

The Evergreen State College New Academic Directions Workforce Development team proposal 7 28 20

Introduction

Workforce development is a broad term that 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). Over the past two months our team, along with the college's senior leadership, interviewed local leadership of key organizations in the local workforce development system (Pac Mountain Workforce Development Council, Thurston Economic Development Council, and the state's Employment Security Department), began research into the complex set of state and federal workforce development programs, and considered how the college's evolving curriculum under the New Directions initiative could support a workforce development approach.

This proposal will provide a brief introduction to the concept of workforce development and the evolving system that supports it; examine a set of implementation challenges and possible timeline; and offer a set of options for consideration by the New Directions Feasibility Team and Senior Leadership. We believe that because the campus is making a gradual pivot toward attracting a greater number of adult and "New Majority" students, a greater emphasis on workforce development will help us attract and retain students. It will also provide a new frame for the college locally that will help us resolve our reputational challenge.

A Brief Summary of Workforce Development and Related Challenges

The concept of workforce development has evolved over the last two decades to reflect the systemic approach shown in Figure 1. A robust workforce development system within a region provides organizations of all shapes and sizes—but notably major employers—with people who have the skills needed to support their missions. 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)

Concern about national and regional workforce development has increased over the past few years as the impact of trade, digitalization and automation have been better documented. Most recently the biggest concern is how automation poses 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*. The report estimates that Latinx and African-American workers may be the most impacted by these changes given the disparities in the US education system, with up to 12 million displaced. Consequently, effective workforce development strategies can be powerful moves toward equity. Yet McKinsey also concludes that many entry level positions typically held by young people are at risk (15 million jobs) as well as another 11.5 million jobs held by workers age 50 and over.

Sector Partnerships: The Keystone to Connecting Career Pathways to Industry Cluster Growth

Sector Partnerships align education and training programs with industry needs to produce readily employable workers.

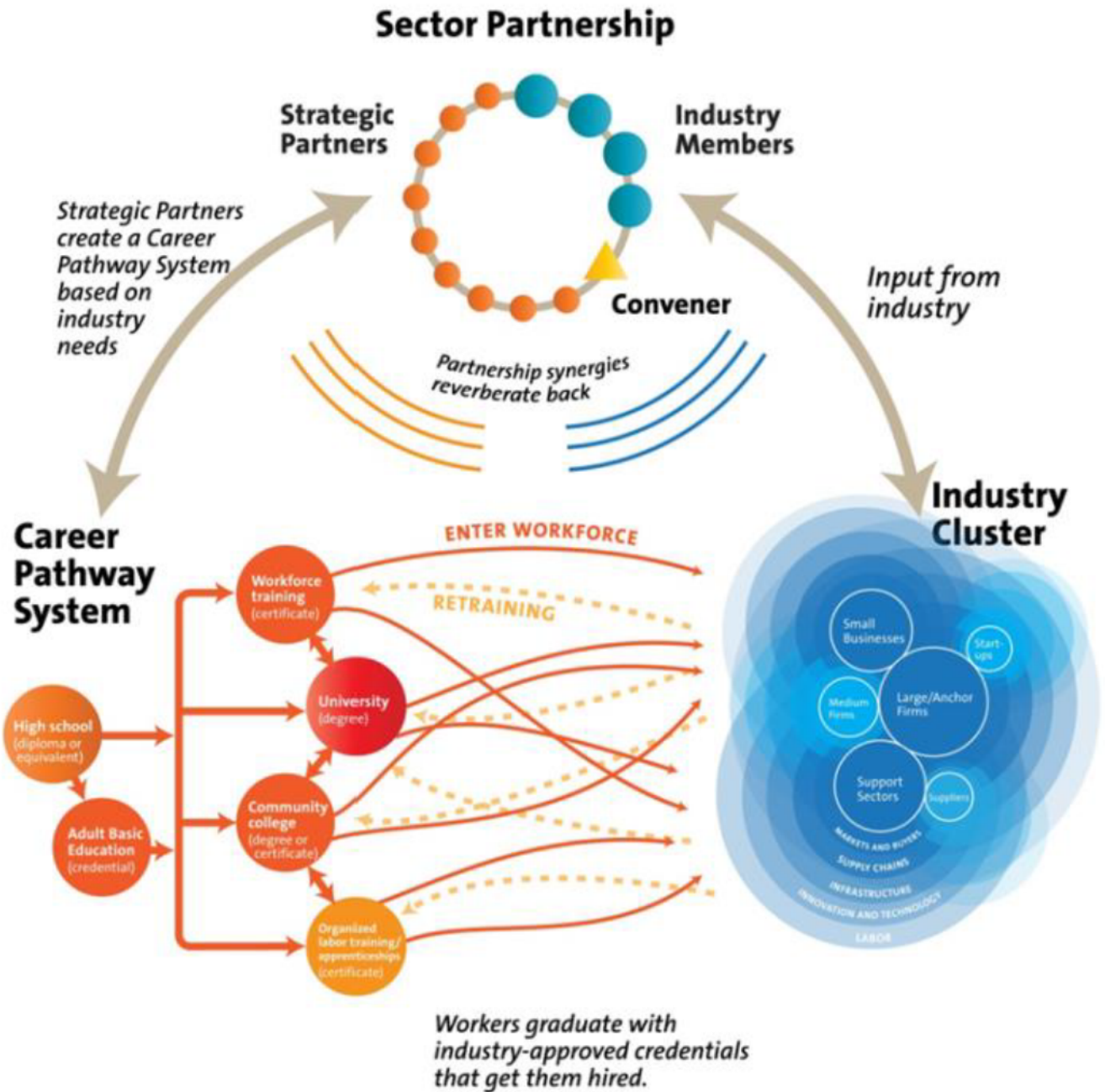


Figure 1. A depiction of the workforce development system emphasizing career pathways and sector partnerships. Source: Pac Mountain Strategic Plan.

The workforce development sector has taken note of these warnings and is seeking to prepare for this wave of change that has been compounded by the sudden loss of jobs due to the coronavirus pandemic. It is unknown how many of the lost jobs in the restaurant, entertainment and hospitality sectors will come back as the pandemic relents and economy begins to right itself.

The sector, composed of workforce development councils, economic development councils (such as Thurston County's EDC), local, state and federal agencies (such as Washington's Employment Security Department and the Workforce Development Board), businesses/nonprofits and the higher ed sector, was already developing strategies and programs to aid workers in transition. These include efforts to enhance skills and competencies through training and education, approaches to economic development, job matching and even digital infrastructure and housing. Another set of agencies has led in helping people with disabilities, with Morningside leading in this role in Thurston county.

The higher education sector has a significant role in the workforce development system. Broadly viewed, the entire post-secondary sector supports workforce development. But in general, four-year colleges, especially at the R1 level, support economic development more broadly through research and development. The community college sector has taken the lead in working with the formal workforce development sector to offer Associate of Arts degrees, certificate programs and training aimed at students seeking new skills and a trajectory toward employment and/or career change. To support this work, many CTC's have staffs that specialize in both working with faculty to craft appropriate curriculum and help students to interface with the federal and state programs that provide workforce development assistance. For example, South Puget Sound Community College has an Associate Dean of Workforce Development and three Workforce Transitions Specialists.

Many faculty members, particularly in the liberal arts college sector, have concerns about tying higher education too explicitly to preparing graduates for future employment. Traditionally the liberal arts have had a broader goal of helping students expand their "desire and capacity to learn, think critically, and communicate proficiently, and to prepare them to function as engaged citizens" (Becker, 2003).

While this broad set of goals defined by Becker are reflected in Evergreen's mission, there is also a case to be made for more directly acknowledging to current and potential students that the college (and eventually, university) is helping to prepare them for employment. Support for workforce development initiatives by the future Evergreen State University has the potential to enhance our reputation by raising applicant confidence that an Evergreen education will benefit their employment prospects.

Both anecdotal and survey data show that college students are concerned about the payoff from higher education. The most recent Princeton Review survey of over 10,000 high school students applying to college asked the question, "What will be the biggest benefit of your getting a college degree?" The most frequently chosen response, by 45% of the respondents, was "The potentially better job and higher income." The next two highest responses were, "The exposure to new ideas" (34%) and "The education" (21%). (Princeton Review, 2020). In addition, the New

Directions project seeks to gradually pivot Evergreen toward attracting more adult and New Majority students who have traditionally had more of a focus on career preparation or career change.

Evergreen has been successful at preparing its graduates for both future employment and graduate school. It has not, however, 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. Our curriculum does have several areas of strength (the Food and Agriculture Path of Study, our computer science programs, and our psychology/health programs) that overlap with three of the six industry clusters (Food Manufacturing; Wood Products; Health Care; Specialty Manufacturing/Logistics; IT/Telecommunications; Tourism and Recreation) identified by Pac Mountain as central to the region's economy.

Several other areas of Evergreen's undergraduate and graduate curriculum provide a strong foundation for deeper integration with the workforce development system. These include our other Paths of Study, education, and our three graduate programs. The Master of Public Administration program prepares students for leadership positions in the nonprofit and public sector and has long been a contributor to the success of state government, while the MES and MiT programs have supported the environmental and education sectors in the region. In addition, the development of our business/entrepreneurship pathway and the Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership and Transformational Change provides us with an opportunity to offer strong classes and certificate programs in business, entrepreneurship and nonprofit management. In addition, we are noted for providing Evergreen graduates with a solid base of critical thinking, communications, and team skills that benefit our alums.

Through the New Directions project both Paths of Study and specific curriculum teams (notably Climate Justice and Interdisciplinary Art and Design) are proposing possible certificate programs for implementation as soon as the 2021-22 academic year. A separate team is crafting a framework for the types of certificates we can support over time and studying implementation issues. This is a critical element of New Directions with significant workforce development implications, given the strong interest by many potential students in obtaining focused and faster credentials that have been shown to have an impact on labor market outcomes (Lumina, 2015; Xu and Trimble, 2015). This trend has been further accelerated by the coronavirus pandemic (Lohr, 2020a; Lohr, 2020b). In addition, the need to offer these courses/certificates in an online format offers another dimension.

The complexity of the workforce system is reflected in the matrix provided by Washington's Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, which documents the 15 different federal and state programs available in Washington, in six categories (Employment and Training Services; Occupational Skills Training; Job Search Assistance; Basic Skills Instruction; Employer Matched Current Worker Training; Income Support). (See <https://www.wtb.wa.gov/planning-programs/washington-workforce-system/>; the matrix is too big to include in this document). Benefits under several of these programs, notably Occupational Skills Training, are provided to individuals who meet program criteria, who can

then select a program or institution to provide the training/educational services. Evergreen is listed in Career Connect Washington's database. With the limited amount of time available to our team, we were not able to analyze this system in enough detail to be able to recommend that the college commit to engaging in specific programs.

Potential Partnerships

Figure 1 emphasizes the role of partnerships in workforce development. Implementation of a strategy in this arena is to a significant degree, a partnership strategy. This requires careful consideration of whom to partner with, the mutual goals of such a partnership, agreement on implementation and on an assessment strategy. Several different sets of partners are available to us:

Formal Workforce Development agencies: This includes Pac Mountain, Thurston County EDC, as well as state government agencies such as Employment Security and Enterprise Services. Such partnerships would likely occur in the process of engaging in specific state/federal workforce development programs, such as those funded by WIOA, or engaging with the state as a contract provider of training services through Enterprise Services.

Community and Technical Colleges: As we gradually pivot to becoming a completion college it will make sense for us to partner with South Puget Sound Community College (SPSCC) and potentially other CTC's in a variety of areas. (Business curriculum is likely to be a first step). SPSCC has a strong workforce development program, so we will have to emphasize curricular areas that don't have significant overlap with what they already offer.

Businesses, Nonprofit organizations, State agencies, Tribal Nations. Many WD programs emphasize robust partnerships with local businesses and other organizations, including nonprofits, that are major employers and can offer internships and other career-connected learning opportunities. We have strong partnerships with a small number of such entities, and as noted below, there are significant potential opportunities for us in working with regional tribes with significant workforce development needs.

Crafting and sustaining such partnerships requires time, patient negotiation, and can be resource intensive, but can also bring significant payoffs. We should invest the time required to explore initial partnerships with a small number of agencies and organizations; it will take time and further research to determine which organizations we should start with, although Pac Mountain would likely be a strong initial partner given its central role in the WD system.

Tribal Education

We are in the process of exploring ways to deepen our engagement with the region's tribes. At present the Native Pathways Program for upper division undergraduates, and the Tribal Governance concentration of the Master of Public Administration program have been effective in producing the next generations of tribal leaders, managers, directors and statewide tribal liaisons. These positions are key to ensuring the health and sustainability of tribal nations in our region.

According to a recent policy statement from the National Congress of the American Indian, “Investments in education equip the future leaders of tribal governments. There is no more vital resource to the continued existence and integrity of Indian tribes than Native children.”

Evergreen currently has an unheralded opportunity to build upon the strengths of our successes in Native education and tribal relations, while creating new curricular possibilities through the workforce development component of the New Academic Directions initiative. With our unique combination of Native academic and public service programs, we are well-positioned to weave together important strands of work in tribal relations, strategic planning, and workforce development.

A small team of faculty and staff from the Native American and Indigenous programs at Evergreen plan to engage in dialogue with representatives from local tribal nations (tribal leaders, education directors and human resources staff) to discuss areas of confluence where the educational interests of our closest tribal partners converge with current and potential curricular offerings at the college. We plan to reach out to the following tribal nations: Squaxin Island, Nisqually, Puyallup, Skokomish and Chehalis. We will also examine what Northwest Indian College currently offers in their four-year degree and certification programs to determine what complementary programs we might offer through Evergreen.

We have identified several of our long-term tribal partners, compiled the appropriate contact information for each of them, and will develop a timeline for the following milestones: the development of an outreach and communications plan, virtual meetings with tribal representatives, and a written report summarizing our research. The findings from the report will provide a basis for the ongoing development of a Tribal Relations plan and will inform the overall strategic plan for the college.

Cross-divisional implementation issues

There are a number of cross-divisional implementation issues that will need to be addressed as more of our outreach and enrollment growth is focused on adult, new majority, and some college, no degree students. These students have different enrollment patterns, different financial needs, more varied situations and complex lives than many traditional age students. This population brings experiential wealth to the college (presenting a hidden savings in the context of our commitment to experiential learning, which is deeply valuable but complex and expensive to administer). On the other hand, the college will need to invest to support this group’s need for greater flexibility and support to successfully enter, navigate, and complete their undergraduate education.

General work and planning process

Once the Workforce Development proposals have been evaluated in terms of feasibility, priority, scope, and timeline, we will need to develop marketing materials that correspond to whatever certificates, training, and other program elements we have developed. The college should charge a cross-divisional work group of staff and faculty to map nationally recognized best practices for outreach and supporting adult students, to identify and amplify Evergreen’s current strengths,

and to identify and shift institutional and policy barriers to student enrollment and success. Examples of the range of possible shifts include removing barriers for non-matriculated students to enroll, developing an array of payment options for adult learners in order to expand equity and financial flexibility, holding reserve financial aid funds for each quarter rather than concentrating on fall matriculation, etc.

A plan for scaling up: along with the research and policy work, a first step in increasing our adult student population would be a pilot program reaching out in fall and winter of 20-21 aimed at students who stopped out at Evergreen within some margin of completing their degree. The messaging should be about how we have worked to become better able to support them. If successful, we could begin work with those students in 21-22 in tight coordination with the Wrap-Around Advising group, who could pilot their support model and involve the students in feedback to refine the structure and approach.

As that pilot unfolds in 21-22, we can scale up outreach to students in Washington who have some college and no degree, while we continue to build our own capacity. In terms of faculty and curriculum, we need a corresponding timeline for faculty development in supporting adult student success, hybrid and online curriculum development, and have a mechanism for identifying a pool of faculty committed to part-time and evening and weekend schedules. We need to scale up Evergreen's Prior Learning from Experience program, increase its visibility, and make that program more flexible and transparent. We will need to navigate between faculty interest, skills, and expertise and data-driven decision making around what paths to ensure are available in flexible schedules and modalities. We should be ready by the time the larger cohort of adult students arrives, beginning in 22-23, with a set number (three?) of paths entirely available in the hybrid and online modalities, at least one offered entirely during daytime part-time options, and two to three completable in evenings and on weekends. (These "sets" of paths can and maybe should be overlapping options.) There will be corresponding cross-divisional work needed in marketing and the web, admissions, financial aid, advancement, advising, activities, and other areas of the college.

Increasing institutional capacity for hybrid and online teaching

Increasing our institutional capacity for hybrid and online teaching will play an important role in the success of many other current proposals, e.g., serving adult students, prison education, workforce development, increasing our geographical enrollment reach. We made an impressive transition to remote instruction for spring 2020, but significant investments in training will be needed to improve our capacity to offer world-class online instruction.

Work plan

The first stage is already underway, with the formation of a small "train-the-trainer" cohort that is working with Six Red Marbles higher education consultants, led by the faculty development dean and the Learning and Teaching Commons. Individuals in that group are working on developing skills and then exemplary courses or modules to share at a late summer faculty institute. We will need a plan for the dissemination of this training to faculty and staff educators. Scaling up support for hybrid and online curriculum design and delivery will also require

infrastructural investment and possibly additional and new staff expertise. (Hiring an Instructional Designer? Continuing work with current or other consultants?)

Transformative Justice initiatives with links to Workforce Development

The group working on Transformative Justice has a number of proposals and has been asked to submit a detailed cost analysis in September. Here we will mention those here that connect most directly with Workforce Development. Formerly incarcerated persons (or incarcerated persons who hope to join the labor force on release) face particular challenges around finding sustaining and meaningful employment, and they are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of an economic downturn. During normal times, the unemployment rates for the formerly incarcerated are up to five times higher than for the population in general. This is true for the formerly incarcerated as a whole, and these numbers, when disaggregated, reveal impacts on all races and genders but differentially distributed, with formerly incarcerated Black women in one national study unemployed at twice the rate of their white male counterparts ([43.6% vs 18.4](#)).

Work plan

The Transformative Justice group has a constellation of related proposals which are not under the guidance of the Workforce Development Team, so we are including the parts that seem related. Ordered from the smallest (-seeming!) to the bigger lifts, we can start with the proposal that the Sustainability in Prisons Certificates be attached to the award of Evergreen credit without the students needing to have first matriculated at the College. From the SPP website: “Since 2016, SPP has awarded 308 certificates for educational achievements. For enrolled Evergreen students, certificates translate to up to 15 transfer credits. Certificate recipients emphasize that credits awarded *during* incarceration would provide important benefits, including encouragement and support for pursuing additional education post-release.” The SPP project also offers a starting network of relationship and infrastructure on which we could build, with area prisons as well as community college partners like Centralia, Tacoma, and Pierce, which loops the larger aim of the Transformative Justice coalition, to build a prison education program, to the Workforce Team’s proposal link with community colleges and interest in 2+2 programs.

Building Evergreen’s own capacity to support justice involved students succeed in completing their undergraduate careers range from proposals for institutional support for Peer Navigators to designing and staffing Evergreen transitional housing (modeled on best practices for that support). Finally, Sue Feldman presented a broad vision of an explicit partnership with the state to develop and employ a “Decarceral Workforce” with the aim of becoming the nation’s first decarceral state by building a transformative justice system, a proposal that centers transformative justice as workforce development. That proposal (which is a broad vision but includes scalable pieces) includes certificates and curriculum for non-profit management, large group facilitators, prison educators, land and tenant mediators, community organizers, and a suite of humanities, math, and science offerings organized around decolonizing the mind.

Potential Impact and Options

Gradual implementation of a thoughtful workforce development strategy makes sense for Evergreen. It is consistent with Governor Inslee's support for career-connected learning throughout the higher ed sector and is a natural fit with our pivot to a curriculum that aims to attract more adult and New Majority students. There is a reason that CTC's have moved into this arena. Evergreen can be a leader in crafting a strategy showing how a four-year liberal arts college can thoughtfully offer such programs in a manner consistent with its mission. We believe that implementation of such a strategy as an element of our strategic plan could raise our enrollments by 200 students by the start of the second year of implementation, likely 2022-23.

Our team is prepared to continue to support this initiative through the 2020-21 academic year. However, we have just scratched the surface and need a much more detailed understanding of the overall system and specific government programs before we can submit a detailed proposal for consideration that would include specific workforce programs to engage in and partnerships to explore.

Our team recommends a two-part strategy.

The first component is support for current and emerging elements of Evergreen's curriculum that benefit adult students and individuals seeking alternatives to a four-year degree. This would include increasing the college's support for Prior Learning from Experience, and for an initial set of certificate programs beginning in the 2021-22 academic year.

The second component is an investment in additional research needed to support a detailed analysis and proposal of the suite of state and federal programs the college could aim to support. This could be done through engaging a consultant or consulting firm, through a temporary hire of a person with the requisite knowledge and skills, or by providing time to a current employee to take on this work over a several month period. A rough estimate of the cost of such a consultant during the 2020-21 academic year would be roughly \$235,000-50,000 to help us craft a strategy and detailed proposal. Although this is a significant investment at a time of budget retrenchment at the college, a thoughtful workforce development initiative is likely to be a successful component of the institution's overall turnaround strategy

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