

Forum for Business Growth
and Workforce Development

June 8 - 12, 2009



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
OF THE BLOOMINGTON-NORMAL AREA
Investing in McLean County



August 14, 2009

Today, findings and recommendations from the *Forum for Business Growth and Workforce Development* held June 8 – 12, 2009, are being released. It is the hope of the sponsoring organizations that this whitepaper will promote informed discussion in the community about challenges and opportunities in workforce development and business growth, and that those discussions will lead to actions that promote the common interests of the community.

The project steering committee would like to thank the thirty-eight business leaders who participated as discussion panelists and Dr. Rick Ringer, from the College of Business at Illinois State University, for moderating the proceedings.

A copy of the whitepaper is attached. A version will soon be available for download on the Action Research Center Web site, www.iwu.edu/action/.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D Halperin".

Deborah Halperin
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Overview

In the fall of 2008, Illinois State University – Extended University (EU) and the Economic Development Council of the Bloomington-Normal Area (EDC) initiated discussions about a community partnership project to identify workforce opportunities and challenges related to economic stabilization and growth in order to gain a better understanding of the state of workforce preparedness in the area. Rapidly changing dynamics in the economy made previous assessments obsolete. Organizations who work toward the promotion of a strong workforce were approached to participate in the project. EU and the EDC were joined in sponsoring a community event by Heartland Community College, Illinois Wesleyan University, Lincoln College – Normal, Regional Office of Education 17, McLean County Chamber of Commerce, CareerLink 16, and the Small Business Development Center at Illinois State University.

Project partners designed and developed a series of discussion forums for eight sectors: Agriculture and Energy, Manufacturing, Small Business Retail, Service, Financial Services, Information Technology, Healthcare, and Construction. The *Forum for Business Growth and Workforce Development* was held from June 8 – 12, 2009 at Illinois State University. Each sector panel discussion was moderated over a ninety minute period and included two to seven panelists from area businesses.

Findings

Following the discussion forums, a subcommittee of the sponsoring entities reviewed transcripts and identified six common perceptions of need as indicated by discussion panelists:

1. Increase awareness of industry careers
2. Expand college preparation programs in order to advance underrepresented, disadvantaged, and English Language Learner populations, and non-college career preparation programs for individuals whose aptitudes are better served in non-college careers
3. Enhance university programming to reflect industry-specific awareness of processes, vocabulary, and standards; foster a broader understanding of basic business principles, quality management systems, and math; promote communication, negotiation and critical thinking; and allow for the demonstration by students of strong work ethics and accountability
4. Improve professional behavior of applicants and workers new to the workforce
5. Bridge the gap between available workers and anticipated deficits in the workforce
6. Conduct a coordinated community effort in order to facilitate recruitment of select worker populations to the area

Recommendations

Recommendations
to Facilitate
Dialogue and
Discussion

General recommendations have been crafted to promote dialogue and discussion among community organizations who deal with business and workforce issues.

1. Universities, K-12 education, and industries should partner to develop industry awareness and career awareness programs at the junior high and grade school levels
- 2A. Community, industries, universities and K-12 education should partner to develop college preparation programs for underrepresented, disadvantaged, and English Language Learners (ELL) populations
- 2B. Community, industries, labor organizations, universities and K-12 education should partner to develop non-college preparation programs for individuals whose aptitudes are better served in non-college careers
3. Universities, businesses and industries should partner to provide more practical examples within curricula that set real world expectations for newly graduated workers
- 4A. Universities, K-12 education, and local businesses should form partnerships to develop professional behavior training that can be incorporated into university curricula
- 4B. Industries and community organizations should leverage already formed youth groups at local churches and other social service agencies in order to facilitate participation in programs that introduce professional behavior practices
5. Universities should increase emphasis on volunteerism, internships, and service learning in order to better promote student ties to the community and increase retention rates of new graduates in the local workforce
6. Community organizations involved in business associations, economic development and tourism along with local government should explore partnerships to create a community branding campaign

Outcomes

Distribution to the
Community

Sponsoring partners of the Forum for Business Growth and Workforce Development will distribute findings to constituents and the community in an effort to promote and support active responses to identified issues.

Identified Perception of Need I

Increase awareness of industry careers

Forum panel participants across several sectors (agriculture and energy, manufacturing, service, healthcare, and construction) indicated a need to improve career awareness in their industry beginning at pre-high school education levels. These sectors utilize employees with common skill sets in areas such as engineering, accountancy, finance, business administration, and human resources. Companies in sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing find it difficult to compete with other industries because of industry stereotypes and perceptions about the amount of education required for industry careers.

An agriculture sector representative stated, “Agriculture is deemphasized when recruiting, because agriculture is perceived as hard work and not glamorous. Many people ‘fall into it’ as a career...an agriculture career is not perceived by most engineering students as an end point, yet almost half the workforce in agriculture are engineers.” Some sectors have initiated programs to address awareness of careers at the grade school level, but feel that more could be done. A healthcare representative relayed a sixth grade program at her workplace conducted in partnership with K-12 education where students visit area hospitals, attend healthcare career presentations, as well as participate in healthcare fairs. She explained the importance career exposure at the younger levels by saying, “We must start with grade school kids because high school kids have already made up their minds.”

Researchers commonly recommend that career exploration and awareness begin before high school, a time when many major decisions about courses are made (Castellano et. al, 2002; Fouad, 1995; O’Brien et al., 1999; Toepfer, 1994). Middle school students need to have reinforced the concept that success in most careers is tied to education and training (Fouad, 1995). “Middle school is an ideal age at which to expose students to the challenging world of work,” according to the National Alliance of Business Learning to Succeed, Preparing Young People for Tomorrow’s Workplace (National Alliance of Business, 1999).

Recommendation I

Universities, K-12 education, and industries should partner to develop industry awareness and career awareness programs at the junior high and grade school levels

Career and industry awareness programs should include multiple components such as: onsite visits, career professional discussions and lectures, hands on experiences and activities. Programs should be designed to be after school and during the summer due to limited availability of class time. Industries can provide career professionals as role models and sites for visiting. Universities can provide learning objectives and outcomes, coordination and service-learning opportunities, and programming related to the hands on experiences. K-12 education can provide recruitment of participating students and possibly recruit volunteer teacher facilitators.

One best practice example of a related program is The Other Side of the Stethoscope, an innovative program directed at Chicago Public School seventh graders and their parents to increase awareness of healthcare careers. The students are introduced to problem solving and creative

thinking skills that are used every day by healthcare professionals (Illinois Hospital Association, 2009). Another example in the manufacturing sector is Manufacturing Your Future a program in Montgomery, Alabama designed to create career opportunity awareness and ultimately supply workers for regional manufacturing jobs. Christi Sellers, coordinator of the program, hopes to show students just how exciting manufacturing can be. “You don’t have a worker walk over to a machine with a toolbox anymore, now they plug in a laptop. It is a very sophisticated career now.” One aspect of the program tours students through four area manufacturing facilities and two training/educational labs (National Center for Integrated Systems Technology, 2007).

Identified Perception of Need 2

Expand college preparation programs in order to advance underrepresented, disadvantaged, and English Language Learner (ELL) populations, and non-college career preparation programs for individuals whose aptitudes are better served in non-college careers

Panel participants (manufacturing, healthcare, service, and construction sectors) noted that there is a need for preparation courses for college entrance and non-college vocational/training programs. College preparation programs can combine the introduction to career paths and build awareness of careers while supplying support for necessary academic entrance requirements. These programs are especially valuable in populations where parents and caregivers are not college educated.

Representatives from a Healthcare System discussed two instances of the organization working with underrepresented ELL populations. The organization offers English as a Second Language (ESL) classes during work hours for employees so that they can become a more effective resource and can advance to in-demand healthcare occupations. In addition, the organization works with children at community centers such as the Western Avenue Community Center and with K-12 education to foster an understanding of the education needed to enter varying healthcare careers. Panelists suggested that universities could help businesses take advantage of an underutilized diverse community through facilitating the college preparation of untapped human resources.

Non-college career preparation programs function in a similar way to college preparation programs. Several panel participants indicated a belief that K-12 education curricula is too focused on college as an outcome, leaving students whose aptitudes are more in line with non-college careers underserved. A commercial construction panelist discussed the idea that not everyone is suited for the university plan; there are certain students who would benefit from vocational or on the job training out of high school. Another contractor went on to highlight advantages of trades work by saying that these students “are in a better economic position and a better workforce position than college graduates but four years sooner.”

Researchers suggest that there are many problems with vocational training because it is disregarded by educators as separate from general education and therefore not given high priority. There is a need to build awareness, as one author notes, “Generally, adults and youth have heard of vocational education, but they have no clear idea of what it is...Groups that benefit most from vocational education include students not going to college, adults who need job skills, and students

with disabilities” (Catri, 1998). Students “are surprised to find out that they don’t have the necessary skills and knowledge to be successful at a well-paying job...97 percent of non-college students say that providing opportunities for real-world learning and making coursework more relevant would improve things, including 76 percent who say that this would improve things a great deal. Ninety-five percent of employers agree” (Achieve 2009).

Recommendation 2A

Community, industries, universities and K-12 education should partner to develop college preparation programs for underrepresented, disadvantaged, and English Language Learner (ELL) populations

College Preparation Programs

College preparation programs are essential for populations that have limited exposure to the process of applying to and attending a university. College preparation programs help students identify areas of study, academically prepare, and gain a better understanding of career paths relative to plans of study. College preparation programs should be developed for after school and summer periods using educational expertise from universities and in-school coordination from K-12 teachers and administrators. Industry may supply career path identification, mentors, and presenters. Community service organizations and K-12 education may help promote programs to parents and students.

Youth Career Awareness

An example of a best practice program related to the topic of college preparation is the Youth Career Awareness Program (YCAP). It is an inventive youth program that introduces underrepresented high school students from Minneapolis and St. Paul to career opportunities in technical fields. YCAP participants are enrolled in a summer program and receive the benefit of exposure to technical fields, ability to earn high school and/or college credits, and exposure to community service (Dunwoody College of Technology, 2008).

Chicago Public Schools, Department of College Career Preparation

Another best practice example related to this topic has been implemented by the Department of College Career Preparation from the Chicago Public Schools. The Department of College and Career Preparation aims to strengthen college preparation curricula and counseling supports in all CPS high schools. In addition, they partner with local and national colleges and universities to create an array of college experiences and resources for students. They also strive to secure opportunities for financial assistance, such as scholarships, that will help students with the costs of college. The Department offers many programs and events crucial to student development, notably College Bridge. “College Bridge allows a student to enroll in courses at local colleges and universities. For each course taken, students will earn both high school elective credit and transferable college credit. Courses meet on the college campuses outside of the regular school day – they can be scheduled in the late afternoon, early evening, on Saturdays or during the summer. The costs of tuition, textbooks, materials and laboratory fees are entirely covered by CPS and are free for students. With the rising cost of college, College Bridge gives students the opportunity to experience college life and earn college credit before they’re graduated high school without paying a dime” (Chicago Public Schools, 2009).

Local groups and organizations have already implemented some programs to help with the preparation of underrepresented students and populations. Community chapters of mentoring

programs such as A.L.A.N.A. (African, Latin, Asian, Native American), and the Black Student Union at Illinois Wesleyan University are two of such resources for individuals. These programs are designed to, “assist first year students in their transition into campus life by providing them with a support network of their peers.” Students from the university, professionals from local businesses, as well as faculty aid the mentees by providing advice and collaboration about academic and life endeavors (Illinois Wesleyan University, 2009).

Students in the Action Research Seminar Course at Illinois Wesleyan University have also taken a proactive approach to assisting disadvantaged students in the community by introducing them to the opportunity of a college education. In the fall of 2008, students in the course organized a campus tour for members of the Boys and Girls Club in conjunction with teens from the west side of Bloomington and their parents. This time was spent touring the campus, listening to a student panel discussion, as well as attending informational sessions from admissions and career center faculty. The panel consisted of IWU first generation college students from different ethnic and economic backgrounds. The teens and their parents were encouraged to ask questions and participate in the discussion. The families also received tips and advice on the financial aid process and how to start applying for college. The event closed with free tickets for a future university football game so attendees were able to come back and experience the college atmosphere and learn of more opportunities available to them. This was especially important because when asked what profession the teens strived toward, a majority answered in the field of professional athletics and they were given the chance to see college athletes in action.

The Teacher Education Pipeline for Urban Schools is an example of regional cooperation and is the result of a partnership between Illinois State University, Chicago Public Schools, and City Colleges of Chicago to provide qualified teachers to high need schools. More than 700,000 new teachers will be needed in high-poverty urban districts in the next 10 years. In addition, nearly 50 percent of all new teachers in urban districts leave the profession during their first five years of teaching. “With fewer teachers entering the field than leaving, this gap will continue to widen. The mentoring and support programs implemented through the Chicago Teacher Education Pipeline will reverse this trend and improve outcomes for new teachers in urban schools” (Illinois State University, 2009). This program will serve to increase urban teacher recruitment and improve urban teacher retention through mentoring and support. “The Chicago Teacher Education Pipeline will provide Chicago Public Schools with a continuous supply of well-trained multicultural teachers, and in doing so will provide the nation an exemplary model for urban teacher recruitment, teacher education and mentorship. To accomplish the aforementioned goals, the Chicago Teacher Education Pipeline project will focus on recruitment, urban teacher preparation, community-based clinical experiences, faculty development and research” (Illinois State University, 2009).

Recommendation 2B

Community, industries, labor organizations, universities and K-12 education should partner to develop non-college preparation programs for individuals whose aptitudes are better served in non-college careers

Non-College
Preparation
Programs

Through collaboration, effective programs can be developed and/or expanded that introduce students to industry and business sectors, teach skills and vocations, and promote pathways to employment. Such programs require a proactive approach and allow students hands on experiences in varying capacities throughout a variety of sectors. The benefits of vocational training, such as job placement and economic stability, should be the main focus of program promotion in order to recruit students not best suited for four year university programs. Partnerships with community organizations can provide for the recruitment of students best suited for non-college careers, while labor organizations, industries, universities, and K-12 education can provide for mentors, professionals, discussions, case studies, hands-on experiences, and training that programs necessitate.

A.S.T.D.

At Delta College in Michigan, “General education is not the only option. The Applied Science and Technology Division (A.S.T.D.), is a major provider of vocational and technical training and has many options to choose from” (Guardado, 2009). The Division was “created to stimulate an efficient and well educated ‘blue-collar’ workforce and to teach students all of the vast amounts of knowledge they will need to start and maintain a successful vocational career” (Guardado, 2009). Students have a wide array of industries to choose from, such as construction where they are able to acquire real live experience with heavy equipment owned by Delta College’s CAT program before entering the workforce. “Among construction, welding, robotics, electronics, electron microscopy, fashion, culinary arts, the various automotive fields, and with the degrees and certificates possible for each program, there is never a lack of student enrollment” (Guardado, 2009).

McLean County
Community
COMPACT

Several activities promoting non four-year degree careers are conducted locally through the McLean County Community COMPACT (MCCC) and their partners. The McLean County Community COMPACT and Bloomington Area Career Center (BACC) began an annual career expo for area eighth grade students in October 2007. The expo features hands-on opportunities for nearly 1,700 students to discover options available in the technical career areas. In addition, MCCC coordinates a job shadowing program for students from LeRoy High School, Bloomington Area Career Center, Normal Community High School ICE program, and the Bloomington Business Academy (University of Illinois Extension, 2008).

Bloomington Area
Career Center

Training programs from the Bloomington Area Career Center (BACC) meet some needs locally. BACC offers vocational programming for juniors and seniors at fifteen area high schools in automotive technologies, construction trades, metalworking occupations, healthcare occupations, cosmetology, and many other topic areas (Bloomington Area Career Center, 2009).

Identified Perception of Need 3

Enhance university programming to reflect industry-specific awareness of processes, vocabulary, and standards; to foster a broader understanding of basic business principles, quality management systems, and math; to promote communication, negotiation and critical thinking; and to allow for the demonstration by students of strong work ethics and accountability

Panelists from all sectors concurred that more could be done by universities to prepare graduates for the workplace. Common was a desire for indicators of accountability and strong work ethics in applicants. Many discussion participants stated that new employees entering the workforce for the first time lacked an awareness of their industry's processes, vocabulary, and standards and often did not have the basic business principles required to be successful without extensive mentoring or in-service education. In addition, new employees lack an appreciation for quality management, need improved math and critical thinking skills, and would benefit from an understanding of negotiating principles and professional communication.

A common theme discussed at every sector session was the idea that graduating students have a sense of "entitlement" to high salaries and minimal responsibilities which clouds their overall understanding of the skill sets necessary for various industry careers. A representative from manufacturing stated, "Students need to be aware that they have to sell their competitive advantage against a dislocated workforce; students need realistic expectations; they need a way to show a competitive advantage over a dislocated workforce with experience." A service sector panelist relayed that in his experience, students have the wrong attitude, expecting their degree to have a 50K salary attachment. Attitude was unanimously ranked higher than aptitude by all panel participants when asked to discuss the considerations of hiring two closely qualified applicants. A person from manufacturing claimed that, "We can train them in most areas, but they need the right attitude." A panelist in the construction sector stated, "The best employees are those that know how to learn, are motivated, have good soft skills, and continue to learn."

One discussion panelist, who consults with companies to improve performance, suggested that often times new employee are educated in-house when leaders define, set and measure standards and provide for accountability. General standards and expectations could be set at the university level prior to employment. Overall, discussion panel participants suggested that universities could do more to close the gap between what employers need in an employee and how students are prepared.

Some researchers, such as those at the Partnership for 21st Century Skills conclude, "the future workforce is here, and it is ill-prepared." According to the 2006 report *Are They Ready to Work?* conducted by the Partnership, "the findings reflect employers' growing frustrations over the preparedness of new entrants to the workforce. Employers expect young people to arrive with a core set of basic knowledge and the ability to apply their skills in the workplace – and the reality is not matching the expectation." A notable account from report participant Richard Cavanagh, President and CEO of The Conference Board, states, "It is clear from the report that greater communication and collaboration between the business sector and educators is critical to ensure that young people are prepared to enter the workplace of the 21st century...Less than intense preparation in critical skills can lead to unsuccessful futures for America's youth, as well as a less

competitive U.S. workforce. This ultimately makes the U.S. economy more vulnerable in the global marketplace” (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2006).

Recommendation 3

Universities, businesses and industries should partner to provide more practical examples within curricula that set real world expectations for newly graduated workers

Practical Examples

University departments and colleges should form and/or expand business/industry advisory groups to support the development of practical examples in line with existing curricula and meeting identified learning objectives and outcomes. Businesses and industry representatives, along with university alumni in identified fields, may participate in crafting examples, explaining industry standards and processes, and functioning as mentors or participants in classroom exercises.

University Lecture Series

One common practice at universities is to incorporate a lecture/speaker series in a curriculum to give students insight into current issues and exposure to industry professionals. The local American Marketing Association (AMA) club at Illinois Wesleyan University is host to an annual sales speaker series. Throughout the semester members of the AMA invite various professionals to lead lectures and discussions encompassing the sector of sales work, but more importantly provide examples of what to actually expect with a college degree through real world stories relatable to IWU students. These professionals may help to bridge the gap between what students want and expect after graduation and what they realistically need to be prepared (E. Wojnowska, personal conversation, July 17, 2009).

Workforce Development Center

Heartland Community College initiated efforts to provide for a capable workforce by investing in its own Workforce Development Center (WDC), which opened in 2007. “Conceptualized in collaboration with area employers, the Workforce Development Center represents an important economic development resource for central Illinois. By providing technical degree programs and customized training, the WDC will increase the College’s ability to develop the skills of 21st Century workers” (Heartland Community College, 2007). The WDC offers classes for students in varying fields and enables them to gain practical experiences in order to become skilled employees in the workforce.

Identified Perception of Need 4

Improve professional behavior of applicants and workers new to the workforce

Panelists from the workforce forum, across all sectors, agreed that there is a lack of professional behavior exhibited by many new graduates applying for work. There is a wide array of areas in which students need more training especially workplace professionalism, soft skills, communication, and overall business etiquette.

Panelists in the small business sector described their ideal job candidate as having a wide range of skills. One panelist stated, “Now employers are more selective, and employees need broader skills.” A small business owner mentioned that she hires “for a variety of ever changing jobs, and the employees with good attitude will have a better chance.” A service sector participant noted “soft-skills are increasingly important...employees need flexibility to weather business changes.” Similar

expectations were mentioned from another panelist in the service sector “Professional behavior and ethics, attendance, and tardiness are the most crucial.”

There are numerous definitions of professionalism and its encompassing components but researchers have agreed that there are five main characteristics: specialized knowledge, exclusivity, high ethical standards, autonomy, and accountability (Loh, 2000). And although these can be the measurement of students’ skill sets, “professionalism does not just happen with completion of a degree and certification of competencies in a selected service occupation. Professionalism must be explicitly taught, motivated, modeled, mentored, evaluated, and expected from the moment a student declares a specialization in one of the recognized professions” (Sherrill, 2006). The 2006 report *Are They Really Ready to Work* conducted by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills found, “Nearly three-quarters of survey participants (70 percent) cite deficiencies among incoming graduates in “applied” skills, such as professionalism and work ethic, defined as “demonstrating personal accountability, effective work habits (e.g. punctuality, working productively with others, time and workload management).” Researchers also found that the lack of the needed soft skills is a national trend. The biannual survey of the graduate job market published by Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) found that 43% of employers were unable to fill all their graduate vacancies in 2006 - up more than 10% on 2005 - because students had failed to match academic achievement with leadership, teamwork and communication skills. Most expected a similar shortfall in 2007 (Ford, 2007).

Recommendation 4A

Universities, K-12 education, and local businesses should form partnerships to develop professional behavior training that can be incorporated into university curricula

A sequence of training modules may be developed that could function as a stand-alone program or be incorporated into existing university classes or vocational preparation programs. The modules might address issues of reliability, integrity, display of empathy, self-motivation and work ethic, appearance and personal hygiene, trust of personal judgment, communications, time management, teamwork and diplomacy, respect, avocation, and service within protocols and policies, in an effort to shape the professional values and attitudes of participants. The modules would benefit from the inclusion of workplace examples.

The Career Services Department at the University of Guelph developed a twelve page guide book that is distributed to students which addresses frequent problems of new employees entering the workforce. Issues in the guide range from first day orientation, time management, and how to be a team player, to personal grooming, accessories, and body language. The guide was written in an “easy to understand” verbiage. By providing the answers to the sometimes “silly” questions in this guidebook the University was able to better prepare its students to transition from school to work.

Some professional behavior training may be found at local university career centers, which provide students with opportunities to take business etiquette classes and to participate in mock interviews and resume courses. The career centers not only provides multiple hand outs and “tip sheets” to students throughout the semester regarding interviewing, resume writing, and beyond,

but also play host to multiple job and career fairs, on-site speakers, workshops, and mock interviews (both from business professionals and trained faculty). These activities could function as a cornerstone for more wide-spread campus initiatives.

Recommendation 4B

Industries and community organizations should leverage already formed youth groups at local churches and other social service agencies in order to facilitate participation in programs that introduce professional behavior practices

Church Partners

Churches in the Bloomington-Normal area play host to numerous ministries including youth ministries, which encompass children as young as sixth grade all the way through high school graduates. These places of worship have programs to educate about religious beliefs and often trips that help develop life skills. These already organized groups could partner with education leaders to provide exposure to professional behavior practices.

Church Youth Groups

At the Mennonite Church of Normal, “The teenagers are active in all areas of our church life, from assisting with the worship service to participating on service trips.” Members of the youth group at the Evangelical Free Church in Bloomington are occupied with leadership training sessions, discussions on various aspects of life, as well as mission and service trips (Mennonite Church of Normal, IL, 2009). Teen participants already dedicate time toward personal advancement and adding a professional behavior curriculum would expand that growth.

Identified Perception of Need 5

Bridge the gap between available workers and anticipated deficits in the workforce

The current recession promises to have lasting effects on future generations of workers. Many panelists agreed, especially in the healthcare sector, that shortages in specialties are prevalent and that there are not enough existing resources to recruit or hire needed individuals. All industries are faced with an aging workforce, most notably the Baby Boomer generation that will soon reach retirement age and need to be replaced. However during this recession, the Baby Boomers and those with secure jobs are not leaving their posts, leading to less hiring and recruitment efforts. One forum panelist stated, “A tremendous challenge will exist after the recession ends, as industries will need to fill the void of approximately 2 million workers”.

A healthcare panelist stated, “There is great concern for the healthcare sector in regards to the number of people about to enter the system; the Baby Boomer generation is getting ready to retire and the system won’t be able to handle those 100 million people; there won’t be enough new workers to replace them.” Other sectors such as manufacturing and construction mention that there is a lack of current job openings. A construction panelist stated, “two years ago construction companies couldn’t find enough workers, now there are few jobs...(however) the construction workforce is an aging one that will eventually need to be replaced.” There is a current disconnect between the need for workers and the resources to recruit them across multiple sectors, but that need will be more greatly felt once the recession ends.

According to economists, “the U.S. labor force could rise considerably in 2009 and 2010, this means the number of people working and the number of people actively looking for work will

increase. It means more people competing for jobs in the short term, adding to stress on U.S. job seekers. Increased competition also implies that the U.S. labor force will become more efficient as vacancies are filled with higher-caliber employees” (Tucker, 2006). Another problem with the job market as seen by economists is that retirees are not actually retiring in these times and waiting for the recession storm to pass, “Baby boomers and pre-baby boomers that had planned to retire but had not actually saved enough were forced back into the labor force unexpectedly. Now, many opt to simply stay at their jobs” (Tucker, 2006).

Recommendation 5

Universities should increase emphasis on volunteerism, internships, and service learning in order to better promote student ties to the community and increase retention rates of new graduates in the local workforce

Emphasize
Volunteerism

Universities regularly respond to requests from communities to supply volunteers for activities and events. Many of these volunteer opportunities are limited in duration, and the student’s understanding of the community service organization or similar entity receiving the service is sometimes peripheral in nature. Programs should couple community awareness education with concentrated volunteerism as a university program requirement. In addition, universities provide numerous interns and service learning participants to communities each year. Even though service learning and internship activities are a high university priority at most institutions, internships and service learning opportunities should be increased in order to introduce more students to life outside campus.

Service Learning

Volunteerism, internships, and service-learning programs have increased support in current years from universities across the nation; development and implementation trends have not changed, “Service-learning is a teaching methodology, similar to experimental education, which involves a cycle of planning, action, and reflection, integrating academic studies with community service. Through service-learning, students acquire knowledge and skills while applying what they learn in community settings to community needs” (Leggett, 2006). Fairfield University in Connecticut has strongly integrated service learning into the curriculum, even opening an Office of Service Learning. “Service-learning is a pedagogical approach that links study and community-based service so that each is strengthened and both are transformed...the service learning program at Fairfield University facilitates connections between appropriate service that addresses needs identified by and with communities. Critical reflection is an essential component of service learning, as is the development of partnerships with the community that are based in mutuality, reciprocity, and cooperative education for the common good” (Fairfield University, 2009).

State Farm
Community
Partnership
Program

The State Farm Community Partnership Program offered through the Action Research Center at Illinois Wesleyan University is a unique program where student interns work full-time in a split work week with three days at a corporate office and two days in a community-based not-for-profit organization. Interns complete major project assignments for both organizations. This program demonstrates for emerging student leaders how for-profit and not-for-profit organizations can align to serve the shared community and fosters a sense of community investment in its participants. To act as a bridge, the IWU Action Research Center conducts a series of workshops

to teach students useful tools and to assist with understanding the dynamics of community development (Illinois Wesleyan University, 2007). There is anecdotal support that the program is influencing students to remain in the region after graduation. One recent participant stated, “What followed [the internship] was the realization that there are more career opportunities than I ever imagined which made staying here a financially feasible option. It’s just easier to start your adult life as a well-connected, engaged, and caring community member here than in a large city” (Wojnowska, 2009). Further, Bloomington-Normal newspaper, The Pantagraph, cited an example of another Community Partnership Program graduate using his acquired skills in his new job with the regionally-based Illinois Student Assistant Corps to motivate kids about the possibility of getting a college degree (Steinbacher, 2009).

Identified Perception of Need 6

Conduct a coordinated community effort in order to facilitate recruitment of select worker populations to the area

All panelists referenced the difficulty in recruiting select populations for jobs in the Bloomington-Normal area: 1) individuals younger than 30 because of perceptions that the community did not have enough entertainment and nightlife, 2) dual income couples in lower to middle-level salary ranges when one spouse is unable to find suitable employment, and 3) highly skilled, highly sought after individuals. In general, panelists did not believe that the community provided recruitment materials that highlighted available entertainment and active lifestyle opportunities that may appeal to harder to recruit demographics, items one and three above. In addition, panelist felt that there was not a unified message from the community about the essence of life in the community. Conversely, panelists in general felt that other demographics were easy to bring to town due to excellent schools, strong community family values, four institutions of higher education, large corporate employers, and the convenient location relevant to nearby major cities.

When asked if recruitment was difficult to the area, a healthcare panelist answered, “It depends on the position, usually the higher up the position the easier it is to relocate the individual.” Another panelist replied, “No, it is not hard to sell the area, physicians and other types of jobs just need to find ties to the community through some way to keep them grounded.” A representative from manufacturing summarized the problem by saying, “We retain people because of the community...It is a family oriented community that values education...but recruiting is difficult because the community is too small for new alumni.” There are advantages and disadvantages to the community and the recruiters have to highlight its advantages.

Local economic development organizations and business associations have workforce incentive programs and partnership programs that may assist businesses in targeted recruitment. In addition, Bloomington-Normal community has a number of visitor resources available for area businesses and industries to use. The Bloomington-Normal Area Convention and Visitors Bureau maintains an extensive Web site of local information, and publishes an annual visitor guide (Bloomington-Normal Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2009); the Economic Development Council of the Bloomington-Normal Area has extensive information on community demographics,

economics, and quality of life available on its web site (EDC, 2009). These resources are used by companies for worker recruitment, but may not go far enough.

Several panelists specifically suggested the need for a community branding campaign. “The goal is to create a shared vision of the community to define the city’s unique attributes for residents and visitors” (Naples Daily News, 2009). The questions that most communities must first ask themselves are, “What is your reputation? What experience do you sell? What do people believe, think, and feel about you, your community, and your business? How do you make sure they keep believing, thinking or feeling that?” (Hayes, 2009) Such a campaign requires, according to leading firms, “the planning stage to be long enough to point you in the right direction and short enough to keep the momentum going into the implementation phase” (Muldrow, 2009). Communities have to make such a campaign effective, Don McEachern of National Cities Weekly suggests, “A true brand moves beyond its identity package to address politics, diplomacy, architecture, economic development, arts, and education. In other words, it addresses every touch point a community has with a consumer” (McEachern, 2008).

Recommendation 6

Community organizations involved in business associations, economic development and tourism along with local government should explore partnerships to create a community branding campaign

A partnership between community organizations involved in business associations, economic development and tourism, and local government might be the first step in creating an effective branding campaign. Although the campaign should focus on the core attributes of the Bloomington-Normal area, it could assist specific worker recruitment if benefits attractive to harder to acquire demographics are included and/or highlighted.

The city of Bonita Springs in Florida has undertaken the processes of community branding. The community of Bonita has recently engaged in a similar campaign. Bonita Springs Mayor Ben Nelson and Bonita Chamber Chief Executive Officer Christine Ross have established an “ad hoc committee comprised of local branding, marketing and public relations professionals to develop a community branding initiative for the city of Bonita Springs” (Naples Daily News, 2009). This will be the first of many steps to develop a brand concept for the city to draw a shared vision for residents and tourists. “The committee will employ best practice procedures used by leading marketing practitioners to create a set of key messages, imagery and outreach methods. Focus groups, online polls and targeted workshops will be conducted throughout the summer months to garner community input, and the committee expects to begin the launch of the new brand this fall” (Naples Daily News, 2009). The effectiveness of the city of Bonita Springs’ efforts to community brand is not currently know.

It is noteworthy that during the compilation of findings and development of recommendations following the *Forum for Business Growth and Workforce Development*, Bloomington Mayor Stephen Stockton initiated a task force in partnership with the Town of Normal, Bloomington-Normal Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, Illinois State University, the Economic Development Council of the Bloomington-Normal Area, and other community organizations and businesses to explore the need for a community branding campaign (D. Folsie, personal communication, August 13, 2009).

Community
Branding Campaign

Key Messages,
Imagery, and
Outreach

Local Activity

Agriculture and Energy

Ray Dostal

Cargill

Caton Fenz

Horizon Wind Energy

Manufacturing

Jerry Berwanger

Mitsubishi Motors North America

Dan Irvin

Mitsubishi Motors North America

John Franklin

ACC Electronics, Inc.

Christine Davis

CAMtek, Inc.

Robert Nickrent

Bridgestone/Firestone OTR

Dave Raistrick

En-Vision America

Frank Sliney

Franmar Chemical, Inc.

Small Business Retail

Jen Schriber

Farnsworth Group

Kelly Mathy

Kelly's Bakery & Café

David Voigts

FastSigns

Service Sector

Colby Geiser

World Painting

Brad Ellsworth

AFNI

Mark Wilkins

Doubletree Hotel

Dave Haning

Marriott - Hotel and Conference Center

Paula Mitchell

CTS

Financial Services

Dionne Wallace Oakley

State Farm Insurance

Tyler Beard

COUNTRY Financial

Thom Ewen

Illinois State University Credit Union

Larry Horvath

First State Bank of Bloomington

Information Technology

Harlan Geiser

Integrity Technology Solutions

Jamie Mathy

Mavidea Technology Group, LLC

Jeff Hartweg

Burwood Group, Inc.

John Schirpke

State Farm Insurance

Laura Rouge

State Farm Insurance

Betty Cupach

COUNTRY Financial

Keith Goesch

TEKsystems

Healthcare

Diane Crutcher

BroMenn Healthcare System

Mary Ellen Larson

BroMenn Healthcare System

Sue Herriott

OSF St. Joseph Medical Center

Sandi Scheidenhelm

OSF St. Joseph Medical Center

Connie Hoselton

Heritage Enterprises

Billy Adkisson

Adkisson Consultants

Barb Nathan

Community Cancer Center

Construction

John Meek

Felmley-Dickerson

Jim Whitmer

Johnston Contractors, Inc

Clint Heinold

Core Construction

According to the Economic Development Council of the Bloomington-Normal Area unemployment figures have been on the rise in the past two years, keeping on track with trends discussed during the workforce forum. The current economic recession almost doubled unemployment rates in 2008, but concurrently the labor force figures have been on a steady rise since 2004. This causes the unbalanced and extremely competitive workforce seen in Bloomington-Normal, as well as the rest of the state. McLean County has weathered better in its unemployment figures than the rest of the state.

McLean County Employment and Labor Force

Source: Individual Companies

YEAR	LABOR FORCE	EMPLOYMENT	UNEMPLOYMENT	RATE
2008	91,644	86,975	4,668	5.10%
2007	91,382	87,926	3,457	3.80%
2006	88,931	85,828	3,103	3.50%
2005	88,466	84,953	3,513	4.00%
2004	85,546	81,827	3,719	4.30%

Illinois Employment and Labor Force

Source: US Dept of Labor

YEAR	LABOR FORCE	EMPLOYMENT	UNEMPLOYMENT	RATE
2008	6,658,332	6,177,826	480,506	7.20%
2007	6,730,873	6,356,276	374,597	5.60%
2006	6,628,182	6,331,698	296,484	4.50%
2005	6,480,297	6,120,384	351,615	5.40%
2004	6,395,944	6,012,264	383,680	6.00%

(EDC, 2009)

Other figures provided by the EDC show the employment figures in select industries from the time period 2000 - 2006. Certain sectors that participated in the forum have been included. Several of these industries (Financial Services, Construction, and Manufacturing) have seen a steady decline in numbers. Data aligns with comments from forum sector representatives regarding “an aging workforce that will soon need replacement.” Other industries, such as the Service sector, are experiencing growth on a yearly basis.

Annual Employment by Industry - McLean County

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006*	10 Yr. Change
Total Nonfarm	90,000	91,400	92,100	90,700	89,000	89,700	89,400	12.59%
Total Private	75,500	75,900	76,600	75,600	74,500	75,000	74,600	13.55%
Goods Producing	11,100	10,800	10,800	10,700	10,100	9,600	8,900	-16.82%
Service-Providing	78,900	80,500	81,300	80,000	78,900	80,100	80,500	17.18%
Private Service-Providing	64,300	65,100	65,800	64,900	64,400	65,400	65,700	19.24%
Nat. Resources, Mining & Construction	3,600	3,600	3,500	3,300	3,200	3,200	3,100	24.00%
Manufacturing	7,600	7,200	7,300	7,400	7,000	6,500	5,800	-29.27%
Durable Goods	5,100	4,800	4,700	4,800	4,600	4,100	3,500	-43.55%
Trade, Transportation and Utilities	14,200	13,900	14,000	14,000	13,800	13,800	13,900	6.92%
Wholesale Trade	2,600	2,400	2,400	2,400	2,500	2,500	2,600	18.18%
Retail Trade	9,400	9,400	9,700	9,600	9,400	9,300	9,300	8.14%
Transportation and Utilities	2,200	2,000	1,900	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	-9.09%
Information	1,400	1,200	1,300	1,300	1,200	1,100	1,100	-8.33%
Financial Activities	13,400	13,100	12,600	12,200	11,800	11,900	12,000	-3.23%
Professional and Business Services	13,700	16,400	17,200	16,700	16,700	17,400	17,400	68.93%
Educational and Health Services	9,600	8,400	8,000	7,900	8,300	8,600	8,800	7.32%
Leisure and Hospitality	8,700	8,600	9,200	9,300	9,100	9,200	9,100	33.82%
Other Services	3,600	3,500	3,500	3,500	3,500	3,400	3,400	3.03%
Government	14,500	15,400	15,500	15,100	14,500	14,700	14,800	8.82%

(EDC, 2009)

Panelists in the forum frequently stated that current graduates are not prepared to enter the workforce. This is supported by the 2005 Annual Employment and Job Flows for specific age groups. Both in Illinois and McLean County more employees were hired in the 25 - 34 range than the 22 - 24 range, or the “graduate” age range.

2005 Annual Employment and Job Flows* by Age - McLean County, Illinois

McLean County	14-18	19-21	22-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-99
Avg Monthly Earnings	\$572.75	\$938.50	\$1,619.50	\$3,069.75	\$4,419.75	\$4,837.00	\$4,692.50	\$1,800.75
Avg New Hire Earnings	\$558.50	\$858.25	\$1,340.25	\$2,048.50	\$2,657.00	\$2,679.00	\$1,974.00	\$1,085.75
Job Creation	639	834	581	928	799	596	287	141
Net Job Flows	300	208	-92	-179	-126	-177	-207	-70
New Hires	1,367	2,071	1,641	2,637	1,765	1,181	496	183
Separations	1,245	2,193	1,940	3,146	2,200	1,664	921	381
Total Employment	2,559	5,254	6,055	19,071	21,495	20,187	9,472	2,375
Turnover	25.00%	22.90%	19.10%	9.50%	5.70%	4.40%	5.20%	8.60%
Illinois	14-18	19-21	22-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-99
Avg Monthly Earnings	\$662.25	\$1,086.00	\$1,900.50	\$3,245.00	\$4,340.00	\$4,574.00	\$4,315.00	\$2,614.00
Avg New Hire Earnings	\$606.00	\$1,005.25	\$1,658.25	\$2,464.50	\$3,123.00	\$3,220.25	\$2,817.50	\$1,481.25
Job Creation	46,956	44,892	42,732	80,856	70,093	57,592	30,584	12,224
Net Job Flows	22,665	5,725	7,282	73	-3,860	-7,122	-11,375	-6,322
New Hires	100,451	106,827	99,702	206,743	151,349	107,055	45,843	17,885
Separations	90,315	120,263	105,759	241,392	190,211	148,395	80,545	35,541
Total Employment	189,246	290,667	353,951	1,239,435	1,340,344	1,291,103	694,497	208,652
Turnover	24.80%	21.20%	17.40%	11.60%	8.30%	6.80%	6.80%	9.00%

(EDC, 2009)

Sponsoring Entities and Participants

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