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Community College Graduates: Assets, Not Liabilities For Employers



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Rufus Glasper, Grads of Life

Rufus Glasper is the President and CEO for League for Innovation in the Community College and Chancellor Emeritus, Maricopa Community Colleges, Arizona.

Throughout their history, community colleges have faced the major challenge of constantly changing in ways that demonstrate their ability to adapt to the economic and political environment while increasing their contributions to students, local communities, and employers. Community colleges have met this challenge in numerous ways, the successful



placement of their graduates premier among them. Community college students are a source of talent for employers, not only because of the individual characteristics and abilities they bring to the workforce, but also because of the skills pathways they take to get a job.



The community college field is keen to help employers recognize the value of its graduates.

Addressing employers, [Walter Bumphus, president of the American Association of Community Colleges](#), said:

“Your best workforce resource may be your local community college. As colleges reimagine their roles for the 21st century, they are committing to work with business and industry to provide trained and adaptable talent. We encourage companies to work with their community college partners to develop programs and pipelines that meet their current and future needs.”

As the largest provider of workforce training, community

colleges are closely connected to the businesses and communities they serve. In fact, this educational sector's *intentional* relationship with local companies allows them to collaborate on the development of curriculum directly aligned with changing industry needs. Because these relationships with career and technical partners lead to curriculum and training that are in line with competitive workforce requirements, community college graduates are well positioned to demonstrate success in the workplace. As a result, community college students often stand out when prospective employers are sorting through applications and resumes. Gary Thomsen, CEO of McDonald Wholesale in Eugene, Oregon, noted the quality of education and training at Lane Community College:

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“The culinary program in particular gives the students a taste of the real world. I was really impressed with how the classroom space is set up and run like a real commercial kitchen. They are getting a taste of reality, and school doesn’t always teach you that.”

Certifications and degrees also make a difference. Historical employer hiring qualifications and training are insufficient to meet the rapidly changing needs of the communities we serve. New and tenured employees alike are being asked to increase their workplace skills commensurate with 21st century [science](#), technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, with the primary focus in the areas of “[communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity](#).” Community colleges are bastions of the new workforce pipeline, and at the forefront in developing stackable credentials as a new system of well-designed career pathways. These flexible pathways allow employees to come in and out of the workplace while building credentials that may address more effectively the “demand-side needs of employers and the supply-side needs of individual workers.”

Employers recognize that credentialing systems put tangible value on core skills needed in an evolving workplace. Thus, employers are reassessing the past practice of in-house training programs as a core function of the organization and viewing community colleges as a long-term solution. These changes allow employers to eliminate unnecessary cost and thus turn their focus to the primary mission of the company.

Although the community college's "relationship with career and technical partners may often be relegated to the background....this is probably where the real economic power of producing a future workforce is found." In fact, during the recession many graduates with bachelor's and master's degrees enrolled in community college training programs to earn industry certificates and associate degrees that could improve their chances of getting a job. Many of these students were "seeking new careers...[or] looking to upgrade their skills in computer-related professions or other job-rich fields including biotechnology."

For example, Evonne Bowling, Program Director, Fashion Merchandising and Design, at