Study Identifies Strong Demand for Memphis-Area Degree Programs

KNOXVILLE -- Researchers from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER) and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) have completed a report analyzing how well the state’s higher education system is supplying graduates to meet the occupational needs of employers.

The findings show many gaps between supply and demand, and indicate degree programs identified as preparing students for jobs in undersupplied fields are housed at Memphis-area colleges and universities.

The researchers analyzed historical data from 2000 to 2008 to project academic awards for various instructional programs and disciplines for Tennessee's public, private, and non-profit institutions through 2018. They then linked the academic award projections on the supply side of the labor market to anticipated job openings by occupation on the demand side of the labor market.

According to the study’s findings, some of the state’s most undersupplied career pathways are supplied by programs in Office Technology and Biotechnology at Southwest Tennessee State Community College, the Computer Engineering program at the University of Memphis, and the Pharmaceutical Science program at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center.

These programs are all part of larger “career pathways” that have an anticipated deficit between the number of graduates produced and the number of job openings in a given year. For example, the Computer Programming and Software Development pathway, which includes degree programs in Computer Engineering and Information Systems, is estimated to have a shortage of nearly 400 graduates annually during the 2008-18 time period.

“While these findings should be handled with care because statewide trends may not always reflect the employment outlook for specific individuals, these academic programs show a clear deficit between the number of available jobs and the amount of graduates currently being produced,” said Richard Rhoda, Executive Director at THEC.

The report is a key feature of the institutional performance funding program and the 2010-15 Master Plan for Higher Education and can be accessed online at www.tn.gov/thec.
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