

Gaining new skills for new careers

By TCPalm Staff

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The workforce is dynamic. While some careers decline, new jobs appear to meet the demands of new and changing industries. As those new fields take hold, colleges and universities add new programs to help workers learn new skills and adapt to the changing workplace. Often, these programs help workers shift from a job in a declining field or industry to something in demand.

To decide what is in demand, schools do surveys and study statistics from state-provided studies, said Dr. Arthur Keiser, chancellor of Keiser University. For example, schools look at the lists compiled by the state, of jobs that are in-demand for each campus' workforce region.

"But if you follow just statistics, you can miss the market," he said.

So they talk to employers and ask about their present and future workforce needs, he said.

"We also do a survey of demand by students," Keiser said. If enough prospective students ask for a specific field of study, the university will study the local employment opportunities to see if they should add that program.

Indian River Community College, which recently added nine bachelor's degree programs, went through a very rigorous analysis before adding these four-year programs, said Ian Neuhard, director of Baccalaureate Programs. IRCC did a complete analysis of workforce need and demand, a survey of local employers and a survey of student demand for the programs. They also compared the need for graduates to the number of graduates coming from existing educational programs.

"There was quite a bit of study on the need for people with bachelor's degrees," he said. "And what the state found was that we need to increase our capacity to produce people with bachelor's degrees."

The primary barriers to entry for students was the cost of attending existing programs and the distance students had to travel. Allowing community colleges to offer programs helped to bring the cost down and put the programs in the towns where we live.

"We (IRCC) have five degrees in education, one in nursing and three in the BAS,

bachelor of applied science, program," said Neuhard. "There is a critical need for nurses on the Treasure Coast, especially those with bachelor's-level training."

"This is the perfect opportunity for nurses who have their associate's degrees to continue in school locally and get their bachelor's degree," he said.

School teachers are also a field with high demand. "There's a huge teacher shortage. Florida estimates the state will need 20,000 additional teachers every year for the next 10 years," he said. "We aren't producing enough here. IRCC is offering teacher education programs in math, science and exceptional student education."

Students who go to IRCC for a bachelor's of applied sciences degree can choose organizational management, public safety administration or health care management. All of these are high-demand, high wage careers.

Indian River Community College is changing its name to Indian River College to reflect the fact that it now also offers bachelor's degrees.

The college has also produced a number of new programs at the community college level including new associate degrees, certificate programs and personal or career enrichment.

The University of Florida/IFAS Indian River Research and Education Center near Fort Pierce also opens classes to people who want to take them for personal or career enrichment. The campus also offers a number of bachelor's and graduate degrees. Most are targeted to entrepreneurs and managers in agriculture and nursery industries.

Environmental Plant Identification is the newest course. A graduate-level course, it is being offered in May as part of a five-course certificate program in Environmental Horticulture or as an elective toward the master's degree in Environmental Science.

The campus has also added a statistics course called Data Analysis which is targeted to managers.

One of the newest fields that is also fast-growing may be environmental management. And UF is offering bachelor's degrees in the field at its local campus. Last year, Robin Koestoyo, UF's local spokesperson surveyed environmental job openings south of Orlando. She found a total of 1,500 environmental job openings including 500 on the Treasure Coast.

And 20 percent of what the U.S. News and World Report call "hot track" careers for the future are related to the environment, Koestoyo noted.

On the Port St. Lucie campus, Keiser has added associate of science degrees in hot fields like Biotechnology, Radiologic Technology and Sports Medicine and Fitness Technology. "The Sports Medicine and Fitness Technology has done very well in Port

St. Lucie," said Arthur Keiser. "So has Biotechnology."

Radiologic Technology is already second only to Medical Assisting in enrollments.

The University has also added a number of bachelor's degree programs including bachelor of arts degrees in Accounting, Business Administration, Criminal Justice, Health Services Administration, and Legal Studies. They have new bachelor of science degrees in Health Science and Nursing.

On the Melbourne campus, Keiser has added new associate of science programs in Diagnostic Medical Sonography (ultrasound), Nuclear Medicine and Web Design and Development. Nuclear Medicine and Diagnostic Medical Sonography are already among the top five courses of study with students.

This is not a complete list of new programs on the Treasure Coast. If you are interested in going back to school, check with your local college or university for more information about growth careers that may be right for you.

The workforce is dynamic. And many jobs that were in demand 20 years ago have been replaced by new career fields that offer good wages and opportunities for advancement.

The best way to get into these new career fields is through a good education. And area schools keep adding these high demand programs to meet the needs of the changing workplace.



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