

# AI's role in hiring, recruitment

**TOPICS:** 2020 AACC Workforce Development Institute

Laura Leatherwood (left), president of Blue Ridge Community College in North Carolina, speaks during a session on Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work in Education at AACC's Workforce Development Institute. (Photos: Ellie Ashford)

**BY ELLIE ASHFORD** JANUARY 26, 2020

AMELIA ISLAND, Fla. — Artificial intelligence (AI) isn't just transforming education, it's becoming a major force in how companies hire and retain workers, according to a new survey. The survey shows that companies are letting go of the idea that only graduates of four-year colleges qualify for professional jobs.

Those are two of the main trends in hiring and recruitment identified by a survey during a session of the **American Association of Community Colleges' (AACC) Workforce Development Institute**.

IBM is using **Watson**, its powerful AI-focused computer system, to give employees personalized learning plans and recommendations for further training, said David Barnes, IBM's chief workforce policy officer. Watson also uses analytics to measure employee engagement.

During the hiring process, the "Watson candidate assistant" can infer applications that candidates don't articulate them on their resume, Barnes said. If job candidates are not qualified for the position they are applying for, Watson can point them to another position at IBM they might be qualified for.

Watson also comes up with alternative questions if the tool detects an unclear answer.

or minority job applicants, Barnes noted. In addition, the tool uses machine learning to predict with a high degree of accuracy that an employee is at risk of leaving – and suggest ways to retain that person at IBM.

Such innovations have greatly enhanced the HR process for a company that processes 100,000 job applications a year, Barnes said, adding that they also save IBM \$50 million annually.

## The human element

Despite all these algorithms, “humans have the final say,” Barnes noted. The company is taking a human approach to bolster human capacity and decisions – not to replace them.

Human involvement is important in the hiring process, he said, because “you don’t want to miss the duck,” meaning those people who don’t fit a conventional mold but who bring unique skills and ideas to innovations.

IBM also focuses on continued learning among its employees, all of whom are encouraged to take time for learning a year, Barnes said. Last year, employees, on average, logged 60 hours of learning. IBM has already issued 1.5 million badges to employees for completing learning activities.

A new innovation at IBM allows employees to use an AI chatbot on their mobile devices to help them reach the next rung in their career ladder and how to attain the skills they need.

## Multiple paths

A growing number of companies are rethinking whether a bachelor’s degree is the best path for their workforce. Apple, for example, is “no longer locked into the idea that a job requires a four-year degree,” said Jennifer Dame, market segment executive for Apple. “We’re looking for people who fit the culture and who want to continue to learn and advance. Many of the qualities don’t require a degree.

Apple is also developing programs that help individuals leverage the company’s resources. When the iPhone debuted in 2007, it led to the creation of a huge developer ecosystem.

build apps and distribute them through the Apple Store. In response, Apple developed a curriculum to help people learn how to code and develop apps. About 100 community colleges have added it into their curriculums.

In one example, Dame said, a group of students at [Mesa Community College](#) took a coding course as a cohort, developed an app with resources to help students struggle with food insecurity.

## Changing the mindset

Although many large companies are examining what they seek in employees, hiring managers at IBM “still want to prioritize people with four-year degrees,” Barnes said with that “requires a cultural change.” To overcome that challenge, the company is focusing on recruiting at community colleges, he said.

A four-year degree is no longer necessary for what Barnes calls “new-college” jobs. In the past few years, the number of IBM employees in this category has grown significantly. Now, 15 percent of the company’s workforce.

IBM has changed its “hiring ethos” to focus on skills, Barnes said. “We test for skills. We look for people with relevant job and life experiences.” And because the average tenure of life of three to five years, “there’s a heavier emphasis on soft skills,” he added.

## A powerful message

All jobs today have a technology component, noted AACC President Walt Duggins. Both government, as well as employers, must understand that a community college can lead to many high-paying careers.

Community colleges are playing a larger role in setting the nation’s policy. For example, Bumphus, Sheree Utash, who is president of [WSU Tech](#) in Kansas, and [Kentucky Community and Technical College System](#), serve on the [Advanced Technology Advisory Board](#) created by the White House.

(From left): AACC President Walter Bumphus, David Barnes of IBM, Jennifer Dame of Ap president of WSU Tech.

“That is giving all of us an opportunity to advance community colleges a said.

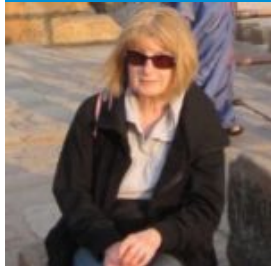
Being at the table with top corporate CEOs has given community college importance of access and equity in the drive to make sure everyone has c Utash said.

It’s important for community colleges to make sure students have the so and to understand why that is important, she said.

The Ad Council is expected to roll out a **campaign** next month, one of se the American Workforce Policy Advisory Board, to educate the public abo and technical education.

“This will be another tool to amplify the message that there are multiple said.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Ellie Ashford**

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