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RCC lands $920K in grants to train businesses, workers and students

By Vickie Aldous of the Daily Courier

Rogue Community College has received $770,000 to directly train manufacturing businesses, plus $150,000 to create fast-track student programs for dental assisting, emergency medical services, medical assisting and a new course to help automotive technicians safely handle electric and hybrid vehicles.

Most people know that RCC trains students to get new jobs or advance in their careers, but the $770,000 in federal funding will help the college train manufacturing businesses and their workers in Josephine and Jackson counties.

RCC will reach out to manufacturers to see what types of specific skills they would like the college to teach their workers. The instruction — offered either at a business or RCC campus in Grants Pass, Medford or White City — will be quick so that employees aren't diverted from work for long, said Stephen Phelps, dean of instruction and student engagement.

"We can respond really fast to the need of the community in a less formal way than a true academic program," he said.

As one example, Phelps said RCC could teach the principles of lean manufacturing, which involves analyzing steps in a company's manufacturing process to improve efficiency, reduce waste, lower costs and get products to customers faster.

"A request we have heard over the years is for lean manufacturing training," he said.

Companies that can demonstrate they have efficient processes are more likely to win government contracts, Phelps said.

RCC's effort to train manufacturers is part of a statewide program to offer training and technical assistance to businesses.

The Oregon initiative got $5 million in funding from the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Meanwhile, RCC landed two grants totaling $150,000 from the state to develop short-term, "stackable credentials" in healthcare and electric vehicle safety.

RCC will redesign dental assisting, emergency medical services and medical assisting, which normally take 22 to 33 weeks spread out over two or three academic terms. Students will be able to complete the new accelerated programs in a single 11-week term, RCC said.

"This investment will expand access to accelerated, high-quality healthcare training that prepares students for in-demand careers while helping meet the urgent workforce needs of our region," Rusty Riis, dean of healthcare and education, said in a statement. "By strengthening pathways in dental assisting, emergency medical services and medical assisting, we are creating more opportunities for students to earn valuable credentials and move quickly into family-wage employment."

The shorter programs will reduce the time between starting an education and entering the workforce. Students will also be able to build on their initial credentials and pursue career advancement in high-demand fields such as dental hygiene, nursing and paramedicine, RCC said.

Known as stackable credentials, the training can be stand-alone to start a career, or be used as a stepping stone to more training and career advancement.

RCC is creating a credential for handling electric and hybrid vehicles safely that will be part of other automotive training.

The accelerated training will prepare graduates for entry-level technician jobs in quick lube, express maintenance, car dealership service and fleet support that require basic vehicle maintenance skills and an understanding of high-voltage hazards, according to RCC.

In Josephine and Jackson counties, the demand for automotive service technicians is growing. RCC will work with local businesses, including car dealerships, to develop the accelerated program.

Phelps said the grant from the state is helping RCC to invest in high-voltage diagnostic tools, specialized safety gear and other modern safety equipment.

The automotive training and medical training will incorporate “soft skills” identified by businesses as essential for worker success. Those include communication, teamwork, adaptability, digital literacy and problem-solving, RCC said.

The college expects the accelerated programs to launch in fall 2027.

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