

## Danbury College Fair opens doors for adults as well as students

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The good news is that there are a growing number of jobs in Connecticut for people with training or certifications beyond a high school diploma but not a four-year college diploma.

They are called middle skill occupations.

And a free College Fair at the Danbury Fair mall Oct. 19 from 5 to 9 p.m. will offer students and adults in the region not only the opportunity to speak with representatives from hundreds of four-year degree programs, but also those that offer training for these middle-skill jobs like community colleges, nursing programs and technical schools.

Research shows that a Connecticut woman with an associate's degree will earn \$9,000 more a year than one with a high school diploma, and males with an associate degree will earn more than \$11,000 over a male with a high school diploma.

The challenge is to get high school graduates to pursue training to this pipeline of jobs and to encourage the workforce to get the additional skills needed for these positions.

And unless things change, Connecticut's economy will suffer, according to a new study released Thursday by The Workforce Alliance and the Skills2Compete-Connecticut campaign.

"We are hearing that a lot of good jobs are going unfilled because the skills of the work force don't match the needs of the employers," Jessie Hogg Leslie, executive director of The Workforce Alliance, said in telephone conference call Thursday.

About 43 percent of all job openings projected for Connecticut by 2016 are "middle-skill" -- roughly 245,000 positions.

Valerie DeRubertis, a guidance counselor at Danbury High School, said her district urges students to begin thinking early about careers and even holds a career fair in the middle schools.

The annual college fair offers lots of help for students and adults.

"This is not just for students but for adults who need extra training," DeRubertis said.

John Beauregard, director of one of Connecticut's nine Regional Workforce Development Boards, which assess regional employment and training needs and coordinate programs that address those needs, said he's seen a change in who comes to the unemployment centers.

In the past, people would see their job loss as cyclical.

Now, many understand that employers need workers with more training.

Some see that their jobs are gone for good and want to move to another field, like going from finance to health care, while some are tradespeople who want to transfer their skills into another industry, such as green technologies.

His center has five times as many people who want to be retrained than in the past, but he said that won't make a dent in the overall demands in the state.

So, go to the College Fair.

It can open a door.