

The Problem

The Information Technology (IT) industry is a key component of the U.S. economy and the demand for technology workers exceeds the supply of people with the required skills. Companies have out-sourced work overseas or hired foreign IT workers to meet the demand, still thousands of positions go unfilled.

So where do we get the skilled workers to fill these positions. We have to build them. Fortunately, we have untapped sources of raw materials. Consider the high school dropout with a technical aptitude, but 'turned off' by the school environment. Then there is the high school graduate that has a technical aptitude, but either cannot afford college or just isn't 'college material'.

Another basically untapped resource is the vet returning from military service. The military trained many of them to work with high tech systems. They just need a way to transition this knowledge to the civilian work environment.

Finally, as industries modernize or down-size workers are being displaced. For many workers their options are limited unless they can find a cross training resource.

A Potential Solution

What if a technology trade school focusing on the basic skills required by the IT industry could be established in Sisters, Oregon? Sisters is situated half way between the IT hubs of Silicon Valley and Seattle, Washington, yet is insulated from big city congestion and distractions.

Envision an institution administered by a consortium of leading technology companies who would collaborate on its core curriculum, faculty and teaching resources. The curriculum would include training in various software languages, information systems principles and analysis, operating system principles, computer networking and the Internet, and security principles. As part of the curriculum the students would have the option to serve an internship at one or more of the participating companies. Training programs ranging from six weeks to two years would be offered.

The consortium companies would fund the school either directly or through a foundation. Additional funding would be provided through grants and student tuitions. No State or Federal funding would be used.

A campus environment is preferred to stimulate creative interaction between students. The campus would include classrooms, labs, and lecture hall. A dormitory for up to 50 students (25 rooms) on the property would be desirable. In addition, a technology 'incubator' facility could be built adjacent to the campus for technology start-ups.

If such a facility could be successfully established, the concept could be replicated in smaller communities across the country. It would also demonstrate how private industry could cooperate in a non-competitive environment to solve a common problem without government involvement. Wouldn't this be a win-win for the technology industry and the un/under employed.