

2025 Kick-Off Speech for JH Webpage

Today we look forward to the beginning of our 56th year as a college, and through all that time (and actually years before) Chemeketa has been utterly committed to transforming lives and strengthening communities. This is a profound inheritance, and remembering it allows us to approach another fall term and our everyday work in ways that are larger than ourselves: in historical terms, in humanitarian and economic terms, and in generational terms. Taking the long view and understanding the difference each of you makes in all the steps along the road to meeting our mission should make you feel immensely gratified and proud. It should also help to fortify us as we navigate a context that seems increasingly uncertain on many levels, and which challenges us directly at this moment of a lack of faith in American higher education.

I don't need to tell you the impact Chemeketa makes in the mid-Willamette Valley, for the 18,000-plus individuals who come to us in a given year to improve themselves, to make a better life, and to support a community that gets stronger through these very efforts. You see it every day and in every corner of our institution, regardless of your role. If we were not here doing what we do as a college, what kind of positive future would exist for our region? Let's start with our young people – those living in the maze of apartments adjacent to us, for instance, or in one of our many small rural communities in our district with few job prospects, or those enrolled in one of Oregon's many under-performing schools? How would our region's working adults and businesses retool for a world of work that is changing more rapidly than at any time in human history, with AI and automation threatening entire categories of jobs and local means of commerce? How many companies would choose to locate here without being able to count on a well-trained, relevant workforce? And how could communities strive to be healthier and more civically engaged, important by-products of the American Dream and – here's the important part – realistically being able to pursue it? I've said this every year at in-service, and I believe it to be even more true during this time of uncertainty for so many: This college, and that means all of us, are needed more than ever for the wellbeing of the community we call our own and that we are privileged to serve.

Chemeketa, as you likely know, is distinguished by five institutional values: Adaptability, Belonging, Community, Opportunity, and Quality. We also have an annual tradition in which we focus on one of those values over an entire academic year and ask all employees to consider the concept fully, think about how it shapes or could further shape Chemeketa's day-to-day experience, and foreground it in the course of a year's work. Do you remember last year's value of emphasis? [Community] And the year before that? [Belonging] For the upcoming, 2025-26 year, College Council has chosen "Adaptability" as our college's value of emphasis. I think this is an excellent choice and great timing, as it highlights a primary strategy for how Chemeketa can maintain and grow in relevance and vitality as the winds of change blow ever harder and volatility in all things becomes the new national norm. The good news is that our college is an unusually innovative institution – very attuned to its environment, oriented to collaborate, and ready to try new things to make a difference for our students and build success across our various ecosystems. I would even use the word "nimble" to describe us, at least

within the higher ed space. All of this suggests that adaptability is neither unfamiliar nor an aspiration for us, but rather a part of who we are. At no time has this orientation and skill been more important than now, and I'd like to frame our successes of the past year in terms of our ability to adapt to our circumstances in order to continue to meet our mission.

Let's look back at last year. In some ways, it was ... supremely difficult. My guess is that we can all agree on that! And of course we got through it, and relatively well, on the whole. How did we accomplish that? With a focus on purpose, and through tremendous adaptability. Our bargaining process provides an outstanding example, and I would be derelict today if I did not pay tribute to everyone involved who tirelessly continued to adapt and iterate week after week after week to get the process to the finish line.

What I'd like to do now is provide a recent snapshot from across our institution of other demonstrations of adaptability that produced positive results, and frame those results in tangible, specific outcomes in terms of student and community benefit. These stakeholders – students and community – form the center of our mission's bulls-eye – they are the point of it all, and their success is our success. I know that all of you have been a part of these kinds of efforts, large and small, and I obviously cannot list them all, but I hope you'll enjoy these examples of how we are continually adapting to increasingly transform lives and strengthen communities. Let's start with a problem to be solved, then show how our amazing employees, in the past year or two, innovated to find a solution.

Problem One: Hundreds of new students tried to enroll at Chemeketa, but did not make it into classes.

Innovative solution #1: Enrollment Services made big changes in the admission process. What used to take 10 business days in processing an admission application has been reduced to about 2-3 days, and often less. Work continues in order to simplify the admission process for students.

Innovative solution #2: Students Affairs created the Student Success Center and instead of running multi-day summer orientation sessions, which accommodated only a fraction of incoming students, they transitioned first to one-day orientation sessions last year, and then half-day orientation sessions this year, all while continuing to provide enrollment support to new students and connecting them to campus services. This resulted in increasing service from 354 students to 1,162 students in a similar period, while maintaining a 90% enrollment yield and reducing dedicated employee hours.

Innovative solution #3: Chemeketa's Advising Department has achieved a transformative redesign by implementing a new, standardized advising model supported by EAB Navigate. In addition, the department revised its procedures for students in poor academic standing, introducing intensive, targeted interventions that focus on building essential skills, creating smooth transitions, and setting long-term goals. Together, these innovations have created a

more consistent, equitable, and responsive advising experience that strengthens student success across the college.

This marked shift has dramatically expanded student access to advising services, resulting in over 24,000 scheduled appointments and a surge in drop-in appointments from fewer than 100 to more than 6,000 in a single year. The new approach has also reduced advising wait times from nearly a month to just a few days, ensuring timely support for students when they need it most.

Problem Two: Our region has a large population of adults who have an associates degree, but not a bachelors, keeping many skilled workers from advancing to management positions.

Innovative solution: In 2023, we launched the first applied baccalaureate program in Oregon, adapting the program in many ways – from meeting schedule to the application of content – to the realities of the working adult. Outcome: this past June, the first graduating class received its Bachelors of Applied Science in Leadership and Management. To continue this groundbreaking innovation, Chemeketa will launch a Bachelor of Science in Nursing and, if all goes as planned, a Bachelor of Applied Science in Education in the next two years.

Problem Three: Employers need trained medical assistants, and high school students need healthcare pathway opportunities. Innovative Solution: YVC partnered with Amity and McMinnville High Schools to train 27 students as medical assistants. Of those, 26 passed the national exam on their first attempt—a 96% pass rate and way above the national average. Every student has since enrolled in college courses in the medical field, with at least four working as medical assistants to earn income while continuing their education. Additionally, 15 students chose to earn an extra certification in phlebotomy, further strengthening their employability. This is but one example of how our CTE programs across the district stay relevant and adapt to meet evolving workforce needs.

Problem Four: At Chemeketa and across our nation's community colleges, students placed in developmental math and writing courses, particularly at the lower levels, are not succeeding through college level. This has devastating effects on their ability to complete a college credential, particularly for those who are most marginalized. Co-requisite approaches to learning in gateway courses show tremendous promise, and our math and writing faculty have taken this complex body of work and made it their own, in some cases leading the state. Positive outcomes from the work are as follows: Last fall, students in the WR115 corequisite courses had a six percent higher persistence rate than students in the same standalone course during that same term. Meanwhile, students completing math classes with corequisite support courses succeeded at comparable or higher rates than students taking the standalone versions of these courses, despite having placement levels that would have previously directed these students to start in lower-level math courses. Last year, students taking MTH111z with a corequisite support course successfully completed it in a single term at a rate that is more than 20 percentage points higher than the rate at which we would have expected them to complete the course in two terms had they been directed to start in an Intermediate Algebra course before

enrolling in MTH111z. This truly is transformative work, and we have our faculty, and their herculean efforts, to thank.

Problem Five: Marion Berries Baseball, the new local team in the West Coast summer collegiate wood-bat league, realized that their expected arrangement with another local postsecondary institution fell through and they didn't have a stadium to play in some four weeks before their inaugural season this summer started. They came to Chemeketa to see if we could adapt to meet the sudden opportunity to create a home field for the team here at the Salem Campus. The improvements to our old and battered baseball field, which were significant and, thanks to the bond passage, were scheduled to take place over many months, were condensed down to mere weeks with campus and community partners pitching in to create a home run for our community and the future of athletics at the college. The immediate result of this tremendous effort by our truly amazing Facilities team? Over 32,000 community member visits, with people from all over our region coming on-site for the games, exposed to the college anew and more cognizant of its offerings and role as a change-maker for the region.

And finally, Problem Six: Chemeketa's facilities are aging rapidly and are often static – yet we need them to function well and be extremely flexible to adapt to future educational needs and workforce trends. As you know, the college tried very hard to pass a capital projects bond measure last fall, yet was not successful. Here's where adaptability – not to mention fortitude – came in. The college changed its approach – with a new bond consultant, a more active PAC, and a new strategy that brought a lot more engagement by community partners with skin in the game. A great number of employees, with student support, rolled up their sleeves and put their shoulders to the wheel, an effort I hope none of us will ever forget. I know I won't! That shift had a lot to do with the passage of the bond last May, which resulted in an almost exact reversal of results from November. The impact of the passage of our bond? Well, it will improve our facilities over the next 15-20 years, which will allow us to adapt our programming to keep up with the times. These improvements will positively affect the experiences of employees and students who will occupy those facilities over that entire period. How to quantify that? Well, it's safe to say that many tens of thousands of stakeholders will benefit over that time. In 4 months, it's already resulted in 32,000 additional in-person visits and created a palpable new interest in East Salem from community leaders. All of this points to more students, more engagement, and more of an opportunity for positive impact.

One could say that these six adaptations are just evidence of our institution's ongoing work, but without a plan and accountability, we cannot set and meet goals that are strategic, create and build upon meaningful impact, or achieve scale. In fact, the work addressing each of these six issues created measurable improvement related to our institutional priorities.

So what are those priorities, you ask? Well, every fall at this time, we make mention of the strategic plan of the college, show how employees are engaged in that work, and talk about the upcoming year's strategic priorities. So here we go, and don't worry; I'll provide you with just the basics. At the end of a given academic year, all units create unit plans for the upcoming year. Once summer starts, the executive team reviews those plans, looks at the institutional

scorecard – which shows all the many things we measure, such as data relating to student progress — and then develops a list of priorities for the year to come. Often these are continued from year to year, as many large efforts take awhile. This summer, facilitated by the quite amazing Colton Christian, ET came up with the following priority buckets of work, which have been reviewed by College Council: Student Success, Community Engagement, AI and Accessibility, and Bond and Operations. These are our four general strategic priorities, and each reflects a handful of specific efforts. Let me list them for you: Under Student Success, the initiatives of focus are to: 1) Expand Guided Pathways work to completion Success, 2) Reinforce and expand CTE Program Success, 3) Continue work on completion of College-level Math and Writing in first year, 4) Build dual-credit programming, 5) Charter a committee to develop a coordinated 3-5 year action plan on how to serve adult Learners, and 6) Develop a timeline and plan for improving the non-credit registration process. Under Community Engagement, the foci are: 1) Continue promoting the Chemeketa brand, 2) Sustain community relationships after a successful bond effort, and 3) Grow community and workforce partnerships. Under AI and Accessibility, the priorities are to 1) Provide Generative AI support for faculty and staff college-wide, 2) Develop a coordinated, district-wide approach to testing that is resilient to Generative AI, and 3) Implement recommendations from the Digital Accessibility Guidelines Workgroup to achieve full compliance. And finally, under the umbrella of bond and operations, the priorities are to 1) Initiate Building 7 construction projects, including community fields and courts, 2) Upgrade classroom technology, including projectors, 3) Ensure the future Science Lab at Woodburn meets the science needs of students, and 4) engage in College-wide strategic enrollment management.

Adaptability is reflected throughout this year's strategic priorities, helping us embrace flexibility, navigate change, and continue to innovate. As I mentioned earlier, our college has a propensity for innovation, but it also encourages it through a relatively new and available-to-any-employee opportunity called the Chemeketa Innovation Grants, commonly referred to by the acronym CIGs. Those employees who apply and are awarded with funds have the following year to try to make their projects happen and, even if the effort isn't successful, the hope is it will teach us something that is useful as we continue to innovate as a college. CIGs are designed to empower action at the local level, incentivize innovation across the institution, and help us use data to shape our work and continuously improve. If adaptation through innovation took the form of a car, a CIG grant could be the gas to propel it forward. The annual CIG process is steered by Gaelen McAllister and award decisions are made by a representative college committee. You may remember that last year at Kick-Off, each person who had just won a CIG grant came to the microphone to share their concept with all of you. Today, those among them who completed their projects last year will tell you how it went.

The final item on our agenda this morning could well be the most important – it is a formal public recognition of the excellence within our internal college community. Let's start with the faculty. In April, we celebrated our fourth annual faculty excellence awards, which resulted in the recognition of two deserving faculty members. One award recognized a part-time faculty member's exceptional contributions to teaching and learning, service to the Chemeketa community and its district, and excellence in content expertise. It is my pleasure to recognize

that the winner of this award was Frankie Hruzek, who teaches mathematics at Winema on the Salem campus.

The other award recognized a full-time faculty member's exceptional contributions to teaching and learning, remarkable involvement with the broader Chemeketa community and the district we serve, and excellence in content expertise and professional scholarship. It is my pleasure to pay tribute to the winner of this award, Christopher MacLean, who has been faculty with us since 2008 and teaches Psychology here on the Salem Campus.

I'd also like to publicly congratulate the three faculty who have completed Chemeketa's Excellence in Teaching Certificate in the past year: Raschel Larsen, Jennifer Schramm, and Debra Van Houten. They participated in a comprehensive program of professional development activities and created a professional portfolio showcasing how they demonstrate Chemeketa's Excellence in Teaching Competencies in their practice. I've had the privilege and pleasure of reading these portfolios, and they stand as inspiring testimony to the hard work and dedication Chemeketa's faculty commit to our students' achievement.

Two years ago at Kick-off, we began another tradition at Chemeketa, announcing the recipient of our college's award to recognize one outstanding employee annually from the classified ranks. As with the faculty excellence awards, this process begins with many nominations and a lot of internal engagement. I am very pleased and excited to announce the winner of this award, and would ask them to join me on the stage to receive the award as soon as it is revealed. The 2025 recipient of the classified employee excellence award at Chemeketa is Kathryn Ellis from the Yamhill Valley Campus.

In the spirit of celebrating excellence from within our college community, this year begins a new tradition at Chemeketa in which one outstanding employee from the exempt ranks will be recognized annually. The process follows that of the already-established faculty and classified awards, beginning with many nominations and ending with a rigorous evaluation process by committee. It is with great pleasure that I announce the inaugural winner of this award, and would ask them to join me on the stage to receive the award as soon as it is revealed. The 2025 recipient of the exempt employee excellence award at Chemeketa is our manager from Grant Accounting & Accounts Payable, Kela Kruse.

The faculty, classified, and exempt excellence awards are always very competitive and hard-won. Quite simply, there is a lot of excellence at this college, and we need look no farther to find it than across this lawn. But we are made up of more than faculty, classified, and exempt; our culture and our work is shaped by all who are here and identify as Chemeketans. I'm referring to our Board of Education, and of course to our students. In those two important categories of stakeholders, I also happen to have news of particular excellence to share.

First, it is my great pleasure to inform you that last year's Chemeketa Board of Education chair, Ken Hector, was recently named the 2025 Pacific Region Trustee Leadership Awardee by the American Association of Community College Trustees and also the Howard Cherry Board

Member Award from the Oregon Community College Association. Ken, who has served on our Board for 12 years, was recognized in these awards for his exceptional leadership, tireless advocacy, and deep commitment to expanding access to higher education. A former mayor of Silverton and lifelong public servant, he has been a driving force in legislative advocacy at both the state and national levels for us. His efforts have been instrumental in advancing applied baccalaureate degrees for Oregon's community colleges, securing critical funding for infrastructure, and championing initiatives that support student success and workforce development. He also played a particularly large role, in tandem with the rest of our Board, in passing our capital projects bond last year. Please join me in recognizing Ken Hector for being our champion and for receiving these prestigious awards.

Next, it is my pleasure to announce that Lillian Anderson, returning President of the Associated Students of Chemeketa (ASC), who will be closing this morning's address today with a few words, has been named a Newman Civic Fellow on behalf of Chemeketa. To my knowledge, Lillian is the first Chemeketa student to receive this year-long fellowship, which recognizes students' potential for public leadership and their work with communities. Last year, Lillian's approaches to addressing the root causes of social issues derived from her deep understanding that students at institutions like ours come from, and represent, the very communities the college exists to serve and uplift. Through Lillian's focused, well-organized, and trauma-informed leadership, ASC facilitated student exposure to external community resources and identity-based centers, created opportunities for belonging on campus, and promoted civic engagement among the student body. Please help me recognize Chemeketa's 2025-26 Newman Civic Fellow, Lillian Anderson.

Before Lillian sends us off to a new fall term, I'd like to thank the executive team for its outstanding leadership and extraordinary commitment to our college, especially over the past year. And to all of you who have come to the gathering place this morning, I cannot begin to tell you how much you are appreciated and how integral your role is at our institution, which continues to find ways to serve and empower students and communities to create positive impact, even and especially during these unsettled times. Adaptability is our mantra this year; it will help us find direction as we continue to make a difference for all who call this area home.