In the United States, more than half a million information technology jobs are unfilled. Many of these are considered “middle-skill” jobs, requiring more than a high school diploma but less than four years of post-secondary training. Workforce experts recognize community colleges as essential to eliminating the middle-skills gap – no easy task, but one that Cuyahoga Community College’s newly established Center for Information Technology Training has taken on.

Under the leadership of College-wide Dean and Executive Director Monique Wilson, Ph.D., the center aims to increase the number of IT professionals trained for middle-skill careers in Northeast Ohio, preparing them for jobs that provide family-sustaining wages. Middle-skill IT jobs pay an average of $53,000 per year — about 10 percent more than jobs with similar educational requirements. With Cleveland’s poverty and unemployment rates at three times the national average, this represents a major economic opportunity for area residents.

“The Center for IT Training is uniquely positioned to leverage our outstanding faculty and a legacy of high-quality education to train the next generation of IT leaders in Northeast Ohio,” said Wilson.

Wilson came to Tri-C in 2014 from the Hospital Corporation of America, where she was responsible for strategic planning prioritization. With more than two decades of experience in IT, Wilson has gained a reputation as an innovator and visionary by leading large scale projects at Fortune 500 companies such as ACS (Xerox) and Bridgestone Corp.

“I’m both honored and humbled to have been asked to lead the IT center. This role allows me to meld my experiences as an IT student, faculty member, industry professional and administrator to help our faculty and staff best serve our students,” said Wilson.

The goal of the IT center is to unite and leverage the strengths of existing academic offerings and workforce development training to optimize career and educational opportunities for Tri-C students. By converting unemployed and underemployed individuals into skilled professionals, the center will provide qualified workers to close the skills gap and fill the high demand for new talent in Northeast Ohio’s IT industry.

Wilson and her team have identified five areas of high growth using a combination of higher education research, industry predictions, IT certification trends and market research. These areas are: cyber security, cloud computing and virtualization, analytics and big data, mobile development and agile development and management.

The IT center provides streamlined pathways toward careers in these areas and others while being more responsive to the needs of both industry and community partners. New certificate programs in data analytics, cloud computing and data center management were rolled out in fall 2015 along with a graduate certificate in cyber security analytics. Eventually, each of Tri-C’s four campuses will have a strategic focus for IT training and education with distinct training opportunities offered in labs equipped as certified Cisco Academies.

President Alex Johnson recently named The Center for IT Training one of Tri-C’s Centers of Excellence, citing the strength of its faculty and programs as well as the significant impact the center will have on the local economy.

“The Center of Excellence designation is significant,” said Wilson. “Dr. Johnson’s advocacy for IT training is based on a belief in Tri-C’s ability to educate our students and prepare them with the skills and competencies necessary to fill high-demand jobs and earn family-sustaining wages.”