



Photos: arthboard.com

A Yukon College student takes a break from his practicum underground at Capstone Mining Corp.'s Minto Mine.

Preparing for the Future

Yukon College is educating today's students for tomorrow's industry.

By Catherine Lai

AS THE TERRITORY'S mining and exploration industry grows, Yukon College will meet its needs by providing essential research and training. Last year, the college established the Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining (CNIM), which provides training programs to address the skilled-labour shortage in the Yukon.

According to a CNIM study, in the next ten years the territory's entire existing mining workforce will need replacing and a potential 1,895 additional jobs at new mines will need filling. Currently, roughly 47 percent of the mining workforce lives outside the territory.

"[The mines] are bringing in people across Canada to work here for two weeks in, two weeks out, and we see that people within the territory are losing the opportunity to take advantage of the employment that's available to them," says Shelagh Rowles, executive director of CNIM.

Although the amount of funding CNIM receives has yet to be determined, the college put together a five-and-a-half year, \$30-million proposal. Dollars will flow from the college, complemented by funding from the territorial and federal governments and the private sector.

So far, CNIM operates two training programs, both of which are successfully finishing their first year. Future plans are aimed at providing trade and apprenticeship programs in the next few years—a first for the college.

Yukon College's 44-day Introduction to Mining Operations program prepares students for entry-level positions. The program

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Above and left: Students learn safety procedures before working with equipment. Far left: A mine simulator provides essential training by putting students in the driver’s seat.



introduces students to surface and underground mining by combining classroom training with a work placement at one of the territory’s three producing mines.

The Mineral Resources program offers a one-year Technician Certificate or a two-year Technologist Diploma and combines classroom theory with hands-on experience. The program includes weekly labs, field camps, and technical training in helicopter safety, WHMIS, and wilderness/remote first aid.

Apart from training, Yukon College is also facilitating research for mining companies.

The college partnered with several mining companies to apply for the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada’s (NSERC) Industrial Research Chair, which was granted in January. Dr. Amelie Janin will work with the Yukon mining industry to develop a research program on reclamation activities throughout the mining lifecycle. Specifically, she is working on using bioremediation as a passive treatment for removing metal from water.

“I can help them by doing research that they would not have the resources to do otherwise, but that they do need,” Janin says.

The NSERC grant will also give students an opportunity to be directly involved in lab-based research, and there are opportunities for two students to work with Janin this summer.

What sets the college’s mining programs apart is that industry stays involved throughout the entire process, from planning and development of the programs, to intake and graduation.

“That’s the beauty of the model,” says Rowles. “They have a hard time figuring out training without us, and without them, we really don’t have a sense of where the jobs are.”

Yukon College does everything it can to make sure students get a job after they complete a program, working closely with mining companies to ensure there are available positions and that its students can provide what the industry is looking for.

For example, CNIM screens all the applications to the Introduction to Mining program and interviews applicants together with the mining companies, based on industry criteria. “It’s almost like a job interview even before they start,” Rowles explains.

The industry stays involved in the students’ education during the program as well.

“We’ve had input from mining companies,” says Chad Bustin, a student in the Mineral Resources program. “They’ve told us what they’re looking for in a technologist.”

Of the 10 students in the Introduction to Mining Operations program’s first graduating class, eight have already found jobs and there are indications the remaining two will secure employment as well.

Bustin thinks the Mineral Resources program’s hands-on training will make the students valuable assets to mining companies.

“This program was set up for us to be gainfully employed this summer, and I think that’s going to happen,” says Bustin. “I think you couldn’t find more employment-ready students than we will be at the end of the field camp.” □