

2005 – 2012 Legacy and Lessons Learned



Washington State Board for Community and
Technical Colleges



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Building a work-ready Washington

The national spotlight is shining brightly on community and technical colleges as the United States struggles to emerge from the national recession and advance in a global economy. President Obama, Congress, and governors across the nation are touting the importance of community and technical colleges to the prosperity of everyday Americans and the health of the economy.

Community and technical colleges are recognized as engines of economic growth that fill an important niche in higher education. With a mix of real-world, affordable job-training and transfer opportunities to four-year schools, community and technical colleges train people for jobs available right now in growth industries, while building the base of credentials and degrees needed for our shared economic prosperity.

Here in Washington, nearly 470,000 people attend community and technical colleges each year to train for good jobs, earn certificates or degrees, or move into even higher levels of education at four-year institutions. Employers turn to community and technical colleges for the just-in-time training they need to thrive and survive.

Our colleges are as nimble and innovative as the employers they serve – from the wineries in Walla Walla to the aerospace suppliers in the Puget Sound corridor and everywhere in between.

Washington is one of the few states in the nation with a unified system of community and technical colleges. Our 34 colleges not only align with employers in the regions where they operate, but also with each other through common programs – like advanced manufacturing and allied health – that promote Washington’s overall job-growth strategy. This approach connects every community in Washington to the full range of economic possibilities locally and regionally, and gives our state a competitive edge.

It’s a network of talent and opportunity that benefits each and every one of us, whether we’re employees or business owners, and whether we’ve ever attended a community or technical college.



“...in the coming years, jobs requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as jobs requiring no college experience. We will not fill those jobs – or keep those jobs on our shores – without the training offered by community colleges.” ~ President Barack Obama, Warren, Michigan, July 14, 2009

About the SBCTC

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges administers Washington's public community and technical college system. In overseeing the 34 community and technical colleges, the State Board sets policy, allocates state operating and capital funds to the colleges, strategically plans the two-year college mission, and approves educational programs. The agency is governed by a nine-member, governor-appointed board of directors.

A recent case study on the SBCTC⁶, funded in part by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, found the "SBCTC has an enviable national reputation as a coordinating entity that works effectively. This reputation is justified by three sets of accomplishments: 1) establishing a cohesive system mission of public value; 2) facilitating policy changes at scale; and 3) balancing and mediating relationships among multiple participants."

The SBCTC looks forward to continuing its work with Governor Gregoire and the future administration to further strengthen community and technical colleges' role in advancing our economy.

Washington's community and technical colleges have three primary missions:

- 1. Transfer preparation, providing the first two years of a bachelor's degree.***
- 2. Training (or re-training) for jobs in today's economy.***
- 3. Basic skills for those who need to learn English and/or need to prepare for college-level coursework.***

The importance of planning

Planzzz. Talk of plans and mission statements puts people to sleep. However, plans are important because they capture visions on paper. As Yogi Berra said, "If you don't know where you're going, you might wind up someplace else."

A vision captured in Governor Gregoire's 2006 "Washington Learns" report has guided the success of Washington's community and technical college system and the students it serves. The report set a clear mission for our state's entire education system: "To be competitive in the global economy, we must educate more people to achieve at higher levels."

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) built this simple, yet profound, goal into its 2006 System Direction and 2008 Mission Study. The plans led to increased enrollments, broader industry-specific training, and innovative programs for student success. Among the initiatives: an open course library which drastically reduces textbook costs, and the I-BEST program which teaches basic literacy and workforce skills at the same time, allowing students to move through school and into work faster.

Another showcased innovation is the Student Achievement Initiative. This performance-based funding system measures students' progress and rewards colleges when more students reach key academic milestones that lead to good jobs and financial stability. It was one of the first such programs in the nation and is now being replicated across the country.

Governor Gregoire used the Student Achievement Initiative's measures of success in her Government Management Accountability and Performance (GMAP) project – a tool that helps Washington state agencies measure, improve and report performance. Since the initiative started in 2007, completions have increased 42 percent.

Final thoughts

Plans don't have to be dust collectors. SBCTC staff members routinely report progress toward plan goals when the nine-member, Governor-appointed State Board meets each month. Plans focus the system's attention on a shared outcome; in this case, student success.

Job training and “degrees of degrees”

There are 29 million jobs that pay middle-class wages between \$35,000 and \$75,000 annually in the United States and don't require a bachelor's degree, according to a September 2012 report from the Georgetown University Public Policy Institute. That represents one out of every five jobs in the economy and nearly half of all American jobs that pay middle-class wages.

The report reminds us that good jobs don't always require a bachelor's degree. Dr. Anthony Carnevale, lead author of the report, warns the national discussion tends to leap from “high school to Harvard,” ignoring the wide band of jobs that pay well but require less than a four-year degree.

The report pinpointed five pathways to these jobs: employer-based training, industry-based certifications, apprenticeships, postsecondary certificates, and associate degrees – programs offered by the nation's community and technical colleges.

Two-year colleges power people into these middle-class positions, creating the nurses, computer technicians, aerospace workers, and other specialists who are the building blocks of our economy. Armed with good wages, these professionals are better able to afford pursuing a bachelor's degree or even higher levels of education. Appropriately, the Georgetown report is titled, “Five Ways that Pay Along the Way to the B.A.”

An economic study in Washington state found that shortly after graduation, community and technical college workforce graduates have comparable employment rates and earnings to bachelor's degree graduates.¹ At career mid-point, the average annual income of the typical associate degree graduate in Washington is \$49,400, 35 percent more than someone with a high school diploma alone.²

Final thoughts

There are “degrees of degrees.” With each level of degree or credential earned, students step up the ladder to a better wage and a better life. Each rung is important and contributes to a higher level of success.

More bachelor's degrees for Washington

Community and technical colleges boost bachelor-degree production for Washington's economy by serving as a pipeline into four-year colleges and universities. Four out of 10 public baccalaureate graduates in Washington start at a community or technical college. Students pile up less debt and arrive well-prepared, having already mastered study skills in small classes taught by community college instructors passionate about teaching.

The state's Direct Transfer Agreement – now in its 40th year – offers a smooth transfer path to public and private four-year schools. For students who want to transfer after one year, the Governor-requested “Washington 45” agreement spells out a list of community and technical college courses that satisfy one-year's worth (45 credits) of general education requirements at public four-year institutions.

Bachelor's degree programs are also available on nearly every community or technical college campus, through on-campus university centers or other on-site partnerships with universities. In addition, eight community and technical colleges now offer applied bachelor's degrees designed to meet the needs of the economy in specific, high-demand occupations. Originally a limited number of community and technical colleges offered the degrees as part of a pilot project; however, Governor Gregoire removed the “pilot” status, allowing more colleges to offer the degrees.

Final thoughts

Community and technical colleges and four-year institutions are partners for the benefit of all students and our entire state.

If only for the elite, Washington can't compete

During a July 2012 town-hall meeting at the University of Washington, Senate Ways & Means Committee Chairman Ed Murray was asked to identify one of the biggest hurdles facing higher education funding. He responded: "There (has been) a bipartisan, populist feel that somehow higher education is elitist... We have a huge challenge; not just for the people who are elected, but for the people who elect them. We need to get people in this state to view higher education not as elitist, but a way forward."

If Washington is to have a robust, vibrant economy, higher education must be viewed as a necessity, not a privilege. Why? Because by 2019, two-thirds of job openings in Washington will require at least one year of college education.³ The knowledge-based economy has raised the bar for everyone who seeks a family-wage job. People without some level of college education or job training have fewer opportunities to climb a career ladder. There is also less hope of sustaining the state's economy or employment base without an educated workforce.

This speaks to the heart of the community and technical college system. We have an open-door policy that offers everybody in Washington an opportunity to go to college. Microsoft founder Bill Gates points out that prestige doesn't necessarily come from exclusivity: "... prestige comes from commitment to equity, opportunity, and excellence. So it is not a point of high status to keep students out; but rather, it is high status letting them in and even taking students who haven't had the greatest high school education, who don't have the highest SAT scores, and giving them a high quality education."⁴

Final thoughts

In a Tri-City Herald opinion editorial, Columbia Basin College President Rich Cummins references Adam Smith, who in 1776 wrote that the wealth of nations is directly correlated to the development of its human capital. In the 21st century, when people increasingly work with brains instead of brawn, more people carry the means of production between their ears. Management guru Peter Drucker labeled this "knowledge work."

"America puts its future in jeopardy if it tampers with access to higher education and degrades its universal value for all.... Remember, those who dismiss college for all are talking about your kids, not theirs." ~ Seattle Times editorial columnist Lance Dickie, June 2012

"Waking up at three in the morning to pick apples and cherries as a young child was not my version of the American Dream...I believe education is the most powerful tool a human being can have." ~ Cristian Ramon, Big Bend Community College graduate now studying at the University of Washington, January 2012 "Transforming Lives" project

Certificates and degrees targeted to jobs

Increasing the number of Washingtonians who hold certificates and degrees is only part of the economic puzzle. Students' education should lead to jobs, just as public colleges and universities should link their programs to the needs of the marketplace.

Throughout Washington, community and technical colleges develop high-impact partnerships with businesses to predict areas of the most job growth, and then develop courses for students to fill those positions. They "turn on a dime," quickly launching programs where jobs are available and ending those where demand is weak. Students are prepared for good jobs available right now in communities and in growth industries around the state, like aerospace and advanced manufacturing, alternative energy, value-added (farm-to-table) agriculture, health care, and technology.

This targeted approach also helps fill "skills gaps" in Washington – the mismatch between residents' skills and employers' needs. It may be hard to believe, but thousands of jobs are going unfilled in Washington because employers can't find people with the right skills. Our state is at risk of letting these jobs slip through its fingers. The jobs will go unfilled, get snapped up by out-of-state residents, or move away to other states.

Community and technical colleges track the economy and ramp up training quickly to narrow skills gaps. Every two years, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the Washington Student Achievement Council (formerly the Higher Education Coordinating Board) and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board publish a joint report assessing the number and type of higher education and training credentials needed to meet employer demand.

Based on those forecasts, community and technical colleges produced 78 percent more registered nurses from 2003 to 2011 to help fill a nursing shortage. From 2006 to 2011, two-year colleges increased training in aerospace and manufacturing-related fields by 37 percent to narrow a gap caused by increased orders and pending retirements. Better yet: 74 percent of community and technical workforce graduates are employed within nine months of program completion.

Governor Gregoire narrowed the aerospace skills gap significantly by investing \$4.8 million for aerospace training and apprenticeship programs at community and technical colleges over the past five years.

Final thoughts

Walla Walla Community College President Steve VanAusdle likens the skills gap to two games of musical chairs. In the “high skills” game, there are 100 chairs representing job openings, with 48 people playing the game. When the music stops, about half the chairs are empty. In the “lower-skills” game of musical chairs, there are 60 chairs but 100 are playing the game. When the music stops, 40 people are left on their feet, unemployed. The problem gets worse as chairs are moved out of the low-skill game and into the high-skill game. The answer: move more people to the high skills game so they can have a seat at the economic table.

Community and technical colleges launch directly into STEM jobs

Our high-skilled, high-technology global economy requires more workers with training in science, technology, engineering and math, yet states across the nation are producing too few people trained in these “STEM” professions.

Here in Washington, for each unemployed STEM worker, there are 2.1 job openings. In contrast, there are 3.7 unemployed people competing for every non-STEM job.⁵ Community and technical colleges provide affordable, accessible programs that prepare students for direct entry into STEM jobs or to continue their studies at four-year institutions. One in three engineering majors in Washington’s four-year public colleges and universities transferred from a community or technical college, most with either an associate of science degree or a heavy concentration of STEM credits.

Final thoughts

“STEM” covers a wide range of professions served by every level of credential and degree. When these jobs are filled, workers, employers, and Washington state’s economy win.

Rethinking the “traditional” student

When you think of a college student, what comes to mind? To many, it's a student who goes straight from high school to a university dorm and gets a bachelor's degree four years later. But times have changed. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, three-quarters of today's college students no longer fit that mold. A new generation of college students exists – workers who have gone back to school, veterans starting new careers, and parents wanting to do better for their families.

In Washington, six out of every 10 college students are enrolled in community and technical colleges. Our students mirror national trends: 30 percent are parents, 43 percent work, their median age is 26, and about half attend school part-time.

Our colleges accept students at any age and stage in their lives and at any educational level. We take students from where they are, to where they need to be. Adult students can brush up on skills – typically math – so they can succeed in credit-bearing, college-level classes. Students can earn “stackable credentials” to use on the job immediately, and later build on those certificates to earn an associate degree.

eLearning allows students to learn anytime, anywhere. In the 2011-2012 school year, 39,000 students took classes completely or partially online, saving time and travel expenses. A new project underway will take eLearning even further. By 2014, all public two- and four-year colleges and universities in Washington will be able to share a breakthrough learning management system called *Canvas*. With one log-in, students, faculty, and staff will have access to an integrated suite of eLearning tools that works on any mobile device or social networking site.

By offering flexible education near where students live and work, community and technical colleges help today's college students build better futures without leaving their jobs and families behind.

Final thoughts

Non-traditional students represent a vital resource in Washington – a deep pool of talent and potential we can't afford to waste.

“The truth is, if you want a decent job that will lead to a decent life today you have to work harder, regularly reinvent yourself, obtain at least some form of postsecondary education, make sure that you're engaged in lifelong learning and play by the rules. That's not a bumper sticker, but we terribly mislead people by saying otherwise.” ~ Thomas Friedman, New York Times, September 8, 2012

Adult Basic Education: growing talent for the economy

In Washington state, roughly one in six adults lacks the math, reading or English-language skills needed for a living-wage job. These adults will make up almost all of the growth in Washington's workforce over the next 20 years. As well educated baby-boomers leave the workforce, more people are entering who lack high school diplomas and English-language skills. To add to the complexity, companies need employees with even higher skill levels to adapt to new technologies and solve problems.

This crisis is playing out nationally. One-third of manufacturing companies report that poor reading and writing skills among hourly workers are a problem, according to a national survey released by the National Association of Manufacturers in November 2001.

Washington's community and technical colleges deliver more than 90 percent of the adult basic education in the state. Programs are designed to get students to the first "tipping point" toward financial security – one year of college education and a vocational certificate. One such program is the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training – or "IBEST" – program, a nationally-recognized model that quickly boosts students' literacy and work skills to earn credentials, get living wage jobs, and put their talents to work.

I-BEST pairs two instructors in the classroom – one to teach professional and technical content and the other to teach basic skills in reading, math, writing or English language – so students can move through school and into jobs faster. As students progress through the program, they learn basic skills in real-world scenarios in the job-training part of the curriculum.

Research conducted separately by the Community College Research Center and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board found that I-BEST students outperform similar students enrolled in traditional basic skills programs. I-BEST students are three times more likely to earn college credits and nine times more likely to earn a workforce credential. I-BEST programs have expanded to more colleges thanks to targeted funding pushed by Governor Gregoire.

In the 2011-2012 school year, adult basic education programs served 55,000 adults, a small fraction of the population who need basic skills.

Final thoughts

The demand for skilled workers is outstripping the supply. Washington's economy simply cannot afford to lose any workers or leave this population behind.

Responding to the Great Recession

The Great Recession put Washington's community and technical colleges in a vise grip. Budgets were slashed at the very time students flocked to colleges for job-training and retraining. Since the 2008-2009 academic year – a year of record enrollments – funding for community and technical colleges has dropped by 23 percent. The system saw a \$110 million cut in the 2011-2013 state operating budget alone.

Colleges initially responded by leveraging efficiencies in the system, such as shared resources, coordinated staff training, compatible technology, and joint instruction. Colleges prioritized retaining instructors, but significantly cut administration and direct student services. Unfortunately, they couldn't protect instruction entirely. Today, course sections and entire programs are shuttered at many colleges. Students are finding it more difficult to get the classes they need to graduate on time.

Just before the recession hit, Governor Gregoire in 2007 expanded the Opportunity Grant program beyond the pilot stage to cover all 34 community and technical colleges. These grants help low-income adults train for high-wage, high-demand careers. Grants cover 45 credits of tuition (one year full-time) and help pay for books, supplies and other assistance, such as child care and transportation. In the 2011-2012 academic year, 5,174 students received workforce training with the help of Opportunity Grants.

Governor Gregoire and the state Legislature also made targeted investments in job training for workers laid off during the recession. In January 2010, Washington state's unemployment reached 10 percent, nearly two percentage points higher than the prior year. The Governor and Legislature responded quickly, investing an additional \$17.5 million in state funding for the Worker Retraining program to help laid-off and unemployed workers with financial aid and training.

Today, the Worker Retraining program remains a critical lifeboat. In the 2011-12 school year, 16,600 students trained for new careers through the program. Those who complete the program experience an 11.5 percent higher re-employment rate and \$2,700 more in wages per year than non-participants.

Both the Opportunity Grant program and the Worker Retraining program provide immediate financial assistance so students can enroll right away, instead of waiting for the approval of federal financial aid as the clock ticks down on their unemployment benefits.

In 2010, the Governor's support for Washington's Basic Food Employment and Training Program (BFET) prompted the federal oversight agency, Food and Nutrition Services, to visit the state to provide technical assistance and help with the identification and use of additional resources. This paved the way for Washington to continue providing critical employment training services to food-stamp recipients and expand the program, which is now provided statewide by 27 community and technical colleges and 14 community-based organizations.

Despite steep funding cuts, community and technical colleges have maintained their open door policy, continuing to serve more students than funded by the state. The state funded target is 139,000 full-time students. Our colleges served 152,378 full-time students in the 2011-2012 school year, about 10 percent above the funded target.

Final thoughts

Governor Gregoire has often reminded state agencies to "not let a perfectly good crisis go to waste." As our state begins to recover from the Great Recession, community and technical colleges are moving forward with valuable experience and an even stronger connection to the future of Washington's economy.

"Winning in the turns"

In her State of the State address in January 2012, Governor Gregoire urged lawmakers to turn crisis into opportunity, saying determination and action can propel Washington through the recession and past the competition.

"We are in a time of great challenge and even greater opportunity," she said. "When things get tough, we step up individually and together to build our future." Washington state, she said, is like a race car driver who knows how to "win in the turns" – to accelerate and round the bend just when everybody else is hitting the brakes.

"You made a smart choice for your education. Our community colleges are recognized as national leaders in fields like online and hybrid learning and in student completion rates. And President Obama frequently talks about community colleges as an important tool to make sure America can compete in a world economy." ~ Gov. Chris Gregoire, speech for the All Washington Academics Team celebration, March 2012

With all of its flexibility and innovation, Washington's community and technical college system knows how to win in the turns. Under Governor Gregoire's administration, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges has launched innovative programs and served a record number of students looking to retool their careers, find new jobs, or get an affordable start on a four-year degree.

During the 2012 legislative session, lawmakers chose to spare state colleges and universities from further cuts. The 2012 budget decision marked a turning point. Rather than dwelling on past cuts, colleges are looking forward to what the state needs and making plans to deliver. That means aligning programs and services even more closely to Washington's labor market, and increasing enrollments in STEM fields and other high-demand professions to get people to work and grow the economy. It means continuing to pursue innovations to get students further and faster through college and into jobs. And most important, it means *winning in the turns* to get even more Washingtonians across the finish line to higher education.



Sources

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