

TAXPAYER PERSPECTIVES: SOUTHWESTERN OREGON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

State and local taxpayers earn 19% rate of return on their investment in Southwestern Oregon Community College.

The verdict is in: Southwestern Oregon Community College adds more money to the state treasury than it takes out. Not only does the college pull its own weight, but it also effectively subsidizes other sectors funded by the taxpayers. Absent Southwestern, taxes would actually have to be raised in order to maintain services in all other sectors at their current levels.

The return on investment is considered from two taxpayer perspectives: broad and narrow. To better appreciate both of these, we develop them more fully below.

Broad Investment Perspective

In the broad perspective we add up all benefits regardless of recipient and compare the total to the investment made in a benefit/cost ratio. If the ratio is less than one, the investment is not worthwhile; if it is greater than one, the investment can be considered sound.

Some examples: a transportation authority justifies a new road by showing that the savings in travel time and vehicle expenses accrued by thousands of drivers exceed the project's cost. Public parks are justified by showing that recreation, scenic and other values accruing to park users exceed the public outlay for park infrastructure, operation, and the net value of extractive resources not used. All benefits are counted, not just those that accrue back to state or local government. This is the hallmark of the broad investment perspective.

Applying this perspective to Southwestern, the benefits accrue to different publics. The students accrue the higher earnings as long as they are in the workforce, whereas the public at large accrue the external social benefits (i.e., reduced crime, welfare and unemployment, improved health, and less absenteeism from work). All of these are tallied up and compared to the investments made by state and local government, or the taxpayers. A broad perspective benefit/cost ratio greater than 1.0 is a minimal indicator of a worthwhile public investment.

Southwestern Oregon Community College's benefit/cost ratio thus counted is 30. In other words, the cumulative added value attached to each dollar invested will have a present value of \$30 by the end of the students' working career.

Narrow Investment Perspective

The narrow investment perspective counts only benefits that can be entered into the books of state and local government. For example, a portion of higher student earnings will be captured by state and local government in the form of added tax receipts. Additionally, because state and local government bears part of the cost of crime, its budget benefits from education-induced crime reductions. The same holds in varying degrees for the other assorted benefits of an educated populace. The bottom line: while state and local government spends money in support of Southwestern Oregon Community College, it receives benefits in the form of increased tax receipts and an assortment of reduced expenditures or avoided social costs.

Worthwhile public projects routinely generate negative narrow perspective returns. Generally, the role of government is to provide services that the public wants, but the business sector finds unprofitable. Considerable funds are spent on public parks, for example, yet except for entry fees and some concessionaire or special events receipts, no monies directly return to the state or local taxpayers. From a narrow investment perspective, taxpayer returns are negative, and the park is justified by the benefits tracked under the broad perspective.

The important finding of this analysis is that the results are not only strong from the broad perspective but, unlike most government endeavors, the taxpayer investments generate strong results from the narrow perspective as well. Economists generally assume a 4.0% discount rate in analyzing government investments, assuming that governments can obtain unsecured loans at a rate of 4.0% or receive a return of 4.0% on any excess funds were they to be invested. **Since Southwestern's narrow rate of return of 19% is greater than 4%, we conclude that the state government actually makes money on the investment.** By funding the college, therefore, other beneficiaries of state funding are actually subsidized through the revenues generated by the college.

