges and Workforce Development Department's strategic student success plan and the state's overall higher education policy goals,” commented CCWD Commissioner Cam Preus. “The state's legislature has set ambitious college completion goals, and the work that the seven participating Colleges are doing via Foundations of Excellence aims to help Oregon realize these objectives.”

“The Foundations of Excellence process will allow the individual participating institutions to address the student success issue in a local context,” added Elizabeth Cox Brand, CCWD Director of Communications and Research. “It recognizes that all state policy goals need to be operationalized in an institution-specific manner, and it provides a platform to help that to occur. We are excited about the possibilities.”

The Oregon Community Colleges participating in the Foundations of Excellence process will come together for a launch meeting in Portland, Oregon on September 7, 2011. Since 2003, the not-for-profit Gardner Institute has worked with nearly 240 colleges and universities – including more than 110 community colleges – to conduct the Foundations of Excellence self-study and action-planning process.

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