

**Rogue Community College
Occupational Skills Training/OVRS Partnership**

Site Report

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Rogue Community College “Systems Change” Site Report

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this report is to describe and document the impact of the partnership program developed between the Occupational Skills Training Program (OST) at Rogue Community College and the Oregon Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (OVRs). This partnership was initially funded during the 2001/2003 biennium and is currently funded through June 30, 2007. The OST/OVRs partnership is designed to improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities by providing a combination of classroom instruction and community based training experiences.

During the fall of 2005 and winter of 2006, a team of researchers from the University of Oregon conducted an on-site visit with Rogue Community College and Vocational Rehabilitation Services in Southern Oregon. We were interested in collecting information that would allow us to better understand how this innovative partnership was developed and integrated into the existing community college and OVRs programs. Through site visits and extensive interviews we were able to examine the pattern of services provided through the OST/OVRs partnership and document how the program developed and changed over time.

During the site visits, we conducted group and individual interviews with many of the key personnel involved in the OST/OVRs partnership in the Rogue Community College region. All of the interviews were tape recorded (with informed consent of participants), transcribed, and analyzed for common themes and key findings. The following specific interviews/activities were completed for this report:

- Individual interview with the OST Program Manager
- Two group interviews with the OST core program team
- Individual interview with the OVRs Branch Manager for Jackson, Josephine, Klamath, and Lake counties
- Interview with OVRs counselors
- Focus group interview with the OST workgroup which included OST, OVRs, YTP, and other program-relevant personnel
- Student focus group interview
- Two student case study interviews
- Interviews with training site managers

In addition to these interviews, we collected informational and historical documents in order to gather a basic understanding of the program and the partnership with OVRs. Document review and some informal interviewing were performed prior to the group interviews, and helped guide the study. However, it was the information from the interview participants that shaped the writing of this report. Key themes and details regarding the OST program and the OST/OVRs partnership emerged directly from the interview transcripts as well as from our observations.

This report contains information on the program, the partnership, and influencing factors associated with program development and integration from the perspectives of OST and OVRS staff as well as from other high school and community college staff and the OST workgroup. The report is divided into three major sections: (1) the development of the OST/OVRS partnership, (2) how and why the partnership changed over time, and (3) the description of program impact and systems change.

The systems change research team from the University Oregon would like to extend a sincere thank you to the participants at Rogue Community College, as well as participants from OVRS, and the workgroup. Tim Hoone and Laurie Rydell were extremely helpful in scheduling the site visits and participating in many of the interviews. Their participation and cooperation were essential to the success of this project.

§ 1 – Responding to a Need: Development of the OST/OVRS partnership

The Rogue Community College partnership was created in response to a need to provide employment skill training for OVRS clients with a variety of disabilities, including physical and mobility impairments, learning disabilities, and emotional/psychological disabilities. In order to create appropriate training programs for this broad range of individuals, OVRS and community college personnel had to think creatively about building a collaborative program, which motivated changes at both the administrative and program level. This unique partnership started in July 2001 and is currently jointly funded by Rogue Community College and OVRS.¹

Development of the Program

A series of key events facilitated the development of the partnership at Rogue. Table 1 displays the history of major events from the pre-partnership stage up through the present. This Table is intended to summarize critical events in the development of the program and the numerous factors that have influenced the partnership. During the mid to late 1990's, key personnel from the University of Oregon, community colleges, and OVRS were engaged in a series of discussions to brainstorm ways that community colleges might be able to better prepare individuals with disabilities for higher wage occupations. Along with a commitment from state level OVRS administrators, these initial discussions led to the first OVRS/community college grant in 1998. Early success of the partnership helped promote a willingness to expand this model to additional community colleges in Oregon. In 2001, Rogue applied for and received its first OVRS grant.

Prior to the partnership in 2001, the OST program at Rogue primarily served injured workers from private rehabilitation agencies. At that time, private VR counselors would refer individuals with disabilities directly to OST Faculty Coordinators (Jane Hagle at Medford and Alex Kozlowski at Grant's Pass) who would organize and deliver the training curriculum. This system of referrals was not entirely satisfactory partly due to lack of awareness about OST on the part of private counselors, and also due to the sporadic communication private counselors had with OST staff. Prior to the partnership, there also seemed to be less of a focus on job placements, and training plans were often less flexible or individualized. However, administrative re-organization within the college paved the way for a creative re-thinking of the program, and the advent of the OVRS funded Employment Specialist changed both the referral process and the client base.

During the 2000/01 and 2001/02 academic years, the college underwent a major administrative re-organization. Laurie Rydell, who eventually became the OST/OVRS Program Manager, facilitated a "redesign team" charged with reorganizing the college to make it more efficient and flexible. By helping to redesign college administration, these teams helped allow the college to grow without requiring an influx of new managers to coordinate the increasing number of students and programs at the college. This process necessitated an openness to change

¹ Because OVRS helps pay for their training, all OST students are also OVRS clients. To help maintain clarity and readability, throughout this document these individuals will consistently be called "OST students". The term "OVRS clients" is reserved only for particularly appropriate circumstances, i.e. if referring to a potential student who is not yet involved with the OST program.

on the part of the college, and this added flexibility helped make room for an OST program that could respond to the changing needs of new OST students:

“I’ve really had a lot of freedom in my own area to make changes. In fact, when I came into the department, it had some problems. A lot of it was around the disorganization, things kind of falling through the cracks, some issues around things not being done correctly, that kind of thing. And I think that because of the process that we had just been through, I was given a fair amount of freedom to make the changes that I thought needed to be made.” (Laurie Rydell, OST Program Manager, interview)

Administrative flexibility set the stage for changes in service; however, it was the influx of resources from OVRS that enabled the college to develop an entirely new set of employment and training services for individuals with disabilities. The grant from OVRS created a new faculty position at Rogue known as an Employment Specialist. This position (filled originally by Tim Hoone) was designed to help OST students navigate the OST and RCC systems.

Although the Employment Specialist has been a tremendous help to OST students navigating the college system and OVRS counselors referring individuals with disabilities, success did not come automatically. Tim had to work with existing OST faculty and VR counselors to network and establish himself in the OVRS and employer communities. This took some time. Internal disorganization also affected the program in these early years. With the help of a new Program Manager in 2003 (Laurie Rydell) and an OVRS Branch Manager who advocated for the program (Kelly Franklin), pieces fell into place and the OST program at RCC became an efficient and individualized means to get students with disabilities trained for work.

Now that the system is in place the Employment Specialist is able to coordinate the student, the OVRS counselor, the OST program, and training sites, making the referral easier on all sides:

“We see the added navigational support of what Tim, who takes students through the process and supports them, is...that added piece that fits, the piece that they [students] needed to be successful at the college or on the job. And the difference between why that’s a better choice to what it was five years ago or ten years ago is that Tim’s position adds support that wasn’t there before this program. So some folks (and I know this from just many years of doing this) would get to the financial aid packet and that was it...it was too much. And so they never got past the financial aid packet. And if you look at that, the intimidation does you in and you never go back through those doors. With Tim, who helps and guides you, and the counselor communicating, they get past that door. And then they get to another door that may have been intimidating in the past and then they keep getting past doors that they had never thought that they would get past.” (Kelly Franklin, OVRS Branch Manager, interview)

Without an Employment Specialist, OST could not support diverse OST students in the ways they require: coordination between individual counselors, students, and training sites would be too much for OST Faculty Coordinators. Prior, then, to the partnership, coordination between OVRS and the community college was not efficient. As one OST Faculty Coordinator recalls:

“Well, I really didn’t get referrals from all the VR counselors. There were certain ones that knew me and worked with me, and others I’d never heard from. So I think there was a certain back and forth...I think there’s a confidence factor or more of a risk-taking factor in that students with disabilities might represent a little bit more complexity, a little bit more work load, and it wasn’t that I would turn anyone away, but there was certainly more of an ease knowing that I could say, well, we’ve got Tim Hoone, he’s our connection. He’s going to help you figure out how to fill out the VR application. It just felt like we could make more space for those people.” (Alex Kozlowski, OST Faculty Coordinator, Core team interview 2)

Key Personnel

Table 2 summarizes how the OST staff and related personnel have changed and grown over the years in order to accommodate changes in the college as well as meet the needs of the students served. Prior to the partnership, Jane Hagle was the OST Faculty Coordinator at the Medford (Riverside) campus, and Alex Kozlowski was the Faculty Coordinator at the Grants Pass (Redwood) campus. In 2001, Rogue hired Tim Hoone as the Employment Specialist to help Jane and Alex with intake and coordination, specifically regarding orientation, eligibility, and selecting a career program. Laurie Rydell, who is the Director of Student Employment and Workforce Programs (which includes OST), was hired in 2003. Due to the positive impact of the OVRs-funded Employment Specialist position, Laurie Rydell hired Kim Haney as a liaison for other (not OVRs-referred) students that attend Rogue CC. Finally, due to the increased flexibility of the program and the growing number of referrals, Bob Hutsell was also brought on board to serve OST students from a number of referral sources.

Pattern of Services

Rogue’s OST program serves adults with disabilities who come to the program with a variety of needs and interests. The referral process begins with the OVRs counselor who works with the client to determine his/her employment goals. If the counselor feels the client would be a good match with the OST program, the Employment Specialist at Rogue CC is contacted. Then the Employment Specialist, OVRs counselor, and the client work together to decide if OST is a good option for the client; at this point, the client enrolls at Rogue CC as an OST student. In the next phase of the program, the Employment Specialist works with the student and an OST Faculty Coordinator to develop a training plan. Once a training site is set up, the student begins working more with the OST Faculty Coordinator to finalize the curriculum, including coursework and on-site training. OST faculty communicate regularly with the training site supervisors to monitor progress and evaluate competency attainment. Upon completion of training, an OST faculty person and OVRs counselor work with the student on finding employment by providing resume and interviewing help, and communicating with employers. While OST is not a job placement program, per se, getting employed in a desired field is always the goal, and OST faculty and OVRs counselors are committed to this outcome.

Training. All OST training programs have both classroom instruction and hands-on components. OST faculty work closely with students in order to pick the right combination of classes needed to meet requirements:

“I can say for me, there’s not one class that I took that hasn’t been extremely helpful out in the real world. Business Math, Excel...it’s kind of like a math to me. And I was in Financial Accounting 1, that’s all I had to take was the first one, that was enough. And now I’m doing Payroll Accounting, struggling, but you know...I’m gonna make it through.” (OST student, Student Focus Group interview)

In addition to classroom instruction, students receive hands-on training at an employment site related to their job goals. Training sites range widely, from social service, to health and medical assistance, business positions, and other trades. On-site aspects of training not only help students learn the skills they need for the job itself, but also help build soft skills and employer relations, which are both essential for the demands of the labor market:

“The more we address soft skill issues, and people not only building the actual work-related skills, the better we can provide candidates to employers who have solid soft skills...then employers will recognize that.” (Kelly Franklin, OVRs Branch Manager, interview)

Other college services, such as financial aid, career counseling, and disability services are also critical for almost all students in the program. It is the college’s responsibility to provide these services to OST students, and it is the Employment Specialist’s responsibility to assist students in getting the help they need to complete their training. Overall, the combination of coursework, support within the college, and hands-on training provide students a great opportunity to build confidence both in the classroom and on site.

Jobs. Although they must meet certain guidelines, it is important to note that OST programs are also flexible, and are individually tailored to specific students’ needs and goals. This means that OST faculty must closely attend to the student’s interests and the labor market. Finding a good and reasonable fit between student, goal, training site, and labor market is fundamental to the program’s success:

Tim Hoone: This goes back to the fact that different employers demand different things... so different plans are entirely appropriate because of what the labor market’s doing. You know, we’re trying to do whatever we can to get people on to work.

Laurie Rydell: And that’s the program...its capacity to tailor the [student’s] training to the individual as well as to the needs of the labor market. That’s what it’s about. (Core Team 2 interview)

Although OST is not a job placement program per se, employment in a student’s desired field is the end goal. Although resume help, interviewing practice or role play, and support with job search are helpful services for students, a good match between student and training site and a good training plan are the fundamentals of getting students employed after they complete their training:

Bob Hutsell: And normally, if it’s the final term of the training then we would ask, would you feel if you had a vacancy that this person would be a potential employee?

Jane Hagle: I’m actually at that point saying to the student that I don’t think you’re going to get hired here but there’s this other site, maybe we’ll shift sites. We’re really pretty darn honest. It’s

just that we try and cover ourselves that we're not going to promise that we're going to do job development. But we try to do it all along the way.

Alex Kozlowski: [Job development] has always been a primary focus. (Core Team 2 interview)

Collaboration. Thinking more flexibly about training requires close collaboration between the VR counselor, the student, and OST faculty, and due to the partnership these stakeholders all work together better. This collaboration between positive people benefits everyone involved by making the referral and placement processes more streamlined and effective:

Bob Hutsell: One of the changes that I've seen over time pertains to the interplay at the employment-support-development level. It's the interplay between the VR counselor and the placement or job developer person that might be working with a particular individual at the college, and saying, "What could give a person the leverage toward an open door? Is there an OJE, is there particular class they need? Is it looking at utilizing an occupational skills training or professional skills training opportunity that would open a door for the person?" It's about bringing some transferable skills and needing to add some academic and some on-site skills all at the same time a marketing effort. And I'm feeling more of a collaborative approach.

Jane Hagle: I would agree. I think once they, whoever the agency is, if it's rehab or the veterans... Once they understand that we are student-centered...student-centered, that's who we are...it works. (Core Team 2 interview)

"I think much of [the success] is dependant upon people, and that partnerships really come down to relationships. And at this point we have developed some very good working relationships and trust and confidence, and that is really what makes the partnership work."
(Laurie Rydell, OST Program Manager, interview)

§ 2 – How and Why the Program Changed

OVRs Collaboration

One of the keys to the success of the OST/VR partnership at Rogue CC has been the strong collaboration and communication from the local VR Branch Office. Led by Branch Manager Kelly Franklin, counselors at this office have learned to see the community college as a valuable resource for short-term training and employment services. Having both a VR liaison in close contact with counselors and a workgroup where OVRs counselors sit down with OST faculty and other stakeholders has helped build counselor awareness of OST as a viable option for students. A supportive OVRs Branch Manager who is responsive to OST has also been invaluable. Throughout the development of the partnership, Kelly Franklin has been willing to meet regularly with Employment Specialist Tim Hoone to discuss progress, brainstorm new ideas and remove system barriers as needed.

"...We've got a really wonderful Branch Manager. We couldn't have anybody better than Kelly in terms of supporting us and I think that's a huge component of making this successful. She's constantly helping us to target what more we can do, who else do we need to work with at VR, how do we make the partnership stronger. So I think as long as we have people like Kelly and

counselors that we work well with, I think the partnership is very viable.” (Laurie Rydell, OST Program Manager, interview)

Role of the Employment Specialist

The OVRS partnership brought additional resources, as well as new challenges to Rogue’s OST program. The advent of the Employment Specialist position (initially filled by Tim Hoone) facilitated a new process for collaboration between OVRS counselors and OST faculty. The Employment Specialist position acts as a liaison, streamlining the student “handoff” and helping students connect with the college early in the referral process, thus minimizing the chances of premature dropout due to confusion or miscommunication. For many OST students, the possibility of college training can be intimidating, and having a friendly and helpful person to guide them through the initial maze of paperwork, registration, and training decisions can make all the difference:

“Yeah, [Tim] actually goes to the site now and has time that he spends at this site, to meet with the counselor and the student to make that whole process work better. So it’s not the referral getting...it’s not a matter of sending the student to the college...Tim goes there. So, the difference is that the student is already there, Tim goes in and they establish a relationship. And then it’s not so scary, to come to the college, you know, to follow up. Sending anybody to the college is an intimidating experience.” (Laurie Rydell, OST Program Manager, interview)

“Through experience, the participant really lights up and says, “This is a possibility.” It’s oftentimes after they have sat down with Tim, and one of his many strengths is that he charts out just this very basic handwritten, “Hey, this is the first three months, one step at a time and here’s what it looks like nine months from now, let’s just start with the first step.” And there’s some visual connection there with this familiar face, that the student knows they can go to...there is a “go to” person here on site. (OVRS Counselor, Workgroup interview)

Changing student population

When OST expanded to serve OST students, OST staff received an influx of students with many different types of disability issues. Presently, OST staff serves students with learning disabilities, Aspergers, autism, visual impairment, and blindness. Creative problem solving both internally, and through the workgroup has helped OST faculty meet the needs of their students:

“Because we get students coming from all sorts of different backgrounds, areas, and agencies, everyone seems to come with a little bit different emphasis and with some strings that we might not be aware of. This [workgroup] has been a wonderful forum for making things more understandable so that we can try to see how the college, rather than setting up its own systems that appear to be walls or barriers, can accommodate the needs of the people wanting to get services.” (Bob Hutsell, OST Faculty Coordinator, Workgroup interview)

In response to the needs of their new students, OST faculty had to work with them to make sure that training was individually tailored to student abilities, career goals, and labor market availability. The push to get their students employed as a result of their training has also

encouraged OST faculty to help students think about what is realistic in terms of their training. Finding a challenging, realistic, and solid fit between student and training plan is at the heart of the partnership, and is fundamental to setting students up for success both during their training and afterwards.

Despite the faculty's best efforts, OST students still struggle to overcome barriers. Oftentimes, the academic requirements of the program are difficult for students, particularly since many OST students begin at developmental educational levels:

“Every VR client (OST student) I see starts out in developmental education classes, and those credits include Reading 20, Reading 30, Writing 10, 20, 30. So there could be an entire year, or year and a half of developmental education classes preparing for them to enter [transferable level classes]. And so I meet a student and they say, “Oh yeah, pharmacy tech, you know that’s what I’m interested in.” Then they take a placement test and then, you know, they expect one year. That’s the first thing I mention to people: we just call it a one-year certificate, but it’s usually not. It can take a lot longer.” (Tim Hoone, Employment Specialist, Core Team 1 interview)

Although the OST team and OVRS counselors work hard to provide a system of support services, the right attitude on the part of the student is also critical for success. Many students served by this program have multiple barriers to overcome, and a good work ethic and strong sense of internal motivation can be the deciding factor that helps facilitate program completion:

Tim Hoone: A person has to have their job goal, and there has to be a match in the labor market for that goal for us to train in that field. So I agree with Bob saying that the job goal is a huge part of the match.

Bob Hutsell: We foresee a particular set of attributes that a person needs. Some people are motivated to do something, but what it is may not be particularly clear.

Jane Hagle: That’s my one...their attitude or motivation. If they’re on fire about something, great. If the goal is appropriate, we’ll make it work. If they’re not on fire and they don’t know, the chasm is deep and wide and we don’t have time to go through it.

Alex Kozlowski: Yeah...motivation gets the glue [for the match] warmed up. (Core Team 2 interview)

Workgroup collaboration

The innovative solutions benefiting OST students, OVRS, and the college also required face-to-face collaboration between many different stakeholders. The Rogue OST workgroup has helped fill this role by providing a structured monthly meeting that includes key personnel from OST, local counselors from OVRS and Commission for the Blind, as well as high school transition personnel. The OST/VR workgroup was initially facilitated by technical assistance providers from the University of Oregon, but is now led by Rogue’s Employment Specialist, Tim Hoone. The workgroup has been instrumental in providing the opportunity for people from different agencies to sit down together and communicate about important issues pertaining to the partnership, including: streamlining the referral process; outreaching to high schools and YTP sites; marketing the program to employers and other agencies; and providing a venue for

stakeholders to catch up with each other and network. This communication is key to the partnership's success. Effective communication and problem solving leads to more successful referrals, better YTP and high school collaboration, and better fits between students and training plans:

“One thing that the workgroup does is allows a forum for the high school folks in the youth transition program, the college [OST] staff, and the VR Counselors to problem solve together. Oftentimes, there’s a different VR Counselor than the high schools might normally work with, and this helps people think differently and solve their own problems. The high schools have issues of their own, and so talking with kind of an independent mediator, we can solve some of those issues. The other part of it is that the workgroup helps people talk about problematic students. Sometimes, you’re not sure what to do with this student and we spend part of each meeting problem solving the harder-to-serve students. (Tim Hoone, Employment Specialist, Core Team 2 interview)

Flexibility at the college level

As noted before, administrative reorganization at the college level helped make room for the service innovations the partnership required. This increased flexibility continued as the new OST students coming to OST challenged both the thinking and practices of the community college. At times, this challenging demanded some systems-level changes on the part of the college, including flexibility regarding academic and financial aid requirements, subsidized disability testing, and advent of the On the Job Evaluation (OJE) Program. For instance, to address the lack of disability documentation many students exhibited, OST faculty worked with the college to develop an alternative. In the end, the college agreed to provide \$300 for testing, leaving only \$100 to be picked up by the student or OVRs. By helping these students obtain the assessments for the documentation of a disability and needed accommodations, they are able to eventually enroll at the college with the necessary disability supports, thus bettering their occupational futures as well as providing revenue for the college.

These changes were necessary to help individuals with disabilities, who don't fit inside the conventional college box, access the services and supports they needed to get appropriate classroom instruction, training placements, and jobs:

“One of the things that I’ve seen in this program is that there can be a barrier, and then also some...almost...healing for people with disabilities. It might be a math requirement for a particular degree program, and Tim tries this with a counselor’s support to talk faculty into the fact that the student was able to learn some skills on the job. It’s that kind of systems change, because they were able to think outside of the box, or just think differently about, “What does college credit mean to students and how can they still achieve what they need to in terms of getting that degree?” (Brenda Nulty, University of Oregon technical support, Workgroup interview)

“And the [training] types have really changed in regards to the market trends. For years it was academic, the bachelor’s degree...you got the work if you had the education, and then it went a workforce thing. And now, you kind of need a little bit of both in a lot of instances to really be

able to increase your wage and your opportunity.” (Kelly Franklin, OVRS Branch Manager, interview)

Professional Development

Another key element in the development of the partnership was the external training and technical assistance from the University of Oregon team. This technical assistance role was initially provided by Roz Slovic and more recently has been filled by Brenda Nulty. University faculty were instrumental in the early stages of partnership development, and have been helpful by providing problem-solving assistance and troubleshooting to Rogue CC staff throughout the years. The UO technical assistance team hosts quarterly meetings to facilitate communication and sharing across the network of community college sites, and provides monthly on site visits.

“The support that we get from the U of O is the other thing that is absolutely phenomenal to me. Having the University there to troubleshoot, to provide support, provide feedback as an unbiased, third party who doesn’t have an axe to grind, who isn’t there to pull away your funding, so you can be straight up. They just really want to know what’s working and what’s not. To me, that is huge. I can’t even say strongly enough how important of a piece that is.” (Laurie Rydell, OST Program Manager, interview)

§ 3 – Program Impact and “Systems Change”

Student impact

Both in mission statement and practice, the OST/OVRS partnership at Rogue CC provides quality services for a population that has typically had difficulty in finding and maintaining living wage jobs. Since 2002, 18 students have completed the OST Program. However, program completion is not the goal of the program: employment is. In this capacity, OST has successfully helped 39 of its students receive college training and get employed, 70% (27) of whom were still employed at 90 days after their first day on the job.

During their time in the program, students learn more than just academic and occupationally-specific skills; they also build confidence in themselves, develop soft skills, and learn about themselves and their career goals via real-world experience:

“For me, I also boosted my confidence because...you take these classes and you come out thinking, “Yeah okay, I passed this class with an A or a B or whatever and when I get out in the real world, am I still going to know what I’m doing and do it efficiently?” And this has proven to me that you can do it! It doesn’t scare me anymore, I’m excited about it, and I’m looking forward to it.” (OST student, Student Focus Group interview)

Community impact

Getting individuals with disabilities good jobs is the purpose of the partnership. While there are many benefits for the students themselves, successful placements also help show

employers that these individuals can do the work competently, thus relieving some prejudice in the community:

“I think one of my biggest goals is to continue to change the awareness level of people in our community so that people with disabilities are provided more opportunities to continue to strive for employment and choice. That’s what the program is about.” (Kelly Franklin, OVRs Branch Manager, interview)

Even OST staff are sometimes surprised by the talent of their students:

“[We’re] learning that, sometimes difficulties have nothing whatsoever to do with disability. We’re always learning new things about what students are capable of.” (Alex Kozlowski, OST Faculty Coordinator, Core Team 2 interview)

Keys to Success

The RCC/OVRs partnership has been successful for a number of reasons. In this section we summarize three key factors that have contributed to the successful development, implementation and expansion of the program over the last five years.

Dedicated/dynamic staff. The team of people responsible for the Rogue partnership is creative, dynamic, and committed to providing the best services possible for each individual served in the program. OST faculty have a unique ability to assess the needs of the students, and build training programs that meet those needs while being aware of the changing demands of the local labor market. OST personnel provide critical support and help students build their skills in ways that make them competitive in today’s labor market:

Student: “I mean, not only do you have a financial burden, but it’s also tough trying to find people to support you. Jane and Tim and some of these others...it’s like that was the only place to get positive feedback.”

Interviewer: “Positive people?”

Student: “Yeah, and somebody to lift you up.” (Case Study interview)

In addition, the administrative support and vision from program administrator Laurie Rydell has set the tone for creative problem solving and innovative service delivery.

While Rogue CC’s faculty and administrators have been key contributors, OVRs personnel are just as important to the success of partnership. The OVRs Branch Manager has played a critical role in negotiating a mutually symbiotic relationship between students, OVRs, and the college. Further, counselors have focused on the necessary up-front work (e.g. career counseling, interest testing), been aware of the program, and referred students in order for the partnership to accomplish its objectives of helping OVRs provide quality job training and development services to its students.

Communication. The partnership has also thrived through ongoing communication on multiple levels. Having competent and quality people on staff is critical for the success of the

OST program. Although these people must work together, they also need to have some freedom to do their jobs:

“You know, part of making this all work is having the right people in the right positions. I think it’s a real collaboration...I think you have to have a pretty collaborative model of working together and really emphasize teamwork and give people a lot of freedom to do what they want to do, but build in lots of accountability too...I had good people to work with when I came in to this department, and I’ve kept the best.” (Laurie Rydell, OST Program Manger, interview)

The workgroup also provides a structured venue for problem solving and ongoing assessment of program needs. By bringing together the districts’ Youth Transition Program (YTP) Specialists and other high school staff, the workgroup helps to establish a network between the high schools and the college, thus making non-traditional post-secondary options (such as OST) for high school students more available and salient.

OST and OVRS work at their relationship too. Sometimes this is difficult, however OST and OVRS personnel work hard at maintaining communication to ensure that students make their way through the program as effectively as possible.

“Before...there was no communication. So [employment] could have been a focus but we didn’t know because we never came together. Now we have connections...there’s that connection when things start going kind of off the track you would call Bob or you would call Jane and say, “What’s going on here?” And so it’s that relationship and the communication that we provides so much more information.” (Kelly Franklin, OVRS Branch Manager, interview)

Systems change – The partnership between OVRS and OST is truly innovative, and innovation takes equal measures of risk and tenacity. To meet the needs of their students, OST and OVRS personnel had to think differently about systems-level tools that could help students meet their goals. Over the years, the college has changed in ways to accommodate the needs of OST students. Over the years, the Employment Specialist has advocated with the Financial Aid office, assisting with an appeals process to have student financial aid reinstated or maintained. For one student who completed the program as a home health aid, Tim successfully petitioned the curriculum committee to waive a Math requirement. These examples exhibit OST staff dedication to their students, and doing what it takes to get them the support they need to complete their training and get employed.

Another specific example of “systems change” developed by this team is their innovative strategy for addressing the need for disability testing at the college. Disability identification is something that many students do not complete prior to coming to OVRS and OST. The testing itself is often expensive (particularly if it’s done privately), however OST faculty, OVRS counselors, and the college Disability Support Services Coordinator worked together to contract with local psychologists to perform disability testing for RCC students for only \$400; \$300 of this fee is covered by the college Foundation Office, with the remaining \$100 paid by the student or by OVRS. Although the college bears most of the financial burden of the testing, these students often go on to enroll at RCC, bringing in tuition dollars to the college:

“[The initiative] has been so successful that I wrote a paper just recently to the two Deans that helped fund it. And within a matter of one year, we’ve reported in this particular campus (Riverside) just right here, 30 students have taken the exams and qualified for accommodations. For 30 students at \$300, that’s an investment. Those thirty students will enroll in credit hours... we start talking about retention and you know, good things happen for the college.” (Guerin Fisher, Oregon Commission for the Blind Counselor, Workgroup interview)

A final innovation worth noting is the creation of the On-the-Job-Evaluation (OJE). The OJE is an assessment tool used by OST faculty and OVRS counselors to determine if a training site will be a good fit with a student, and to help assess the specific training needs of a student. This option provides students a short (two to four week) training opportunity at a site so that they can get a better sense of what they’re interested in before they enroll in the coursework. The OJE helps students get a better understanding of how their goals match up with the world of employment, make more informed decisions, and ultimately saves time and money on all sides. With an OJE, students are more informed and confident about their career decisions. Sometimes, an OJE can even lead straight to a job:

“We’ve had more than one person who’s done an OJE and has done so well that the employer says, ‘I want to keep them; I want to hire them.’” (Laurie Rydell, OST Program Manager, interview)

Conclusion

The OST partnership provides OST students unique, tailored opportunities to achieve their career goals. For many of these students, college may have seemed impossible. But by working with each student individually, OST faculty develop a training plan that fits student to skills to employer, thus making both college and a new career a realistic option. Although statistics about the program are important, the personal impact of the program on each student is invaluable:

Interviewer: You’ve talked about things you like and things that were barriers. Would you recommend this program to other students?

All students together: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: Well, what would you say if somebody else came up and said “I’m thinking about OST...tell me, why should I consider it?”

Student 1: I think it’s good because it gets you exposure to your field and it gives you a taste of the real world before you get there which is very helpful.

Student 2: That way you can determine, “Do I really want this?” You start putting in all this time you know, going to school and then you get out there in the real world and go, “Oh my god, I hate this,” and “Gee, what I am I going to do now because I spent so many years in school”...you know, it helps you really, truly find your field.

Student 1: I think it also helps you get into the field or it has that opportunity to get you into the field a lot sooner because the emphasis is not going through the whole book learning thing. The emphasis is you know, hands on training...yeah, getting your foot in the door. (Student Focus Group interview)

Key Events for development of partnership at RCC

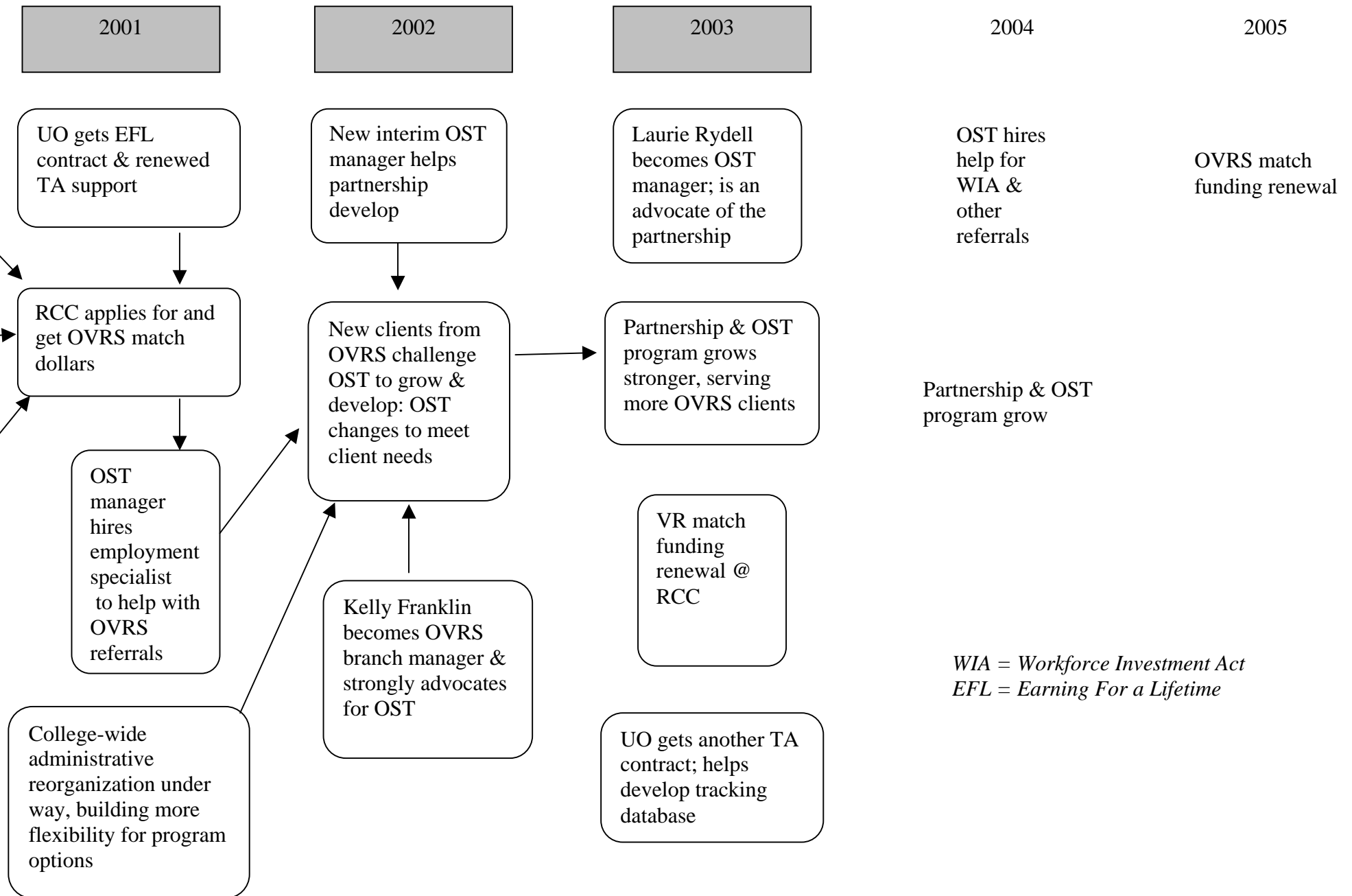


Table 2: Key Personnel Across Phases of Development at Rogue CC

	Prior to partnership	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
OST personnel	<i>Jane Hagle</i> (MD) and <i>Alex Kozlowski</i> (GP) work as faculty instructors. Ted Risser was director for student employment (includes OST) and Tom Clausen was OST program director	Tim Hoone hired as transition specialist (former YTP specialist). <i>Jeanine Hawk</i> is director	<i>Shirlee Willis-Haslip</i> replaces <i>Jeanine</i> , serves as interim as director for student employment/OST manager	<i>Laurie Rydell</i> replaces <i>Shirlee</i> as director for SE/OST manger (Feb.)	<i>Bob Hutsell</i> hired to help with WIA clients		Tim Hoone leaves OST
VR people	Frank Lucas VR branch manager. <i>Kelly Franklin</i> was a VR counselor in this branch.	Franklin Corbin becomes OVRs branch manager	<i>Kelly Franklin</i> becomes new VR branch manager		<i>Dan Hutson</i> (counselor specialist) promoted to RCC liason for the partnership		
YTP people	Tim Hoone and Becky West are involved YTP specialists						
Other people: workgroup, etc.	<i>Ellen Levine</i> helps organize the partnership effort	Roz Slovic (UO) main TA person for RCC	Brenda Nulty (UO) becomes main TA person for RCC (March)	Roz Slovic does TA for 3 months when Brenda is on leave	Brenda Nulty returns in January		Brenda Nulty leaves; <i>Roz Slovic</i> returns as RCC TA contact at UO; <i>Al Jones</i> contracted job developer for OST

***Italicized names refer to OST staff whom presently work for the program in the position listed above, or other people still involved with the partnership.*