

July 22, 2026

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

# Disclaimer

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# Let's learn about you!

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# Agenda

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



# The Problem

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- 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

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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

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- 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?**

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**Turn to a Neighbor!**

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# **Oregon Inclusive Career Advancement Program (ICAP)**

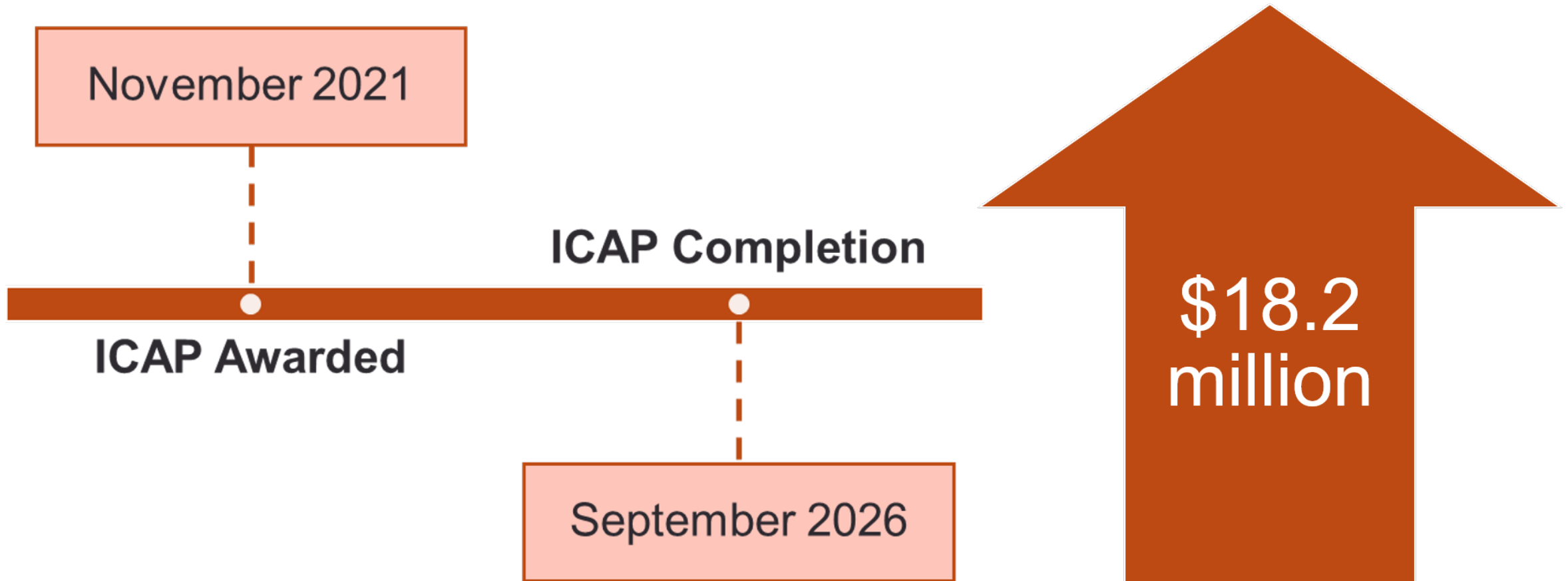
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**A collaboration between Oregon Department of Human Services  
Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Cornell University, Oregon  
Commission for the Blind, and Portland Community College**

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# Project Support and Duration

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# Intent of the Program

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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.**



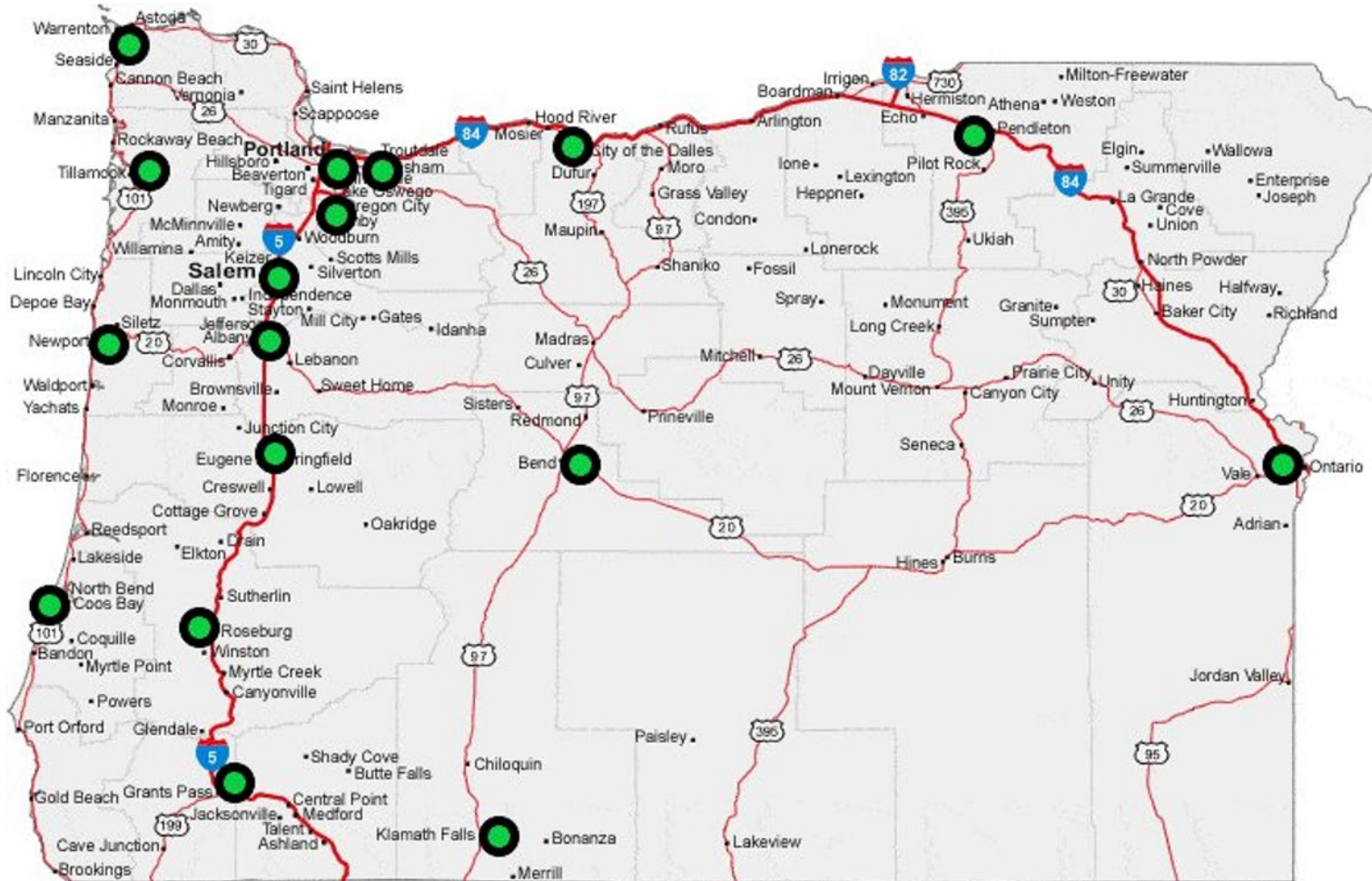
# ICAP Services

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- 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

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## 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

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- 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

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## 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

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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

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## 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

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- 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

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- 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<br>Lower Bound | 95% CI<br>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

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- 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

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- 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

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## 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!

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## Any questions?

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