



Community Colleges Vital to Workforce Development

By Nicole Adrian

With the increasing number of people who have lost their jobs during this economic recession and the added emphasis on having a degree to obtain a job, it's no wonder people are turning to their local community colleges to grow their skills and obtain first-time or additional degrees. These schools are an integral pathway to workforce development.

Community colleges offer flexible schedules for part-time and full-time students and are often more affordable than traditional four-year universities. Many of these colleges, however, currently offer only two-year degrees. That could soon change, though, as more states look to add four-year degree programs to their community colleges.

Addressing an audience at Macomb Community College in Warren, MI, last July, President Obama said, "Now is the time to build a firmer, stronger foundation for growth that will not only withstand future economic storms, but one that helps us thrive and compete in a global economy. It's time to reform our community colleges so that they provide Americans of all ages a chance to learn the skills and knowledge necessary to compete for the jobs of the future."

Many community colleges are already working on creating new and desired courses and programs for the local workforce. This issue of *ASQ Higher Education Brief* chronicles some of their stories.

After coming face to face with a new workforce opportunity, Columbia Gorge Community College in The Dalles, OR, used quality tools to develop a wind technician training program. In its first year, 48 students completed the program. By spring, the school hopes to have as many as 144 students enrolled in the program each year.

Other community colleges are working with organizations to offer training and certifications vital to workforce development. For example, Ivy Tech Community College in Indiana is partnering with ASQ to develop training programs for quality improvement associate and Six Sigma Green Belt certifications. These programs teach useful continuous improvement skills and knowledge that can be applied to any profession and within any organization.



Community colleges should not be overlooked as more and more workers want—and need—to expand their skill sets for new jobs or new opportunities.