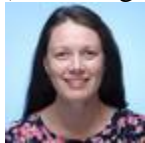


GCC's new program for adults with autism matches potential with skills



Aram Ohanis, chair for Glendale Community College's manufacturing department, directs students to the next presentation in the Engineering Design Manufacturing HUB at an information meeting for a brand new program called the Uniquely Abled Academy at Glendale Community College on Thursday, May 5, 2016. The academy trains high-functioning adults with autism how to use a CNC machine.

(Tim Berger / Staff Photographer)



[Kelly Corrigan](#) Contact Reporter

Next month, Glendale Community College will debut a one-of-a-kind program to train highly functioning adults with autism to operate computer-numerical-control machines, setting them on a path to working as machinist apprentices or computer numerical control operators and programmers.

The upcoming training is the result of the college's new partnership with the Uniquely Abled Academy, which is part of the Uniquely Abled Project, based in Valley Village. The project works with educators, nonprofits and corporations to place high-functioning adults with autism in high-performing and well-paid jobs.

Management consultant Ivan Rosenburg established the Uniquely Abled Project in 2013.

After consulting with aerospace companies, he discovered there was a need for computer-numerical-control operators in manufacturing. As the father of two children with autism, he also set out to shift people's perspectives in placing people with perceived disabilities in high-skill jobs.

"The Uniquely Abled Project is to shift the social paradigm from 'disabled' to 'uniquely abled,'" he said, adding that adults with autism are a great match to work as computer-numerical-control machine operators and programmers because of the highly focused and repetitive work the job requires.



Nolan Askew, 17, of Monrovia, presses a go button on a CNC machine to begin making another part at during an information for the Uniquely Abled Academy at Glendale Community College on Thursday, May 5, 2016.

(Tim Berger / Staff Photographer)

"You want to be able to follow objective orders. You want to be able to work alone very well," he said.

Employees can earn a median salary of about \$18 per hour or more, he said.

An open house informing parents and prospective students about the training program was held Thursday evening at the college, where parents and students toured the manufacturing and engineering labs.

The 10-week program for 20 students will begin at Glendale Community College on June 20. Instructors will guide students through 300 hours of instruction, lab time and soft skills, such as interviewing and resume building.

To enroll, students must be able to function independently in social and academic settings, and demonstrate a competence in basic math, reading and computers. Students must also be at least 18 years old and have earned a high school diploma or GED.

Glendale Community College is a major manufacturing hub with state-of-the-art machines and certificate programs addressing the demand for manufacturing employees.

“The community colleges — most of them recognized this need for [computer-numerical-control] training,” Rosenberg said.

Rosenberg met Jan Swinton, dean of the college’s workforce development, while both were serving on the Los Angeles Economic Development Committee.

Whittier parent Karen Chong heard about the program through a friend and drove to Thursday’s open house with her 19-year-old son, Brandon, whom she thinks could excel with the training because his strength is in working with computers, she said. She drove 45 minutes from Whittier to Glendale for the open house, and is willing to make the drive many more times for his participation in the program.

“If it’s something that’s going to meet his needs, then, of course, I’ll commit and do the driving,” she said.

Rosenberg said he is hopeful the program will eventually expand nationwide on campuses that have similar resources and equipment to train students.

“Hopefully, we’re starting a revolution,” he said.

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