Health, cyber security drive community college numbers
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Real estate, finance courses cut as jobs in those areas wane
Premium content from Baltimore Business Journal by Bruce Vail, Contributor

Ida Sass said health care is “huge” at Baltimore City Community College.

At community colleges in Greater Baltimore, the troubled economy means rising enrollment and a heavy emphasis on courses that will help older students advance their career prospects, local educators say.

With Johns Hopkins Health System and the University of Maryland Medical System among the region’s top employers, it should come as no surprise that health care courses are the most popular on community college campuses. Students are signing up for training programs that will help them land jobs as nurses, medical billing specialists and X-ray technicians. Federal government work has also generated interest in project management and cyber security programs.

Community college leaders say they are very sensitive to economic trends and are continually adjusting their non-degree course offerings in response to shifting demands.

Consistent with their mission to serve the evolving needs of local markets, these educators say they are cutting courses related to real estate, finance and small-business development as jobs in these industries wane. Anne Arundel Community College, for instance, had 296 business students in 2010, compared with 294 in 2012. By contrast, enrollment in health/medical
courses was about four times as high, according to Sandy Jones, director of continuing professional education at Anne Arundel Community College.

“We are market-driven,” said Sandra Kurtinitis, president of the Community College of Baltimore County. “We take market measure very seriously here,” she said.

Many hospitals, nursing homes and related medical facilities are generating steady demand for training and certification programs, Kurtinitis said.

“Health care is huge,” said Ida Sass, associate director of workforce development at Baltimore City Community College.

BCCC’s certified nursing assistant program is the most popular in the school’s workforce development division, she said. Because of the continuing demand, the CNA program has consistently been the most popular over the years, according to Sass.

The same can be said for Howard Community College.

“Our CNA classes are packed all the time,” said Patty Keeton, Howard’s executive director of workforce development. Courses that lead to certification in medical billing and coding are also very hot right now at the Columbia campus, Keeton said.

Both Sass and Keeton said college administrators encourage students to view CNA programs as a first step in a continuing educational process leading to more specialized, higher-paying jobs in the health care field. Currently, many students in this area are upgrading their certifications to qualify as venipuncturists, who draw blood from patients for testing, and multiskill medical technicians, Sass said.

John Wesner, a 44-year-old CCBC student, is a good example of this process.

An Air Force veteran, Wesner is enrolled in courses for certification as a CT scan technician. Wesner had X-ray training in the military, he said, and he is unsatisfied with the income from his job as a bartender. “I’d like to get up to $50,000 to $60,000 a year,” and courses at BCCC are a direct path to that goal, he said.

Local educators also cited certified project manager programs as especially popular right now as students in these programs wind up getting work as government contractors or at IT companies, said Anne Arundel Community College’s Jones. In these programs, students are taught how to plan and execute large-scale projects that are short-term in nature, but often involve large capital investments or institutional changes in private or public organizations.

“It’s been the most popular for the last three or four years, and we are offering some of these courses online now,” Jones said.
While courses designed around the health care industry are the bread and butter for community colleges in this area, educators say work for the federal government is driving demand for courses in cyber security. Howard Community College’s Keeton pointed to the nearby Fort Meade military complex, home of the National Security Agency and the U.S. Cyber Command, as the source of demand for these courses.

“Some 10,000 to 15,000 Howard County residents work at Fort Meade, so this is sort of in our backyard,” she said. “Employment is still growing at Fort Meade and the Aberdeen Proving Ground.”

Furthermore, law enforcement agencies of all kinds are generating steady demand for certifications in computer forensics, she said. Kurtinitis at CCBC said computer forensics courses are growing in popularity there as well.

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