



# EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING REPORTER

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Courtesy reprint from ETR 12/20/10, p. 192

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## **Community Colleges**

### **CASE MANAGEMENT RAISED OUTCOMES FOR AUTO STUDENTS**

When a Seattle-area community college with a long history of automotive technician training developed a generalist certificate for entry-level jobs, with integrated classes mixing in adult education, it found that graduates began to make inroads in automotive careers.

Results of this approach became even more promising after a “career navigator” was brought on board to offer intensive case management for a student population that typically has barriers to success.

Shoreline Community College’s General Service Technician program has, since 2005, provided an entry point into automotive training and careers for students who lack the basic skills to succeed on their own in the market for entry-level industry jobs and more advanced training opportunities.

For decades, Shoreline has had an industry partnership with the Puget Sound Automobile Dealers Association. In 1992, the college and industry group opened the Professional Automotive Training Center, and over the years it has become a regional training headquarters for a variety of automakers.

The college offers students new to the field associate degree programs tailored specifically for Chrysler, General Motors, Honda and Toyota dealerships, and provides incumbent worker training to a variety of other automakers and related companies, such as Snap-On Tools. Many students in the associate degree programs are fully sponsored by their employers. And with significant financial support from employers, the once 26,000-square-foot facility grew to 32,000 square feet with an addition opened this summer.

Despite rising wages for service technicians, industry and college stakeholders faced a challenge filling the workforce pipeline. Dealers needed a more diverse workforce to serve increasingly diverse customers, and the college faced the omnipresent issue of potential students being unprepared to succeed in existing programs due to educational and personal challenges.

“We were asking ourselves if there is some way we can bring in students who have the potential, but don’t yet have the skill level,” Susan Hoyne, dean of science, mathematics and manufacturing, told MII.

In 2004, Shoreline and a cast of partners received a \$1.5 million High Growth Job Training Initiative

grant from the Employment and Training Administration and used the funding to develop its General Service Technician program.

Shoreline’s GST is one of six projects across the country being studied by Aspen Institute researchers as part of their Courses to Employment demonstration project. Each Courses to Employment workforce development project displays a sectoral focus and collaboration between community-based organizations and a community college. Aspen researchers have tracked participants in each project and are publishing a series of reports on their outcomes.

For the GST program, small cohorts of 18 to 20 students at a time who have language or basic academic skill deficits are recruited.

Instruction consists of 36 credit hours of classroom training covering areas such as shop safety and an introduction to the inspection, diagnosis and repair of the major component systems of cars and trucks. The program, structured across three academic quarters, concludes with an internship providing nine additional credits.

The program is part of Washington state’s Integrated Basic Education Skills Training initiative, which supports a team teaching approach, placing an adult educator in the technical classroom to provide English language and basic skills instruction that is integrated with the training.

Adult educators may tutor individual students, pause and reframe a lesson they see students struggling to grasp or teach a lesson to the whole class, Hoyne explained.

In 2008, Aspen — through the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County — funded an additional aspect of the program, its career navigator. This is a staffer who provides intensive case management to students in the program who seek assistance.

The navigator recruits students from workforce-agency partners and helps them find financial resources to pay for the program. Most students qualify for the Washington State Opportunity Grant, a need-based scholarship, though some are supported with workforce system funding and other sources of aid.

The navigator helps enrolled students deal with

crises, such as a broken-down car or a sudden loss of child care.

Navigators also help GST participants find internships and job placements after they graduate. This has made a strong contribution to the success of the program, according to Peter Cavanaugh, a program manager with the Workforce Development Council.

Among many reasons students who withdrew from the GST program cited for their departure, failure to find an internship was second only to attendance problems.

“Sometimes he drives the student to the interview, or coaches a student on how to explain their situation. For some of our students, there are language issues and they are not used to speaking to employers,” Cavanaugh told MII.

Aspen researchers followed the outcomes of 126 students who enrolled in the GST program between 2006 and 2009, tracking them through this past July.

The program attracted the student body for which it aimed. Most were young workers, earning only a dollar or so more than the state’s minimum wage at enrollment. More than half were minorities and 71 percent had never before enrolled in college.

About 64 percent earned the GST certificate and an additional 4.8 percent of those who did not enrolled in another auto-related field. Afterward, employment in the automotive field was much more common among graduates than among those who did not complete the program.

When they enrolled, 53 percent of all participants were employed with an average wage of \$10.24 per hour. One year after graduation, more than 90 percent of graduates were employed, and 65.6 percent were employed in an automotive job, with an average wage of \$12.57 per hour.

Two years after graduation, a few more had found automotive jobs (bringing the in-field employment rate to 72.1 percent); however, the average wage of graduates had risen considerably, to \$17.36 per hour.

Hoyne and Cavanaugh both said they were impressed with the retention of students in the automotive field and gains made in the frequency of full-time employment among students, compared to their work situations at enrollment.

“This was a very difficult economic period, when some dealers were closing their doors,” Cavanaugh said, of the time after most of the students involved in the project were being tracked in the labor market.

Among program participants who did not graduate, only 15.2 percent were employed in the automotive industry at a one-year-out follow-up point, and this number actually declined slightly by the second year of tracking.

Initial wages were similar between graduates and

nongraduates; however, over two years, a significant gap grew between their employment outcomes.

Only 50 percent of those who dropped out of the program were working, and their average hourly wages was \$15.58. That is \$1.78 less than those who completed the program, or more than a \$3,700 difference, extrapolated to annual earnings for a full-time worker.

Most of the jobs graduates found were entry-level positions in the field, such as oil change technicians; however, about 45.2 percent of all participants (and 57 percent of graduates) continued their education, with more than three-quarters doing so in an automotive field.

Many went on to Shoreline’s dealer-sponsored, degree-granting training programs, and almost all who made it to this level either completed their program or remained enrolled at the time of the Aspen researchers’ latest follow-up.

The statistics are heartening, but what is even more promising are the outcomes of the cohorts of students offered the help of a career navigator, according to Hoyne and Cavanaugh.

Again, students could choose to use these services. Although 42 of the GST trainees tracked by the researchers met with the navigator while enrolled and after he was hired in 2008, 20 did not.

The outcomes of those who did use this service were much brighter than for those who did not.

For instance, 81 percent of those who received case management graduated, compared with 30 percent of those who did not.

Forty-four percent were employed in the automotive field at the year-out follow-up point, compared with a third of those who did not receive the service.

While this employment outcome was lower than among all graduates included in the tracking project, it is important to remember that these students were competing for new jobs at the height of the recession.

“Many of our students come to us with a lot of personal obstacles. It takes a great deal of courage for them to spend a significant amount of time on campus, when challenges such as paying for a book can cause some to leave or stop out,” Hoyne said of the outcomes for students who received navigator services. “This is why this intense case management is so effective.”

✓ Find out more about Shoreline’s General Service Technician program and the Aspen Institute’s Courses to Employment demonstration by visiting [www.aspenwsi.org](http://www.aspenwsi.org).

—Ryan Hess

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