

STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

COLLEGE PREP PROGRAM GRADS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT CAREERS

By Katie Lannan

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STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, DEC. 17, 2015....Jihane Berkane moved to the United States from Algeria two years ago and was so unfamiliar with her new language that she didn't know how to ask for directions when she got lost on her way to an English class. On Monday, the recent community college graduate will start her new job as a biomedical manufacturing technician.

Berkane, an alumna of the Jewish Vocational Services Bridges to College course, shared her story during a graduation ceremony at the State House that honored 60 students who completed the 23-week college preparation program aimed at working adults. The course focuses on high-demand occupations, including biotechnology, health care and business accounting.

Many of the graduates, according to JVS, will continue their studies at either Bunker Hill Community College or Quincy College.

Addressing graduates during the ceremony, House Speaker Robert DeLeo said community colleges play a crucial role in higher education and should be better integrated into the system.

"We back up that belief with funding, and we continue to see results," he said.

DeLeo told the News Service after the event that he believes community colleges are important both because they allow students planning to go on to a four-year college to save money along the way and because they help prepare a skilled workforce.

"Not everyone is going to want to go to a four-year institution, but in today's day and age, pretty much everyone is going to need something more than just a high school graduation, so I think that's where community colleges come into play," he said.

Nicki Lin, who completed the Bridges to College biotechnology track and will start a biotechnology and compliance certificate program at Quincy College, said she believes she and her classmates will "find great jobs very soon" after they graduate.

"If you were to ask me, 'How are you?' six months ago, I would probably say, 'Same old thing,'" she said. "But now it's different. I can imagine my future. Every day is closer and closer to my dream."