

CCCS leads effort to increase gender balance in state workforce

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Colorado Community College System (CCCS) has launched a federally funded five-year effort intended to ultimately increase the gender balance of occupations in Colorado that are currently dominated by one sex or the other. The initiative is being 100 percent federally funded with \$60,000 annually from the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006.

“Despite the current unemployment level, Colorado is facing a chronic shortage of skilled workers for critical workforce needs,” explains CCCS Associate Vice President and Provost Dr. Geri Anderson. “These jobs can be filled, in part, with men and women who have not traditionally entered a career due to gender stereotypes.”

The effort involves increasing the number of women in Career and Technical Education programs dominated by men and conversely doing the same for those programs in which females make up most of the enrollment.

“For example,” illustrates Anderson, “More women are needed in science, technology, engineering and mathematics related fields and more men are needed in child education, paralegal and occupations assisting doctors and dentists.”

As another example, the National Center for Educational Statistics cites that women only earn 25 percent of all Information Technology degrees and certificates in the United States.

Why is CCCS involved in this effort? Anderson explains, “CCCS is charged by the State of Colorado with supporting and coordinating all aspects of career and technical education (CTE) delivered by public secondary (e.g., high schools) and postsecondary entities.” She adds, “It’s our job to assure quality programming, efficient delivery, development and establishment of optimal statewide policy and the appropriate regulation and administration of CTE funds.”

Additionally, as the agency that first receives all of Colorado’s federal “Perkins” Career and Technical Education funding, CCCS is charged by the U.S. government with undertaking efforts to decrease the disproportionate enrollment of any gender in the state’s CTE programs.

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The effort involves helping 19 higher education institutions execute voluntary Community Action Plans. The institutions include: Arapahoe Community College, Colorado Northwestern Community College, Community College of Aurora, Community College of Denver, Front Range Community College, Lamar Community College, Morgan Community College, Northeastern Junior College, Otero Junior College, Pikes Peak Community College, Pueblo Community College (including its Southwest Colorado Community College division), Red Rocks Community College, Trinidad State Junior College, Aims Community College, Colorado Mountain College, Western Colorado Community College, Pickens Technical College, Emily Griffith Opportunity School and Delta-Montrose Technical College.

In September, CCCS will award mini-grants in amounts up to \$20,000 to institutions who formulate feasible plans for increasing the balance in their gender-disproportionate CTE programs.

According to CCCS Perkins Director Lorrie Toni, "This effort to expand Colorado's pipeline of skilled workers aims to help all Career and Technical Education providers in our state to learn how to assist individuals with finding a viable career that fits them personally as well as meets current workforce demands."

She adds, "Our goal is that from 2009-2014, the current trend of non-traditional gender participation decreasing in programs dominated by a particular sex will be reversed and then from then on out continuously improve."

Toni states the CCCS Workplace Balance Project has five strategic objectives. They include:

1. Working with teachers, faculty, counselors, students and parents to formulate a plan to communicate opportunities;
2. Creating a "Celebration of Excellence" approach that involves seeding new activities around workplace gender balance and recognizing documented success;
3. Facilitating the creation of support systems for students who cross gender barriers;

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4. Engaging employers, employer groups and other stakeholders to adapt their workplace culture so that it does not repel individuals of a non-traditional gender; and

5. Keeping score and measuring progress via leading indicators (e.g., career counseling, contacts with non-traditional students and community outreach) and lagging indicators (e.g., retention, completion and employment of those who pursue programs dominated by the opposite sex).

Educators or employers wishing more information about the project may contact Toni at 303-595-1565.