Grants Pass Daily Courier

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Small Business Development Center in Medford to close

By Vickie Aldous of the Daily Courier

Southern Oregon University's Small Business Development Center in Medford will close to the public at the end of December, but Rogue Community College will continue to operate its Small Business Development Center at its Grants Pass campus.

The centers provide free advising and low-cost classes on everything from how to start a business to selling a company.

RCC's center expects to see more Jackson County entrepreneurs using its services when SOU's center shuts down, according to Veronica Lambert, coordinator of the RCC Small Business Development Center.

"It has actually started to happen," she said.

SOU is in the midst of budget, staff and program cuts due in part to student enrollment dropping by 29% in recent years. Meanwhile, RCC has seen its enrollment rise by 36% over the past few years.

On Monday, SOU announced its Small Business Development Center is closing after 41 years of service. The university and state government were unable to reach agreement on a plan to maintain U.S. Small Business Administration funding for the center, SOU said.

"SOU has historically augmented the federal funding, but the university's plan to rebuild itself as a smaller, more resilient institution reduces its ability to help pay for all services," SOU said in a statement.

SOU submitted a joint proposal with RCC to combine the Medford and Grants Pass centers, but the state office that coordinates Oregon's 18 centers rejected the plan, SOU said.

"We definitely knew that the budget environment would mean less capability to subsidize the SBDC's operations, but we did in earnest work with the state to find a creative solution to continuing services," SOU President Rick Bailey said in a statement.

"We went back-and-forth with the state in our effort to create a single center for Jackson and Josephine counties — despite our budget issues — but ultimately were unable to move our proposal forward," he added.

SOU said more than 11,000 entrepreneurs and small business operators have tapped the services offered by SOU's center, which is located in the RCC/SOU Higher Education Center in Medford.

The center works closely with SOU's School of Business to teach and advise students and collaborate with faculty. It offers help to anyone who operates or is planning to open a business and also runs a Market Research Institute that can offer in-depth, applied market research to the center's clients, SOU said.

"The Rogue Valley owes a sincere debt of gratitude to all the amazing staff at the SOU SBDC and Market Research Institute for their service to our community and our region," Bailey said. "They have been role models of dedicated, heart-centered service."

Small Business Development Centers are operated by each of Oregon's 17 community colleges. SOU's center in Medford is the only one managed by a university, after Eastern Oregon University closed its center a year ago. Oregon's centers are part of a national network and provide advising, training, online courses and resources for businesses throughout the state, SOU said.

RCC will continue to offer services at its center located on the Redwood Campus in Grants Pass.

The statewide network of Small Business Development Centers is supported by state and federal resources, including the U.S. Small Business Administration and the Oregon Business Development Department, RCC said in a statement.

"While statewide funding conditions are evolving, Rogue Community College remains committed to providing support, helping ensure continued access to critical advising and training for local businesses," RCC said.

RCC's center connects local entrepreneurs to state resources, including the Capital Access Team for funding readiness and loan support, RCC said.

"Maintaining this network capacity ensures local businesses can access expert help and capital opportunities close to home," RCC said.

RCC's center is pursuing new partnerships and grants to expand services, the community college said.

The center offers confidential, free advising on topics that include business plan development, how to get a loan, location analysis, marketing, managing a business, handling employees and selling a business.

"Every single advising session is tailor-made to the individual," Lambert said.

The RCC center also offers the Josephine County Child Care Business Accelerator, where people can learn how to start or expand a child care business.

People who want to become licensed construction contractors can take classes to prepare for licensing.

Other low-cost classes include business planning, finance and accounting, human resource management and marketing strategies.

For more information on RCC Small Business Development Center services, see roguecc.edu/sbdc, call 541-956-7494 or email sbdc@roguecc.edu.

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Reach reporter Vickie Aldous at 541-474-3813 or valdous@thedailycourier.com.