

Mt. Hood Community College

2025-26 Hearing Minutes

Wednesday, June 18, 2025

6:30 P.M

6000 SE Stark St,
Gresham, Oregon

Present:

TSCC:

Chair Harmony Quiroz,
Vice Chair Matt Donahue,
Commissioner Tod Burton,
Commissioner Allison Lugo Knapp
Commissioner Dr. Rita Moore,
Allegra Willhite, Executive Director,
Brittanie Abayare, Budget Analyst

Absent: None

Mt. Hood Community College Representatives:

President Lisa Skari
Jennifer Boehmer, Vice President of Advancement and Community Engagement
Pete Zeus, Dean of Science Technology Engineering Mathematics and Bachelor's Degree Programs
John Hamlin, Vice President of Student Development
Jennifer DeMent, Vice President of Finance Administration

Opening Remarks and Introductions

Chair Harmony Quiroz opened the hearing, welcoming everyone

- The Tax Supervising and Conservation Commission (TSCC) is a community oversight commission established by the Oregon Legislature more than 100 years ago.
- The Commission oversees the budgets of all TSCC member taxing districts and annually conducts a thorough budget review and certification process.
- TSCC holds public budget hearings like this one to engage with district leadership and provide additional opportunities for public comment before the budget is adopted.
- This is her seventh and final year with TSCC, making this her last budget hearing.
- Commissioners and TSCC staff introduced themselves and confirmed no conflicts of interest.

- Congratulated the district on the receipt of the Triple Crown Award, an honor granted for excellence in budget and financial reporting.

President Lisa Skari gave remarks:

- She expressed excitement and optimism regarding the recently passed bond, noting that she was not entirely sure it would pass when they last met with TSCC at the bond hearing a couple of months prior.
- The bond passage is transformative for the institution and its students, as it's been 50 years since a bond of this nature has passed.
- She attributed its success to many years of planning and diligent work by the college, community, and board, calling it a "win for all of us".

Public Comment

- No members of the public had signed up for testimony in advance.

Commissioner Questions and District Responses

Question (Chair Quiroz): MHCC is the only public college in Oregon to receive the Government Finance Officers Association's prestigious Triple Crown Award. This represents a real accomplishment and we would like to again extend our congratulations. Tell us about what's been working well - what has made you successful in getting these awards?

- **Jennifer DeMent, Vice President of Finance Administration:**
 - Thanked the TSCC for the recognition and kind words, noting it was "no small feat".
 - She recalled it had been 10 years since they achieved the first award, which was for financial reporting, and was probably the biggest challenge.
 - She credited her financial managers, Michelle and Jamie, who took on the budget award as a project, aiming to surprise her with a draft.
 - Explained that GFOA announcements continually introduce new government accounting standards to make financial statements more transparent, but not necessarily for the general public.
 - Their goal was to add value to their financial reports by sharing more than just numbers, instead also detailing what the college is doing.
 - She described the final award, for the popular annual financial report (achieved in 2022) as the most fun because it was shorter, included graphs and pictures, and had fewer numbers.

- The team also ensured all content on their new website was ADA accessible, which was a difficult task for financial tables.
- Ultimately, the staff's desire to achieve the award and produce transparent financial statements that different levels of the community could understand was key to their success.

Question (Commissioner Lugo Knapp): It's a challenging time for many education districts, and we noticed this is another year of deficit spending for the college - how long can this continue? And what's the plan for next year?

- **Jennifer DeMent:**

- Stated that deficit spending can continue through the current budget cycle.
- The budget was intentionally built with the knowledge of spending down reserves due to uncertainties, including the start of a new biennium (state funding unknowns) and ongoing contract negotiations with one of their largest employers.
- Investments were made in employees' salaries, which represent the largest expenditure for most educational institutions.
- Acknowledged that an across-the-board cut would not solve their issues.
- They are preparing to roll out a plan in the fall term, based on the NUBO (National Association of College and University Business Officers) Pathways to Sustainability project.
- This plan involves looking at industry-standard ratios, including financial ratios and other metrics like graduate programs and support staff per client.
- The process will identify "mission critical" versus "mission adjacent" activities and determine the minimum enrollment threshold needed, rather than focusing solely on enrollment growth.
- Despite spending down reserves, they aim to maintain them at a 10% level, which feels "relatively comfortable" and was possible due to reserves built during the pandemic.

Question (Commissioner Moore): This year students will see a tuition increase. We're curious, how do you balance doing needed increases to cover costs without reducing enrollment? Given current economic uncertainty and challenges, do you see any danger of pricing out some student populations with these increases?

- **John Hamlin, Vice President of Student Development:**

- The college leadership and board have extensively discussed this topic, expressing concern about maintaining high-quality, affordable education while facing increased operational costs.
- The Higher Education Price Index is used as one tool to guide decisions regarding tuition increases.

- The board's diligent approach ensures costs remain affordable, helping navigate uncertain financial times.
- The commitment to affordability is also supported by the work of their Student Basic Needs offices and Barney's Pantry, which provide free resources to students.
- They recognize that tuition costs cannot always be reduced, but other resource needs for students (like transportation, housing, and child care) are addressed, and significant growth has been seen in these areas.
- The board and college remain committed to providing affordable and high-quality education in East County, with equitable access as a key pillar.
- **Follow-up (Commissioner Moore):** Are you able to increase aid programs to balance out cost increases for some students? Do you know yet how federal cuts will impact Pell Grants, Work-Study, and other financial assistance programs?
 - **John Hamlin:**
 - The final impact of federal funding is unknown, as they are still awaiting decisions, but potential impacts have been evaluated.
 - A simple change, like removing Pell Grants for less than half-time students, would substantially impact 51% of their student population.
 - A shift from 12 to 15 credits for full-time status would impact fewer students but still have a substantial overall change.
 - If these federal changes occur, they anticipate a greater reliance on resources from the pantry and additional student basic needs programs.
 - They expect to surpass \$1 million in foundation giving for scholarships this year.
 - Tuition waivers are also an aspect of their aid. While resources are limited, they are available, and they hope major federal changes do not happen due to the potential detriment to students.
- **Follow-up (Chair Quiroz):** Asked about the growth in demand for services from the Office of Basic Needs, specifically inquiring whether this need peaked during the COVID-19 pandemic or if it represents a perpetually growing trend.
 - **John Hamlin:**
 - The need is perpetually growing, not just peaking during COVID.
 - They have improved their ability to identify students' needs and challenges, recognizing that tuition is one expense among many.
 - Partnerships with housing complexes, initiated last year, have been "hugely beneficial".

- Community-based resources that are not a financial obligation from the college are also key partnerships.
- Barney's Pantry has seen substantial growth, and the new Equity and Community Resource Center has also seen substantial student usage.
- **Follow-up (Commissioner Lugo Knapp):** Asked about the million dollars in foundation scholarships, specifically inquiring whether these funds were a mix of pass-through funds granted by the college or if they were donor-advised funds managed by an entity like the Oregon Community Foundation, which students could apply to through a separate process.
 - **Jennifer Boehmer, Vice President of Advancement and Community Engagement:**
 - The MHCC Foundation is the umbrella organization that holds many endowments, some for programs and some for scholarships.
 - Students apply for scholarships through the MHCC Foundation itself.
- **Follow-up (Commissioner Burton):** Followed up to confirm that the combined support provided to students from the MHCC Foundation's endowments was expected to be just over a million dollars.
 - **Jennifer Boehmer:**
 - Confirmed that the combined support they are able to give students is just over a million dollars.
- **Follow-up (Commissioner Burton):** Inquired whether there was any state funding available to help fill financial gaps, specifically mentioning major state funds such as the Oregon Opportunity Grant and the Oregon Promise program.
 - **John Hamlin:**
 - Oregon Opportunity Grant and Oregon Promise are two major state funds.
 - These funds are included in the budget to be funded for the next state fiscal year.
 - A significant number of MHCC students benefit from these programs.
 - Oregon Promise is for recent high school graduates, and the Oregon Opportunity Grant is need-based.
 - He was on the Senate Bill 81 advisory committee when Oregon Promise first passed, noting it started with \$10 million, which was insufficient to fund all students.
 - The program has been modified multiple times, changing criteria such as estimated family contributions (making it need-based with limitations).
 - The program has supported hundreds, even thousands, of students at MHCC, and while it helps, it's "never enough".

Question (Commissioner Burton): The fiscal year 2026 budget assumes a 4.5% increase in enrollment based on improved outreach and retention, and last year we spoke to you about the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan and its successes. This year we'd like to hear a bit more about the retention side of things - what are your current retention rates for degree seeking students specifically, and has it been increasing or decreasing over time?

- **John Hamlin:**

- Over the past five years, MHCC has seen growth in its overall student retention.
- Five years ago, retention was at 70%, dropping to 61% in 2020-2021 during the pandemic. It has since recovered to 73%.
- This improvement is attributed to their Strategic Enrollment Management, which includes stronger onboarding, connecting with students before they step on campus, and ensuring they are prepared for their first day.
- They provide resources like Barney's Pantry and Student Basic Needs to support non-tuition related challenges such as transportation and child care.
- Regular communication with students, including piloting outreach to every student before campus entry and inviting them to orientation, helps build connections.
- After the first day of class, extensive work in advising offices and the student services hub focuses on building a sense of belonging and relationships, making students more likely to utilize services.
- Barney's Pantry served over 20,000 students last year, and academic advising/student services hub support thousands monthly.
- He emphasized the positive impact on student experiences, including students referring others to MHCC.

- **Follow-ups (Chair Quiroz and Commissioner Burton):** Chair Quiroz inquired about the annual student headcount at Mount Hood Community College (MHCC), mentioning that 18,000 students had been previously mentioned. Then Commissioner Burton asked if most of MHCC's degree programs were two-year programs and sought clarification on whether the 73% retention rate referred to students staying from the first year to the second year or term-to-term. Finally, Commissioner Burton inquired about benchmarking this retention rate against peers nationally.

- John Hamlin:

- Student headcount is closer to 19,000.
 - The 73% retention rate is measured term-to-term.
 - MHCC is in the top third for retention in the state of Oregon and has good national retention numbers, though they always strive for improvement.

- **Follow-up (Commissioner Burton):** We're curious to hear more about any age demographic shifts you might be seeing - in recent years, are you seeing more adults going back to school for vocational training? And if so, which degree programs or certifications are most popular with this demographic?
 - **John Hamlin:**
 - Confirmed that they are seeing age demographic shifts.
 - Before the Oregon Promise program, their average student age was higher; it became younger when the program offered resources for direct high school graduates.
 - Over the past five years, the average age has shifted from 25 to 25.5 years, representing a 10% increase in the 25-and-older age group.
 - Last year alone, there was a 15% increase in this older demographic, which is believed to be economically driven.
 - Older students have different financial needs compared to 18-year-olds.
 - They are observing a focus on career technical education (CTE) among the 25-and-older crowd, with popular programs in healthcare, business, and cybersecurity.

Question (Commissioner Lugo Knapp): Congratulations on passing your capital bond! Now that the \$136.4 million in bond funds is approved and budgeted, we're sure you are eager to start on projects. We'd like to take just a moment to reflect on your success, however - after a history of failed attempts, which of your many efforts do you think moved the needle with voters and enabled this to pass?

- **President Lisa Skari:**
 - Identified three key factors that contributed to the bond's success after prior failed attempts.
 - 1. Expert Counsel: They hired consultants known for success in the community, who provided critical understanding of strategy, timing, and messaging. Initial polling in July for a planned November ballot measure indicated more time was needed, allowing them nine additional months for preparation.
 - 2. Community Involvement: A bond development workgroup, primarily composed of community members, was established early on. This group helped define projects and advised on what would be most successful, with members continuing to support the PAC and broader community campaign.
 - 3. Outreach: There was tireless in-person outreach by board members since April 2024, presenting to community groups and events (over 90 conversations, including with local government partners). Employees also volunteered. This was complemented by a strong communication campaign that articulated the bond's purpose, which aligned well with the PAC's subsequent campaigning efforts.

- **Comment (Chair Quiroz):**

- She personally observed the high level of investment and dedication within the community to ensure the bond's success, citing conversations with a neighbor who works for the college.

Question (Chair Quiroz): The fiscal year 2026 budget includes continued funding for the Bachelor of Applied Science in Cybersecurity program. Can you provide an update on the program's enrollment, outcomes so far, and how next year will expand or build on existing offerings?

- **Pete Zeus, Dean of Science Technology Engineering Mathematics and Bachelor's Degree Programs:**

- Enrollment: The program was designed with an inaugural class target of 15 students. As of Winter 2025, there were 29 students enrolled in the first year (which is technically the program's third year), equating to 19.4 FTE, which is above budget. Most students are enrolled full-time. For Fall 2025, nine students are currently enrolled, with expectations of similar numbers due to advertising and word of mouth. He noted that the program is the only Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) in Cybersecurity in the state, designed as a statewide model, attracting students from other community colleges (e.g., Clackamas Community College), veterans, and younger students progressing from associate degree programs.
- Outcomes: One full-time cybersecurity faculty member was hired last year, teaching and contributing to curriculum development. He began supervising the computer information systems division in January. Three full year courses were delivered for the first time this academic year. The overall pass rate for the 300-level information systems and technology management classes was 86%.
- Expansion/Offerings for Next Year: An employment offer has been extended to a second full-time cybersecurity faculty member, with an anticipated start in fall. Budget funds have been secured for course development for the 10 remaining classes for the next academic year; development for fall offerings has already begun, putting them "a quarter ahead". They expect their first graduates in 2026. He proudly announced that MHCC's students, coached by faculty member Jeff Sperley, finished 69th nationally out of 510 colleges and universities (9,216 students competed) in the National Cyber League, a virtual cybersecurity competition.

- **Follow-up (Commissioner Burton):** Asked if they bring in guest speakers for these classes.

- **Pete Zeus:**
 - Confirmed that they do bring in guest speakers.
 - Their instructor, Eddie Villareal, has a great network from his 27 years as an industry professional, Army veteran, and intelligence worker.

- Guest speakers have included individuals from the Oregon Highway Patrol stationed at the FBI office in Portland, and a woman working for the state of Oregon in cybersecurity defense.
- **Follow-up (Chair Quiroz):** Raised a logistical question concerning students' uncertainty about their career paths upon entering college, noting that some students may not know what they want to do or may change their minds. She inquired whether the institution observed a similar trend of students entering programs and then potentially shifting their focus
 - **Pete Zeus:**
 - Stated he is still learning the student body for sure.
 - He explained that the cybersecurity program is unique because it's the only BAS in cyber in the state, allowing them to attract students from other community colleges.
 - He also noted that enrollment in this program is a little higher than some others, which makes sense as it serves junior and senior-level students rather than just freshmen.
- **Follow-up (Chair Quiroz):** Last year we spoke with you about other possible four year programs the college might offer, potential in the areas of public safety, applied technologies, or science-based, such as forestry and natural resources. In the past year, have you explored any of these options any further? If so, what's the current status of possibly pursuing other four year degree programs?
 - **Pete Zeus:**
 - President Skari has expressed a desire to increase the number of applied baccalaureate (BAS) degrees at MHCC.
 - Following a reorganization in January, he took over management of current and future BAS programs, including cybersecurity.
 - They are revising his position description to create a designated point person to focus on this work and familiarizing themselves with state and accreditation processes.
 - This summer, they will work on a framework for new BAS programs, building on the model used for the cybersecurity program. This will create a more formal process for faculty and community members to propose educational needs.
 - Since January, preliminary discussions have occurred with several departments:
 - Health and Physical Education, Fisheries, Natural Resources Technology: Exploring a potential amalgamation, possibly a "bachelor's for people who work outside," and faculty are meeting with advisory committees.

- Health Professions (Physical Therapy Assistant, Respiratory Care, Dental Hygiene): All three programs are interested in potentially applying for BAS programs. They have aligned their pre-program professional requirements across all three in anticipation of BAS applications.
- Advanced Industrial Mechanic: They are also looking at a potential BAS degree in this area, based on feedback from semiconductor partners about workforce needs in East County.
- He is also preparing to hold an information session on BAS programs for interested staff during their in-service.
- **Follow-up (Chair Quiroz):** Asked about the advantages of a bachelor's program in applied health fields, such as dental hygiene. She specifically inquired if the benefit was higher pay or increased competitiveness upon entering the field, acknowledging that an associate's degree or certificate already qualifies individuals for such roles and requires passing boards. She expressed curiosity about the precise advantage of pursuing a bachelor's degree in these areas.
 - **Pete Zeus:**
 - Speaking extemporaneously, he explained that for certificate or associate degree level healthcare programs, a bachelor's degree can serve as a "bridging" mechanism.
 - If someone working for a large health system (like Kaiser) wants to move into a management role, a bachelor's degree is often required.
 - It also opens doors for pursuing master's degrees (e.g., in public health) or further professional schooling (e.g., physical therapy school).
 - He noted his own applied baccalaureate degree helped him consolidate disparate information into a valuable bachelor's package, aiding his educational progression and opening doors to leadership positions.
- **Follow-up (Commissioner Moore):** Asked if they anticipate getting push back from the four-year colleges in Oregon.
 - **Pete Zeus:**
 - Confirmed that they do anticipate pushback from four-year colleges.
 - He believes the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) is responsible for refereeing such arguments.
 - MHCC's role is to be strong advocates for their position against university partners who often have external influence.
 - He cited the cybersecurity BAS as an example of successfully cracking a "tough nut" on the first try.

- They will need to be strategic, proposing programs that do not directly compete with local university partners and offer a clear benefit to students in terms of wages and advancement opportunities.
- They will emphasize the value of these degrees, particularly in CTE programs where advancements are built upon, and note that universities like the University of Oregon do not have programs such as dental hygiene.
- He stated they will "fight the fights when we have to" if a program is needed, even if controversial.

Question (Commissioner Moore): At our budget hearing with the East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District earlier this spring, we heard about the dam removal project for your campus. What will be the college's role with the project? Do you have plans to contribute any funding, and if so, how will you fund project work?

- **Jennifer DeMent:**

- MHCC has had a relationship with the East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District for over 10 years, including previous work on bio-walls in their parking lots.
- The dam project itself is completely funded by grants and other agencies, including Metro, the City of Gresham, and the East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District.
- MHCC has supported these groups in grant writing and has served as a fiscal agent for some grants.
- As the property is publicly owned, all work is considered public works projects, and MHCC handles the bidding, invoice administration, and prevailing wage documents for the project.

- **Follow-up (Commissioner Moore):** As the habitat restoration work progresses, do you anticipate being able to incorporate any of it in the curriculum or student work opportunities?

- **Pete Zeus:**

- The integrated natural resources and fisheries faculty are enthusiastic about the dam removal project, even more so than previous smaller projects like bio-walls.
- They are planning to integrate the habitat restoration work into the curriculum for the upcoming academic period.

Question (Commissioner Burton): We're excited to hear about this partnership, and are curious if you have other examples of key partnerships with local governments that you could share?

- **Jennifer Boehmer:**

- Began by emphasizing the community college's mission to link with the community at all levels to solve local problems and provide educational opportunities.

- Highlighted partnerships concerning the youngest members of their district:
 - Gresham has the highest percentage of toddlers in the United States, with 45.5% of individuals under 18 being under five, and a nearly 60% increase in toddlers over the last decade.
 - MHCC partners with Multnomah County and the Preschool for All efforts to connect people through their child care resource and referral service.
 - In the last year, they served 80 programs and educated 469 individuals providing care for young children.
 - The Preschool for All program also provided a large grant (over \$100,000) to the MHCC Foundation, funding scholarships for early childhood educator students.
- Reiterated the importance of partnerships for the historic bond passage:
 - Collaborating with other local governments was essential in recognizing the benefit of accessible higher education for the entire district.
 - The board and leadership team participated in over 90 conversations with various community groups, including local government partners, to build credibility and gain support for the vision.
 - This collective effort ensures a campus that can serve future residents, benefiting everyone.

Closing Remarks

Chair Quiroz thanked everyone for their transparency, thoughtfulness, and candor in their responses. She emphasized the importance of these discussions for community representatives and expressed appreciation for ending the budget season with hope and optimism, especially given the difficult budget cycle. She then closed the hearing and opened the regular business meeting of the TSCC.

Staff Recommendations & Certification

- **Allegra Wilhite (TSCC Executive Director):**
 - Commended the MHCC staff for their partnership, professionalism, and quick responses throughout the budget process and the year.
 - Stated that TSCC staff found the budget estimates to be reasonable for the stated purposes and in substantial compliance with budget law.
 - No objections were raised.
 - One recommendation was issued: The TSCC's review of the MHCC fiscal year 2023-24 audit revealed that the district had expenditures exceeding appropriation limits in the

federal, state, and special project funds. This has been a recurring challenge (three times in the last five years). MHCC staff were highly responsive, explained the situation, and presented a comprehensive approach to prevent future occurrences. The TSCC encourages the district to implement these enhanced policies to mitigate future issues.

Vote to Certify

- A motion was made by Chair Quiroz to authorize the commission to sign the certification letter as recommended by staff.
- Commissioner Moore seconded the motion.
- All commissioners present voted "Aye".
- Mt. Hood Community College 2025-26 approved budget was certified by the TSCC.

There being no other business, Chair Quiroz closed the meeting.