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This past Sunday a number of articles about the College of Western Idaho ran in the *Idaho Statesman* that spoke about the benefits that our community college will provide to our students and the greater community. As I read these articles there was a significant recurring theme in each piece – **opportunity**.

Granted, opportunity is a subjective term and usually depends on your current needs and background. By offering classes that range from developmental education to workforce training to transferable courses, CWI is uniquely positioned to meet a wide range of needs and create opportunities that cater to people of any background.

George Copa, a professor in the Community College Leadership Program at Oregon State University, shared a number of statistics within his article that detailed the diversity of students attending community colleges today. He noted that nearly 58 percent of community college students nationwide are older than 21, and 16 percent are over the age of 40 – those whom we call the lifelong learners. A majority of students are female, and 35 percent of all students are from different ethnic backgrounds than white Caucasians. But one of the most important statistics Dr. Copa mentioned truly captures the sense of opportunity a community college offers: 39 percent of students are the first generation of their family to attend college.

To me, this emphasizes a community college's role as the gateway to future opportunity, regardless of your background. More importantly, those who seize the opportunity to better themselves are rewarded for their efforts. According to the College Board, a person with an associate's degree makes \$500,000 more over a lifetime than someone with just a high school diploma. This increased training and income is obviously significant to the student and their family, but it also contributes more to our community through increased purchasing power and a better trained workforce – both of which benefit our local businesses and overall economy.

As executive director of the Boise Valley Economic Partnership, Paul Hiller is intimately familiar with local businesses and businesses that are considering relocating to Idaho. One resounding theme he continues to hear (and noted in his article) throughout his efforts is how a community college is a necessity for a strong economy – not a luxury. Whether it is a new business considering relocation here or a local business hoping to expand, having skilled workers is at the top of the list. CWI will be critical to helping fill that need.

Even these articles came from authors with different backgrounds and perspectives, but both realize the opportunities that CWI offers its students and our community. Now it is up to CWI to help everyone – students, businesses and our community – to achieve more. We are excited by this challenge and look forward to seizing the opportunities with you in the days and years ahead.

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