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***For Immediate Release***

**BELLINGHAM TECHNICAL COLLEGE AND WALLA WALLA COMMUNITY COLLEGE RECEIVE FEDERAL GRANT TO STRENGTHEN STUDENT ACCESS AND SUCCESS IN HIGH-DEMAND WORKFORCE PROGRAMS**

Bellingham Technical College (BTC) and Walla Walla Community College (WWCC) have formed a new collaboration to boost the number of students in professional technical programs and increase their chances of finishing school and landing high-wage jobs.

The two Washington state colleges will share a \$2.75 million, five-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education to fund the *Redesigning Professional Technical Programs for Student Access & Success* project.

“BTC is incredibly excited to be funded through this grant process and to work with our colleagues at WWCC to expand access to our colleges,” said BTC President James Lemerond. “Each of these interventions will provide more people who might not otherwise have attended college access to life-changing education and allow them to earn a degree needed to pursue a meaningful career.”

While the colleges are located at opposite ends of the state, their similarities make them ideal partners for this project. Both institutions are open-admission and offer educational opportunities in high-wage, high-demand careers in healthcare, advanced manufacturing, information technology and others.

In Fall 2022, the typical student enrolled in professional technical programs at both institutions was older than 25, first-generation, and financially disadvantaged. Both colleges recognize a need to increase access to their workforce training programs and increase completion rates for part-time students.

The colleges will work together to identify and remove barriers to entry within their onboarding pipelines and better support students as they go through the process to enroll, register for classes, and prepare to start on their first day. To more effectively communicate with students about important steps as they navigate the entry process, the colleges will design, develop, and implement more effective outreach with students, including text and chat.

Both colleges will also pilot flexible learning models in professional technical programs. This will increase access to programs, allow students to practice required skills at times that work for them, and help students to meet work and family commitments while they are in school. This new flexibility will also allow workers already employed but seeking to acquire new skills, to participate in these programs.

“WWCC is focused on preparing students for the types of high-wage and high-demand jobs that will benefit them, their families, and the entire state’s economy,” said WWCC President Chad Hickox. “We look forward to partnering with BTC on a project so critical to the future.”