Recent discussions on
The Future of Work (and training) in the Merrimack Valley

1. Workforce Solutions Group (WSG), Northern Essex Community College, November 9

WSG is a five-year, $15 million project to reform the state’s workforce development system—concretely, to develop public support and funding for better worker training. Lead partners include the state AFL-CIO, the Women’s Union, and Workforce Investment Boards. This year they held Regional Forums across the state and fed them into a $122 million Workforce Solutions Act that they’re taking to the state legislature. The Merrimack Valley forum attracted lots of service providers and union activists, harshly criticized the present employment & training system, and named outsourcing as a major problem. Regional planning groups are supposed to keep discussing these issues and coordinate lobbying.

Further reading:
“Labor Force Blueprint,” Merrimack Valley Workforce Improvement Board, October 2003
“Workforce Solutions Act of 2005” and “Outline of Proposals,” summaries from the Workforce Solutions Group, December 2005
“A Commonwealth Growing Apart: Family Income in Massachusetts,” Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, September 2004
The CLMS/Northeastern reports can be downloaded from http://www.weiu.org/Advocacy/

2. Greater Lowell Workforce Investment Board, Doubletree Hotel, Lowell, December 2

The Greater Lowell WIB assembled a couple hundred people to hear Paul Harrington, Marty Meehan, Thom Clark (CEO of Saints Memorial Medical Center), and Steve Kaufman (Northeast Regional Competitiveness Council) talk about the un-recovery and future jobs. Nobody laid out the WIB’s position or thinking on these topics, but the main points Paul made were:

- Massachusetts unemployment figures would be far worse than they are if we weren’t exporting young, more educated workers. Our economy is anemic.
- We aren’t building the educational and human capital infrastructure that lets us grow.
- We need an immigration strategy that’s tied to economic strategy.
- Unemployment for 16-24 year olds is particularly dire.

Paul left little time for anyone else, but Steve Kaufman named these areas as competitive for us: aerospace and defense, information technology, analytic instruments, medical devices, and communications equipment. Additional areas of opportunity were: biopharma manufacturing, homeland security (building networks using scanning, security, communications), “innovation services in creative economies” (e.g. developing new lofts and studios in old mill buildings), and manufacturing on the high-value, high-tech high end.

Meeting notes with comments available from Mike Prokosch, mike_prokosch@uml.edu, x 3239
3. Future of Work Regional Meeting, UMass Lowell, December 7

Background: The UMass President’s office is funding the labor programs at all four campuses to organize regional meetings, a conference, curriculum, research papers, a book and website on the Future of Work in Massachusetts.

About 50 UML faculty, union and community leaders came to UML discuss the future of work (what will the jobs be and what will they be like), the workforce, and the workplace. This enthusiastic turnout on a nasty day indicates huge interest in the Future of Work, and it overlaps with CITA’s focus this year.

The meeting began with participants saying what "Future of Work" means for them -- they laid out quite a landscape. Three speakers followed. Darcie Boyer from Coalition for a Better Acre said we can't talk about work without talking about housing, transportation, healthcare, and the power to make decisions; she also appealed for allies. Bill Laznick outlined eight areas to watch including the rise of temporary work and offshoring, the key roles of venture capital and the stock market. Ric Casilli from IUE-CWA Local 201 said managers at companies like GE are running on buzzwords, don’t know how to increase productivity, don’t know what they want out of their workforces, and unions are surviving by delaying and playing along while building up supportive movements (like the global justice movement) on the outside.

Small groups then identified action steps. This was probably the least successful part -- people didn’t get beyond the ideas they had when they walked into the meeting. We barely started incorporating the rich analysis of the earlier conversation, and that’s a clear next step. Another is to carry out some of the practical suggestions from the small groups including education of the public, secondary school students, and union members.

A Future of Work Conference at UMass-Boston will take up these themes April 27-28.