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# The Chip Challenge: Growing a Workforce for the Semiconductor Industry

by Lisha Dunlap, Chandler-Gilbert Community College

According to the Arizona Commerce Authority, "Arizona is the best state in the nation for entrepreneurship, innovation and emerging technology."

At the end of August, Governor Doug Ducey capitalized on that sentiment with a five-day trip across the globe to visit the Republic of Korea and Taiwan for relationship building within the international technology industry. Reported by the Arizona Republic, the expedition was specifically focused on growing Arizona's semiconductor industry and building relationships with high-tech manufacturing companies.

Why Taiwan? Because last year trade between Arizona and Taiwan equaled \$1.92 billion and is only growing. In fact, the Republic also stated that the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. plant is currently under construction in Phoenix, bringing 2,000 new positions in need of a newly trained workforce to operate what may be the most advanced chip manufacturing process in the U.S.

To say that this is important is an understatement. Semiconductors make the use of almost every piece of technology possible. Without continued production, there would be no smartphones, radios, TVs, computers, video games, or advanced medical diagnostic equipment, emphasizes the Semiconductor Industry Association. It's exciting to think that Arizona is such a major part of that.

In an effort to provide the talent needed to keep production going, Chandler-Gilbert Community College (CGCC) is one of three colleges in the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD) to offer a Semiconductor Technician Quick Start program, an in-person, 10-day certification course where participants can learn the skills needed to join this fast-growing industry—in less than two weeks. Estrella Mountain Community College and Mesa Community College are offering the program as well, developed in partnership with major area employers such as Intel Corp.

The Semiconductor Technician Quick Start program can be completed at no cost to Arizona residents. Those meeting the eligibility will receive a \$270 tuition stipend, fully covering Maricopa County resident tuition—and partially covering non-resident tuition. According to CGCC, this stipend is awarded upon successfully completing the class and passing the NIMS Technician Certification test. Students who do not pass the certification test will be responsible for paying the \$270 tuition.

This training supports the renewed effort to grow the workforce needed to support the production of semiconductors and related technologies, preventing a large-scale shortage that could span worldwide. Outlined in the CHIPS and Science Act signed by President Joe Biden in August, the government recognizes this need, and the new legislation provides up to \$52 billion for semiconductor manufacturing, workforce development, and R&D. For the Phoenix area, this directly impacts Intel, currently expanding its chip manufacturing plant in Chandler and adding 3,000 new jobs.

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And for those looking for a steady career, the job outlook is a good one. Arizona already leads the nation in pay for Semiconductor Processing Technicians, with an average salary of nearly \$30 per hour according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. There has been an immediate rush locally to sign up for the Semiconductor Technician Quick Start program, with a waitlist of over 300 at CGCC alone. Fortunately, with the three MCCCDC colleges offering multiple courses monthly at each location, the educational demand will continue to fit the need.

As Arizona more fully develops into this new silicon desert, CGCC and its affiliates will make sure the community is ready for the technology career boom—with a monsoon of trained employees.

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