Southwestern Oregon Community College is enrolling students now for the second year of its new forestry degree program. This marks the completion of a successful first year of the articulated degree program with Oregon State University’s Pro School of Forestry.

First graduates transfer to Oregon State

Two students who joined the program in Fall 2014, who were partway into their studies, graduated June 12 with their Associated of Science degrees with a forestry emphasis. Wyatt Dunlap and Kelsey Nelson will be SWOCC’s first students transferring to Oregon State University’s Pro School of Forestry, as juniors in Fall 2015, pursuing bachelor’s degrees.

“I took Intro to Forestry last year and it sold me on the whole program. It opened my eyes to the possibilities of a career path.”

That class sparked her interest. Otherwise, it’s unlikely she would have transferred. In fact, she probably would have taken a year off from college. Several forestry students like Nelson are first generation college students.

“We’re changing people’s lives. Our students now have an opportunity not to work in a cubicle or check-out stand,” visiting forestry instructor Dr. Gail Simonds said. “They have a chance to do something that makes them happy.”

Equally important to the intellectual challenge, Nelson, who’s minoring in

Continued First Graduates...
First graduates ...

recreation management, found a strong support group of students with similar interests. She also worked as a lab assistant with Dr. Simonds, assisting new students in learning tree species.

Partnerships add real-life experience

Forestry students gained valuable work experience and mentoring; and those opportunities will increase. Working side-by-side with U.S. Bureau of Land Management staff, Kelsey Nelson was able to assist with timber cruising and tree measurement. Wyatt Dunlap has a cumulative internship commitment with Campbell Global LLC in North Bend for summer work throughout his college studies.

Two first-year students completed internships at the South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve in Charleston and one student is enrolled in a forestry internship with the Coos Watershed Association.

"The more experiences they have, the more connected they are to the material and they remember it," Dr. Simonds said.

Weyerhaeuser Co. and the Coos County Forestry Department also helped with field lab study. In addition, the College’s Vice President of Instruction and Student Services, Dr. Ross Tomlin, and the forestry instructor collaborate with a community-based Forestry/Natural Resources Advisory Committee.

"Advisory committees for these career-focused programs are critical to their success," Dr. Tomlin said.

“They ensure the curriculum includes learning outcomes that graduates need to obtain employment in the field and to be successful, and includes relevant and necessary hands-on skills.”

Committee members come from a variety of additional public and private organizations, such as Roseburg, Coquille Indian Tribe, Stuntzner Engineering, U.S. Forest Service, Coos Bay-North Bend Water Board, The Nature Conservancy, Oregon Department of Forestry/Fish and Wildlife and Oregon State University Extension Service.

New professor an OSU graduate

SWOCC has hired Tasha Livingstone to fill the tenure track position for the Forestry and Natural Resources program. Livingstone has bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Forestry from OSU, along with two years of forestry teaching experience at OSU and SWOCC. She also taught internationally and has four summers work experience with the BLM. Livingstone is on the job this term, teaching high school students in the Summer Bridge program, a partnership with the Coos Watershed Association, Ford Family Foundation and Pacific Power.

She grew up locally, graduating from North Bend High School, and in her spare time is writing a sci-fi fantasy trilogy.

What’s next?

Program adds new degree, GIS certificate

For the 2015-16 school year, SWOCC is adding an Associate of Science degree in natural resources with a watershed emphasis. The watershed focus brings a strong curriculum, requiring a full year of coursework in biology, physics and calculus for students pursuing the two-year degree.

Graduates will be able to enter the Natural Resources-Watershed option program at OSU as juniors. The curriculum of the Forestry and Natural Resources programs are similar enough that students can wait most of their first year before deciding which program to pursue.

The college also is developing a GIS certificate for 2015-16 to give students in-depth skills in collecting field data to develop GIS databases and maps.