

# THE OWL FEATHER EXCHANGE

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Illustration by Haley Werst

Oregon Tech is launching a new student resource called the Owl Feather Exchange through the Student Involvement and Belonging office. The Exchange acts as a used clothing closet which collects and distributes free secondhand clothing of all kinds to students who may have need.

The program began in the imagination of Oregon Tech senior Haley Werst, who was inspired by a similar program she volunteered with at her former high school in Astoria, Oregon. In an interview with The Edge, Werst shared that she felt Oregon Tech would be a perfect place for just such a program, and she brought her idea to Professional Writing 215, a Writing in the Public Interest course taught by Dr. Kari Lundgren. The idea of a clothing exchange at Oregon Tech was developed further through brainstorming sessions and in-class discussions with fellow students; Werst credits the entire PWR 215 class for their collective part in helping build the idea of the program.

During her time in PWR 215, Werst contacted Josie Hudspeth, the director of Student Involvement and Belonging, to propose the creation of a clothing exchange. “I was shocked at how enthusiastic and absolutely ready to start she was,” Werst says. It wasn’t long before clothing was being collected, sorted and prepared for student use. When asked about the origins of the name, Owl Feather Exchange, Werst explained that an owl’s feathers are like its clothes, and the Buffalo Exchange is a company that resells used clothing – combining the two concepts made the Owl Feather Exchange.

Clothing exchanges are not unheard of on Oregon college campuses; Oregon State University, Portland Community College and the University of Oregon have periodically hosted clothing

exchanges in recent years. Eastern Oregon University, a public school. Werst believes there are many benefits to hosting a similar clothing exchange here at Oregon Tech. “Most aid seems to go toward food and housing insecurity,” she explains. “Food and housing is definitely a high priority, but clothing has such an impact on how we live our lives and how we can succeed, in the literal sense. If you don’t have a proper winter coat and you have to walk to and from campus in the snow, that’s going to be miserable and potentially detrimental to your health.” Werst cites concerns about transgender and nonbinary students who need gender-affirming clothes and can’t get those clothes otherwise, as well as low-income students who might not be able to afford clothing, stating, “It’s a need that is infrequently addressed, but it’s a much larger problem than a lot of people think.”

Werst’s efforts in establishing the Exchange were also inspired by a wish to reduce clothing waste. She cites a 2019 article by Berkeley’s Student Environmental Resource Center which estimates that about 10.50 million tons of clothing are thrown away every year in the United States. She believes that this waste of otherwise usable clothing can be greatly reduced by reusing and thrifting clothes.

With plans to be fully operational this school year, the Exchange is currently welcoming donations of gently used clothing of all kinds. Anyone interested in making a donation is encouraged to contact Student Involvement and Belonging to coordinate their donation. The Exchange may also be welcoming student volunteers in a variety of capacities. Students can use NobleHour to signal interest in this volunteer work through the following link or QR Code:



<https://www.noblehour.com/oregontech>

A QR Code leading to Oregon Tech’s page on the NobleHour website

If there is anyone with an immediate need for clothing, they are urged to reach out to Student Involvement and Belonging. All students are encouraged to stay tuned for more information about the Owl Feather Exchange in the near future. **E**