Bakersfield College makes a historic move to help students stay competitive in the workforce. A new four-year degree in the industrial automation field is now being offered on campus.

It’s part of a pilot program set in motion by Governor Jerry Brown.

Bakersfield College is one of 15 community colleges picked for the program, which means more students and new positions opening up for teachers.

This fall, BC students will be joined by a new group of men and women interested in obtaining more than just a two-year degree.

“This is as good as creating an entire new community college. It's going to give re-birth to the system," said Steven Holmes, president of the Bakersfield College Academic Senate.

BC is offering a Bachelor of Science degree in industrial automation, a historic program that prepares the state’s future workforce.

"When you have those big industries that are driving the economies of communities like Bakersfield, they want to insure that they have a workforce locally being created for them to continue to expand and be profitable," he said.

Industrial automation represents the technology-driven business model of the 21st century. In today’s industry, an engineering team is involved in developing new products or systems.

The new degree program will allow students to apply for highly-skilled jobs in the oil fields or in agriculture.

"These are going to be people that can come in to the work force, not just to repair equipment and that kind of thing, that would be more of a technician level, but they could be the operators. They will understand the systems," said Liz Rozell, Bakersfield College Dean of Instruction.

Students who enroll in this pilot program will pay more tuition, but still less than half the cost of CSUB and one quarter the cost of UCLA.

"Definitely, the students will not have to leave Kern County to get that four year degree. They can do that all here at Bakersfield College now," said instructor Manny Fernandez.

By the end of the pilot, BC expects to have a total of 250 students enrolled and ready to take on the-changing field of industrial automation.

"Farming isn't just farming anymore, there's so much technology and everything else that goes into it and BC can now be a contender for those jobs now. Our students now have a place where they can fight to get those positions," said Alex Dominguez, student government president.

School leaders plan to hire at least four new faculty members and say they have plenty of room to accommodate the new program.

The pilot runs eight years with the first set of students expected to graduate in the spring of 2018.

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