

The Workforce Development Program at Delaware Technical Community College

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Not everyone has the financial resources to pursue a four-year degree before entering the workforce, but that doesn't mean they can't gain the skills they need for a high-quality career in the health-care field.

According to the results of a recent higher education study, more than half of parents surveyed believe college costs do not justify the value of a college education, and less than half agree that U.S. colleges are preparing students well for the workplace.

This may be part of the reason community colleges are becoming a more popular choice for students who want to prepare themselves for a career at an affordable price. At Delaware Technical Community College, students can enroll in a degree program, or they can begin with a workforce certification program that will more quickly lead to a job in their field of interest.

The College's Workforce Development and Community Education Division is designed to offer students a fast track to the skills they need to start working in fields like health care, information technology and advanced manufacturing. With these credentials, they can start working, while at the same time pursuing additional credentials to help them advance to the next step on their career path.

For example, a student could start by earning a certified nursing assistant (CNA) certificate, learning how to perform basic nursing skills under the supervision of a licensed nurse in a health-care facility. While working as a CNA, that student could then pursue credentials to become a phlebotomist or patient care technician. By "stacking" credentials in this way, students are able to chart a career path, rather than just finding a job.

Students get hands-on training with equipment and high-tech simulation mannequins in a classroom lab so they can participate in simulated experiences that mimic those they would face in an actual patient-care setting. In addition, Delaware Tech is fortunate to have excellent partnerships with the state's major health care systems and long-term care facilities, which affords students the opportunity to get hands-on experience in actual patient-care settings to help prepare them for the workforce. Many of their instructors have worked in the healthcare field, so they are able to bring their own experiences to the classroom.

Another advantage of the College's workforce development program is that students are able to complete these programs in a matter of months, as opposed to years, which makes a significant difference for a person who doesn't have the time, resources or desire to enroll in a degree program.

And these programs aren't just helping our students. Their skills are in high demand by local employers. The highest number of job postings listed in the last year in Delaware were for certified nursing assistants, home health aides and phlebotomists. And rates of new employment growth, while slowing over the next five years, will still be robust for the health care industry, with home health aides continuing to generate the most new jobs. Statewide, we expect to see

about 460 new jobs for home health aides, and about 275 new openings for both medical assistants and for nursing assistants.

Once our students enter the workforce, they often decide that after some experience on the job, they would like to pursue a degree program to help advance their careers. Those students can then return to Delaware Tech to pursue an associate or bachelor's degree in nursing or another healthcare program, bringing with them the experience they gained in their workforce development studies, as well as on the job.

In addition, those who step away from the workforce for a while could take advantage of an RN Refresher course, which gets students up-to-date on nursing practices today. They can learn about pharmacology, care planning and current trends in health care.

Soon, students will have the advantage of a brand-new lab for training at the Health Care Center of Excellence on the Terry Campus in Dover. Thanks to support from the governor's Delaware Higher Education Economic Development Fund, we will be able to renovate an existing 8,700-square-foot building on our campus to train more than 300 certified allied health technicians for in-demand jobs over the next three years.

The new Health Care Center of Excellence will train students in our workforce development programs in state-of-the-art learning spaces to ensure they are well prepared for jobs with our local employers. These skills are increasingly in demand in Delaware, where the state's 65+ population is expected to increase by roughly 60 percent (from 159,000 in 2015 to an estimated 263,532 by 2050). As Delaware's population ages, more people will be retiring and leaving the workplace, while at the same time, increasing the demand for health care services. Our new center of excellence will help create a pipeline of skilled workers to both replace an aging workforce and to train new/existing employees.

Delawareans might be surprised at the number of health care professionals in our local hospitals, clinics, doctor's offices, and long-term care facilities who were trained at Delaware Tech. In 2002, when the state was on the brink of a statewide nursing shortage, policy makers invested health funds to expand Delaware Tech's nursing program. As a result of that investment, there are now approximately 1,000 students in the nursing program pipeline, resulting in over 400 graduates each year statewide. We also train most of the state's paramedics, surgical technicians, and dental hygienists, to name a few, so if you are accessing health care services in Delaware, it's likely that you are receiving help from a Delaware Tech graduate.

Thanks to our patient care Pathways program, high school juniors and seniors can start earning college credits and certifications for nursing assistant, phlebotomist and patient care assistant. This two-year program began this academic year in three Delaware high schools, and is funded in part by Bloomberg Philanthropies, has about 45 students enrolled from Caesar Rodney, McKean and Woodbridge high schools. Students receive over 600 hours of education and training, including clinical work with local health care partners. At the completion of the program, students will have earned 12 Delaware Tech credits toward an associate degree program at the College.

We are proud to be putting our students to work in Delaware's hospitals, doctor's offices, home health care and other patient-care facilities. Responding to the demands of our state workforce is our mission as the state's community college system, and we couldn't do it without our valued community partners in the health-care industry.

For more information on Delaware Tech's workforce development opportunities in health care, visit <https://www.dtcc.edu/continuing-education/workforce-training>.

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