

MEDIA RELEASE

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College Board embarks on period of transition

Dr. Birgitte Ryslinge, after ten years as College President, announces plans to retire in September

At the January 24 meeting of the Oregon Coast Community College Board of Education, board members were caught up on how the recent ice storm and power outages had impacted the College, received a recommendation for next year's tuition rate, and heard informative reports about the College's department of Library and Media Services, and heard other campus business. However, board members could be forgiven for forgetting all of that, given that they also heard an announcement from longtime President, Dr. Birgitte Ryslinge, announcing her intention to retire on Sept. 30, 2024.

"June 16 this year will complete my 10th year as President of Oregon Coast Community College," Ryslinge said. "Without a doubt, this decade has been the best professional experience of my life. I am profoundly thankful for the opportunity to lead this remarkable college in partnership with a student-centered and supportive Board. Over these 10 years, 964 students have earned degrees or certificates at OCCC, changing their lives and their family's lives for the better ... 2024 will be my last year with OCCC. It is my goal to retire from full-time employment by September 30, 2024, so that the next President can usher in the 2024-25 Academic Year."



Board chair Rich Emery said a retirement announcement has been something Board members have known would be coming for some time.

"On behalf of the Board of Education, I can say we look on Dr. Ryslinge's announcement not with trepidation, but with appreciation – appreciation of a job well done, and of institution having been well-prepared for the changes to come," Emery said. "Dr. Ryslinge was hired a decade ago, charged with the task of leading the College to its own independent accreditation. She and her team accomplished that feat in 2020. No one would have second-guessed a decision to retire at that point, at the start of the pandemic. However, true to her nature, Birgitte stayed at the helm and helped the college leverage its nimble nature, its creative

team of faculty and staff, and its remarkable student body, to thrive throughout the pandemic, which proved to be devastating to many lesser prepared colleges across the country. The College and the Lincoln County community owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Ryslinge for her stewardship of the amazing public resource we call Oregon Coast Community College.”

Steady, as she goes

OCCC was founded in 1987. Over its 37-year history, the College has enjoyed a remarkable degree of stability in leadership. While Oregon community college presidents tend to average a little over five years in office, two OCCC presidents together have served the college for more than 32 years.

Dr. Patrick O'Connor served as President for 22 years, retiring not long after achieving a series of milestones for the institution – including the successful construction of the College's permanent facilities in Waldport, Newport, and Lincoln City, as well as the creation of both its Aquarium Science and Nursing Programs. In the summer of 2014, Dr. Birgitte Ryslinge took the reins, and – as noted above – received a mandate from the OCCC Board of Education: lead the college to independent accreditation.

Oregon Coast was the last of Oregon's small colleges to be accredited through larger institutions, following on the heels of schools like Columbia Gorge and Tillamook Bay.

True to her commitment, Dr. Ryslinge successfully led the college to independence, which was formally recognized by the Northwest Commission on Colleges & Universities in February 2020.

The celebration was short lived, as the frenetic pace of work continued as the college radically changed its instruction and operational modalities to ensure student needs were met throughout the pandemic. The rapid growth and changes the college had undergone in pursuing independent accreditation served it well as the pandemic unfolded. For example, to manage multiple meetings across its 1,200 square mile county, in 2017, Dr. Ryslinge ensured that OCCC adopt a preferred video conference tool (Zoom) and along with a consistent on-line learning management platform (Canvas). Thus, instructors, students, and staff were comfortable and familiar with the technology that would ultimately dominate distance education and meetings, providing a head start of sorts.

Ryslinge built and fostered a culture of action at OCCC. “Perfect is the enemy of good” was an expression frequently heard in meetings with the President, who urged forward movement as opposed to more meetings. This principle, which she dubbed “Strategic Doing” is something many of her team point to when explaining how the College managed to achieve independent accreditation in five (rather than the expected seven years) and also endure the pandemic with far less loss of enrollment than most other colleges suffered.

While thriving under pandemic circumstances and achieving independence would be enough to mark a successful term of service, Dr. Ryslinge's leadership led to many other accomplishments. The College's relationship with the Lincoln County School District became more robust and productive than at any time in the past, with new options for students to earn college credits while still enrolled in high school and a variety of joint projects designed to expand career and technical education (CTE) options for local students of all ages.

“Dr. Ryslingle has been instrumental in developing a post-secondary partnership with Lincoln County School District,” said Lincoln County School District Superintendent Dr. Majalise Tolan. “That partnership has provided trades and degree seeking education to support our students, county, and workforce.” CTE programs launched under Ryslingle’s tutelage include welding, early childhood education, new programs within nursing and allied health, and the innovative “Teach at the Beach” grow-our-own teacher program, among others.

Next steps

At the Jan. 24 meeting, the Board created a subcommittee of three members who will meet independently over the next two months to review current employment conditions related to the presidency, gather process options, and report on both to the Board in March.

Next up for the college’s Board of Education is a joint meeting in February with the Lincoln County School District’s Board of Education. Meanwhile the board is preparing to support its budget committee, which will meet in the spring to review the college’s proposed 2024-2025 budget.

To learn more, peruse the links under the “Administration” menu on the college’s website, oregoncoast.edu.

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