Workforce Learning Summit Innovation or Best Practice

Durham Technical Community College

I EARN Initiative (Industry-driven, Education, Apprenticeship, Resume-building, Networking)

Employment skills training is focused on the completion of a credential which will make the student more attractive to employers, thereby enhancing his or her employment options and outlook. Our best practice involves the development of a package of “employer incentives” that can be integrated into a career pathway, resulting in an "incentive package" for employers, e.g., a student with multiple credentials, pre-approval for a program such as On-the-Job-Training, and hours earned toward an apprenticeship.

DETAILS

In August of 2013, the college was awarded a Back-to-Work grant. Using these grant funds, we were able to respond to the needs of our manufacturing partners in Durham and Orange counties by offering, for the first time, the Certified Production credential. We also expanded our bio-manufacturing course offerings. The grant supported significant employer involvement, including a commitment to interview all program completers. Five of our manufacturing partners signed on to the grant.

We were also able to fund a Student Success coach who worked directly with each student on the development of a career pathway. This led us to think about student success in a more global manner. We began to consider the various ways in which we might enhance our students’ employability profile beyond awarding a credential. For example, several of our industry partners offer apprenticeship opportunities, so we sought and obtained approval for pre-apprenticeship status for both our CPT and BioWork coursework. It was also clear that many of our students were likely to be eligible for On-the-Job-Training funds. To help facilitate the approval process, we invited a North Carolina Career Center staff member to spend time on campus each week, working with program students to establish eligibility. Finally, we collaborated with our curriculum partners to develop a local articulation of our CPT credential into our Industrial Trades AAS program, resulting in an opportunity for students who want to continue along a manufacturing focused career pathway.

Following graduation from their programs, students were invited to a “round robin” interview day. Five of our industry partners came to campus and spent the day interviewing various graduates. Companies were provided with an integrated “bundled” resume for each candidate which included the following: a Gold or Silver Career Readiness Certificate/HRD, training/skill credential (Bioprocessing Technician/BioWork PLUS) or MSSC Certified Production Technician credential), completion of pre-apprenticeship hours, and pre-qualification status for On-the-Job training funds.

This interview day with “bundled” resumes was a first for the college, and feedback from our partners indicated that they would like to participate in such events in the future. Partners also reported that they felt the “incentive packages” were important in their hiring practices, and offered to help us develop this practice going forward.
Implementation began in September 2013.

**Partner Type(s):**
- Business/Industry (direct involvement)
- Economic Development
- Workforce Development Board
- Career Center

**Impact/Outcomes**
The most immediate impact was reflected in our partner feedback. Employers felt the addition of multiple incentives such as OJT eligibility screening, and graduation from pre-apprenticeship approved programs would have an impact on their hiring process. They also offered to help us continue to expand and refine this practice, e.g., matching industry partner hiring timeline with credential completion in a more specific way.

We are still compiling data on employment outcomes for our BTW graduates, but, to date, 25% of our graduating cohort have been offered employment with one of our five partners.

We have also begun exploring how we might expand a career pipeline into our public schools, especially around apprenticeship, using our CPT credential to link high school vocational training, and our Industrial Trades AAS degree program.

**Funding Source(s)**
Our funding source was the NC Community College Back-to-Work program. Our budget was approximately $75,000.

**REFLECTIONS**

**Innovation or Best Practice**
This initiative represents a step forward in our thinking about student success and training outcomes. As we discuss career pathway development and refinement, we consider not only entry and exit points, credential opportunities, and employment skills, but also employment “incentives” that we can “bundle” into the student’s package of credentials.

**Lessons Learned**
This is a new initiative for us, but one lesson we learned is that we must consider the various hiring process timelines of our industry partners. We have already started conversations with our Back-to-Work participants on how we might more effectively connect our students with their hiring process prior to graduation.

**Scalability**
This strategy can be used with any program. The primary costs are associated with the employment of a student success coach who can help to coordinate the various moving pieces of the process.
RESOURCES

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