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America’s Community Colleges Unite to Train Students for Jobs in the Green Economy
Over 300 Schools Join Leadership Initiative to Create More Competitive U.S. Workforce

WASHINGTON, Oct. 11 – To lead in the accelerating green economy, America needs millions of new skilled workers for jobs in renewable energy, energy efficiency, green building and sustainability. To meet this demand, America’s community colleges are joining the first nationwide initiative to collaborate on and implement programs to train students with the education and skills needed to succeed.

Launching today, The SEED Center (www.theSEEDcenter.org) is a leadership initiative, free resource center, and online sharing environment for community colleges to dramatically scale up programs to educate America’s 21st century workforce to compete in the green economy. SEED – Sustainability Education and Economy Development – is a landmark effort by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and ecoAmerica to enable the nation’s 1,200 two-year colleges in the critical task of preparing the American workforce with the skills needed to succeed in sustainable, clean tech and other green economy jobs.

More than 300 community college presidents – over one-third of the AACC members – have already signed on to the initiative, far ahead of expectations for this stage of the program’s development. SEED was publicly launched today at a meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education in Denver.

“Community colleges are uniquely positioned to be leaders of the sustainability movement, focusing on local economic development and partnering with businesses and government to provide access to jobs,” said John J. Sygielski, president of Mt. Hood Community College in Oregon and chair of the AACC Board of Directors. “Community colleges are the backbone of American workforce training, and now is the time for us to step up and help our students and communities restore American prosperity.”

Many community colleges have already built innovative training programs preparing students for long-term careers in the green economy. From The SEED Center’s case studies:

- To meet immediate local industry demand for trained windpower technicians, Columbia Gorge Community College in Oregon initiated a short-term training project that led to a 92% placement rate and graduates earning $20-$24 an hour. The college has now transformed that course into a longer-term program, which forges a career path toward a two-year degree. The program has become a national model.

- Cape Cod Community College in Massachusetts began 10 years ago to train technicians for jobs in the area’s burgeoning number of wind farms. Hundreds of students have earned
transfer degrees in coastal management, solar technology, wastewater and other careers, including cleanup of Superfund sites at an abandoned military base.

- Oakland Community College in Michigan has more than 350 students enrolled in its Renewable Energies program and related courses. OCC students gain field experience in the community, refurbishing public buildings with renewable materials, performing energy audits for government and working with small businesses and hospitals to reduce waste and pollution.

“There is a vast amount of information on green jobs training out there, but SEED cuts through the clutter and brings together the best resources, providing them for free to all community colleges.” said Amy Golden, Executive Director at ecoAmerica, a nonprofit organization that partnered with the AACC to create The SEED Center. “Until now there hasn’t been a nationally available network or resources to connect schools with advanced programs with schools still developing their curricula. The SEED Center will fill that important void.”

For community colleges seeking to develop green jobs courses and programs, the SEED Center offers a broad array of free resources. Content includes curriculum resources, industry and employment information, case studies and other information, with additional support for program implementation, faculty development, and funding. Initial subject areas include solar, wind, energy efficiency, green building and sustainable education, expertly curated by a Technical Advisory Group of leading academic, government and industry sustainability and clean tech authorities. An online sharing environment, including discussion boards and a wiki, provides the opportunity for faculty to share best practices and learnings, ultimately contributing to the continual growth and refinement of the resources offered.

SEED will reach beyond the campus. Community college presidents who sign on as members pledge not only to foster the center’s programs at their colleges, but also to build bridges to local business, government and nonprofit communities to connect training to jobs.

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The SEED Center is being developed by the American Association of Community Colleges and ecoAmerica, with funding from The Kresge Foundation, Surdna Foundation, and Flora Family Foundation.

The American Association of Community Colleges (www.aacc.nche.edu) is a national organization representing the nation’s close to 1,200 community colleges and their more than 12 million students. Community colleges are the largest and fastest growing segment of U.S. higher education.

ecoAmerica (ecoAmerica.org) is a nonprofit that uses consumer research and strategic partnerships to create innovative programs that engage mainstream Americans in climate and environmental solutions. ecoAmerica develops and launches behavior-changing programs that make environmental solutions personally relevant. ecoAmerica has created numerous programs including The American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment, The Princeton Review Green College Ratings, Nature Rocks and more.