Columbia Gorge Community College

The Renewable Energy Technology Program

The Renewable Energy Technology (RET) program at Columbia Gorge Community College offers many people in an economically-struggling rural community a second-chance at employment in an expanding and innovative field. The nationally-recognized RET program provides broad-scale training in renewable energy technology to prepare individuals to work in wind-power and other related fields. The RET program is located in the Columbia River Gorge region – a gateway to renewable energy in the Northwest because of abundant wind and sun.

Students in the RET program receive a 9-month certificate or a 2-year Associate of Applied Science degree with coursework in electrical engineering, mechanical systems, and electronics.

- The 9-month certificate prepares students for employment in renewable energy with a focus on the **wind industry**.
- The 2-year degree prepares students for employment in a broad range of industries including **wind-generation, hydro-generation, solar-generation, automated manufacturing, and engineering**.

- The RET program was one of the first three in the nation to receive the **American Wind Energy Association (AWEA) Seal of Approval**.
- The RET program has **articulation agreements** with Clackamas Community College, Chemeketa Community College, Linn-Benton Community College, and Oregon Institute of Technology.

Leveraging Resources for Program Development

Training a renewable energy workforce requires ingenuity, and the RET program at Columbia Gorge Community College has relied on key partnerships to develop and implement a comprehensive program. Industry partners stepped up with cash and in-kind donations; state and federal grants were sought and awarded; and statewide and national organizations collaborated to develop program curriculum and complete quarterly program reviews. Some allies include:

Photo Above: Dr. Toda of CGCC (center) and Camille Preus of CCWD (left) cut the ribbon to the new Building 11 for the RET program.

Government Agencies: Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Energy

National and Local Organizations: American Wind Energy Association, Northwest Renewable Project

Private Companies: Vestas, enXco, Iberdrola, PGE, Suzlon

Responsiveness to Workforce Needs

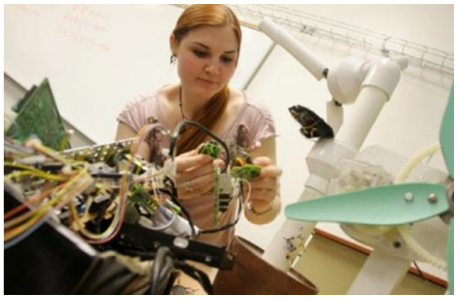
Many community colleges in Oregon have responded to the call for a renewable energy workforce, and Columbia Gorge Community College answered that call beginning in 2007. The college:

- Created an RET program in **less than one year** based on a regional wind industry needs assessment.
- Secured funds to design and build a **cutting-edge rescue training tower** for use by RET students, industry partners, and public/private organizations.
- Participates as one of nine rural Oregon colleges in the **Oregon Green Tech Certificate** consortium.
- Maintains **consistent graduation rates** with a skilled and motivated clean energy technician workforce - 55 students will graduate in December 2011 and 64 students will graduate in June 2012.

Real-World Implications

RET students engage in a variety of networking and hands-on opportunities while enrolled in the program that allow them to progress more quickly into family-wage employment in wind, hydro, solar, and biofuel technologies.

Christina Bagdhanov, RET Degree, Spring 2012



"I have been able to maintain a 4.0 GPA which gives me a sense of self confidence and validation especially in a male-dominated environment. The women in my cohort participate fully." – **Christina Baghdanov**

Nick Scott, RET Certificate, Spring 2011

"The RET program has provided me with many opportunities. I received an internship as a wind technician with General Electric at Shepherds Flat Wind Farm – which will be one of the largest wind farms in the world." – **Nick Scott**

- Over half of all RET graduates become **wind-turbine technicians** and the other half go on to work in hydro or solar technologies, work in automated manufacturing, or continue their education at a university.
- RET students formed the **Delta Energy Club** which hosted a Clean Energy Forum, a White House Roundtable, and a Clean Energy Film Festival.
- RET students are partnering with Focus the Nation to promote a **Community Renewable Energy Park** which will supplement local energy sources and educate people about renewable energy.