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Communications Office
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Connecticut Community Colleges Awarded \$2 Million U.S. Department of Labor Grant to Fund Educational Programs in Sustainable Operations, Alternative and Renewable Energy

The Education & Training Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor has announced a \$2 million grant to the Connecticut Community Colleges (CCC) to deliver education and training to prepare students with the workforce skills needed to enter careers in growing fields of employment. The Sustainable Operations: Alternative and Renewable (SOAR) Energy Initiative has the potential to make Connecticut a national and global leader in industries that will need employees equipped with the foundational skills needed to advance along career pathways in fields such as environmental technology, alternative energy, automotive technology, building performance, clean water and energy efficient operations.

The CCCs were selected as the recipients of this highly competitive grant in the USDOL's fourth round of Community-Based Job Training Grants which attracted 274 proposals resulting in a total of 68 awards in 36 states. This fourth award makes Connecticut the only state in the nation to receive awards in all four rounds of the Community-Based Job Training initiative which has focused on building the capacity of the nation's community colleges to prepare a skilled workforce to fuel economic growth. Governor M. Jodi Rell endorsed the grant proposal and applauded "the success of the previous grants in health care and manufacturing in strengthening the partnerships of Connecticut's Community College System with the state's leading businesses and industries."

The latest grant has the potential to advance Connecticut's vision for a cleaner, greener state for years to come. The Governor's "CT's Energy Vision for a Cleaner, Greener State" mandates that, by 2020, "20% of Connecticut's power be supplied by renewable sources including solar thermal electric, photovoltaic, landfill gas, wind, biomass, hydroelectric, and fuel cells." Additionally, construction projects on Connecticut state buildings and schools must incorporate energy efficiency technology, and the state automobile fleet will convert to hybrids.

The core curriculum will modify existing college courses to build basic academic and technical skills within a sustainable operations context. Occupational specialty courses will be adapted or developed by individual colleges with input from an industry consortium to ensure relevance to employer needs. A Sustainable Operations Certificate program will also feature instructional technology, tuition assistance, and targeted academic and career counseling.

In addition, simulation equipment to enhance student learning will be available through grant funding and agreements with industry partners. College faculty members will gain an understanding of industry applications to better connect teaching and learning to industry needs. The colleges will recruit sustainable operations industry professionals as mentors, advisors and expert speakers, and program coordinators will support students, particularly those facing barriers to retention and academic success, through academic and career counseling, and financial aid. Raising awareness of the range of careers in alternative and renewable energy is an important part of SOAR, and the CCCs' College of Technology and its Regional Center for Next Generation Manufacturing will assist with increasing awareness through outreach, student recruitment, and faculty development.

Key to preparing a successful proposal and developing the program components of the grant are partners that include the Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology; the Connecticut Workforce Development Council; the Connecticut Department of Labor; the Connecticut Business & Industry Association; and numerous energy industry employers and associations.

“Preparing students to enter Connecticut’s Knowledge Economy with the education and skills needed to succeed is a primary focus of our Community College System,” according to Marc S. Herzog, Chancellor of the Connecticut Community College System. “This SOAR grant responds directly to the skills gaps and workforce shortages outlined in state and regional economic development and workforce investment plans, and we are most grateful to our partners from business, industry, and government for their invaluable support in bringing this needed funding to Connecticut.”

CT Department of Labor Commissioner Patricia Mayfield expressed her support for this latest workforce development initiative. “We look forward to working with the Connecticut Community Colleges once again to expand the opportunities for higher education and 21st century careers. The award comes at a critical time for the future of the State and its workforce.”

For more information on this USDOL Community-Based Job Training Grant Initiative, please contact Gail O’Keefe, Director of Workforce Development, Connecticut Community College System, GOKeefe@commnet.edu or 860.244.7619.

There are 12 Connecticut Community Colleges conveniently located throughout the state. Visit the Connecticut Community College System website at www.commnet.edu.