

Discover

Chemeketa



Community College

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March 18, 2015

The Honorable Tobias Read, Chair
House Committee on Higher Education, Innovation, and Workforce Development

Re: House Bill 3390

Chair Read and members of the Committee, I am Nancy Green, Executive Director of Corrections Education for Chemeketa Community College and the Education Manager for the Salem Area Prisons.

Thank you to the members of the committee for your time. I have one of our teachers and two of our students here today to talk about the College Inside program that Chemeketa Community College offers inside two Salem-area prisons. We're glad to be here to talk about this transformative program that is making a difference in individuals' lives, their families' lives, and in our community at large.

If you are here in the committee room because you have personally attended classes through the College Inside program or are someone else who supports this program, would you please raise your hand? Thank you so much. This number would certainly be even higher if it wasn't finals week for our former students who are attending four-year schools and for teachers in the program who are giving exams.

Today I want to talk to you about:

- how prison education works to make our communities safer and stronger,
- how Chemeketa's College Inside program works,
- and how we're uniquely positioned to offer the program detailed in HB 3390.



WHY WE BELIEVE IN PRISON EDUCATION

My first point is that we know that locking people up and throwing away the key doesn't work. But, even if you think this is the way things should happen, I want you to think of another fact. Ninety-five percent of the people currently incarcerated are going to get out of prison. They will be our neighbors, our coworkers, parents at our children's' schools.

The College Inside program helps with this transition back into the world. For example, we know that probation officers sometimes put our students on lower supervision requirements because they are college graduates. We also know that while the recidivism rate in Oregon is about 26.5%, we have had just 6 of our graduates return to prison. Because only about half of our 127 graduates have been released from prison so far, this gives us a recidivism rate of about 9.3%. This is about one-third of Oregon's recidivism rate. We are proud of this fact.

But, don't just take our word for the value of education while incarcerated. A 2013 Rand Corporation study found that being involved in a prison education program reduces someone's likelihood of coming back to prison by 43%. The study found that nothing else has this significant of an impact on someone's likelihood to reoffend.

We know that our graduates will face barriers to employment, housing, and other things when they release from prison. But, we also know that education gives them important items in their toolkits to help them stay on the right path. We know that beyond learning math, writing, or communication, our students also learn empathy, critical thinking skills, and other things that will help them find paths to better futures for them and their families.

When they stay on the right path, as more than 90% of them have, it makes our communities safer. It means fewer future victims. It also means that they have the ability to be paying taxes rather than being a burden on taxpayers.



OUR CURRENT PROGRAM

My second point is to tell you about our program. We are very proud of our students and their accomplishments. Several of them are here with us today, and you will get to hear from two of them in just a little bit.

You can see an information sheet in your folders if you want to look more at these numbers. But, we have served 417 students since we began in 2007 and have had 127 graduates.

It's also encouraging for me to be able to report that 76.6% of our released graduates are working or going to school.

We are funded entirely through private donations. As with many non-profit programs, funding can come and go. We were fortunate to have a generous citizen provide the majority of the funding from 2007 through 2013. When the funding ended, we scrambled to find another funding source. The Sunshine Lady Foundation responded to our request for emergency funding for the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years. While we are hopeful they will continue to fund the program, we have no guarantee. We are very lucky to have tremendous support from local community members as well as staff and students who donate regularly to the program. But, we are still only guaranteed to be in existence until next June.

I believe we have much to offer the community and the state. For example, with a completion rate of nearly 80%, we can certainly help achieve the 40/40/20 goals set up for education in Oregon. This completion rate is higher than many other college's completion rates, especially for two-year colleges.



WE'RE UNIQUELY POSITIONED TO CONTINUE DOING WHAT WE DO BEST

My third point is to tell you about how we are uniquely positioned to continue doing what we do best. We are the only college in Oregon that is offering any type of regular college degree. There are other certificate programs, but we are the only college who has provided a steady stream of graduates for the past 8 years. We have had 127 graduates who have received associate's degrees since 2009.

Another thing important to note is that we're fortunate to have the support and relationship that we do with the Department of Corrections. Collette Peters, Director of the Department of Corrections, has spoken at one of our graduation ceremonies, and I know that she is a supporter of educational programs. Other Department of Corrections officials, such as Deputy Director Kim Brockamp, have also spoken at our graduations and support our mission.

We already have strong programs at the Oregon State Penitentiary and at the Santiam Correctional Institution. We have good relationships with the administrations at those institutions. We have busy classrooms set up and teachers who have gone through the Department of Correction's trainings and who are already teaching these classes. Most, if not all, of these teachers will tell you how rewarding this work is. Many will say our students are the best they've ever taught. Some of them have taught for us for more than 6 years. You will hear from one of our longest-serving teachers shortly. We also have computer labs and study halls in place. We have had over \$50,000 of books donated by publishers from across the country to keep our costs low and re-use those same books over and over.

We have a well-oiled machine already providing an important service. The only piece we don't have is sustainable funding, and this bill would provide that for us. We would welcome working with all of you and the Department of Corrections to have that happen.



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CLOSE WITH IMPACT

In closing, I would like you to think about the worst thing you have done in your life. Now, think about how you would rather not have that be the thing that you are known for forever.

With Chemeketa's College Inside program, we would rather have our students known for being college graduates and successful tax paying citizens.

Thank you for your time!

I am glad to answer any questions now or can wait to take those questions until our other three panelists have spoken.

Remarks by Michele Dishong McCormack

College Inside Professor

Chemeketa Community College

In support of HB 3390

March 18, 2015

The United States has more prisons and jails—5,000 plus—than we have colleges and universities. As a college professor who has spent a lot of time working and volunteering in Oregon prisons, this startling statistic illustrates that we must do better. The bill offered today by Representatives Evans and Witt can help us with this imbalanced situation.

Today I want to tell you briefly about:

- The best teaching I get to do
- Some of our students' impressive statistics
- And the human story surrounding this program

The best teaching I get to do

My work in prisons began about 8 years ago and includes teaching college-level communication courses, serving as a writing tutor, and facilitating the Penned Thoughts creative writers' group through Chemeketa's College Inside program. You have one of the writers' group's publications in your folder. I also volunteer my time to provide governmental, media, and public relations services to this program.

I've been teaching in colleges and universities for nearly 20 years now, and the very best job I have is teaching inside Salem-area prisons. I believe that programs like College Inside, along with religious services and other programs

staffed mainly with volunteers, are offering some of the only true rehabilitation that is happening inside Oregon's prisons. It is exciting and challenging to work with people who are exploring paths that are different than those they've been travelling.

When I walked into the first class I taught at the Oregon State Penitentiary 7 years ago, a student said to me, "We have all read the first 4 chapters of the book. What should we do next?" I joked and told him that we could just go home then, since students on Chemeketa's Salem Campus don't always get the book read. And they certainly don't have half the book read before the class even starts.

My incarcerated students always post the highest grades of any I give out. The GPA each term is often as high as 3.9 on a 4-point scale. When I help recruit other teachers for the program, I always tell them not to take a prison class on unless they are willing to bring their A game. These students keep me on my toes. They have so many questions about the material. They want to learn more, and they work very hard.

Many tell me that Chemeketa's College Inside program has changed their lives. It has made them see a different path than the one they've been travelling. Some have told me that the program has saved their lives.

Some of our student's statistics/information

Once our students are released from prison, many head to 4-year schools to get bachelor's degrees. We have two, so far, that we know about who are working on master's degrees. We have at least two in the Portland State University Honors College. We have one who serves as an ambassador for new students and potential students in the PSU College of Engineering. This list of accomplishments is long.

The human story/men helping each other

I attended a meeting inside the Oregon State Penitentiary on Sunday night. This is a group that meets with University of Oregon students and professors to talk about education and prison reform. I went to the meeting to ask for support in regard to this hearing. Less than 24 hours later, I had letters from 7 inmate clubs asking this committee to support the College Inside program. That is truly impressive.

The president of the Veterans Association wrote, "Prisoners' lives are being transformed through the experience of College Inside, both while serving time at OSP and when returning to society upon parole."

The president of the Latino Club wrote, "Many have participated in this program and then continued with their higher education upon release from prison. And with education being one of the cornerstones to the rehabilitation process for all prison inmates, we would very much like to see this meaningful program continue. . . Please remember that there are a great number of inmates who are striving to leave prison as better men than when they entered."

The president of the OSP Narcotics Anonymous group wrote, "These programs are a key element to many prisoners' rehabilitation plans. Nothing else that the administration provides takes up and occupies as much time in positive activity than the education programs."

In addition to having a positive impact inside the prison, this also has a ripple effect on our students' families. This story is from Francisco who wasn't able to write until he entered prison at age 20. He now has a 3.9 GPA and will graduate next

summer with his associate's degree in business. He said, and I quote: "The biggest blessing is how this program has affected my 19-year-old son Frankie, who through no fault of his own grew up in foster care most of his life. The influence this program has on me, I was able to pass that on to my son. He was at first not interested in going to college. I stayed on him and shared how exciting learning is. Now Frankie will be in his 3rd term at Portland Community College. The statistics say that my son should be joining me here in prison, but College Inside beats the statistics."

Francisco is right. We are beating the statistics. This program is a good investment for our communities. I believe that education is a better investment than a prison bed. I heard committee member Jennifer Williamson talk about this same idea at the Sponsors gala last fall in Eugene. And, it really resonated with me.

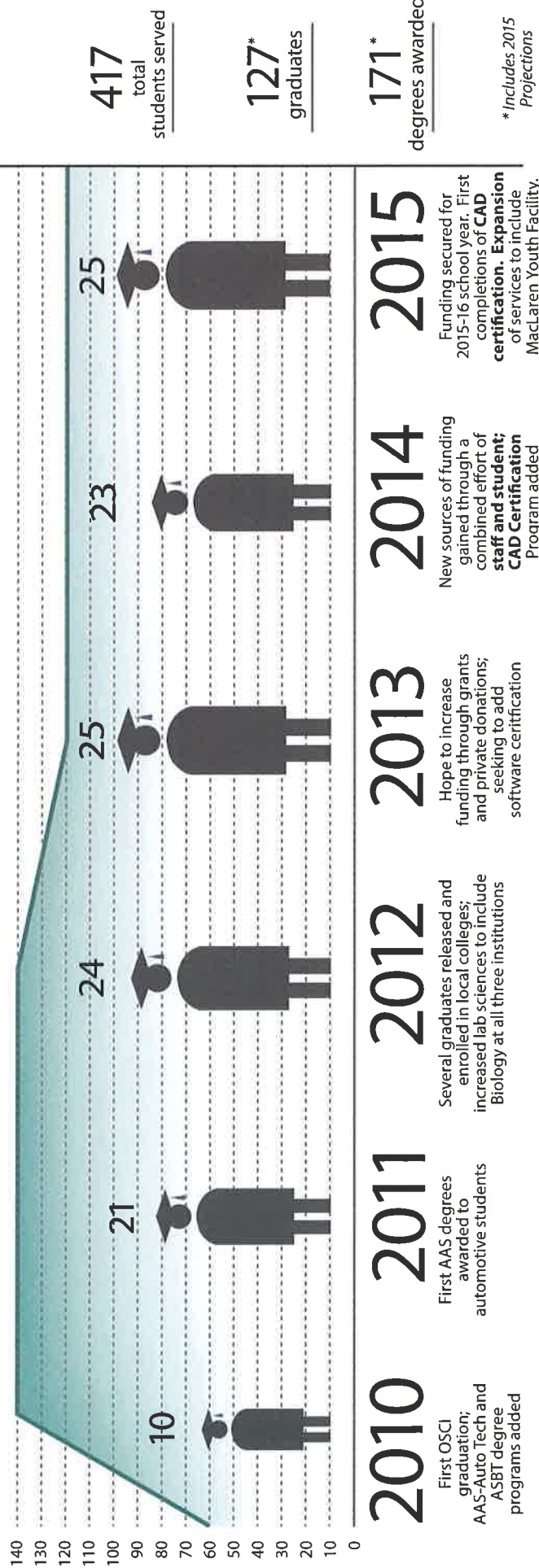
Considering that 95% of those currently incarcerated will be released from prison, I want to continue to be part of the solution that involves those folks staying out of prison. And, we are doing that with College Inside.

An Irish poet once said that education should be about lighting a fire rather than filling a bucket. The fires that education has lit for these students, their families, and their communities are without compare. Chemeketa Community College, in partnership with the Oregon Department of Corrections, can continue to keep these fires burning with the help of HB 3390.

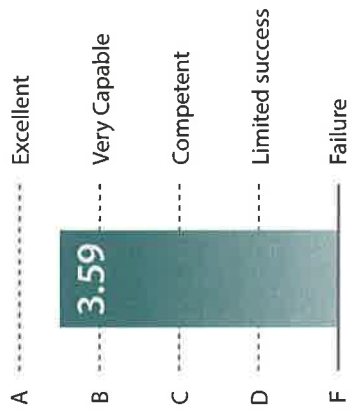
Thank you for your time. I would be glad to answer questions now or at the end of our panel's presentation.



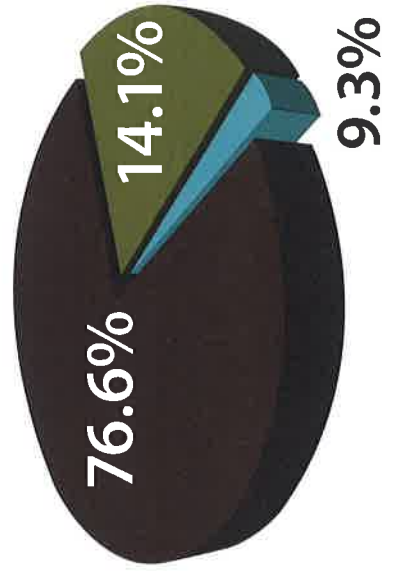
● Current Student Enrollment & Graduation



● Student Performance Grade Point Average



● Post-Release What are They Doing Now?



Legend:
 Working and/or College
 In Transition
 Recidivism

Data based on students who graduated prior to release from prison.



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Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Who Benefits from College in Prison?

A. In general, society as a whole benefits from elevating the education of incarcerated adults. Studies show that the higher the education of a person incarcerated, the less likely they are to commit new crimes, the more likely they are to find employment, and the more likely they are to earn wages high enough to support themselves and their families. Basically our communities are safer and more productive when citizens, incarcerated or otherwise, are well educated. More specifically, the individual benefits because as he/she is exposed to alternate thinking and gains valuable skills, a new understanding and connection with the world around them is developed. This translates into a more productive, positive, law-abiding citizen. The effects of this ripple through that person's family, workplace, neighborhood and statewide. The cycle of incarceration is costly and with 27% recidivism, the current remedies are ineffective. Something must break the cycle; education is the key.

Q. How are we currently funded?

A. We are funded entirely through private donations. As with many non-profit programs, funding can come and go. We were fortunate to have a generous citizen provide the majority of the funding from 2007 through 2013. When the funding ended, we scrambled to find another funding source. The Sunshine Lady Foundation responded positively to our request for emergency funding for the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years. While we are hopeful they will continue to fund the program, we have no guarantee.

We are also very lucky to have tremendous support from our local community members as well as staff and students who donate regularly to the program.

Another major support has come from publishers who over the years have donated more than \$50,000 in books so that we can continue to offer courses to our students at low cost.

Q. How much does it cost?

A. For a cohort of 25 students using the current Chemeketa tuition rate, from start to finish an associate's degree, it costs \$8460 per student or \$211,500 in total tuition costs. This includes the core 90 credit hours needed for an associate degree and four credit hours for an additional math class since almost all of our students are not ready for college-level math when they begin the program. Most textbooks are donated but we spend an average of \$5000 a year for books shared between three locations.

Q. What other higher education is being offered in Oregon prisons?

A. The following certification (1 year programs) in the Oregon prisons are being offered:

- Welding - Central Oregon Community College
- Construction Trades - Treasure Valley Community College
- Computer Assisted Drafting – Chemeketa Community College

Associate degree programs being offered with consistent graduates are through Chemeketa Community College as well as a few graduates through Blue Mountain Community College.

Additional Resources:

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults:

http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR200/RR266/RAND_RR266.pdf

College Inside

Changing lives through education

(Written by Francisco, OSP Education Committee 2013)

College Inside

College Inside is a program of Chemeketa Community College that brings higher education to at-risk populations in Oregon prisons.

Background

The College Inside program started in 2007 with the help of a local businessperson who saw the value in giving incarcerated people an education. His vision was realized, and it gave birth to a very successful program. Through his generous donations, students at the Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP) and Oregon State Correctional Institution (OSCI) have been taking classes to earn an Associate of Science in Business Transfer degree, the Associates of Arts Transfer degree, or the Associate of Science in Automotive Technology degree. Through this support, 300 students have had access to college classes. Currently, 95 students are enrolled and since the program began there have been 90 graduates. The average GPA of College Inside has been an impressive 3.40. We believe that this speaks volumes about the dedication and hard work of students, as well as the effectiveness of the program. However, late last year the program lost its main funding source when its primary donor notified the program that he would no longer be able to fund the program, but he still very much supports the program.

Funding

Since the program lost its main donor, we have received a generous grant award from the Sunshine Lady Foundation. Although this was great news, it was only enough funding to graduate the program's current students. Consequently, without enough funding to add new students the program is at risk of being eliminated. The good news is that our communities see the enormous value in education and have donated over \$16,000 since we lost our main donor. Also, the Education Committee here at OSP has held two fundraisers, raising \$3,800 for the program. In addition, students, given the modesty of average incomes of \$30 to \$150, are asked to contribute a percentage to their tuition.

Impact of Prison Education

It is well known that providing education to incarcerated adults can have a powerful affect in their lives that can help carry them to successful and positive interactions within their communities. The benefits are numerous: higher employment rates, admissions to universities,

healthy family relationships, increased empathy for others, empowerment, and most importantly, lower recidivism rates.

A recent Rand report found that the odds of a person recidivating after having received some form of education while incarcerated dropped 43% as compared to individuals who did not receive any education while incarcerated. In other words, an inmate who does not receive some form of education while incarcerated is almost twice as likely to reoffend.

Our program has a 2% recidivism rate, which is an impressive record for any program to be able to claim, particularly when considering the average recidivism rate. This program is changing lives and allowing men to reintegrate successfully back into their communities. These students are finding employment, attending local universities, and volunteering in their communities.

Need

Although this program does have community support, the need is very great; it costs approximately \$9,000 to graduate one incarcerated student. However, this will give that person a two-year transferable degree and a lifetime of opportunity.

How to help

If you would like to be a part of this amazing program that is changing lives and would like to help in any way. Please contact the College Inside Communications Director Michele Dishong McCormack at michele.dishong.mccormack@chemeketa.edu, or you can donate directly at collegeinside.org



2013 Graduation

“College saved my life.”

Robin

College Inside is Transformative

“Taking college classes while I’ve been incarcerated has been nothing short of transformative for me. Through college I have discovered my true ability to influence change within myself as well as for others. I believe that taking college classes while in prison will have a major impact on my success upon my release as my degree will help offset my felony conviction and help me be a productive member of society.”

Josh



Marc's Graduation

“ After my graduation, I feel that I can overcome any obstacle put before me. Even though I’ve made plenty of mistakes in my life, education has played a key role in becoming the person that everyone knew I could be. I can now stand proud of my achievements and walk with confidence.”

Marc



A brighter future

“Attending college while in prison was a very challenging and rewarding experience. I never saw myself going to college or thought that I was smart enough to complete college. That all changed when I took my first college class. I realized that even I could complete college and be successful.”

Eric



