



## CASE STUDY:

# Achieving strategic priorities with the help of external resources.

Ellucian Grants Services helped Mt. Hood Community College successfully secure nearly **\$9.7 million in grant funds** to support student success, workforce partnerships, and innovative programs

## Upgrades, updates, and user improvement

Like many colleges, Mt. Hood Community College (MHCC) has a lot of great ideas about how the college can better serve its students and its community. These ideas are centered on advancing the college's strategic priorities, including:

- Increase student access, retention, and completion
- Enhance student success in gateway courses such as math
- Foster student and community interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) programs
- Increase innovation in academic and vocational programs to meet the changing needs of industry

The challenge, of course, is finding funds to support these priorities.



A two-year public institution in Gresham, Oregon. The college's 950-square-mile service area includes a diverse range of communities, from the highly urban greater Portland area lying to the west, to the sparsely-populated, rural communities that dot the landscape near the base of Mt. Hood.

### Enrollment

27,387

### Objective

To identify external funding opportunities aligned with the college's strategic priorities, and to enhance the college's capacity to pursue, secure, and manage those additional resources.

### Solution

Ellucian Grants Services

### Business Benefits

- Implemented strategic pursuit of external funding
- Increased number of grant and foundation proposals submitted
- Improved grant and foundation success rate

The college has three main sources of revenue: state support, student tuition and fees, and property tax revenue. State support has declined significantly over the past several years. Hikes in student tuition and fees must be approached with caution because of the high number of students (more than 71 percent) dependent on financial aid. And property tax revenue has decreased over time due to ballot measures limiting the levying authority of education districts.

Where, then, would MHCC find the funds it needed to carry out the college's strategic priorities? That was the challenge Dr. Debra Derr, former president of MHCC, faced when she became MHCC's president in 2013.

"We were stuck in the mindset that we couldn't be creative and innovative because there were no state dollars to support that," Derr says. "We hadn't really looked seriously at the possibility of leveraging resources outside of state aid. That's why our first priority became grants and resource development."

## Upgrades, updates, and user improvement

Derr first learned of Ellucian Grants Services when she worked with the Grants Services team at a previous institution.

"Ellucian Grants Services came in and assessed what we needed in terms of grant support. They ended up helping us get a Title III grant, which was amazing," Derr says. Title III, a grant program offered by the U.S. Department of Education, is designed to strengthen institutions' academic programs, institutional management, and fiscal stability. Grant awards average around \$2.25 million, spread across five years.

"When I first came to Mt. Hood, we hadn't submitted a Title III application since 2002, and we hadn't successfully leveraged any other grant resources for a very long time," Derr says. Although the college had a part-time grant writer on board, they knew they needed more than that.

"It's wonderful to have a talented grant writer, but we needed a full grants office," Derr says. "The support that Ellucian brings is much more than just writing the grant. Ellucian understands the workings of Washington, D.C. They know how to do research that supports grant applications. They know how to pull stakeholders together to get the grant written. They know how to help the college set up policies, procedures, and systems to ensure that once you are funded, you are able to meet the grant requirements and accountability measures."

"We needed a partner who could support the entire spectrum of grant activity, not just write a grant. I am not aware of any other vendor that has the background and flexibility to do what Ellucian does in the area of grant services," Derr says.

## Putting processes in place

In the spring of 2015, the Ellucian Grants Services team joined forces with MHCC.

"We wanted to work on policies, communication, and the formalities of the grants office first, but we had so much opportunity at that time, we had to jump in and just go after the grants that were available," says Al Sigala, executive director of development and communications.

A Title III grant competition provided an immediate, and pressing, opportunity for the college. A quick turnaround on the application was essential: Title III grant competitions are only held every other year, and MHCC didn't want to wait two more years to apply.

The Ellucian Grants Services team helped the college develop and submit a competitive Title III application by the June 2015 deadline. The team then took a step back and worked on building up the college's internal grant infrastructure.

The college's previous grant efforts had been somewhat scattered, according to Sigala: "Some folks were applying for grants without anyone else at the college knowing they were applying for grants," he says. "We needed a better system in place to manage that."

To that end, the Ellucian Grants Services team worked with MHCC to develop policies and procedures supporting grant development. Those policies and procedures have helped MHCC facilitate college-wide communication about grant opportunities, and helped ensure that the college pursues funding opportunities that make sense in the context of their priorities.

"We aren't going to apply for every single grant that comes out," says Derr. "We have to prioritize, because it's not just about getting the money. It's about getting the work done as well."

### **An extraordinary return: \$9.7 million**

"We knew there were possibilities, but I don't think any of us dreamed we would have secured nearly \$9.7 million dollars in grant funds in less than two years as a result of our partnership with Ellucian Grants Services," says Sigala. "The return on investment has been extraordinary."

As planned, the college is using grant funds to support its strategic priorities, including enhancing student success, implementing innovative programs, and addressing industry workforce needs. Highlights include:

- **A U.S. Department of Education Title III "Strengthening Institutions" grant award for \$2.1 million dollars.** The grant enables MHCC to implement evidence-based retention strategies to improve student enrollment, retention, and completion.

- **A U.S. Department of Education "Talent Search" grant award for \$1.2 million dollars.** In this program, MHCC works with low-income and potential first-generation college students in three high schools and three middle schools in the college's service district. The purpose of the program is to help disadvantaged students successfully complete high school and enroll in postsecondary education.
- **An Oregon Talent Council (OTC) grant for \$453,129.** With seed money from the OTC grant, and an additional \$597,730 committed by community and industry partners, MHCC is establishing an Advanced Manufacturing Certification (AMC) Center. The center will provide state-of-the-art training and certification for incumbent workers, emerging workers, dislocated workers, college students, and recent high school graduates. The OTC grant is helping MHCC establish industry-vetted certifications in advanced manufacturing as well as a two-year associate of applied science (AAS) degree in mechatronics (a blend of mechanical, electrical, and computer-control training).

"With this program, MHCC holds the distinction of being the first community college in the state to be awarded resources for an A.A.S. program in an engineering-related field," says Derr.

- **A \$150,000 Oregon Department of Education grant establishing MHCC as a Regional Hub for STEM programming and initiatives.** The STEM Hub designation has opened the door for MHCC to receive additional state funds related to STEM initiatives.
- **A State of Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) Open Educational Resource (OER) grant for \$15,000.** Open Educational Resources are free, public-domain educational materials that can be used for teaching.

“OER resources help students by removing the need to buy expensive textbooks,” says Sigala. MHCC will use the grant award to create an OER curriculum that can be used statewide to support MTH 111 Pre-Calculus I: Elementary Functions. MTH 111 is a key gateway course for STEM programs.

## More than money

The financial return on the college’s investment in Ellucian Grants Services has been exceptional. But both Derr and Sigala say that the non-financial return on investment has been equally important. The Ellucian Grants Services team has facilitated a culture on campus that not only supports current grant awards, but will facilitate future success in resource development as well.

Through a combination of on-site visits and remote support, the Ellucian Grants Services team has helped the college establish processes to guide grants development; delivered professional development on grant topics to faculty and staff; and facilitated grant-planning meetings with internal and external stakeholders. The exercise of getting a group of people together and engaging in planning can pay unexpected dividends, even if a particular grant is not funded. Planning activities can help refine priorities, support collaboration, and lead to creative conversations about ways to leverage resources when grant funds aren’t available.

And when questions arise about whether a particular opportunity aligns with the college’s priorities, the Ellucian Grants Services team is only a phone call away.

“People don’t realize that we are in constant communication with Ellucian Grants Services,” says Sigala. “We talk with their team at least weekly, and sometimes daily. It really is like having a grants office here at the institution, except the depth and breadth of Ellucian’s support and expertise is so much greater than what we would have had if we had just hired a couple of independent grant writers.”

Sigala says that the biggest impact on the college may be the fact that where they used to see obstacles, they now see opportunities. “It’s changed the college’s perspective on possibilities,” he says. “We’ve moved from thinking that a lot of things were not feasible, to knowing there are ways to accomplish the goals we want to accomplish.”

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### **DR. DEBRA DERR,**

Former President, Mt. Hood Community College



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