

Colleges across the country are scrambling to figure out how, or if, they will re-open in September.

That includes Technical schools, which used to draw students with a simple pitch - hands-on training tailored for specific, high demand jobs. In Kansas, COVID-19 and Wichita's collapsing aviation industry have hollowed out the promise. Stephan Bisaha (steven bih-SAH-ha) of the Kansas News Service reports on how one tech school is handling it.

Bisaha 1: Let's Start with the first part of the tech college pitch -- hands-on training.

Coleman 1: In all honesty, that was the best part.

Bisaha 2: It's what convinced Chris Coleman to ditch the beaches of Florida for Wichita State University's tech college in landlocked Kansas. A scholarship covering moving expenses and tuition helped. But Coleman called the shift from memorizing textbooks to learning by doing a game changer.

Coleman 2: They took a guy with zero experience, got an aircraft panel in front of him that was already painted, handed me a sander and I had to learn, you know, the proper technique of sanding.

Bisaha 3: After just one semester, he had a job with Textron Aviation - which makes Beechcraft planes and Cessnas But WSU Tech's hands on curriculum has been upended by the coronavirus. Aviation dean James Hall says the school moved some of that training online.

Hall 1: So what my instructors are doing are more or less splitting their classes so they can do all of the lectures and level one and two labs remotely.

Bisaha 4: But more advanced level *three* labs ... where the hands-on stuff is crucial... will have to wait until students can return to campus.

Hall 2: It's really hard to rig an aircraft in a virtual environment.

Bisaha 5: The college's quick-term certification programs that can take less than two months to finish are completely on hold.

That's ultimately a short-term problem. A bigger, *long-term* challenge has to do with the second part of the TECH COLLEGE pitch -- *training tailored for high-demand jobs*. So what happens when those high demand jobs disappear?

CNBC 1: This is a key Boeing supplier saying they're issuing a statement today saying they're considering layoffs...(fade under)

Bisaha6: The grounding of Boeing 737 Max has stretched past a year, leading to Wichita's Spirit Aerosystems to lay off about 4,300 workers. And the coronavirus has led to furloughs at Textron Aviation. WSU Tech had been a training pipeline for those companies, but now that pipeline is disconnected.

Eyester 1: Tech colleges are certainly great when there are lots of jobs and employers are beating down their door.

Bisaha 7: Lauren Eyester is a senior fellow at the Washington D.C. think tank, Urban Institute.

Eyester 2: Right now it's really hard for some industries to think about hiring.

Bisaha 8: The biggest challenge for tech education right now? It's expensive. When colleges shift to whatever the job market looks like post coronavirus, they'll have to either find millions of dollars for new equipment or ways to retrofit their old tools.

Eyester says tech colleges can make the shift. That's because they know what businesses need and have the flexibility to meet those needs quickly..

Eyester 3: Tech colleges are able to avoid some of the challenges of traditional higher ed where curriculum committees and the review process can take a really long time.

Bisaha 9: Recent WSU Tech graduates trained for jobs that essentially disappeared can get scholarships for retraining..

Chris Coleman enrolled in aircraft maintenance classes before he was furloughed by Textron Aviation last month. And despite the hold on some of the hands-on training due to the pandemic, He's on path to get an associate's degree, typically a two-year commitment. But he doesn't plan on stopping there.

Coleman 3: Crazy enough I'm actually looking to stay even longer and take another program so I'll have been turning WSU Tech into almost a four-year college. (laugh)

Bisaha 10: That might not be the top line of the tech college pitch, but it is one of WSU Tech's goals -- get students into high-earning jobs. Quickly. And keep them coming back for more training so they can adapt to an ever-changing economy.

For Here And Now, I'm Stephan Bisaha in Wichita