Cristina Gutierrez, senior Manufacturing Management major at CCSU, uses a 3-D printer to create medical devices. Gutierrez will be the main instructor for CCSU’s 3-D Printing: Design, Research & Management class.

By JEFF GEBEAU

NEW BRITAIN — Central Connecticut State University kicked off its 3-D Printing: Design, Research & Business Management course Thursday afternoon with a panel discussion on the concept of innovation.

The free class has approximately 24 students, about half from the university and the rest from local high schools through CCSU’s TRIO Educational Talent Search program. TRIO is a 50-year-old federal early intervention initiative for secondary students that has multiple divisions.

The course will run in concurrent sessions through Jan. 26, with CCSU students meeting for a two-hour class on Fridays and TRIO students meeting for a pair of two-hour classes after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The course is being presented in collaboration with the Institute of Technology & Business Development Education & Innovation Center. Classes are held at the ITBD building at 185 Main St.

Rick Mullins, ITBD managing director, welcomed both groups of students to the course’s orientation session with a question: “What do you think innovation means?” he asked, addressing the query to each student, one-by-one.

“Working with electronics — figuring out what something is supposed to do, what it’s going to do,” said E.C. Goodwin Technical High School junior Kelvin Rongquilin, one among a wide variety of responses that were given.

Other answers included “creativity,” and “making something and improving it.” Some students replied that they didn’t know what innovation is, a response that particularly pleased Mullins.

“That’s a good answer,” he said, praising the students’ honesty. “We hope that by the end of this course, you will know what it means.”

After he had posed the question to each student, Mullins turned the discussion over to the panel, which consisted of authorities on innovation from an assortment of fields.

Karen Hudkins, director of the New Britain Industrial Museum on the first floor of the ITBD facility, told students that the heart of innovation is using technology to solve problems. She cited the city’s Frederick T. Stanley, founder of Stanley Works, who introduced steam power to his factory to contend with a water scarcity issue.

“That was a huge game changer,” she said.

Duane Pierre, a CCSU alumnus and founder and executive director of ParaDYM, stressed the ever-changing nature of technology and the importance of staying current with it to the aspect of innovation. ParaDYM provides media training and enrichment programs to at-risk youth.

“We are a tech-driven society. All of our current tech is going to evolve,” he said. “What does 3-D printing have to do with media? That’s what we’re going to figure out.”

Jack Crowley, co-founder of local promotional products developer JC Special T, also emphasized the pervasiveness of technology, informing students that they are coming of age in an innovation-friendly era.

“The Internet is an innovation,” he said. “It lets me get creative without being creative.”

Arts instructor and cancer survivor John Barone shared his experience of trying to find a piece of protective equipment for his lower body once he resumed instruction, which was necessary due to the disease’s lingering effects. Unable to locate one, he came up with another solution.

“I said I was going to design my own, and I did, and I came here [to ITBD],” he said. “This will not only help me, but it’s going to help a lot of people.”

CCSU faculty and students helped Barone improve his invention using 3-D modeling software. Christine Gutierrez was one such student. After she recounted to the students Thursday the numerous hours she spent tinkering with and tweaking Barone’s model, which is now patent-pending, she shared perhaps the most important lesson they will learn all semester.

“Any design, if it’s going to be a good design, it’s going to have like 150 million revisions,” she said.

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