

Washington Business

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NEWS WITH A COMPETITIVE EDGE

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The list of potential “asks” of Washington’s employer community is long this year, especially when weighed against measures aimed at improving the economy.

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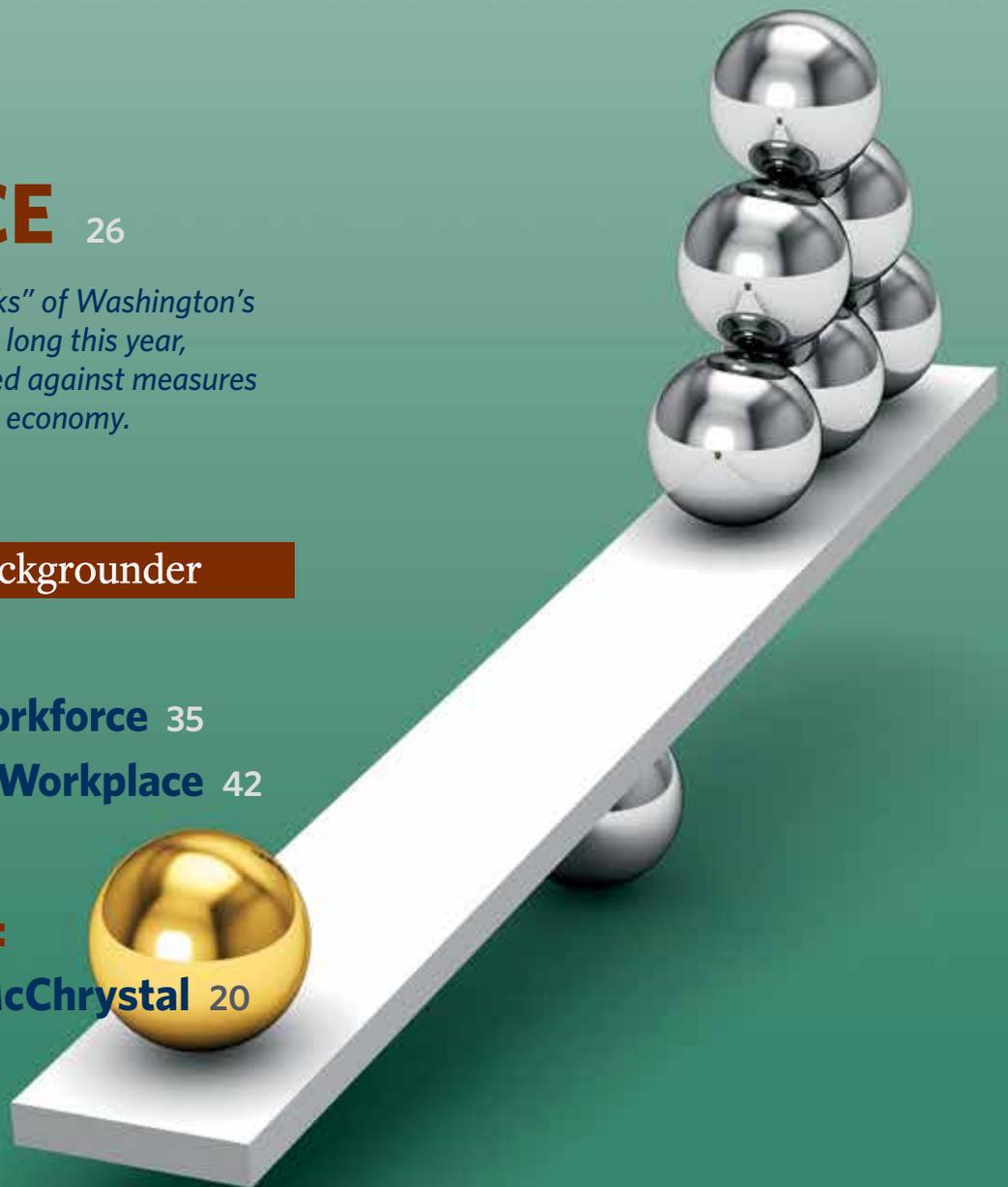
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Supply in Demand

Washington’s Center of Excellence for Global Trade & Supply Chain Management helps ensure that the goods Americans use — and the products we create and ship around the world — make it to their destination on time.

BRIAN MITTGE

Located at Highline College, this center of excellence is well-positioned between Washington’s two largest ports as it prepares students for high-paying jobs in logistics and supply chain management.

Jose Ramos knows exactly how Russell Wilson feels.

Like the Super Bowl-winning Seahawks quarterback, Ramos often has to scramble on the field to make connections as obstacles and deadlines complicate his work as an international trade specialist.

“We can move any product anywhere in the world,” said Ramos, who specializes in air export for the Seattle office of international logistics firm Panalpina. Sometimes that means finding a solution when none seems to be physically possible.

AT A GLANCE

The U.S. will need to fill more than 270,000 supply chain management and logistics jobs every year through 2018 to keep up with expected industry growth.

These jobs are particularly important in Washington and especially the Puget Sound region.

The expected national growth rate in these occupations is 11.3 percent, but in King and Pierce counties these trade-related jobs are expected to grow at 15.8 percent.

Washington’s Center of Excellence for Global Trade & Supply Chain Management is one of 10 flagship institutions focused on building and sustaining industries that drive the state’s economy.



Jose Ramos stands among boxes of aerospace products at Panalpina’s Seattle office (actually located in Kent). Ramos originally planned to become an engineer, but became intrigued by the career possibilities of international logistics.

Ramos is the guy who gets the phone call saying an airline has a plane in Australia that is stranded on the ground and can't fly until it gets a crucial part. They need it delivered yesterday. Oh, and it's packaged in a crate that's 67 inches tall — but the cargo hold in the delivery plane can't take anything over 63 inches.

It's all in a day's work for Ramos and the nation's thousands of global supply chain and logistics professionals. These are the people who ensure the international flow of goods to American store shelves — or from Washington factories and fields to consumers around the world — make it across oceans and through miles of red tape on time and in perfect condition.

Employment in this field is expected to grow at a breakneck 15 percent pace in the Puget Sound region over the next few years.

To help keep the talent pipeline full, Washington has the Center of Excellence for Global Trade & Supply Chain Management, which is based at Highline College in Des Moines but works with community and technical colleges around the state to coordinate mentoring, education and ongoing training in this important and growing field.

Ramos, a father of three who serves on the college's business department advisory board, is also a beneficiary of the college's expertise. He originally attended Highline as a teenager intending to go into mechanical engineering, but quickly became fascinated by the possibilities of international trade. Now a seasoned professional, Ramos is enrolled in Highline College's bachelor's degree program in global supply chain logistics. It's a field he loves.

"Someone, somewhere, is having a world-is-about-to-end day," Ramos said. "They give us a call and we help them. I look forward to those opportunities."

A TALENT PIPELINE CRISIS

Washington is a major hub of global commerce, exporting more than \$81 billion worth of goods in 2013, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. That's nearly \$12,000 worth for every person in the state — the second-highest export rate per capita in the nation. At least 40 percent of all jobs in the state can be tied to trade-related activity, according to the Washington Council for International Trade.

Despite the rosy economic outlook, supply chain management is not a career that many teenagers imagine themselves entering — and that's a shame, because these high-paying jobs are going unfilled.

"Demand for supply chain talent is far exceeding the supply, resulting in a shortage of supply chain management talent," Cheryl Dalsin, supply chain management program manager for Intel, wrote in a 2013 report.

Dalsin sees a "talent tsunami" approaching as experienced workers retire.

"Technology is radically changing supply chain management," said Meg Ryan, director of the Center of Excellence for Global Trade & Supply Chain Management. With so many baby boomers retiring, "they're talking about a crisis. Almost every industry is looking for talent."

WHAT EXACTLY IS LOGISTICS & SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT?

Logistics management is like the travel agent for goods being shipped. It plans, implements and controls the efficient flow of goods between the point of origin and the destination.

Supply chain management is the strategic planning — calculating the costs of working with different suppliers. It links major business functions within and between companies into a cohesive business model.

IN PLACE TO HELP

Jack Bermingham, president of Highline College, said his Des Moines-based campus is a perfect place to house this globally-minded center of excellence. With its proximity to Sea-Tac International Airport and the ports of Tacoma and Seattle, plus its diverse student body, Highline is well positioned to serve Washington's supply chain workforce.

"You can get a two-year degree and get a good-paying job with a clear pathway for advancement, and some would say it's an exciting job in global trade," Bermingham said. "The Center also makes these careers more visible so that students coming out of our schools know about these professional opportunities."

Adds Ryan, "I like to think of it as not just supply and demand, but supply in demand."

Through advisory boards and frequent communication, the college connects with businesses to coordinate the skills and experiences students will receive. The goal is always to serve the graduates, the communities in which they live, and the businesses that need skilled workers. A strong college-business community relationship serves all three groups.

A major focus is on providing training to those already on the job, helping them improve their skills in a fast-changing industry. The center works with its host college, Highline, as well as Shoreline Community College and the four-year Central Washington University.

Flexibility is important, helping make sure existing employees can improve their skills and get certification. And along with serving those workers, the center helps employers train up their future managers, helping today's employees grow to meet expanding responsibilities.

AIRPORT UNIVERSITY

One example is Airport University, part of the Port of Seattle. Highline College provides the instruction and modified courses so the length and credits fit with the needs of the trade-dependent industries. The credits will transfer back to Highline so working students at the port can use their job-related training toward a degree.

The port offers the classes for free to all employees. One of them, Mesfin Yeshewawerk, works as a security officer for a cargo company at the airport as well as a part-time wheelchair attendant. He is one of the many workers who has advanced his skills through Airport University. He has also earned 15 credits that can apply toward certificates and degrees at Highline.

A native of Ethiopia, Yeshewawerk has lived in Seattle since 2010. His Airport University classes focused on computer skills.

“I used to be scared of the computer,” Yeshewawerk told portjobs.org. “Before this class, the computer and I are strangers. First class, we say hi to each other. After next class, we are cousins. Now, computer and I are brothers!”

Along with working directly with employers and employees, the center also looks at other kinds of issues affecting global trade, from piracy on the high seas to the hazards of freak high waves. They also look at international finance. What happens when a shipper is stuck with a load of bananas or other perishable goods?

Supply chain management isn’t all about commerce. The purchasing manager for World Vision, a global Christian charity, is on the board for the center of excellence. World Vision not only ships around the world, they often need to send urgently-needed supplies into disaster zones.

“It’s amazing how they get things to people in need,” Ryan said.



Photo: Don Wilson for the Port of Seattle

Students take notes at an Airport University class, which gives workers at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport the opportunity to take free classes and earn college credit.

“You can get a two-year degree and get a good-paying job with a clear pathway for advancement, and some would say is an exciting job in global trade. But if you don’t know about it coming out of school, how does that help?”

— JACK BERMINGHAM, PRESIDENT OF HIGHLINE COLLEGE

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Many of those who are trained through the center of excellence’s programs are from China, Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan and other international trading partners. They come from abroad and go back home with new skills and ideas about economic development from an American business perspective.

Ryan sees her job as part of a bigger picture for her students, the businesses with which she works, and the state as a whole. She connects with the major players in international trade in this trade-rich corner of the nation, maintains a job board for students, then follows them through the program and beyond.

In a unique twist for two-year colleges, many students who come through the center of excellence already have four-year college or university degrees. They come back for certification or training in logistics or supply chain management.

“As an educator, I think I’m about launching careers,” Ryan said. “And if we make Washington state a place where people want to come to work and learn, I think that’s good for economic development.” **WB**

Center of Excellence for Global Trade & Supply Chain Management: www.coeglobaltrade.com

Port Jobs: www.portjobs.org

Washington Export Resource Center: www.waexports.com

Washington’s Centers of Excellence: www.coewa.com