

In auto department

Hands-on learning keys success

Walking through the large garage area one can smell the grease and grime that is inherent to automotive mechanics. The walls are decorated with the standard fare for an automotive repair shop; first-aid kits, fire extinguishers, posters showing what to do if someone is stuck somewhere they shouldn't be, and charts giving conversion fractions for metric tools. The Clackamas Community College auto mechanics division is a busy place to someone who's not used to the atmosphere.

The garage is full of cars that belong to students or faculty members for the most

part, but occasionally someone else brings their car in for repairs by the students. Any car that is 10 years old or newer is eligible for work in the shop, but some cars that are more than 10 years old will still be accepted if they have systems that are the same as the current models.

Joe Durland, automotive department instructor explained the department is able to fix every part of a car, including the brake system, electrical system, transmission and chassis system. They handle tuneups, front-end alignments and fuel system reviews, to name a few common jobs.

"Doing a standard brake job, a student may be able to finish it in one class period, or he may take two. It is kind of hard to say, because every student is a little different, and I personally make sure that no car leaves the shop until it is fixed absolutely right," Durland said.

The cost of the work is substantially less than one might find in a commercial shop, but the trade-off is that there is no guarantee as to when the car will be completed. "Some people may bring their car in and expect it to be ready to go that afternoon like it is done in a shop in the outside market, but it just is not possible under the conditions in which we operate," Durland said.

Students get their best training by working in the shop, Durland said, but they first go through training in filmstrips and books. He explained that students are able to complete the hands-on work more efficiently once they are familiar with a car's specifications and manual.

Most of the cars serviced at the automotive department are those of faculty members, Durland said, but anybody can apply to have their car worked on.

The car owner first has to come into the automotive office and fill out a simple form that includes the problem the car is having and how the owner can be contacted to discuss a repair appointment.



MIKE WOOD WATCHES as David Bossert(R) gives engine a working over in the College's automotive department.

Photo by Joel Miller

Then the instructor for a given class selects those prospects that look like they will provide the best opportunity for experience for his class, and arrangements are made to have the car brought into the shop for the work.

The cost to the owner is the cost of the required parts plus a 15 percent miscellaneous fee; there is no charge for student labor, which puts the overall cost of the work much lower

than the open market might charge.

One instructor emphasized that the College's shop is not in any way designed to or desirous of taking business away from those in the automotive repair business in the area, but rather acts as an aid to those businesses in providing a work force that is available to the shops to take advantage of.

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