

## **CBC looks to fill gaps in post-Hanford economy**

Herald/Bob Brawdy

Rob Walker, machine technology instructor at Columbia Basin College, answers questions about a student's project recently at the Pasco campus. A new report highlights predicted job-skill gaps in the state as the economy recovers. The college is helping prepare students for the future jobs including machinists, health care professionals, mechanics, pipefitters, electricians and other technical workers. See story below.

Share this story

By Pratik Joshi, Herald staff writer

Published: 02/15/10 1:43 am | Updated: 02/15/10 9:56 am

Demand for health care professionals, mechanics, pipefitters, electricians and other technical workers is rising in the Tri-Cities, even as the community readies for a post-Hanford economy.

And Columbia Basin College, in partnership with businesses and public agencies, is aiming to ensure a smooth transition.

CBC is helping WorkSource Columbia Basin train jobseekers for such jobs as medical secretaries, medical assistants, basic industrial mechanical maintenance workers and automotive technicians, said Candice Bluechel, business services outreach manager at WorkSource. Her agency is an arm of the state that helps people find job training and jobs.

Most of the training courses are short-term, designed to help students get jobs with employers who currently need workers.

Statewide, a shortage of bookkeepers, nurses, lab technicians, aircraft mechanics and manufacturing and production workers is likely as the economy recovers, says a recent report by the state Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board.

Such middle-skill jobs require post-high-school education but not a four-year degree, and are critical to the economy because they fill the gap between high- and low-skill level jobs, said Dean Schau, regional labor economist.

Customized training and apprenticeship programs can develop a skilled work force rather quickly, he said.

Many middle-skill jobs have evolved as a result of mechanization and technological advancements that increased productivity, pruning the number of workers in some areas, Schau said. Other jobs were created by changing social and economic needs.

CBC offers "focused education," said CBC President Rich Cummins. It serves local and regional employment needs.

For example, many students come from other parts of the state to CBC for its dental hygiene program, he said.

The college develops new educational/training programs in consultation with experts from industry and the community and monitors emerging labor market trends, he said. "We create the capacity for the industry to create jobs."

CBC also is looking at training students for jobs in the clean energy sector, he said. For example, the college plans to offer a short-term certificate course in how to install solar photovoltaic cell panels, Cummins said.

The Tri-Cities Research District, the HAMMER training center and the Mid-Columbia Energy Initiative, a group working toward establishing an energy park at Hanford, are helping determine long-term community needs, said Bluechel -- "what kind of skills will we need as we transition from nuclear remediation to energy creation."

CBC also can help develop a program for wind generation technicians, she said, adding it also can offer programs to help replace retiring Hanford workers.

Last year, the college began offering a nuclear technologies program, which is expected to cost about \$2.1 million over the next five years. It's being supported with contributions from Hanford-area companies -- Energy Northwest, Washington River Protection Solutions, Battelle, CH2M Hill and the Mission Support Alliance.

Students are trained in nuclear power plant operations and radiation protection. Later the program is to be expanded to include training in maintenance and chemical and instrumentation control areas, college officials say.

This fall the college will change the name of its machine technology program to manufacturing, said Frank Murray, CBC spokesman. The program is broadening its focus beyond making tools, he said, to include design, manufacturing and marketing. "It's a more descriptive title."

The machine technology program on average had about 18 students but now has 32, he said. The college also plans to start a new program in diagnostic ultrasound, he said.

The challenge in training students for successful health care careers involves ensuring they can work with multi-disciplinary health teams and can communicate effectively, said Curt Freed, CBC dean of health sciences.

The aim is to develop workers who know enough theory to apply it practically, which is why the college emphasizes math and communication skills.

Hands-on courses are becoming more popular because those careers pay well and offer growth opportunities, he said.

More people are realizing community colleges are a good investment, especially in a tight economy, both Freed and Cummins said. They offer training in marketable skills at relatively lower cost than a four-year institution, Cummins said.