

How can the jobless adapt to 10.2 percent unemployment rate?

Spot growing fields in the economy and then find a retraining center. But such schools need to adapt quickly, and require more resources.

By the Monitor's Editorial Board

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As US unemployment has surged – the rate reached a 26-year high in October at 10.2 percent – so too has one solution to help bring it down: retraining in fields where jobs are available.

Worker mobility in learning new skills has become essential in a globally competitive economy, one in which new ideas are the job creators.

But not only workers but also schools need to adapt more quickly.

Last spring, for instance, **Clackamas Community College** near Portland, Or., found a way to handle spiraling enrollment caused by a surge of students seeking new skills. It started "graveyard shift" welding classes from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.

Talk about burning the midnight oil.

People seeking employable skills – especially workers who have discovered that a high school diploma isn't enough – are flocking to schools like **Clackamas** that offer practical degrees quickly.

With nearly 16 million unemployed in America after 22 months of the economy shedding jobs, the country has a strong incentive to narrow the yawning "skills gap." And with more people unemployed longer, there's more opportunity for retraining – although job seekers often need information, the means, and a confidence boost to help them do it.

Many of the jobs lost in the great recession may not come back in the recovery. Economists point to manufacturing, real estate, and finance as particularly vulnerable.

Yet many employers even now are having trouble finding qualified workers who are skilled in manual trades (think welding and plumbing), and certain types of technicians and engineers, according to Manpower Inc., the employee services firm.

And while Americans love to use technology, there aren't always enough people to design, install, repair, or maintain it. And the US will also need more nurturers – in classrooms and sickrooms.

Yet the educational system that traditionally meets these needs – community colleges and training centers – is strained to the breaking point by shrinking budgets at the state

and local level. This demands creative solutions from government, businesses, and individuals.

The Obama administration plans to inject \$12 billion over 10 years into community colleges, but that won't be enough. Businesses must step up, either supporting local schools or doing more specific employee training themselves.

Individuals must also accept more responsibility – scouring community services for sometimes hidden training opportunities or building their skills through Internet courses. Some of these courses are free, some require a fee. Individuals can start by simply Googling "training" in their city.

Who knows? They might become trainers themselves – a burgeoning field when more than 1 in 10 people seeking work can't find it.

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