

Budget Speaking Points

Tell YOUR Story:

Hi, my name is Ashley Kingston and I graduated from Mt. Hood Community College in Spring of 2020 with my Fitness Professional Certification. I was a stay-at-home mom for two years before I decided to go back to college or get a job. I chose school because I was lacking in an education-based skill set. I went to college after high school in 2007, but never finished my degree which infringed on my ability to apply for certain jobs or I was offered lower wages upon being hired.

• Why did you choose to attend a community college? (i.e., local, affordable, had the right programs, etc.)

Most importantly, I chose to attend Mt. Hood Community College because it was affordable. I qualified for some grants and scholarships, but it was essential that I did not end up with student loans. We were in an uncertain transition period in our lives and finances were an issue due to my partner being laid off work and we were residing with my in-laws at the time. Students need a minimum of \$200 million distributed by the Legislature for the Oregon Opportunity Grants to make affordable education accessible to students. The Oregon Opportunity Grant enabled me to attend college and graduate debt free.

Equally important, MHCC had a lot of programs and certifications to choose from. Along with the programs there was a lot of flexibility for days and times of various courses. As a non-traditional student with two children and a spouse, it was important that I had a schedule that fit our family life and also did not interfere with my partner's school schedule. We were both attending MHCC simultaneously at one point.

Third, our house, our child's daycare and the college were all local and convenient for commuting purposes.

• How has your community college supported you in attaining your educational goals?

Here are some of the examples how Mt. Hood Community College supported me in my educational goals: the content of the courses was beyond my expectations. I enjoyed my classes, but I truly felt the value after completing each class. I found my passion in health and fitness and I was ready to share my education in the workforce. I owe a lot of that security to my instructors. Their dedication to the content and their students made it possible for me to graduate with a 4.0 GPA. I can assure you that had I not attended a community college, this one specifically, I would not have received the attention I requested on a regular basis.

My program, the Fitness Professional Certification, has a mandatory internship. This internship and my program's partnership with the National Academy of Sports Medicine are what lead me

to landing my current job in the middle of the pandemic. I applied to be a personal trainer intern and was able to present to the hiring manager: my resume, a professional portfolio, completed course content and a Red Cross AED/CPR Certification, all accrued throughout my program. He took me on as an intern in the beginning of the first shutdown. I was able to showcase my education throughout my internship and was offered employment after I graduated and before I became a certified personal trainer. I am positive that if I had not had the backing of my program, I would not be employed today.

• **Why are community colleges important to students like you?**

This leads me to why community colleges are important to students like me. I am a non-traditional student who decided to go back to school at the age of 30. I worked hard to maintain a 4.0 GPA and I took my career as a student seriously. I wanted a better career for myself, I needed financial security and to remain debt free. I now work part-time and contribute to my family's income. I am eternally grateful for the opportunity to graduate this one-year program and my financial aid was an absolute blessing. I speak very highly of MHCC and its instructors and I believe they deserve every penny for their commitment to the community and their students.