

Community College Lands a Four-Year Program Using Data-Driven Approach

Situation

With an appealing climate, great local employment opportunities,¹ and a robust agricultural sector, it's easy to see why the Tri-Cities has been the fastest-growing region in Washington state since 2000.²

Located in the southeastern part of the state, Richland, Kennewick, and Pasco (a.k.a. the Tri-Cities) have mushroomed nearly 20 percent over the last eight years and boast a current population of 234,000. However, as is always the case with rapid growth, there is one issue: The area's booming population base has few available avenues to earn four-year degrees without traveling out of the region, thus limiting the ability for many residents to ascend higher on the career ladder.

As a result, **Columbia Basin College (CBC)** offered a solution. With a solid grasp on the regional and state economy and comprehensive local labor market and education analysis, the Pasco-based college crafted an idea on how to provide local associate's degree-holders with an excellent opportunity to gain bachelor's degrees—without leaving town.

Challenges

To establish an applied bachelor's degree in management program at CBC, administrators would need to demonstrate to the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges that there would be a good return on investment for allowing four-year offerings. Specifically, they had to provide convincing figures in two areas:

1. **That the proposed program could be mapped to specific occupations.**
2. **That the demand for those occupations would increase over the next 10 years in the Tri-Cities region and the state of Washington.**

Administrators at CBC already knew that there was demand, and that these occupations were growing—they just had to demonstrate with data what they knew anecdotally.

Solution

Columbia Basin's Dean of Institutional Effectiveness, Joe Montgomery, was still searching for the ideal figures to complete the report, which led him to EMSI's web-based analysis suite, Strategic Advantage. Through EMSI, CBC was able to quickly look at specific Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes and link them to Classification of Instructional Programs (CIPs) for their region. Moreover, CBC was able to project how those occupations would grow over the next 10 years. As a result administrators easily determined how many job openings, both new and replacement (those created by things like retirement and out-migration), there would be for each occupation over the given timeframe. Armed with this information and additional surveys of local employers, CBC officials had no problem showing the forecasted labor market demand for the applied bachelor's in management.

¹ The area's large employers include Bechtel, Lockheed Martin, and the US Department of Energy's Hanford site.

² http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/local/356620_metro27.html.



Following up on this information, EMSI created a Socioeconomic Impact report to estimate the return on investment to state taxpayers as a result of the program. The report demonstrated that the higher earnings of the program's graduates, and their associated economic and fiscal effects, would more than pay for the state's investment in funding the program.

Outcome

The state board approved the applied bachelor's program in the Spring of 2008, and the interest level is already high. Starting in the Fall of 2009, CBC hopes to have 35 students in its inaugural class, with the potential for more enrollment slots in future years. Looking back, Montgomery credits EMSI's powerful numbers for helping get the program approved. "It really turned (the project) around for us. The data was really the basis for it." As a result, a segment of the Tri-Cities workforce will soon be equipped to move up the career ladder when it comes to management positions.

In the media

"Four-year CBC program boon to school, community." Tri-City Herald.

<http://www.columbiabasin.edu/home/index.asp?page=10&recordid=1283&returnurl=index.asp%3Fpage%3D10%26pagenumber%3D4%26pagesize%3D15%26deptid%3D%26archive%3D1>

"CBC's 4-year business degree plan approved." Tri-City Herald.

<http://www.columbiabasin.edu/home/index.asp?page=10&recordid=1257&returnurl=index.asp%3Fpage%3D10%26pagenumber%3D5%26pagesize%3D15%26deptid%3D%26archive%3D1>

About EMSI

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