

Workforce Development

Workforce development describes a wide range of activities, policies and programs that aim to create and sustain a viable workforce within a region, while benefitting both individuals and organizations (Haralson, 2010).

Workforce development is a hot policy arena. Automation and digitization pose a threat to many workers, particularly people of color and individuals with a high school degree or less. The latter are four times more likely to be in “automatable” jobs than those with bachelor’s degrees, according to McKinsey’s 2019 report, *The Future of Work*. Up to 12 million Latinx and African American workers may be the most impacted by these changes given the disparities in the US education system. Consequently, effective workforce development strategies can be powerful moves toward equity.

Supporting policies at the federal and state level, notably The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA; P.L. 113-128) provide resources to support education and training services that “prepare individuals for work and to help them improve their prospects in the labor market” (Bradley, 2015). Evergreen has not participated as a formal partner of the South Sound region’s workforce development system, although we do support state initiatives involving the higher ed sector, such as Career Connect Washington.

Because Evergreen is making a gradual pivot toward attracting a greater number of adult and “New Majority” students, a greater emphasis on workforce development is likely to help us attract and retain students. Many students and potential students in our region and the US are emphasizing career development as a desired outcome of their college experience. A focus on workforce development will also provide a new frame for the college locally that will help us resolve our reputational challenge. It is consistent with Governor Inslee’s support for career-connected learning throughout the higher ed sector.

Our curriculum has areas of strength (the Food and Agriculture Path of Study, our computer science programs, and our psychology/health programs) that overlap with industry clusters (Food Manufacturing; Wood Products; Health Care; Specialty Manufacturing/Logistics; IT/Telecommunications; Tourism and Recreation) central to the region’s economy. And our Paths of Study, education, and our three graduate programs provide a strong foundation for deeper integration with the workforce development system.

The Workforce Development team is prepared to continue to support this initiative through the 2020-21 academic year and beyond. The team recommends a several-part strategy.

First, support current and emerging elements of Evergreen’s curriculum that benefit adult students and individuals seeking alternatives to a four-year degree. Increase the college’s support for Prior Learning from Experience (PLE), explore new PLE models, and creating certificate programs that would have a workforce development focus.

Second, we need to continue the ongoing work by a team of faculty and staff from the Native American and Indigenous programs at Evergreen that are developing a Tribal Relations plan for the college.

Third, invest in the research needed to develop a detailed proposal of the suite of workforce development state and federal programs the college could aim to support. Implementation of such a strategy could raise our enrollments by 200 students by the start of the second year of implementation, likely 2022 - 23.