Oregon Institute of Technology

The Oregon Institute of Technology (OIT) is one of the seven institutions comprising the Oregon University System. Located in Klamath Falls, it is the only public institute of technology in the Pacific Northwest.

The 1947 legislative act that established the Oregon Vocational School (OVS) stated that "existing conditions are such that this act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace." Those conditions included the return of World War II veterans to a postwar contracting economy, record high union membership, and a labor action that involved five million strikers across the nation. "An emergency," the OVS legislation determined, "is hereby declared to exist."

Oregon legislators, to help diffuse the potential for social unrest, voted to establish the Oregon Vocational School (OVS) to help veterans reintegrate with the peacetime Oregon economy.

OVS was originally located at the Marine Recuperational Barracks at Klamath Falls. The barracks, intended for the treatment of tropical diseases, had become redundant when sulfa drugs and other therapies were developed at the end of World War II. The school offered training in trades ranging from auto mechanics and cooking to piano tuning. The Oregon Vocational Education Department found a site for the new school in Klamath Falls. Winston Purvine, the Oregon supervisor of vocational education, was appointed director; he later became the school's president. OVS was renamed Oregon Technical Institute (OTI) in 1948.

In the first school year, 1947-1948, veterans constituted 98 percent of student enrollment. By 1950, the figure was 75 percent. In that year, in response to the Korean conflict, the school received a contract for training soldiers in welding and warehouse management. These early military connections strongly influenced the institutional culture, distinguishing it from its sibling institutions in the Oregon University System.

In 1960, to help enhance the status of the institution, oversight was transferred to the State Board of Higher Education. In 1964, the institute moved to the present geothermal site overlooking Upper Klamath Lake.

In 1973, OTI was renamed the Oregon Institute of Technology (OIT). Programs had evolved from the technical training programs offered in 1947 to programs that granted associate degrees in 1953, bachelor’s degrees in 1970, and master’s degrees in 1995.

With an enrollment of 3,300 in 2010, OIT offers baccalaureate degrees in a range of engineering technologies, health and environmental sciences, and applied psychology. It houses a nursing program under the direction of Oregon Health Sciences University.

OIT also offers master’s degrees in manufacturing, engineering technology, and civil engineering. It offers programs both online and at branch campuses in the Portland metropolitan area, in La Grande, and in Seattle in conjunction with Boeing Aerospace. Campus facilities include the Martha Anne Dow health sciences complex and the Oregon Renewable Energy Center (OREC).

Outstanding graduates include Steve Pawlowski (1993), who holds fifty-six software patents and was involved in the development of the Pentium and Itanium series of processors, and David Bajorins, cofounder of Orb Optronix, an optical product development company.

Written by Ed Silling

Further Reading:

Purvine, W. D. *Oregon Tech's First 30 Years: 1946-1976.* Klamath Falls: Oregon Institute of Technology, 1977.

Copyright © 2008-2013 Portland State University