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WCC, NW Career & Technical Academy Partnership Allows High School Students to Earn College Credit While Preparing for Careers

Parents, students invited to March 5 Open House at WCC's Health Professions Education Center

Bellingham, Wash. – Beginning this fall, a new partnership between Whatcom Community College (WCC) and the Northwest Career & Technical Academy (NWCTA) will allow local high school students to earn both high school and college credit while preparing for careers in the fields of medical assisting and computer security and support. Whatcom is the fourth NWCTA campus. The Mount Vernon-based skills center provides interested students valuable hands-on education in high-demand technical fields prior to graduation. Students who complete the Academy program are prepared to enter their field of choice. Those earning a “B” or better grade may apply to earn college credits in addition to high school credits, thus furthering their education.

“Whatcom is committed to expanding opportunities for students to achieve their potential and to furthering our partnerships with local K-12 institutions,” says WCC President Kathi Hiyane-Brown. “Through the Academy, we can leverage our existing classrooms and labs to offer a high-quality educational experience for interested students. By working together, we provide students with the opportunity to learn career skills and to determine whether that career path is the right choice for them.”

Opened in 2010, the NWCTA is one of 14 Washington State Skills Centers. When the Whatcom programs begins this fall, enrolled high school juniors and seniors will attend morning classes, equivalent to three consecutive high school periods daily, in either the Medical Assisting Career Program or Computer Security and Support Program. Medical Assisting Careers students will attend classes in the College’s new state-of-the-art Health Professions Education Center and may qualify to earn 17 college credits and industry certifications. Computer Security and Support program students are eligible to earn 13 college credits in courses related to technical support, networking, or information security.

“The idea is that along with giving them career skills, they can get a jump start on college credits,” says Linda Wise Miller, NWCTA director. “We’re finding that the students who enroll in our programs are more selective and are more serious about their studies because they already have an idea of what they want to do when they graduate from high school.”

Other programs on NWCTA's main campus in Mount Vernon, as well as satellite campuses in Anacortes and at Whatcom County's Meridian High School, include culinary arts, tourism and hospitality, dental assisting, medical technology, criminal justice, finance, veterinary assistant, aerospace manufacturing, sustainable engineering, welding and marine technology. All programs focus on high-demand, high-pay or regionally important industries, and faculty ensure the curriculum reflects industry standards. There's also a focus on skills needed in today's workplace such as innovation, communication and leadership.

The Academy is tuition-free. However, some programs may have industry-related costs or lab fees. Each year, the NWCTA estimates students enrolled in their programs earn thousands of college credits at a total savings of approximately \$300,000 in tuition. Currently, 21 high schools in Skagit, Whatcom and Snohomish counties send students to Academy programs

Parents and students are invited to a 5:30-7 p.m. Wednesday, March 5 Open House at Whatcom's Health Professions Education Center (HPEC) to learn more. The HPEC is located on the corner of Cordata Parkway and Stuart Road, just north of the main campus. An open house at the Meridian High School campus is also taking place from 6-8 p.m. March 5. Construction, sustainable engineering and welding programs are offered at the Meridian location. Enrollment information for all programs is available by calling the Northwest Career & Technical Academy at (360) 848-0706.

About Whatcom: Whatcom Community College is an accredited, comprehensive two-year college with an accomplished faculty and staff who serve 11,000 students annually. On its campus in Bellingham, WA, and through online courses, Whatcom offers transfer degrees, professional and technical training programs, as well as basic education, job skills, and Community & Continuing Education classes. For more information, visit www.whatcom.ctc.edu.

About Northwest Career and Technical Academy: Based in Mount Vernon on the campus of Skagit Valley College, the Academy offers preparatory training in high-demand, high-wage, or regionally specific career areas taught by industry experts. Opened in 2010, the NWCTA is one of 14 Washington State Skills Centers. For more information, visit www.nwtech.k12.wa.us.

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