

A drive to help students register to vote (and, maybe, for classes)

By [Sheila G. Miller](#) / *The Bulletin* Published: October 07. 2009 4:00AM PST

Enrollment at COCC has surged 45 percent over the past two years, but the campus hasn't grown. Classes are so full that some students sit on the floor — if they can get into classes at all. A \$41.5M bond would help, and students are being urged to assist the campaign.

This fall, more than 5,500 students signed up for at least one credit course at Central Oregon Community College.



Associated Students of COCC member Anthony Forrer, right, helps students Heather Madden, from left, Terry Link and Brad Bailey fill out voter registration forms during a student government registration drive Friday at the student center.

Pete Erickson / The Bulletin

And COCC's student government hopes that if those students come out to vote in November for a \$41.58 million bond to build new facilities, they might just be the push needed to pass the bond measure.

On Friday, the office for the Associated Students of COCC in the new student center was packed with signs, stickers and T-shirts with messages about the bond measure. Throughout the building, signs urged students to register to vote, and at the entrance to the center, a table was set up to register new voters.

It's a change in the way the college's supporters are trying to pass the bond measure after last fall's narrow defeat, and students believe their voices can help. About 53 percent of voters rejected last November's bond, which required a simple majority. To pass this November, a simple majority of voters must support the bond. There is no organized opposition to the measure.

Terry Link, 43 and of Bend, a student government member, worked on the bond campaign last year. He said he was the only student making phone calls to garner support for the bond. He's happy students are more involved this time.

"If just the student body voted," the bond in 2008 might have passed, Link said. "I could see this really working."

On Nov. 3, voters in Central Oregon will be asked to approve a bond to pay for construction of a health and science building in Bend, a technology education center in Redmond and education campus facilities in Madras and Prineville. It also would fund new labs, clinics and other facilities for health career programs and pay for renovations of campus facilities.

Part of the reason students are getting involved in the bond campaign is the 45 percent enrollment increase over the past two years that has the college scrambling to find new classrooms, classes and teachers.

"We're all students, so it's very important to all of us that we have facilities and classroom space and the ability to take the classes we need," said Brenda Pierce, 38 and of Bend, a student government member who is overseeing the marketing campaign.

Several of the ASCOCC students have had trouble getting into classes they want to take. Heather Madden, 21 and of Bend, has a physics class so full that students sit on the floor.

Link needs a year of chemistry in order to seek his bachelor's degree. He successfully begged a professor to let him into an already-crowded class; otherwise, he'd have to wait another year to enroll in the course.

When the college's November 2008 bond failed to pass, COCC board members blamed the failure on an unclear message and too many issues on the ballot. This year, the board and the college's supporters are using more of a grass-roots approach to pass the bond. And Pierce and her classmates believe getting the students involved will make a big difference.

"I think students knew about the bond (in 2008), but the student government was not as involved," she said. "We were not approached. This time around, we've gotten behind this and made it our main focus until Nov. 3."

To that end, the six ASCOCC members are working with 25 honorary student government members on a variety of committees. They're focusing first on registering as many students as possible to vote before Oct. 13. So far, the student government has registered more than 260 students.

Then, they'll turn their attention to getting those registered to support the bond. Already, they're hanging fliers around the community, approaching businesses to put placards in their windows, and planning to roll out lawn signs in the coming days.

"Student involvement hasn't been at this level since the Vietnam War," said India Simmons, who has been hired by the COCC Yes political action committee to coordinate public relations for the bond campaign.

On Oct. 22, students will hold a large rally at the campus complete with pizza and cake.

The students also are using more modern methods to appeal to the community. They've set up a Web site, a Facebook page and a Twitter account to get the word out about the campaign. And Rob Walker,

29 and of Bend, the student overseeing the campaign's use of social media, is working on a video he plans to post on YouTube and Facebook. "We want to keep people up to date," he said.

Students also plan to appear in person at community events, make announcements in classrooms on campus, as well as on the Redmond campus and at Oregon State University-Cascades Campus to garner support, and reach into the high schools to register students to vote and teach them about the bond measure.

The bond would cost property owners about 12 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. For a home assessed at \$200,000, the bond would cost a homeowner about \$24 per year.

If the bond passes, it will allow the college to use \$11.47 million in matching state funds, which are earmarked for the health and science building as well as the technology education center.

For the students, passing the campaign is more than just adding classrooms and fancy new buildings.

"I can't think of a better way to fix what's going on right now," Walker said. "This can help fix our economy."

Madden believes if nothing else, more people understand the current struggles on campus better than they did 12 months ago.

"I think people are seeing just how many people are coming back to school," she said.

If the bond measure passes in November, most of the buildings won't be finished in time for the students currently running the campaign to take classes in them. But that isn't stopping them from trying to help.

"I probably won't see any personal benefits," Link said. "But we've gotten a lot from this college. This is such a phenomenal school, and we've seen so much growth. Even if the economy comes back tomorrow, we'll still need these (new facilities)."

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