

## VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR DISPLACED WORKERS

### INTRODUCTION

This investigation resulted from the concerns of citizens who had become unemployed through company downsizing, job obsolescence, company relocations or being judged under skilled for any jobs currently available. Each citizen had completed courses at the same vocational school and were now complaining they were either not finding employment or were let go from the employment they had found within a few weeks for not being properly trained.

### INQUIRY

Our interviews were not confined to persons and authorities normally thought to be within the purview of the Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) Committee because of the number of routes citizens can take in seeking employment. We interviewed members of the Employment Development Department (EDD) and the Workforce Development Division (WDD) to learn their role with each other and with the unemployed citizen. We talked with a number of the staff and teachers in the Technical Development Center (TDC), one campus of the Ventura Continuing Education facility. We obtained course catalogs from Oxnard College, Ventura College, Simi Valley Adult School and Career Institute, Coastline Community College (CCC) and The Learning Tree University. We obtained specific topic data from the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB) and the American Bar Association (ABA). We contacted the U.S. Department of Education and the Inspector General who oversees the welfare of students receiving government funding. Finally we interviewed a number of the students who had attended and/or graduated from TDC and a sampling of the list of companies TDC said were prospective employers who called them seeking to employ their graduates.

### FINDINGS

TDC offers 38 vocational programs. All courses are self-paced, open-entry and offered on a year-round basis.

Students successfully completing courses are issued a certificate of competency.

All students are required to dress in business attire while attending classes.

Many of TDC's students have been previously evaluated by EDD and WDD. WDD explained that they use interviews and/or tests to assess the (prospective) student's needs. If the student has realistic goals WDD honors their wishes. If the student doesn't know what field of study to pursue or has unrealistic goals, WDD makes appropriate career recommendations. There are 30 WDD approved schools from which the student can choose.

The courses offered at TDC, course duration and tuition charges are shown in Figure 1.

COURSE NAME	COURSE DURATION	TUITION
Computer Review	9 wks.	\$2,368
Clerical Review	9 wks	2,398
Data Entry Specialist	11 wks.	2,859
Office Graphics Specialist	11 wks.	2,957
Paramedic Specialist	12 wks.	3,035
Recording Keeping Clerk	13 wks.	3,429
Office Assistant	14 wks.	3,657
Medical Records Tech.	16 wks.	4,309
Word Processing Specialist	18 wks.	4,727
Back Office Assistant	18 wks.	4,732
Clerk Typist	18 wks.	4,739
Computer Repair Technician	18 wks.	4,787
Front Office Technician	18 wks.	4,850
Medical Transcriber	18 wks.	4,853
Data Entry w/ Inventory	18 wks.	4,685
Pharmacy Assistant	19 wks.	5,117
Desktop Publishing	20 wks.	5,369
Pharmacy Technician	21 wks.	5,117
Customer Serv. Rep. Collect.	21 wks.	5,513
Administrative Assistant	21 wks.	5,524
Medical Billing Management	21 wks.	5,553
General Billing Technician	22 wks.	4,685
Accounting Clerk	22 wks.	5,788
Legal Assistant	23 wks.	5,995
Human Resources Mgmt.	23 wks.	5,095
Business Administration	23 wks.	6,118
Computerized Accounting	23 wks.	6,115
Physical Therapy Aide	23 wks.	6,182
Bus. Mgr. -World Wide Web	24 wks.	6,363
Computer System Technician	26 wks.	6,868
Digital Multimedia Animation	26 wks.	6,868
Digital Multimedia Tech.	26 wks.	6,868
Medical Front/Back Office	26 wks.	6,868
Computer Aided Design Tech	26 wks.	6,869
Digital Multi-Media Design	36 wks.	9,450

**Figure 1: Course titles, course duration and tuition costs at TDC**

Over 85% of the students attending TDC are receiving some kind of tuition subsidy.

Tuition charges at TDC include all books and materials.

Ventura Unified School District Principal of Adult and Continuing Education explained that classes at TDC are taught using the principle of andragogy in contrast to the pedagogy principle used in most schools.

TDC reports that they successfully place 96% of their graduates.

## CONCLUSIONS

The paragraphs in this section are sequenced to correspond to the paragraphs in the Findings Section.

TDC's open entry, year-round concept is a plus for many students who find it inconvenient to wait for a uniform start date. It becomes immediately apparent that, with students continually entering and leaving classes, a lecture environment isn't workable. Students learn by working at their own pace but within certain school dictated time constraints. This approach lends itself to combining several related study programs in one classroom staffed with one teacher and one paraeducator to assist the students on an as needed basis. Unfortunately what sounds workable in theory has some serious failings in implementation. Many of the students lack a high school education; some haven't been in a classroom in years. They report having great difficulty understanding some of the basic concepts from workbooks only. Because there are between 28 and 30 students in most classrooms, many of them complained the wait to get help was excessive, often more than an hour. One student studying to be a Computer Repair Technician said he asked for help but was told he should work out the problem by himself because he wouldn't have anyone to ask in the real world. It took him three days to find the answer.

Students at TDC earn a certificate of competency upon successfully passing tests to ascertain they have met the minimum requirements. The courses will not transfer to a college for credit although the school will furnish transcripts when they are requested.

TDC staff considers proper dress a vital part of the student's education and requires all students attend classes dressed in business attire. This is particularly important for students who may have been blue-collar workers and are now entering the white-collar world.

As stated earlier, a large percentage of TDC's students are adults who require additional training to stay in or re-enter the job market. They confirm the interviews and/or tests WDD staff described. The students informed us that although they were told that they did well on the test, no one really discussed the results with them or explained how the results would be used to recommend career choices. One student said he'd driven large equipment for a number of years but was put on disability because he'd had several surgeries on his hands. WDD tested him and recommended he train at TDC to be an administrative assistant. We question why a person who had a problem similar to carpal tunnel syndrome would be steered into a career that is known for causing hand problems. A number of students reported that they requested to attend schools they knew to be excellent in the field they wanted to study but WDD told them they were not on the approved list. Each said they learned later that the schools they requested were, in fact, on the list. The students added that either someone at WDD told them, in confidence, that TDC was the best school to attend or they were given a list of three schools to visit and evaluate. Although the schools on the list differed

among the students except for TDC, each found two of the schools very small and with old equipment.

Because so many students complained they were unable to find employment in the field in which they trained, we compared classes offered at TDC with similar courses offered at other schools. This proved to be a bit challenging because TDC's courses are very structured whereas other vocational and adult schools allow the students more choices. Two of the comparisons, which are representative of the fields we investigated, are presented in Figures 2 and 3.

TECHNICAL DEV CNTR	SIMI ADULT VOCATIONAL SCHOOL
<b>CLASSES FOR COMPUTER APPLICATIONS/WEB ADMINISTRATOR</b>	<b>CLASSES FOR WEB DESIGNER</b>
Accounting 1 Computer Literacy Computer Database Computer Operating System Computer Spreadsheets Electronic Calculator Introduction to the Internet Keyboarding I Presentation Graphics Desktop Publishing I Web Page Design Word Processing 1 & 2	Windows 95 Scanner Internet Exploration PowerPoint 97 Illustrator 7.0 PageMaker 6.0 QuarkXpress PhotoShop4 Acrobat Front Page 97 PageMill HTML Microsoft InterDev Java Mastery of Web Design
<b>POTENTIAL CAREERS</b>	<b>POTENTIAL CAREERS</b>
Computer Processing Specialist Applications & Graphics Specialist Administrative Assistant Marketing Assistant Executive Administrative Assistant Computer Applications Specialist Sales Assistant Marketing Coordinator Program Applications Specialist	Computer Operator Software Applications Web Design  <i>Note: Requirements for certifications are Mastery of Web Design plus seven additional courses of the student's choice</i>

**Figure 2: A comparison of classes required for courses in Web Page at TDC and at Simi Adult Vocational School. Both are certificate courses.**

TECHNICAL DEV CNTR	COASTLINE COMM COLLEGE	UCSB
<b>CLASSES FOR LEGAL ASSISTANT</b>		
Business English Business Law Computer Operat. Sys. Computer Spreadshs Keyboarding 1, 2 & 3 Legal Office Simulation Legal Term/Transcript. Shorthand Word Processing 1 & 2  * Choose 2 + Choose 5 # Choose 1	Intro. to Legal Assisting Legal Procedures I Legal Procedures 2 Civil Litigation I Legal Analysis & Briefing Legal Research Legal Clinic Practicum/Ethics WordPerf. For Legal Office 1 & 2* Civil Litigation 2* Criminal Litigation* Fed. Court Pract. & Proceedings* Law Office Management* Family Law* Corp./Business Organiz.* Bankruptcy Law & Proceedings* Civil Trials and Evidence* Contract and Tort Law*	Intro. to Fundamentals Legal Research Legal Writing Ethics/Case Mgmt. Civil Litigation Business Law+ Bankruptcy Law+ Wordprocessing I & II+ Wills & Trusts II+ Employee Relations+ Corporate Law+ Tort Theory+ Real Estate Law+ Contract Law+ Internship+ Adv. Wills & Trusts# Adv. Res. & Writing#
<b>POTENTIAL CAREERS</b>		
Legal Assistant Legal Secretary Legal Receptionist Legal Clerk	Legal Assistant	Legal Assistant

**Figure 3: Comparison of classes required for Legal Assistant at TDC, CCC and UCSB. TDC and UCSB are certificate classes; CCC and UCSB are ABA approved.**

In reviewing the data from other schools, it became apparent that TDC's tuition was significantly higher than that charged by other non-private institutions. TDC's courses are structured around 60-hour classes whereas the community college programs are in semester units. We first converted TDC's hours to semester units using the following algorithm: Semester units = # wks. (days wk. + hr. day)/# wks. We found that in comparison to the community college tuition of \$13 a semester unit, TDC's tuition charges were as follows:

19 week courses	\$146.20
20 week courses	153.40
21 week courses	147.90*
22 week courses	142.47*
23 week courses	169.49*
24 week courses	171.16*
26 week courses	189.09
36 week course	262.86

\* Mean of all classes in that category

Next we converted the community college classes to hours. To do this, we totaled the number of hours, including laboratory hours, that a student is required to be in class for the business/computer sections. Educators refer to this as seat hours. We compared the cost per hour of seat time that TDC charges with that of the community colleges. To be fair we first deducted book and material allotments from the TDC tuition. TDC's seat hour charge averages \$7.37 compared to the community college seat hour charges that range from \$0.52 to \$0.62.

Most of the students at TDC are receiving tuition assistance of some kind. Companies that have moved out of state pay the tuition for the employees displaced by their move. Insurance pays tuition for students retraining because of physical limitations. Most of the tuition assistance is provided by WDD. WDD informed us that they try to limit retraining duration to 6 months to keep costs at a minimum. It is interesting that WDD is willing to pay between \$6,000 and \$9,000 for courses at TDC that, even over a 12 to 18 month period including parking, health and other routine charges, would cost under \$1,000 at a community college or another adult vocational school.

Pedagogy is the teaching methods used by most schools that includes lecture and practice. TDC uses andragogy, a self-directed learning approach for adults that has been highly criticized. The inventor of andragogy outlined seven steps for adult educators to follow that basically directs them to diagnose the needs of the adult student, teach in a climate favorable for learning and continually evaluate and adjust the course design and methods for further learning. TDC's implementation is that each class, e.g. keyboarding, is taught for 60 hours. The student then starts the next class, often taught in the same classroom. If a student fails to complete the class within the 60 hours allotted, he/she must arrange some extra time with the instructor.

Many of the students said instructors responded to their requests for help by asking what they had done wrong this time. Others report that their instructors simply told them their work was wrong with no further explanation. They said that when they asked what was wrong with it, the instructor told them he didn't have time to talk with them, walked away and didn't come back. These actions don't seem to be consistent with the basic steps of andragogy as outlined by the inventor. We also have some reservations about the value of spending seven hours a day just working with the electronic calculator or keyboarding. It would also seem that concepts associated with classes such as spreadsheets and word processing would be easier to learn if the 60 hours were spent in shorter class periods but with a longer duration of instruction. Students often do better when they are allowed time to mentally assimilate course material before being presented with additional information.

TDC reports they successfully place 96% of their graduates in the field for which they were trained. They furnished data showing that 329 students have graduated between July 1, 1997 and April 1, 1998 and have projected that 420 students will graduate by the end of the fiscal

year. The report shows a placement rate for the 329 students who have graduated so far this year of 87.2%. The status breakdown for these students is as follows:

- 191 are employed
- 42 are seeking work
- 26 are not working by choice
- 26 have moved from the area
- 14 are continuing their education
- 14 are medically disabled
- 9 are unreachable
- 7 are currently on externships

The only way we can come close to TDC's placement statistic is to include the employed, not working by choice, moved out of the area, medically disabled, unreachable and on externships as being successfully placed. Taking the above breakdown at face value, we computed the number of employed students as 63%. They showed no evidence that students had found jobs on their own or which the school had been instrumental in placing. In fact most students told us they felt TDC did very little to help them. They told us TDC gave them copies of want ads and help wanted fliers but they felt they were pretty much on their own. We did learn that TDC sent resumes to some of the recruiting companies but did not find any students who had found permanent employment as the result.

Once we saw the placement statistic given to us was flawed, we wanted to learn more about the breakdown of categories in their report. We called a number of the students from the list TDC gave us. Several students listed as employed were actually unemployed. Others were either employed in temporary jobs and/or in fields other than the one in which they had just trained. One man shown as not working because he didn't want to tell us he had been looking for a job and, at this point, would even take a job as a security guard if he could find one. Security was not related to his field of study. Students listed as continuing their education complained that they were unable to find a job after graduating from TDC. One student listed as unreachable because of a disconnected phone answered our call on the first ring.

All the students to whom we spoke who had trained in animation complained the school used software that has been obsolete in industry for some time. TDC told us they taught relatively current software but didn't feel obligated to use the latest versions because few businesses kept abreast of the latest versions. For example, many businesses are still using Windows 95 even though two newer versions have been released. If the student learns Windows 95 they can handle the upgrades easily. That logic may be sound in most cases but it obviously does not hold true in the field of animation.

Several students informed us they couldn't find employment in their field of study and had to find jobs in their former, lower paying fields. A number of other students who had found jobs in their field of training said they had been let go within from two to four weeks because their new employers said they needed too much additional training.

We also called a sampling of companies that TDC said called them seeking graduates to fill employment openings. We did find two companies that had employed at least two TDC graduates each and were happy with them. Most of the companies on the list deal in temporary employment and routinely send invitations for resumes to all the schools, or were companies who send notices to all schools whenever they have an opening. Other companies said they had either reviewed TDC's student's resumes and didn't think they had sufficient background to warrant an interview or had interviewed some of the students and found them to be lacking in background.

Students who have taken medical office and phlebotomy classes are pleased with their training and have found employment in a timely manner. Many reported TDC had found externships for them that led to employment. An externship is non-paid, on the job training in an appropriate business. Other businesses have not proven to be as rewarding. Externs are often replaced at the end of their tenure with a new extern. The students get some experience and the employers get free help.

We asked WDD for a breakdown of the number of students they sent to each of the 30 schools on their approved list, but were told this information was not available. In answer to our inquiry about the kind of follow-up they did to ensure the students found employment, they said anyone who wanted employment could find it. If a student graduating from TDC or any of their other approved schools could not find employment, it was either because they didn't really want to work or had a bad attitude.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- That WDD re-assess their methods for screening and testing before recommending career opportunities and schools for their clientele.
- That WDD collect accurate data on their clients after they have graduated from training and make appropriate adjustments for maximum efficiency and cost effectiveness.
- That WDD improve their attitude toward all clientele seeking assistance.
- That WDD evaluate the overall cost of training for their clientele not just the duration of the training.
- That WDD reevaluate TDC as providing adequate training at a reasonable cost.

- That the Ventura Unified School District, Superintendent of Schools closely scrutinize all statistics, including placement statistics submitted by TDC.
- That TDC reevaluate their teaching approach to be more responsive to the student's individual needs as stated in their catalog.
- That they keep their teacher to student ratio low, as stated in their catalog.

### **RESPONSES REQUIRED**

Ventura Unified School District, Superintendent of Schools  
Workforce Development Division  
Technology Development Center