

# EASTSIDE BUSINESS *monthly*

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## BCC Launches Nation's First Degree Program for Developmentally Disabled Students

BELLEVUE /PRNewswire/ -- Bellevue Community College (BCC) has launched the nation's first higher education degree program for developmentally disabled students.

With an expanded curriculum of 52 separate courses, the college's Venture program now offers a 90-credit Associate in Essential Studies degree through which high-functioning individuals with learning, cognitive and intellectual disabilities can demonstrate mastery of an established body of knowledge and gain the skills for lifetime success.

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*—Cynthia Johnson, Executive Director of BCC Venture Program*

According to BCC, the program serves a population with untapped abilities. "The cognitively and intellectually challenged are typically not expected nor encouraged by society to learn as much as typical students," said Cynthia Johnson, executive director of the Venture program, which for several years has been offering advanced courses for the developmentally disabled. "Too

many people believe this population cannot possibly perform in the classroom or in the workplace at an adequate level.

"Traditional teaching methods often don't work for our students," said Johnson. "But this population can continue to learn and can reach their full potential with the help of an appropriate program and specialized teaching techniques -- such as short, repetitive explanations of content, hands-on exploration of the topics and extensive reinforcement through social interaction."

According to Johnson, high school programs for the cognitively challenged typically emphasize pre-employment skills over academic coursework, and students normally are not given the intensive training they need to develop mature social skills. As a result, they graduate high school with weaker academic and workforce skills than they are capable of achieving and then find few, if any, options to continue their education. In the post-secondary programs that do exist, the focus is primarily on life and pre-employment skills with little academic content, Johnson adds.

The Venture degree program, however, is designed to offer higher-learning opportunities for the developmentally disabled population, providing academics combined with social and life skills development and workforce preparation, with the ultimate goal of career placement and life success.

Academic topics in the program include mathematics, reading, writing, science, art, media communications and history. Courses in social and life skills include learning strategies, conversation strategies, relationships, self advocacy, disability awareness, nutrition, human sexuality, brain basics, physical education and personal finance.

Workforce-skills course topics include information technology literacy; problem

solving in the workplace; job research; preparation of applications, resumes and portfolios; conversations in the workplace; self advocacy; and internships.

All content also emphasizes problem solving, critical thinking, communication and team building. By reinforcing academic content with practical development of social and workforce skills, the program works to prepare students to live self-sufficient, fulfilled lives with meaningful participation in society.

A major goal of the Venture program is for students to gain challenging employment. A workforce development specialist provides social and vocational coaching and develops a support network to infuse appropriate vocational training into the curriculum. Job internships, job placement and job coaching all provide the opportunity for students to gain first-hand experience, increase self-esteem and enrich personal knowledge and skills.

By combining academics, social skills and workforce training, Venture aims to provide students with a seamless transition to successful employment.