

'Job readiness' focus of HCC-led grant project

Focus on customer service, hands-on experience

Holyoke Community College has been awarded a \$247,000 grant to help unemployed and underemployed individuals acquire the job-readiness skills they need to secure — and retain — stable employment.

Through this grant from the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education's Training Resources and Internship Networks initiative — TRAIN — HCC will work with a long list of regional partners to develop a three-stage program that includes pre-training in job readiness, industry-specific training in culinary arts or

manufacturing, followed by some kind of work experience with a local employer.

Up to 120 individuals from Hampden, Hampshire and Franklin counties are expected to participate in some way through June 2019.

"We hear from employers all the time, and we hear it from every sector, that many applicants lack basic job read-

iness skills — things like customer service, communication, conflict resolution, time management," said Kermit Dunkelberg, HCC assistant vice president of Adult Basic Education and Workforce Development. "They say, we can train them to do the work, but we need them to have these basic things. What we're
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trying to do here is develop a regional model.”

HCC's partners in the TRAIN Pioneer Valley Consortium project include the MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board, the MassHire Franklin Hampshire Workforce Board, the MassHire career centers in Holyoke, Springfield, and Franklin and Hampshire counties, Springfield Technical Community College, and Greenfield Community College.

In addition, the University of Massachusetts Auxiliary Dining Services in Amherst, the Log Cabin Group in Holyoke, MGM Resorts in Springfield, Peerless Precision Inc. in Springfield and Bete Fog Nozzle Inc. in Greenfield have agreed to provide internships, apprenticeships, or job shadowing opportunities to



Customer service is a critical job-readiness skill. Above, a Holyoke Community College student serves lunch with a smile at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute.

program participants.

“The other piece that all our research in the region shows is that people lack the hands-on experience of working in an industry,” said Dunkelberg. “We’re trying to connect them to those opportunities as well, so they can see what the expectations are on the job and

for employers to be able to try somebody out and see what they can do.”

HCC is working with regional career centers to develop a three-week, 60-hour “essential skills/job-readiness” pre-training course that will be offered at least four times at locations in the three

Pioneer Valley counties, said Dunkelberg.

“That will really focus on professional behavior, punctuality, attire, teamwork,” he said. “Communication is huge – and customer service. Customer service across the Valley is something that employers recognize needs to be improved.”

The pre-training segment will also include career exploration.

In the past, job readiness training has been incorporated into other workforce training programs HCC has offered, and that will continue, Dunkelberg said.

“Really, you can’t do enough of it, so it’s not just something that will be done at the front end and never addressed again,” he said. “People need to keep practicing these skills over and over because these are the things that not only prevent people from being hired, but prevent people from staying in a job,

so it’s also about job retention.”

After the pre-training, participants will have the opportunity to continue into one of the industry-specific training segments: a four-week, 120-hour program in culinary arts and hospitality at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute; or a 44-hour manufacturing training program at STCC.

Also, participants might instead choose to enter another industry-specific training program offered by one of the community colleges.

“Someone could go into healthcare training, it that was the right fit for them, or straight into the college,” Dunkelberg said. “We’re mainly looking to get people ready for employment but we definitely want to encourage everyone to think about their long-term educational pathway. The great thing is it’s customizable, according to an individual’s needs and their interests and skills.”