

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## Community Colleges Are an Agile New Player in Job Training

**Millions of Americans rely on the traditionally low-profile institutions for fast, skills-focused education that pays off in the labor market.**

*By Tamar Jacoby, president of Opportunity America, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit group working to promote economic mobility.*

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[Excerpt from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/community-colleges-are-an-agile-new-player-in-job-training-11632405309>]

...An estimated 3.7 million ‘noncredit’ learners currently attend U.S. community colleges, enrolled in skills-focused programs that do not grant degrees. They are largely invisible to the federal government, which keeps copious data on every other kind of college student, including community college students working toward degrees. Noncredit learners are enrolled in skills-focused programs that do not grant degrees, and they are usually ineligible for federal financial aid.

...For most of their history, community colleges have lived in the shadow of traditional four-year colleges and universities. Many people saw them as a less distinguished, more affordable stepping-stone to a bachelor’s degree. Even community college educators often underestimated their institutions’ potential, seeing them primarily as feeders to four-year schools, focused on the same traditional, academic mission.

But that is changing as automation and business restructuring upend the labor market. Technology is shortening the half-life of skills and increasing demand for skilled technical workers. With fewer good jobs available for people with only a high school diploma, many students who could once get by without college are looking for fast, skills-focused programs that will pay off in the labor market.

People displaced by robotics and artificial intelligence need short, targeted bursts of training that enable them to return to the workforce as quickly as possible. And as the pace

of change quickens, workers at all education levels may need to return to school later in life, learning new skills to keep up with the evolving economy.

...For many students, especially older learners, community college holds out hope of a second chance. Mark Gilson of Woodside, N.Y., grew up around animals and wanted a career working with living creatures. He went straight to college after high school, planning to get a bachelor's degree in zoology, but when he flunked out of chemistry he switched to a humanities major. College led to graduate school and two degrees in the fine arts; then he worked off and on for 20 years as a commercial designer. But finally, in his late 40s, his youthful dreams caught up with him and he decided to go back to school to qualify as a veterinary technician.



Mark Gilson is a veterinary tech student at LaGuardia Community College in Queens, N.Y.  
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...[H]e wants a degree. “There’s just so much to learn to pass the national licensing exam,” he says. “You need to prepare as well as possible.” This time around, he bore down on a required chemistry course and is on track to graduate from LaGuardia Community College in December....

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