The Mismatch of Skills and Jobs

As the United States climbs out of one of the worst economic downturns since the Great Depression, an overwhelming majority of Californian’s believe the most important issues facing the Golden State today are jobs and the economy.¹

With more than two million unemployed in California alone, job seekers and workers must be able to navigate the rapidly changing demands of a global economy, quickly adapting to gain the skills required for competitive jobs.² But many job seekers do not have the skills required by companies looking to hire.

As stated in a report by Corporate Voices for Working Families, a “great divide” has emerged between the education and skills of the American workforce and the needs of the nation’s employers—a structural mismatch between the skills employers want and the skills workers have.

A Georgetown University report echoes the same concern. It states that while the share of jobs requiring some post-secondary education has increased substantially over the last four decades, the skills of workers have not kept pace. In fact, from 1973 to 2007, the total number of jobs available in America increased by 63 million — but there were 2 million less jobs for those with only a high school diploma.³
Demand for Educated Workers Outpaces Supply
This structural mismatch of skills and jobs has already had significant consequences. As shown in these two charts by the Brookings Institution, metro areas with larger “education gaps”—where demand for educated workers outpaces supply—had consistently higher unemployment rates than other metro areas from 2005 to 2011.4

For the millions of Californians who rely on the community college system for support, and for the economic recovery of our state and nation, it is critical that we bridge this gap.

In 2009, the average U.S. job required 13.54 years of education, but the average U.S. adult over the age of 25 had attained just 13.48 years of schooling. This gap between supply and demand for the educated workers has significant consequences – metro areas with large education gaps had consistently higher unemployment rates than other metro areas from 2005-2011.

Community Colleges Can Bridge the Gap
Community colleges are uniquely positioned to solve the mismatch between skills and jobs in our state.

As the largest segment of our state’s higher education system, community colleges enroll 70 percent of California’s higher education students, offer affordable tuition, open admission policies, flexible course schedules, convenient locations, and are important for displaced workers looking to attain new skills as well as students who are older, working or need remedial classes.

The college system also provides customized training to growing regional and statewide employers and industry sectors undergoing labor skills transitions, such as in energy, health, advanced manufacturing, advanced transportation, IT and exports.

Many now realize, from policy makers in the state up to the White House, that community colleges are the key to rebuilding America’s skills.

4 Brookings Institution, Education, Demand and Unemployment in Metropolitan America, September 2011, pp. 5.