

CWI: Filling jobs in the Treasure Valley



CHRIS BUTLER / cbutler@idahostatesman.com

Jason Rush said he was making good money doing contract security work as a civilian in Iraq in 2010 after leaving the Marines. He wanted more stability so he signed up for engine-repair classes at the College of Western Idaho, which led to an internship at Carl's.

Students in professional-technical programs are finding employment, but the school's real impact is still unclear four years after it opened

BY BILL ROBERTS
broberts@idahostatesman.com
© 2013 Idaho Statesman

Jason Rush tinkered with a spark plug on an ATV at Carl's Cycle in Boise, where he works tuning engines, checking transmissions and changing oil.

"I like wrenching," said Rush, 30.

Rush's day starts at 7:30 a.m. with classes in small-engine and power-sports repair, one of the College of Western Idaho's professional-technical programs. By 1 p.m. he's working in Carl's maintenance shop as a paid intern. Often he doesn't leave until 7 p.m. "Makes for a long day," he said.

When he finishes at the community college in May, the former Marine infantry corporal, who saw action in Iraq, will step into a full-time job at Carl's, where a typical starting wage is \$10 an hour.

Rush's story is being repeated at many businesses in the Treasure Valley. But four years after CWI opened, it's hard to say how well the two-year college is really doing. Business leaders praise it and students flock to it, but information on the college's impact is scarce.

CWI lacks reliable data showing the kinds of wages students earn after leaving school or the types of industries that are employing them.

An underqualified workforce remains a problem in Idaho, holding down wages and leaving some high-paying jobs begging for local applicants.

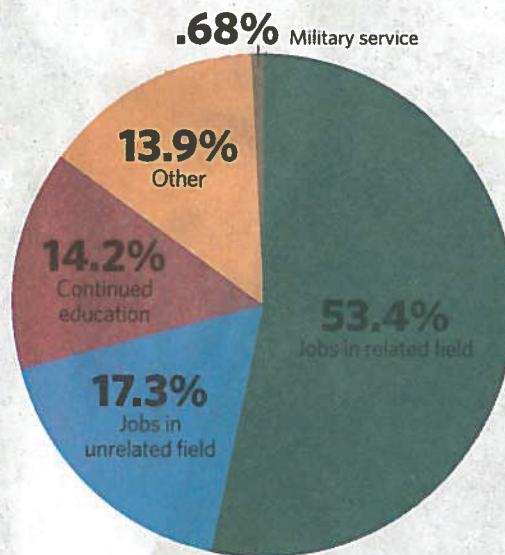
In an informal survey of hundreds of participants at a Boise Metro Chamber

WHERE CWI STUDENTS GO AFTER SCHOOL

Those departing the college's programs don't all end up in the fields for which they were trained. The pie chart shows what students who completed courses in 2010-2011 said they were doing in 2012.

Students completing programs	382
Number reporting	294
Percentage responding	76.9

* Chart numbers don't total 100 due to rounding.



SPECIAL CWI PROGRAMS A14

- ▶ **Retraining** helps laid-off workers move on and find new employment.
- ▶ **Computer security** is a field that will keep growing, creating lots of jobs.

Source: Idaho Division of Professional-Technical Education

CWI

CONTINUED FROM A1

of Commerce lunch in January, people cited workforce development as the No. 1 problem for businesses, even more so than the much-hated personal property tax, whose proposed repeal is among the top issues in this year's legislative session.

VOTERS PROMISED A BETTER WORKFORCE

Voters in Ada and Canyon counties created CWI in 2007 and imposed a property tax on themselves to help pay for it. Voters were promised a school that would help improve Valley residents' training and skills.

Boise State University President Bob Kustra was an early advocate. He wanted to relieve his growing university of providing community college education and training on his increasingly crowded campus.

CWI promised affordability, too. It charges students \$136 per credit hour, about half of what Boise State charges.

Students responded. Enrollment, which started at 1,200 in January 2009, swelled to more than 9,000 last fall.

Programs such as small-engine and power-sports repair enrolled 1,200 people when they were still part of Boise State. At CWI in Nampa, they have nearly 1,800.

Enrollment figures don't count students taking non-credit courses. There were nearly 6,800 of those in 2012. Some were sent by employers seeking to improve performance. Others were people hoping to get in on the ground floor of the health industry by taking short-term classes in certified nursing assistance or emergency medical technician training.

PRESIDENT PRAISED FOR RESPONSIVENESS

The school is still finding its way. For its biggest private benefactor, that's OK.

"After only four years, they should still be making adjustments and continuing to innovate," said Jamie MacMillan, executive director of the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation.

The foundation has spent millions of dollars encouraging Idaho high school graduates to continue their educations and has donated millions more to CWI, including \$13 million to renovate the old Sam's Club store near CWI's main campus for vocational training.

Some business leaders credit CWI President Bert Glandon with responding quickly to demands. "I think he does about 10 people's worth of work every day," said Clark Krause, executive director of the Boise Valley Economic Partnership, the



CHRIS BUTLER / cbutler@idahostatesman.com

Technicians may take several years to become proficient at working on all the types of equipment serviced at Carl's Cycle, said Curtis Bjerke, the service manager. Four of them come from the programs that were once run by Boise State University and now are part of the College of Western Idaho.

economic development arm of the Boise chamber.

MacMillan said the professional-tech programs work with industry partners to see that the college meets business needs.

GRADUATES, TAKE OUR SURVEY — PLEASE

CWI, like other Idaho community colleges, sends surveys to former vocational students and relies on them to report their status.

In 2012, three-fourths of the 382 professional-technical students who completed programs in 2011 responded. Just over half said they were working in the fields for which they were trained.

Glandon says that's not good enough. If classes are to meet community needs, the figure should be closer to 80 percent, he said.

CWI also tracks students in general education when they go on to other colleges to earn four-year degrees. Just over half go to other colleges. Officials don't know what happens to the rest.

"(The) community would love to have specific, vetted information," Glandon said.

UP-TO-DATE TRAINING

At Western States Equipment, a Caterpillar sales and service business headquartered in Meridian, with locations in five states, the technician bay is stocked with CWI graduates from the diesel mechanics program. They work on bulldozers, front-end loaders and other heavy equipment.

In the past year, the com-

pany hired four CWI students for the shop at 500 E. Overland Road. Over the past several years, the company has hired 10 to 12.

The Meridian shop has 40 heavy-equipment mechanics, and the starting wage is \$15 to \$18 an hour.

"CWI students have exceeded our expectations compared to students hired from other programs," said Cameron Pickett, employment coordinator.

The students have a depth of training that comes in part from taking classes at the Micron Professional Technical Education Center (the Micron Foundation, which donated \$2.5 million, won naming rights because the Albertson Foundation, which donated five times as much, declined them.)

The center houses state-of-the-art equipment for many vocational programs. "(It's) close to what is actually out in the industry," Pickett said.

Students are trained on diagnostic software for a variety of the products Carl's sells, including Polaris, Honda and Suzuki, said Curtis Bjerke, the dealership's service manager. "Hopefully (the school) will start using it more," he said.

GETTING BETTER NUMBERS

The State Board of Education and the Idaho Department of Labor are working on a project, funded by a \$3 million federal grant, to get better information on what happens to students af-

ter college.

The goal: Track students into the workplace and learn about their careers, while protecting individual privacy.

Idaho's tracking system could tell where students go, what industries they are in and what kind of wages they make, said Gabriel Reilly, an Idaho Department of Labor senior researcher.

Idaho is one of about 20 states working on the tracking — called a longitudinal data system — that will eventually follow students from kindergarten into their jobs.

Information could guide schools in what occupations have the most demand and what wages students can expect to earn.

Georgia has had a similar data warehouse for a dozen years showing what students in its 25 technical colleges earned as they entered school and what they earned afterward. Reports help the state set educational policy and provide schools and taxpayers with a return on investment for the money they put into educating students, said Andy Parsons, assistant commissioner of data and research for Georgia's technical college system.

Georgia's plan is limited. It doesn't show the salaries and jobs of people working out of state.

Idaho's system, still in development, is expected to be running by 2015.

Bill Roberts: 377-6408, Twitter: @IDS_BillRoberts

RETRAINING IS PART OF THE JOBS PACKAGE

In June 2011, XL Four State Beef Inc. closed its doors in Nampa, costing 522 jobs.

CWI put together a training program in conjunction with the Idaho Department of Labor to help many of those workers find new jobs. The predominantly Hispanic workforce was trained in speaking English in the workplace, taught computer skills and coached in preparing for job interviews, at a cost of \$196,000.

The program began in October 2011, five months after the plant announced its closure, and ran for six weeks, with 146 participants. Ninety-five percent of them completed the class, and by 2012, 43 percent of them had jobs.

"The success in the story was CWI's ability to quickly create a class that would provide specific skills to address the needs of a group of displaced workers," said Jennifer Couch, CWI spokeswoman.

CWI also trains employees at existing businesses. A dozen maintenance people at Jacksons Food Stores, with locations in Idaho, Oregon, Washington and Nevada, needed some basic computer training on Excel and Microsoft Word. The company called the school, which last March ran the employees through a 2.5-hour program covering just the information they needed for tracking work orders.

The cost was about \$1,400.

The school met with maintenance managers and tailored the training to the company's needs, said Susan Rhoads, vice president for human resources. "Their service was great."

GETTING AHEAD ON COMPUTER SLEUTHING

Don Bowers teaches a distinctly 21st century set of courses at CWI born of the technological revolution. He trains students in how to detect and stop hackers.

His courses in information security and digital forensics show students how to dig deep into hard drives looking for sensitive information someone might have mistakenly thought they were hiding there.

About 40 students are enrolled in the program, which began in 2009. Eighty percent of those who complete the program end up with jobs in their fields, Bowers said. Students work at investigation firms and law enforcement agencies such as the Idaho State Police.

"We've got to know what the bad guys are doing," said Bowers, an associate professor.

CWI computer detective training is ahead of the curve, said Neal Custer, who owns Custer Agency, a private investigation firm that specializes in security. He recently started a branch of his business focused on security for tech equipment.

"I personally have had two (of Bowers' students) as interns," he said. "Very high quality."

But he expects more businesses will recognize the need for the kind of computer security people Bowers is training, Custer said.

"One of the things we are trying to get across to businesses is there needs to be more due diligence," said Custer, chairman of a group of businesses that advise Bowers on training needs. "That's why I am excited about Don's program."

BILL ROBERTS

Bill covers workforce issues and higher education for the Statesman. He has been a business reporter since 2008.

