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**COLLEGE CREDIT
FOR HEROES**

Phase II: Update



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On the Cover: College Credit for Heroes Phase II partner Texas State Technical College Harlingen developed an accelerated degree program in wind engineering technology for student military veterans. *Photo courtesy of Jason Johnston, Texas State Technical College Harlingen*

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Gulf Coast students learn about “middle skills” occupations

By Josh Shideler

Special Contributor
Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast

Providing high school students with labor market information and educating them about regional in-demand jobs is a relatively simple undertaking. Doing so in a fun and engaging way, while motivating students to continue on an educational pathway that leads to high-skill, high-growth careers, is a bit more complicated.

This summer, Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast (Gulf Coast), in collaboration with JPMorgan Chase & Co., Project GRAD, and Lone Star College, provided selected rising juniors and seniors from the Houston and Aldine independent school districts with the opportunity to engage in project-based learning in a college setting. The two-week 2014 Chase Middle Skills Institute presented information on entry-level jobs in Houston’s budding energy sector and workplace skills for financing a post-secondary education.

The term “middle skills” refers to occupations like machinists, welders, pipefitters and roustabouts, which require more education than a high school diploma,

but less than a four-year college degree.

“There are opportunities in abundance for students considering middle skills occupations,” said Gulf Coast Executive Director Mike Temple. “By introducing them to these occupations early, and providing information about how they might approach and finance post-secondary schooling, we’re working to build an educated and trained workforce for the region.”

The Institute educated students about realistic options they have at their doorstep—options that not only introduce them to a stable career, but also develop and strengthen the Houston-Galveston workforce and economy.

Students were given time to role play each day through hands-on welding, tooling and machine programming experience and were also coached in employability skills, even getting a chance to practice job interviewing skills in front of a live panel of human resource representatives.

“I call this institute career awareness on steroids,” said Carolyn Watson, the relationship manager of global philanthropy at JPMorgan Chase & Co. “Awareness is

typically a one day job fair, but this was a very targeted, intentional approach.”

Eaton, a global technology leader in power management, was one of the employers involved in the Institute. Representatives discussed the company’s position in the industry and what a global manufacturer is looking for in employees.

“We traditionally work with students that have already chosen their careers and are working on increasing their core competency,” said Allan Clark, Eaton’s global technical marketing and training manager. “This institute gets to the students before they make a decision on a career path. Students learn where employment opportunities are heading and where they should align themselves.”

After the pilot year, each organization learned what was successful and where improvements can be made in the future. All of the partners plan to return next summer to introduce the subsequent round of students to regional high-skill, high-growth careers, the workplace, technical skills needed to get a job and options for financing an essential post-secondary education. ■



As part of the Middle Skills Institute summer curriculum, students learned the art of welding using the virtual reality welding technology at Lone Star College. Success in this activity is a requirement for all welding students in training. Photo courtesy of Gulf Coast Workforce Solutions