

# School should never be 'out'

**R**emember playing Concentration, the game in which you tried to remember the location of every card in a group placed face-down, so you could find each one later from memory? A significant challenge even when the order of the cards remained unchanged.

But what if someone kept rearranging the cards? Without learning the new layout each time, you would surely lose.

Like it or not, we're all indeed playing that game, for keeps, with the stakes being our personal success in life. And whether we realize it or not, these days we all must continue learning throughout our careers in order to keep up with life's equivalent of the constant re-shuffling of cards.

Fortunately, with their flexibility and commitment to meeting community needs, our state's two-year colleges provide exactly that lifelong learning opportunity.

From new technology at work to new worldwide competition, from the evolving ethnic and social makeup of our community to a shifting global climate, we are caught up in a whirlwind of change.

The impact is beginning to get quite personal. Forecasters estimate that three-fourths of us will soon need retraining simply

to do our own jobs, and the need to continually retool our skills won't end there. Eighty percent of us are said to be currently unqualified for the majority of tomorrow's jobs.

Is there something we can do to preserve and improve our competitiveness in the job market?

Yes: lifelong and lifewide learning.

Community colleges offer this very opportunity, both through for-credit programs and, more and more, through Continuing Education.

No longer made up primarily of enrichment programs for one's leisure-time enjoyment, continuing education now offers substantive courses that teach solid career skills to help you keep current with changes in your field or even prepare for an entirely new career.

Even highly trained professionals — engineers, information technologists and people with advanced degrees — are taking advantage of community-college lifelong learning programs, so much so that many people now call community colleges 'the new graduate school.'

In BCC's continuing education program, the largest among all of Washington's two-year colleges, three-fourths of our 26,000 annual enrollments are now in career development pro-

grams that teach marketable new skills such as information technology, project management, human resources management, technical communications, marketing and customer service, medical informatics, medical transcription and many more.

Scheduled primarily for weekends or evenings, the offerings range in length and intensity from single-session seminars up to full certificate programs.

Some — called Fast-Track programs — are designed to allow people to completely yet swiftly retool their job skills, covering in 7 to 10 months the same course-work that would ordinarily require up to two years to complete.

The new reality of life in the 21st century is: we cannot afford to rely complacently on the working and communications skills that have been so effective up till now. We must continue to learn throughout our lives, and in every sector of our lives, if we are to survive and thrive.

So while K-12 classes may be 'out' for the summer, for successful adults living in a whirlwind of change, school must always be in session.

*To learn more about BCC's Continuing Education offerings, visit [www.gotobcc.com](http://www.gotobcc.com).*

Jean Floten is president of Bellevue Community College.

## EDUCATION MATTERS



**Jean Floten**