

BTC awarded \$200,000 grant to create aquatic transfer degree program

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THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

BELLINGHAM - Bellingham Technical College will be receiving a \$200,000 grant from the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation to create a new degree program that helps low income people enter the aquatic conservation industry.

The project is a collaboration among BTC, Northwest Indian College and Western Washington University's Huxley College.

The grant will allow BTC to expand its current fisheries degree program as well as create a new transfer degree program.

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The transfer program at BTC will be aligned with degree programs at Huxley and the NWIC native environmental science degree program, giving students several options for continuing their education or finding a career.

Patricia McKeown, president of BTC, believes the grant will allow the three schools to create a program that embraces their individual strengths.

"You have BTC that has that foundation of hands-on skills where students are exposed to learning the skills to work ... Northwest Indian College that has that piece of native environmental sciences that's so unique to them, then you have Western which is really a leader in the whole environmental sciences arena in terms of Huxley college," McKeown said. "It's a wonderful thing that the Allen Foundation is supporting this; it came at a perfect time to move this initiative forward."

The grant is part of the foundation's asset-building program, which is designed to "support organizations that help people attain financial stability and security," said Bill Vesneski, evaluation director with the foundation.

"One of the appeals with the college is they're working with these communities, they are working with people who are economically vulnerable," Vesneski said. "This program is designed to help those (people) in addition to being academically rigorous."

BTC will start enrolling more students in the current fisheries program - capacity will be expanded by up to 130 additional students over two years - but the transfer degree curriculum needs to be designed before people can choose that option, McKeown said.

The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation awarded \$620,000 to Whatcom County this winter, with grants also going to Lummi Nation Service Organization and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Whatcom County. In all, Whatcom County has received \$2.1 million from the foundation since it was created in 1990. This is the first grant from the foundation to BTC.