

Local

Bilingual computer class will make students 'trilingual'

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A Cabrillo College computer-science instructor says a computer course he will teach this summer will make his students "trilingual."

Otilio Quintero said he will teach a "bilingual basis" computer-science class to about 40 students. By the time the students complete the course, Quintero said, they will be trilingual — competent in English, Spanish and computerese.

"It can open a lot of doors," Quintero said.

He said it is the first time Cabrillo will offer the course as a bilingual class, which will be held at the Watsonville Center. The idea for the course came to Quintero this semester while he was teaching a typing class at the

Watsonville Center to about 30 students. Half of those students were Green Giant workers who were laid off in January and were attending the class as part of a retraining program co-sponsored by the company.

Many of his typing students speak little or no English, but that didn't mean they couldn't learn technical skills if the information were presented to them in Spanish, Quintero said. The same is true of learning computer skills, he said.

When he presented the idea about a bilingual computer class to his typing students, it was received with enthusiasm. Most of the typing students plan to sign up for the course. The bilingual class will have the same academic

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standing as a computer level 1 course taught in English at the main campus.

While Quintero doesn't expect his Spanish-speaking students to be fluent in either computer language or English by the end of the course, he said the class will give them an edge in the job market.

"They might not be able to give you a 4,000-word essay on the concept of computer science and they may not be your star receptionist,

but they will be able to do the work," Quintero said. "They will be able to defend themselves in the job market."

The course will be an overview of computers, Quintero said. Students will study computer hardware and software programs, computer terminology and basic system operations, and will get an introduction to three software programs — word processing, spreadsheet and data base.

The course, Quintero said, is not a panacea for unemployment or underemployment, but will help open a door to a better life for many people whose future in the job market is dim.

"We want to offer people an opportunity, an alternative," Quintero said. "We want them to know that they don't have to spend the rest of their lives picking strawberries and working in the fields."

Quintero said students can start to sign up now at either the Watsonville Center or the main campus for the summer session. He expects the class to fill up quickly, but another class will be offered in the fall. He hopes the idea of similar bilingual classes will catch on at Cabrillo. He would like to see the business and nursing depart-

ments at Cabrillo conduct some of their classes in a bilingual format.

Cabrillo College, Quintero argues, is a community college, and that means it should make a stronger effort to make itself more open to the communities it serves. Offering more bilingual classes is one way it could achieve that, he said.

"In the past the school said, 'We don't have to be accessible, you (the community) have to be accessible to us,'" Quintero said.

Although that attitude is changing, Quintero said, the school is still inaccessible to many people, especially in Watsonville. He hopes the bilingual computer course will serve as a bridge between the Spanish-speaking community and Cabrillo College.