

The Seattle Times

Tuesday, July 8, 2008 - Page updated at 12:00 AM

Permission to reprint or copy this article or photo, other than personal use, must be obtained from The Seattle Times. Call 206-464-3113 or e-mail resale@seattletimes.com with your request.

Seattle CC: education and innovation

By Charles H. Mitchell
Special to The Times

Just recently, we heard that Seattle has again been named one of the top cities in the country for innovation. Like most of us who call Seattle home, I'm always pleased to see that our city continues to be distinguished by its ingenuity and its visionaries, because we consider that community colleges are among the area's leading innovators.

You might think that two-year colleges are pretty much the same as when you — or your son or daughter — went to college. However, just as our city skyline has changed, the Seattle Community Colleges have also taken on an amazing new shape. They are definitely not your parents' community colleges.

Community colleges are as innovative as any of our startups. We have to be, because we work with limited resources to serve an extremely diverse student body, one that reflects the spectrum of our area's residents and their goals. In fact, with that broad job description, I think we have the most challenging job in higher education.

Our innovations may surprise you. You'll find the classic sciences on our campuses, but you will also find the



STEVE RINGMAN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Peter Bos, center, teaches a winemaking class at South Seattle CC.



Charles H. Mitchell

state's first two-year program in biotechnology, based in a striking new Science and Math Building at Seattle Central Community College. At North Seattle Community College, you'll find the state's first two-year degree in nanotechnology.

Even flagship programs such as Culinary Arts have a new flavor. The Northwest Wine Academy program at South is the first in Western Washington and the program has doubled enrollment every year since it opened four years ago. The student-produced wines are already winning awards.

Seattle leads the country on lists of green programs, and so do the Seattle Community Colleges. Very early on, the Seattle Culinary Academy at Seattle Central moved to a model of sustainability, with students and faculty spending summer quarter in the Skagit Valley farmlands, where they focus on food-production practices that support the environment in a curriculum called "From the Ground Up." Graduates will be among the first in the country to fill the already emerging need for culinary professionals with this knowledge.

North has offered a traditional real-estate program for many years. But a new focus on green real estate is a fresh — and popular — innovation. Similarly, green-collar training programs are under way at the Georgetown campus of South Seattle Community College, at the thriving south end of the city.

Our colleges have established unique partnerships with K-12 districts and universities to present programs that will enhance Seattle's economic and social vitality.

The award-winning Bright Future training program at Seattle Vocational Institute offers high-school students the opportunity to earn their diplomas and a certificate of training at the same time.

A new partnership between Seattle Central and the University of Washington, Teachers for a New Era, provides a pathway for a new generation of multiethnic teachers who will better reflect the socioeconomic and ethnic diversity in the K-12 classrooms where they will be teaching. In partnership with Western Washington University, students at North can earn their transfer degrees and then stay on the North campus to continue their studies toward teaching degrees.

Growing numbers of place-bound students who need four-year degrees will find such options through special agreements at all of our colleges.

Additionally, South was one of the state's first two-year colleges to offer a four-year applied bachelor's degree, with a degree in Hospitality Management. Seattle Central is one of three colleges now being

considered for the second group of applied bachelors' degrees, this one in Applied Behavioral Science.

Community colleges are great American inventions that have democratized education and have helped people to achieve the American dream for more than 100 years. They are designed to reflect their communities: If Seattle is innovative, so are its colleges. Seattle Community Colleges, because of our accomplishments and vision, are founding members in the League for Innovation, an elite group of 20 community colleges from across the nation.

My career at the Seattle Community Colleges has spanned more than 25 years, and I feel that the need for our services today is greater than at any time in my memory. This is the reason we are turning to the community with the Power and Promise fundraising campaign at the Seattle Community Colleges. In addition to specialized industry initiatives, the campaign will fund scholarships and support services vital to helping every student achieve his or her goals.

We have received a \$5 million challenge grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, gifts from Boeing and other regional leaders totaling \$17 million, and with the support of additional visionary donors, we will reach our goal of \$25 million and continue to educate and innovate for the Seattle region into the future.

Charles H. Mitchell is chancellor at Seattle Community Colleges.

Copyright © 2008 The Seattle Times Company