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## Community Colleges, Industry To Collaborate On Manufacturing And Technology Curriculum

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*(photo by Carrie Jung - KJZZ)*  
Instructor Jason Jenkins demonstrates how to type

In the industrial technology lab at Gateway Community College in midtown Phoenix, teacher Jason Jenkins is explaining the finer points of how to write commands for what's known in the manufacturing world as a CNC machine.

"We're going to put a program stop," Jenkins told the class, "Which is a?" he asked, hoping to hear a few attempted answers from students.

CNC machines are used to create custom tools, like the hammer these students are making today, out of materials like plastic and various metals.

While Jenkins has been working and, more recently, teaching in the industry for the better part of six years he said the technology is constantly changing, which means the faculty at Gateway are also updating their curriculum about once a year.

But soon, that decision about when and how to update class material will be made by

commands into a CNC machine more than just the faculty at this community college.  
for his industrial technology  
class.

"This is a higher level gathering of folks," explained Daniel Barajas, the director of workforce development for the Maricopa County Community College District.

He said thanks to a new agreement known as the Arizona Advanced Technologies Corridor Project, the college system will now be sharing and developing curriculum with Pima Community College in Tucson and Central Arizona College in Coolidge for its manufacturing and technology related classes.

"At the end of the day if things were to work right, and we believe they will, the student coming out of Mesa Community College or Central or Pima, the employer anyway will not feel that difference," Barajas explained. "They'll see consistency. The same types of credentialing."

In addition to the schools, area manufacturers will also have a chance to influence class material during regular listening sessions to discuss specific skill and certification needs.

The first one is scheduled for next month. Mark Gaspers, a spokesman with Boeing, said his company is planning on going because many of the positions at its plant in Mesa require specialized skills

"We like to think of these people as if they were surgeons," Gaspers said, which is why the idea of sharing and combining curriculum between three community colleges is so appealing to him. He knows what he'll be getting from students graduating from three community colleges in the region.

"I often say education, by its very nature, moves like a battleship," added Trevor Stokes, the workforce program manager for Arizona's Office of Economic Opportunity. "It's big, it's strong, it's going to be there for a long time, but it doesn't move very nimbly. Business is different."

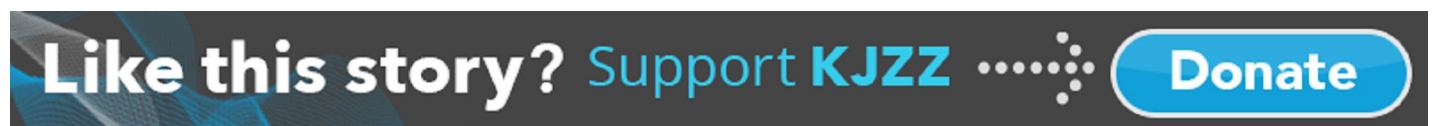
Stokes had the initial idea for the project and has been working to grow it with state partners ever since.


In addition to hopefully speeding up the adaptive pace of Arizona's higher education, Stokes said the goal is to grow the state's skilled workforce. Because more than anything he said, companies considering moving to the state tell him they need to know they'll have a reliable supply of workers.

"We heard anecdotally that the problem they have is not finding engineers, those highest skilled positions," Stokes said. "They say I need engineering techs and those middle skilled occupations that I need so many more of."

While the project is still in its infancy, officials are making progress to begin setting curriculum. After meeting with local industry leaders, the three community colleges will then study their own material to figure out where they overlap and where there are gaps.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: KJZZ is licensed to Rio Salado College, one of the Maricopa Community College District schools.*



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