Power Utilities Technology program graduates bring energy to homes and businesses

Without a reliable supply of power, we wouldn’t be able to flip a switch with the confidence that the lights will come on. And when the power goes out – whether due to a storm or equipment failure – we often have to find alternate ways of doing things.

Building, maintaining and distributing electrical power supply is the work of trained, skilled workers in the utilities industry. For someone interested in entering the field, the Clark College Power Utilities Technology (PUT) certificate program is The Next Step.

Clark’s program is designed to train individuals for entry-level positions in the electric utilities industry. “Clark College’s Power Utilities Technology program provides broad exposure to all elements of the electric power utility craft and careers,” said Program Director Jim Malinowski. Some of the primary topics covered in the PUT program are:

- The elements of electric power systems;
- Operation of electric power systems;
- Safety procedures related to the operation of high-power equipment; and
- The organization of the electric power industry.

Completion of the certificate program gives students the skills and knowledge they need to enter an apprenticeship program. “The program exposes students to a range of skills and equipment,” said Malinowski. “Students who complete the program are strong candidates for apprenticeship programs. Once an individual enters an apprenticeship program, the utility company invests in your training – so they want to be sure that the people they choose are prepared.”

“We are very excited about Clark’s Power Utilities Technology program,” said Rod Krause, substation operator apprenticeship coordinator for the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) and chair of the college’s PUT advisory committee. “We have hired several students from the Clark PUT program for employment in our apprenticeship programs. When we see people in interviews and they are able to use classroom examples to answer questions, it gives them a head start in the employment process.”

Program graduates also believe they have a head start. “The Power Utilities Technology program gave me a general introduction to the field and put me a step ahead among the apprentices,” said Chris Young, who joined BPA in June 2007 as a substation operator apprentice. “As someone starting out in the industry, I may not yet know the ‘how and why’ – but I do know enough to ask smart questions.”

In addition to offering the necessary skills and training to prepare students for a utilities apprenticeship, Clark’s Power Utilities Technology program offers another benefit. Most of the classes required within the certificate program are offered in the late afternoon and evening, allowing many students to work and earn the certificate at the same time. “It is no simple task working and going to school,” said Tom Ingenthron, who completed the PUT program and is now a substation operator apprentice with BPA. “The later class schedule enabled me to do both – it was beneficial for me.”

“There are a wide variety of jobs available in the electric utilities industry, from lineman to electrician to communications technicians to substation operators,” said Malinowski. “Individuals can also move into estimator positions, do design work in facilities expansion, or move into management after gaining experience. It is a field full of challenging, rewarding careers.”

For more information on the Power Utilities Technology certificate program at Clark College, contact Program Director Jim Malinowski at 360-992-2974, jmalinowski@clark.edu.