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**Community College Students With
Disabilities: Factors Contributing to
Drop-Out Versus Persistence**

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Let's learn about you!

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Agenda



- Introduction
 - Problem Statement
 - Dropout Literature
 - Oregon's Inclusive Career Advancement Program
- Method
- Results
- Conclusions

The Problem

- Dropout from programs and research projects is not unique or unexpected.
- Excessive dropout can prevent project teams from learning if their program/intervention is effective or not.
- Context:
 - Midway through Oregon's *Inclusive Career Advancement Program (ICAP)* implementation, a project being implemented in community colleges, the project's evaluation team identified a high dropout rate among students.

Dropout Factors

There is extensive literature on college dropout and retention, including a variety of theoretical frameworks modeling factors that influence student attrition.

- Institutional factors (e.g., academic and non-academic supports; Karp, 2011)
- Environmental factors (e.g., finances, family, employment; Bean & Metzner, 1985)
- Individual factors (e.g., cognitive versus non-cognitive factors; Melguizo, 2011)

A Complex Story

- When students decide to exit college early: (Padilla et al., 2025)
 - The cause is a variety of reasons.
 - Decision to dropout is made over time.
- For non-traditional students, external factors can have the biggest impact. (Bean & Metzner, 1985)
 - Finances
 - Family
 - Employment
- For students with disabilities:
 - Lower academic performance is related to intent to dropout. (Herbert et al., 2014; Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2010)
 - When comparing across disability types, the highest dropout intention for people with psychiatric disabilities. (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2012; Rußmann, Netz & Lörz, 2024)

What do you think has the greatest impact on drop-out versus persistence for community college students with disabilities?

Turn to a Neighbor!

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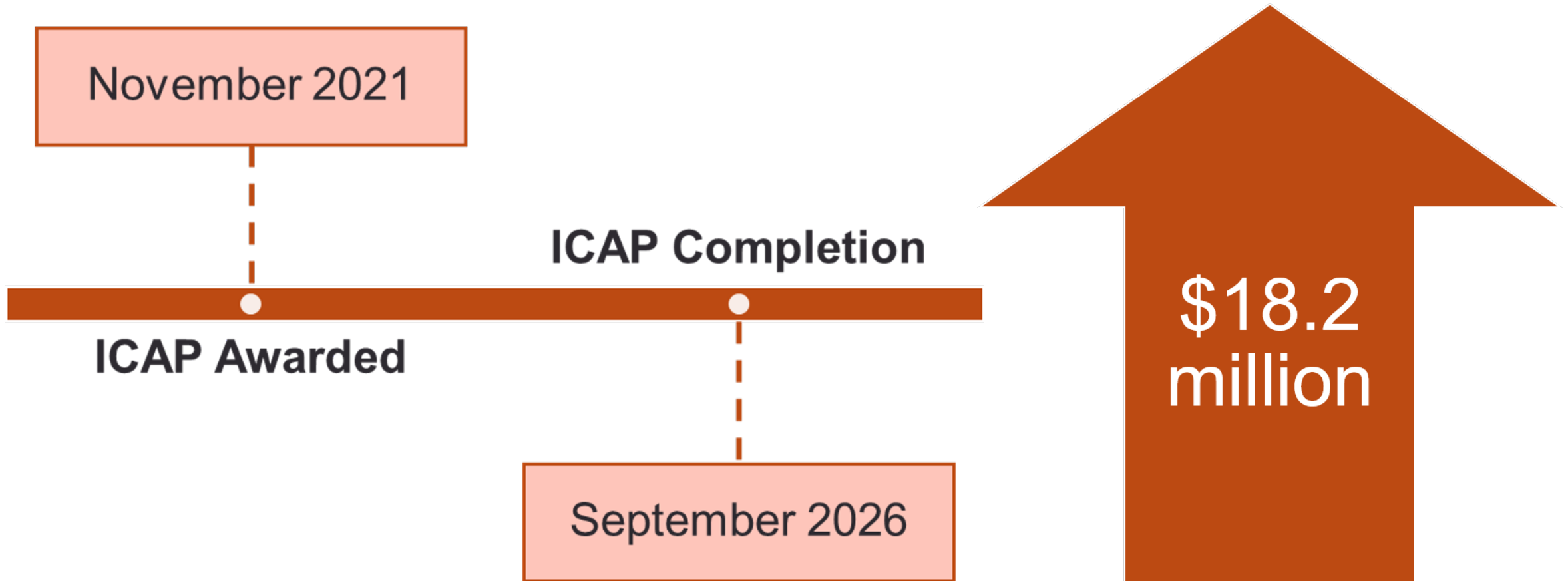
Oregon Inclusive Career Advancement Program (ICAP)

A collaboration between Oregon Department of Human Services
Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Cornell University, Oregon
Commission for the Blind, and Portland Community College

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Project Support and Duration



Intent of the Program

ICAP has provided people with disabilities the opportunity to gain skills and postsecondary credentials toward achieving competitive integrated employment that is **not just a job—but a career.**

This will lead to **economic mobility.**

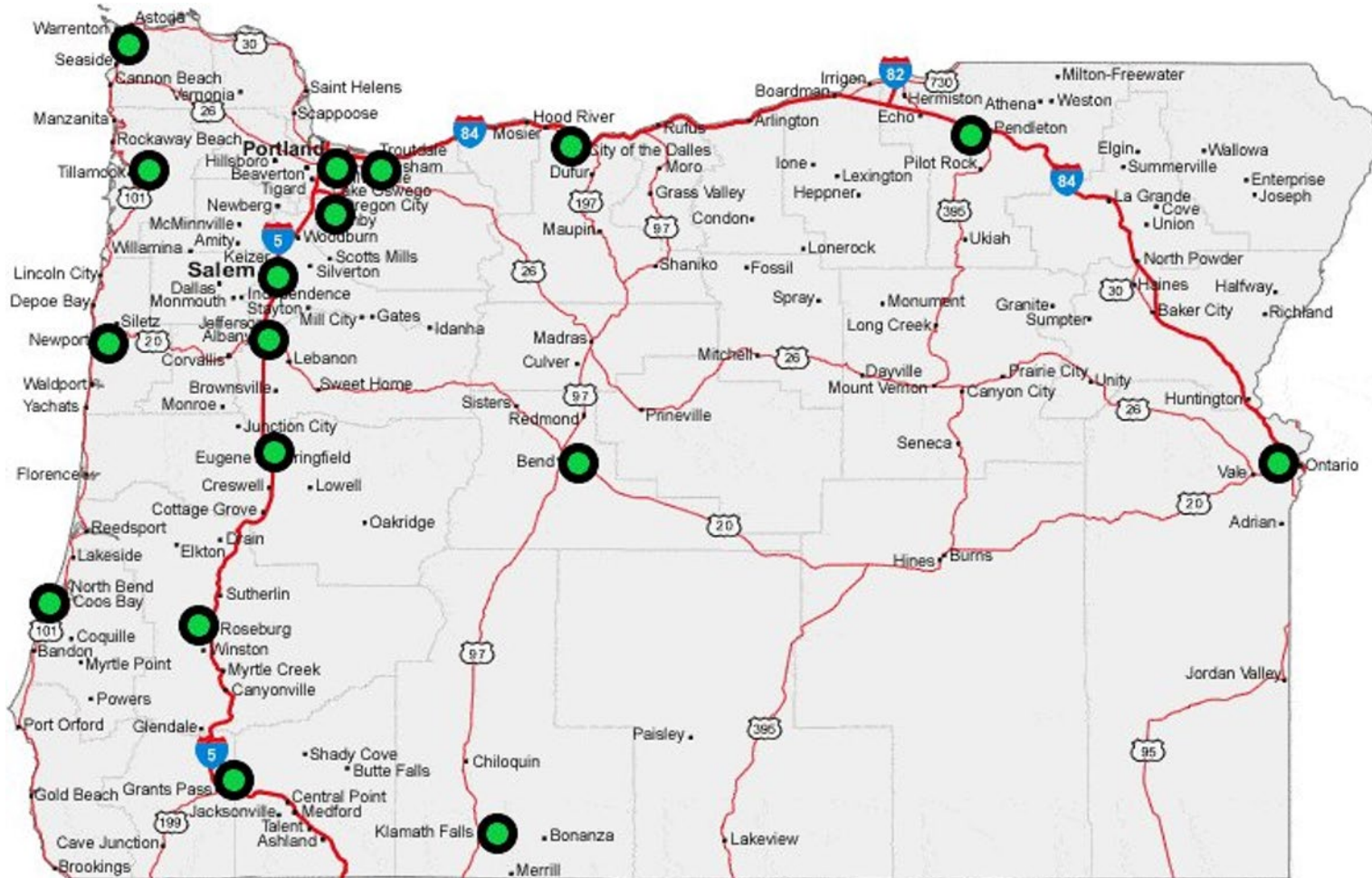


ICAP Services

- ICAP participants are VR clients pursuing postsecondary education.
- Support comes in various forms:
 - Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC)
 - ICAP Career Coach at each community college
 - Disability resources
 - Potential funding for specific disability related and educational expenses
 - Job search assistance upon completion of program



ICAP Community College Sites



- Blue Mountain
- Chemeketa
- Clackamas
- Central Oregon
- Columbia Gorge
- Klamath
- Lane
- Linn-Benton
- Mt. Hood
- **Portland**
- Rogue
- Southwestern Oregon
- Treasure Valley
- Umpqua

Role Responsibilities

Community College Career Coaches

- Recruitment/outreach, engagement, and orientation
- Support students in college process
- Coordinate with VRCs and community-based organizations to support needs of students to facilitate retention and program completion

VR Counselors

- VR application and eligibility
- Development of the individualized plan for employment
- Provide VR services

Both

- Coordinate with project partner to identify and/or arrange internships, apprenticeships, and other work experiences
- Documentation and reporting

ICAP Commitment to Continuous Change



- All partners participated in formative evaluation activities (surveys, focus groups, interviews) and administrative data was processed quarterly.
- The team used data throughout the project to drive change; this dashboard is one example.
 - [Statewide ICAP Dashboard](#)
- ICAP benefited from team members who were willing to make changes to improve the project.



Success Stories

Amber

Unsure about a second try at going to college, Amber found success and a career she can be proud of through ICAP support.

[Video — ICAP Shorts: Amber Johnson](#)



Logan

Through ICAP, Logan found his dream job. Using his certificate in diesel mechanics from Blue Mountain Community College he was able to pursue a career in rural Oregon.

[Video — Logan's career path | Vocational Rehabilitation](#)



**For those working in higher
education, do you have a
partnership with VR?**

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Research Question

Did Early Exiters (EEs) and Program Continuers (PCs) in the ICAP program differ on the following?

- Demographics
- Service receipt
- Other factors

Sample

- As of March 31, 2026
- Average age = 32
- 587 enrolled
 - 314 PCs
 - 273 EEs
- Dropout types
 - 144 dropped education program
 - 30 did not find employment
 - 28 failed their education program
 - 71 exited early for other reasons

Characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Female	245	41.7
Male	279	47.5
Race/Ethnicity		
White	408	69.5
BIPOC	141	24.0
Significance of Disability		
No Significant Disability	25	4.3
Significantly Disabled	31	5.3
Most Significantly Disabled	508	86.5
Low-income	405	69.0
Employed at ICAP intake	120	20.4

Data and Analysis

Quantitative

- Data
 - Data from the state's RSA VR case management system
 - Student tracking data maintained by career coaches at each participating community college
 - All-inclusive student tracker maintained by the primary ICAP VR data analyst
- Analysis
 - Logistic regression

Qualitative

- Data
 - Case management notes written by career coaches
 - Career Coaches were not required to add notes
- Thematic Analysis with frequency counts of the available case notes

Group Differences on Personal Characteristics and Referral Source

- Demographics
 - Tested gender, race/ethnicity, significance of disability.
 - **No group differences found** between PCs and EEs on demographics.
- Intersectional Factors
 - Tested history of foster care, homelessness, justice-involved, low-income, basic skills deficient, single parent, displaced homemaker, veteran.
 - Higher odds of dropout among **displaced homemakers** and **veterans**.
- Referral to ICAP
 - Those **referred by VR and other sources** had higher odds of dropout in comparison to those referred by the community college.

Services Tested and Group Differences

- Advising and course planning
- Accessibility
- Financial aid support
- Benefits
- Mental health
- **Academic** ↑
- Social services
- **STEP support** ↓
- Transportation
- Legal services
- Employment skills (resumes, job application support)
- Employment skills (interview prep)
- Job search/referrals
- Soft skills development
- Job retention support
- Other supports/services

All Significant Variables Tested Together

Predictors	OR	<i>p</i>	95% CI Lower Bound	95% CI Upper Bound
Displaced homemaker	2.50	.006	1.30	4.82
Veterans	3.48	.039	1.06	11.39
Referral Source				
VR versus Community College	2.11	.003	1.29	3.46
Other versus Community College	1.50	.186	0.82	2.72
Services				
Academic	1.47	.037	1.02	2.10
STEP	0.55	.004	0.36	0.82
Constant	0.35	< .001	0.22	0.56

Case Notes Analysis

- For the 61 EEs with case notes, academics were mentioned most frequently.
 - Falling behind
 - Failing courses
- EEs either exited shortly after program entry or after multiple semesters due to individual and environment factors.
- Academic challenges often coincided with health and environmental stressors.
 - Mental health
 - Physical health
 - Financial insecurity
 - Substance use
 - History of justice involvement
 - Childcare
 - Transportation
 - Housing insecurity

**Are any of these findings
surprising to you? What stands
out to you the most?**

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Discussion

- Our study analysis aligned with the literature on dropout.
 - Institutional factors (Karp, 2011) — program practices, academic and STEP service receipts.
 - Environmental factors (Bean & Metzner, 1985) — case notes highlighted environmental challenges from health issues to childcare and transportation challenges.
 - Individual factors (Melguizo, 2011) — students faced academic challenges such as failing courses but also potentially poor coping skills that could lead to health issues.
- When students decide to exit college early, the decision is made over time (Padilla et al., 2025) — we saw EEs who either left early or after multiple semesters.
- Lower academic performance is related to dropout intention (Herbert et al., 2014; Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2011) — this was observed in our data by dropout type and case notes.

Implications

Program Specific:

- Inform ICAP processes for overall program improvement purposes.
- EEs were examined early and program adjustments were made to refer candidates who were considered a good fit for ICAP.
- As the program is ending, the number of EEs increased by 40% from one quarter to the next.
 - Need to attend to dropout through the whole project, not just at certain points.

External:

- A more robust understanding of an individual student's life, both in and outside of the classroom is needed, and the factors that may inhibit their academic performance.

Thank you!

Any questions?

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