

Illinois Community Colleges Expand Cooperative Training and Economic Development

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Illinois Community Colleges are successfully redefining the traditional boundaries of education through partnership with business and industry. As providers of training for business and industry, Illinois community colleges are cooperatively engaging in creative and productive economic development and training efforts. During fiscal year 1990, Illinois community colleges provided customized job training for 828 companies through 2,232 programs, serving 35,252 employees, according to the Illinois Community College Board.

Cooperative training is increasing due to an awareness of and an emphasis on collaboration of resources and services. The Cooperative Training and Economic Development Survey, which was developed by the Illinois Community College Economic Development Association, recently polled Illinois community colleges. Survey results demonstrated several creative approaches by Illinois community colleges to cooperative training and economic development.

In the west central community of Galesburg, Carl Sandburg Community College was involved in a cooperative economic development and training venture during spring resulting in the relocation of a manufacturing facility to Galesburg. Initially, the company had planned to locate within the Chicago area.

The collaboration and timely coordination of numerous Galesburg area agencies and institutions resulted in an offer the company could not refuse. Among the organizations involved in this team project were the Galesburg Area Chamber of Commerce, Job Service - IDES, Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), Carl Sandburg Community College, Galesburg Area Economic Development Committee, Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, City of Galesburg, County of Knox, and Illinois Power Company.

This relocation project began in January 1991, and was completed in April 1991. The company currently provides 330 jobs for Galesburg area residents and plans to double that number within three years. During one weekend, Carl Sandburg Community College processed 2,000 job applicants for the relocating company.

Triton College, of northwest suburban River Grove, became involved in a Cooperative Training/Economic Development project

during 1990-91. This ongoing project is a joint effort between a local branch of a labor union and Triton. Union Officials of Local 399, the International Union of Operating Engineers, began meeting with Triton's Heating, Ventilating, and Air Conditioning program staff members during spring 1989. Triton's existing Air Conditioning/Refrigeration curriculum became the foundation for the training sought by Local 399 officials. Some courses were revised and two new ones were developed and added to further strengthen the curriculum. Local 399 members have the option of working toward a career certificate or earning an associate of applied science degree in stationary engineering. As of spring 1991, more than 150 Local 399 members had enrolled in courses leading to a certificate or degree. This industry-education partnership is successful because of cooperation and collaboration.

Probably the first community college in Illinois (and one of the first in the U.S.) to recognize the need to become involved in business training and economic development is College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn. This large Illinois community college's Business and Professional Institute trained 19,985 employees for approximately 700 businesses in fiscal year 1990. The Institute continues to lead in innovative services designed to assist and improve the quality and productivity of businesses within the college's west suburban Chicago district.

William Rainey Harper College, Palatine; McHenry County College, Crystal Lake; Elgin Community College, Elgin; and the Technology Commercialization Center of Northern Illinois University in DeKalb developed and offered a Business Assistance Conference in April 1991 focusing on business resources available to new and existing firms in Illinois. Conference participants learned about training and retraining resources (including training grant funding assistance and procurement of government contracts), small business programs, venture capitalists, technology assistance, and other types of assistance available through community colleges and universities from 12 experts representing education, government, and business during the one-day conference.

Discovering and utilizing business resource information can be confusing and time consuming because Illinois, like many other states, has numerous programs and agencies involved with various approaches to economic development. Bringing all of these resource people together provided a much needed service to business and industry in the northwest suburban Chicago area. More than 25,000 potential and existing business people received entrepreneurship training and services that helped to establish nearly 700 new businesses and retain more than 150 existing

Illinois businesses. Illinois community colleges also provided assistance to more than 160 Illinois firms in obtaining more than 950 government contracts totaling \$48 million in fiscal year 1990. Nearly 8,000 persons received employment training services to improve their job skills and assist them in seeking employment in Illinois.

Many Illinois community colleges were also strategically involved in:

- The establishment or operation of business incubators.
- Industrial retention, expansion, and attraction programs, which contributed to the retention of 5,242 firms and the start-up or expansion of 364 firms.
- Training grant assistance: Illinois community colleges wrote and administered (through the Illinois State Board of Education) nearly \$1 million in High Impact Training Services ("HITS") grants in fiscal year 1990.
- Needs assessment programs, including programs for quality improvement.
- Technology transfer in cooperation with universities and federal laboratories.
- International business development.

Some Illinois community colleges operate advanced technology centers and others assist in the operation of labor-management councils. All provide information and referral services for business and industry. Also, all Illinois community colleges provide valuable economic development expertise and assistance to the communities and districts they serve.

Illinois Community College Business and Economic Development Centers provide in-plant customized training and general on-campus training programs for business and industry. These programs are both noncredit and credit. Examples of such training programs are Statistical Process Control, Design of Experiments, Business Japanese, Export Documentation, Leadership/Supervisory training, Sales training, Blueprint Reading in English and in Spanish, Welding and Soldering training, World Class Manufacturing, Just-In-Time programs, and Customer Service training. Some Illinois community colleges, in addition to customized and general training, are licensed to deliver training through companies such as Zenger-Miller and Vital Learning. Community Colleges in Illinois and throughout the U.S. must expand upon these collaborative and cooperative efforts. To address the future, Illinois community colleges would do well to follow the state of Wisconsin's lead. Wisconsin Technical colleges are involved in Quality Improvement Networks or Systems.

Some of these networks now involve businesses, colleges, universities, and public secondary and elementary schools.

To prepare quality workforce members and to diminish wasted resources (including human resources), Illinois community colleges will need to develop quality improvement systems within their own institutions; develop a statewide quality improvement system that integrates education, business, and government; and interface with established quality networks at the local, state, regional, national, and international levels.

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