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Portland Community College invests in career tech to benefit students, employers

5–7 minutes

A recent article from [Inside Higher Ed](#) addressed national pandemic-related enrollment declines facing community colleges. On a hopeful note, career technical education (CTE) – disciplines in health care, information technology and construction trades, among others – continues to attract students because these fields offer high wages and career advancement potential.

Career technical education programs are not without their challenges. They are costly for community colleges to run, require smaller class sizes and expensive labs and equipment, and it's harder to find instructors as they can make higher salaries working in industry. Yet Portland Community College is investing in its CTE offerings so students complete their programs and land living-wage jobs, and the local economy is infused with trained graduates who fill the skills gap lamented by local employers.

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Wendy Wright

“The success of PCC’s programs is a testament to the strength of our community and industry partnerships. Together, we’re training and building a workforce that can contribute to Oregon’s economic vitality.”

Recent CTE triumphs include [the college’s training facility as part of the Oregon Manufacturing Innovation Center](#) in Columbia County, one of five counties within PCC’s service area. In May, the college celebrated the center’s grand opening and attracted regional business leaders, state and federal legislators.

The OMIC training center is part of the [OMIC initiative](#), which

brings together industry, academia and government to address problems facing Oregon manufacturers through applied research and workforce training. PCC's OMIC training center was funded by 2008 and 2017 bond measures passed by voters. The center offers manufacturing-related training such as traditional career and technical education and apprenticeship models that combine on-the-job training with classroom and lab instruction. Students can complete an apprenticeship program, associate's degree or certificate leading to an advanced degree.

"Community colleges breathe life into communities by offering students courses that make them job ready – not just providing a degree, but something that assists them to walk out the door and go to work in high-paying, high-quality jobs," said Columbia County Commissioner Margaret Magruder, who participated in the May grand opening.

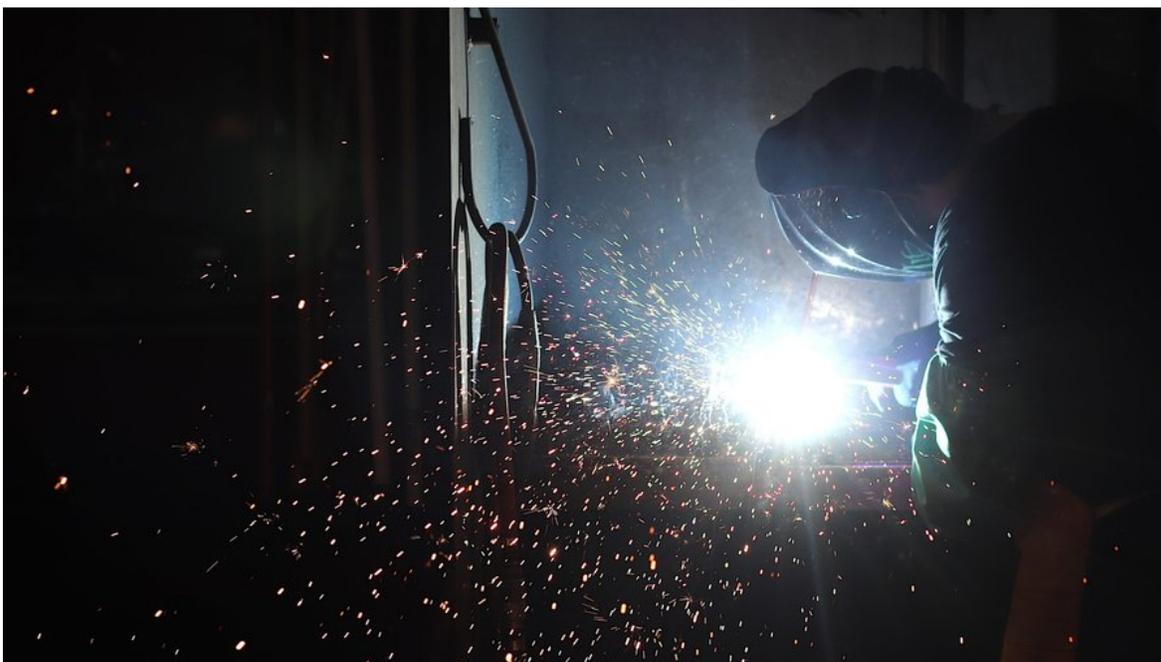
In July, PCC celebrated the opening of its new Dealer Services Technology Building in partnership with Caterpillar Inc. Funded from a \$185 million bond passed in 2017, the facility mirrors an actual Caterpillar dealership, giving students authentic training experience as they study to become service technicians.

Students employ Caterpillar equipment and vehicles used for agriculture and construction as part of their studies in the two-year [ThinkBIG program](#), a partnership between PCC and Caterpillar Inc. that features internships for students at Caterpillar dealerships across the Pacific Northwest.

"The new facility offers us so much more space and advanced

equipment to train our students,” said Jesse Norconk, PCC’s ThinkBIG faculty chair. “It goes a long way to replicating a dealership experience that the students are going to actually work in.”

Meanwhile, PCC’s Maritime Welding Training Center now features two new [short-term certificates](#) that tap into the skills businesses want. The three-class, 12-credit certificates – maritime welding and maritime shipfitting – emphasize desired maritime applications like butt and socket welds, fabricating spools and straight-run offsets.



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“We made sure we captured all the attributes of what students will need to be successful out on the job,” said Matt Scott, PCC welding faculty chair. “In essence, students can basically walk from our facility to nearby Vigor Industrial, and become gainfully employed after they pass their weld test.”

PCC's [Maritime Welding Training Center](#) was built in partnership with Vigor, the region's leading company centered on shipbuilding, ship repair, ship conversion and complex industrial fabrication, to provide the company with qualified ship welders. Skilled welders are a key labor component for manufacturing companies and, locally, there is a shortage.

"Our CTE programs bear witness to the transformative power and impact of enriching our communities," said Bennings.

"We are providing the education and training to produce highly skilled workers for companies and corporations to be globally competitive, and simultaneously providing economic mobility for people in our region."

Learn more about Career Technical Education at Portland Community College at pcc.edu.

Portland Community College is the largest post-secondary institution in Oregon and provides training, degree and certificate completion, and lifelong learning to approximately 50,000 full- and part-time students in Multnomah, Washington, Yamhill, Clackamas and Columbia counties.

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