

# Program joins basic, Career Courses

## Students can see practical reasons for going to class

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THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

BELLINGHAM — When Bellingham resident Rachael Brown decided to attend Bellingham Technical College to pursue her dream of becoming a welder, it had been several years since she had been a student.

Over those years, life threw some curveballs, leaving her a single, unemployed mother with basic student skills long forgotten. Brown was unsure as to whether she could survive rigorous academic coursework.

But then she heard about the I-BEST program, which is designed to give students who may be lacking basic math and English skills a little extra help during the beginning of college. Now Brown's a full-time welding student.

"It helped me brush up on my skills," the 23-year-old said. "It gave me more confidence to do what I'm doing now."

I-BEST, which stands for Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training, is a state-funded program that's been offered at both the technical college and Whatcom Community College since 2006. In selected career paths, it combines basic education classes with career courses, allowing students to see the practical applications of the basic skills they're learning.

Students in the program generally spend half their time in a basic skills class, going over language, math and science skills, and the other half of their time taking career courses with other college students.

By the time students finish the I-BEST program, which generally lasts a few quarters, they've already earned a semester or two of credit in whatever program they plan to transfer into.

### ABOUT I-BEST

Programs that combine academic basics with career-path classes are available in the following specialties:

At Bellingham Technical College:

Welding, diesel mechanics, health care, business, appliance repair and technology programs.

For more information about Bellingham Technical College's programs, contact Sarah Fowler at 752- 8442 or [sfowler@btc.ctc.edu](mailto:sfowler@btc.ctc.edu).

Start dates: Vary depending on the career program.



DANNY GAWLOWSKI FOR THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Jolver Fuentes of Bellingham, left, and Joe Bustos of Lynden work underneath a diesel truck as they install a universal joint onto the truck's drive shaft as part of Bellingham Technical College's Diesel Technology Program on Wednesday. Last spring, Fuentes and Bustos completed BTC's I-Best program, which combines basic education classes with career courses.

"It's really motivating because you don't have to wait two years to get into the program," said Niki Mantas, the basic skills instructor for the IBEST welding program. "They're already in the program."

The students in the program haven't passed the college entrance exam. Many of them never completed high school, are recent immigrants or have slight learning difficulties, Mantas said. Some of the students even earn their GED before they transfer out of the program.

"We can take students on basically any level as long as the student shows commitment to the field and has the ability to show up every day," said Sarah Fowler, who works with the I-BEST program and student financial services. "I think people don't realize there are opportunities to be ready for college-level work."

Brown knows deciding to take charge of your life can be a nerve-racking experience, but her advice to other adults is "don't be intimidated by school."

"I wake up excited to go to school," she said. "Even if you're scared, just come in and talk to someone."