

Pathway Faculty Profile:

Katie Krolkowski

Contra Costa College

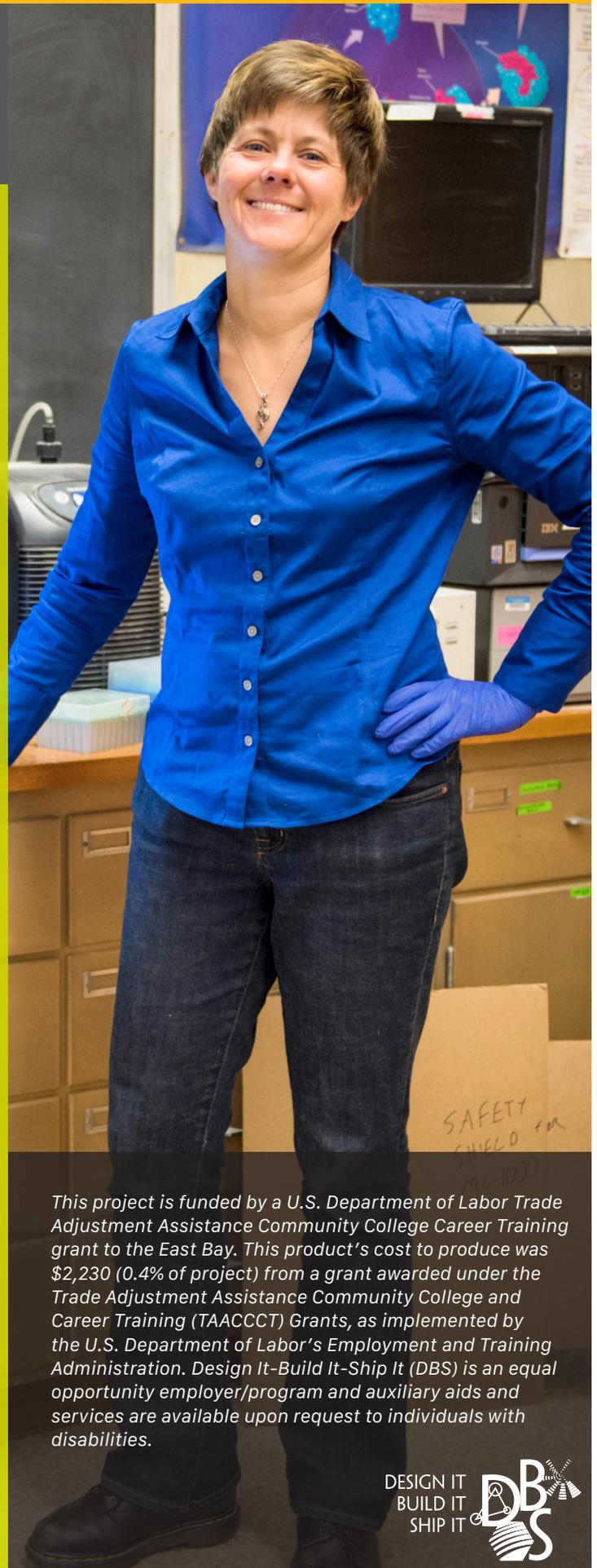
Contra Costa College (CCC) biotechnology instructor Katie Krolkowski calls herself “an evangelist for science.” Trained at Harvard University and the University of California–Berkeley, Katie holds a doctoral degree and has worked in the bioscience field with local companies. However, she found her calling in teaching when she was hired to teach biotechnology at Contra Costa College, a community college in San Pablo, CA.

In 2011, Katie was already looking for ways to strengthen CCC’s biotechnology program at a time of state funding cutbacks when the DBS grant came along. The grant enabled her to create a much needed bridge course for the program and refine the biotechnology curriculum to broaden pathway possibilities for students. Because most higher-skill jobs in the biosciences require an advanced degree, Katie explains, “I needed to ensure that as much of the curriculum as possible was transferable, so that everything possible could be applied to a biotechnology certificate or some other progress that student was making.”

She particularly loves working with the students, helping them open their eyes to the wonder and possibilities of science—and their potential role as contributors to the field. “My students are very pro-science. However, many aren’t able to see themselves as scientists. I’d like to change that.” Katie sees part of her job as informing them of the various job and career options available to them: “I see students that come through even the introductory-level biotech classes, and they have skill sets that are useful (transferable) in all kinds of areas, but making that clear to them is really hard. I think that’s the challenge.”

The bridge course, called Bridge to Biotech, is designed not only to introduce students to the basics of biotechnology but also to the “soft skills” and professional attributes needed for success. Both the introductory lab and the related college success course have built-in activities that push students to research the different professions in the field, prepare a resume, develop teamwork and communication skills, and practice interviewing for a job. “Throughout the class,” says Katie, “I am reminding them that I am teaching them different things that employers want to see.”

Access to advancement is crucial for CCC students, who are primarily from underserved populations that are underrepresented in higher education and STEM careers. However, increasing access not only benefits the students but the field as a whole. As Katie points out, “We serve a particular group of students who are aware of different things in the world than the person on the traditional bachelor’s degree pathway. They have broader experience and also [often] an understanding of real needs in the world, instead of what seems interesting scientifically. They are very tuned in to the practicality of science and really whether things are truly useful.” This is what drives her, she explains, asserting, “Science will be changed when people from underserved communities make up a substantial proportion of the scientific community.”



This project is funded by a U.S. Department of Labor Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career Training grant to the East Bay. This product’s cost to produce was \$2,230 (0.4% of project) from a grant awarded under the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) Grants, as implemented by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration. Design It-Build It-Ship It (DBS) is an equal opportunity employer/program and auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

