

How has Success Changed?

Last week I had the privilege to attend a presentation by Harvard Professor Dr. Ronald Ferguson on his ground breaking research titled "Pathways to Prosperity." The focus of Dr. Ferguson's work is on putting youth on a pathway that will ultimately lead them to a prosperous life, and how we might address that challenge in the coming decades. Some of the statistics were both dramatic and thought provoking.

In 1973, more than two thirds of the nation's workforce had a high school diploma or less, and 60 percent were able to earn a middle class income largely based on a strong work ethic and a marketable skill. In the next 35 years the nation would add 63 million jobs, but the actual number of jobs that only require a high school education has dropped! Of these net new jobs all require post secondary training, certificate or apprenticeship.

The term "middle skill" jobs has replaced what we used to call skilled trades (electrician, plumber, carpenter, etc.) and additionally includes professions like dental hygienist, police officer and medical lab technician. These are good jobs that typically pay a good middle class income and in some cases pay more than jobs requiring a bachelor's degree. Even more sobering is that less than half of Americans have completed any post secondary degree or certificate by their mid twenties. This leads to a phenomena referred to as the "skills gap," where there are, literally, millions of jobs left open because those looking for employment do not have the skills necessary for the openings.

Clearly this issue is a national priority. In 2009, President Obama laid out this goal in a speech on the subject, stating "...tonight I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college, a four-year school, vocational training, or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma."

These are great long term national goals, but what about here and now?

College of the Canyons is already addressing many of these issues through Career Technical Education (CTE) programs and the Fast Track Institute, using information provided by our Institutional Research department.

CTE programs deliver academically rigorous and relevant content in high wage and high employment potential industry sectors, as identified by the State and U.S. Department of Labor. CTE programs also provide opportunities for hand-on learning, while helping to bring about a greater sense of career awareness which allows student the opportunity to develop and demonstrate skills required in the workplace.

Thee college currently offers 39 degree and certificate programs in subjects ranging from computer animation to welding, and all based on skills currently used in these industries. For more information on CTE programs at College of the Canyons please visit www.canyons.edu/cte.

The COC Fast Track Institute is one of the college's latest initiatives. Our intensive Fast Track programs provides the type of fast-paced training job seekers need when looking for new employment opportunities. These Fast Track entry-level courses teach the job skills needed to quickly begin working

in local businesses and industries where applicants with up-to-date training are in high demand. Most Fast Track courses take only a few months to complete, and result in participants completing a complement of skill competencies they can share with potential employers. Programs like CNC Machining and Manufacturing and Assembly have been very effective at preparing participants for positions in local industry.

Meanwhile, the Institute's professional certification program is geared toward mid-career professionals who need to update their certifications or add a new certification to prepare them for more responsibilities. Programs in manufacturing operations are currently being offered and new certification programs in Six Sigma and Project Management are being developed. For more information on Fast Track programs please visit www.canyons.edu/fasttrack.

Pete Bellas is the COC Dean of Economic Development and directs the Fast Track Institute. . His column reflects his own views and not necessarily those of The Signal. For more information about the College of the Canyons Economic Development Division, call (661) 362-3521 or visit www.canyonsecondev.org. For more information about the Fast Track Institute, visit www.canyons.edu/fasttrack or email fasttrack@canyons.edu.