

Schooled on Skills

Corporate/academic partnerships may be a big part of the solution to the skills gap. The key to success lies in understanding the challenges, choosing the right partners, and measuring effectiveness. **BY LORRI FREIFELD**

Corporate partnerships with colleges and universities would seem like a no-brainer—a short- and long-term solution to the technical, leadership, and soft skills gaps that currently plague the U.S. After all, such partnerships could ensure that soon-to-be new employees receive the skills training employers want, while current employees could go back to school to receive additional training to get their skills levels up to par.

That said, notes Michelle Maldonado, AVP, Corporate Strategic Relationships, American Public University, individual contributions and collaborations are heavily influenced by the type of organization and academic institution, as well as the resources available to each.

“In determining how colleges and universities can best assist an organization to bridge these gaps, it’s important to first understand the role and value an organization places on education as a tool for talent development and retention,” Maldonado says. “For example, does the organization tie learning to career advancement? Are there employer-funded tuition benefits? Does executive leadership value the larger HR function as a strategic business partner? Does it prefer informal over formal education?”

Once there is an understanding of organizational culture and the level of commitment to talent and leadership development, Maldonado says, then the true work begins. “Academic institutions can provide courses for continuous education and specific skill development such as business writing and communications, accounting, marketing, etc. Additionally, colleges and universities may

provide continuous education courses or career-related certificate programs that help employees strengthen existing skills or develop new skills as they transition to a different role or career field. Full degree programs are a longer-term solution that can help prepare employees for expanding leadership roles and responsibilities. All are helpful and complementary resources to each phase of employee development, and all must align with overall organizational strategies and objectives.”

In this second part of the five-part Skills Gap series (see <http://trainingmag.com/content/bridging-skills-gap> for the first article in the series), we look at the challenges presented by corporate/academic partnerships, Training’s role in these relationships, tips for choosing and connecting with partners, how to measure success, and examples of effective partnerships.



CHALLENGES

At the early stages, ensuring that all sides regard a partnership as a high-level priority can be challenging, says Daniel Szpiro, Ph.D., dean of the Jack Welch Management Institute at Strayer University, which recently launched Welch Way, an online leadership and management training program designed specifically to address the needs of individuals and companies looking to cultivate leadership skills and talent-rich environments. “With a strong and committed cross-organizational team and ‘owners’ in place to drive the partnership forward, other challenges can be successfully identified and overcome,” Szpiro says. “Frequent and candid communication between partners is also essential to the success of each venture from design to post-execution stages.”

Susan E. Cates, president of Executive Development at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Kenan-Flagler Business School and executive director of the MBA@UNC program, points to three challenges associated with



high-quality, customized executive education:

- The misconception that executive education programs focus entirely on theory and do not provide tangible, practical skills.
- Demonstrating a precise return on the investment in training and development.
- Time learners spend away from the office.

Indeed, UniversityNow CEO Gene Wade notes that colleges and universities are often not very flexible. “For example, working adults have to navigate all of the demands of life and career, while also taking classes. Hence, traditional ‘seat time’-based models don’t work well for them. Colleges and universities must start employing self-paced, outcomes-based models that allow learners to progress on a schedule and at a pace that works best for them.”

It also can be difficult to engage employees in educational programs if they work in a culture or industry that has not traditionally perceived college degrees as necessary for job placement or professional advancement, Maldonado says. “Historically, this has been true in sectors such as retail where professionals have the opportunity to work their way up to management positions. However, with emerging business complexities and the need for strong leadership pipelines, this view is beginning to shift in favor of degrees to gain professional competitiveness. To make these relationships successful, there has to be mutual commitment, ongoing communication, and dedication of appropriate resources.”

Likewise, all knowledge, skills, and abilities are not of equal value, says Joel Wright, Innovation associate, and Preston Yarborough, project manager, at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL). “Some competencies are precursors for learning others. Savvy educators will focus learning objectives on these meta-skills—regardless of whether or not such skills seem to match directly with those identified in a skills-gap analysis. It is important that students learn to ‘walk’ before they learn to ‘run.’ Meta-skills can include interactional abilities such as active listening, creating a shared vision, and learning how to offer and receive feedback. These fundamental skills can enhance the learning and application of more advanced abilities that might be identified in the skills-gap analysis.”

THE RIGHT PARTNERS AND CURRICULA

There are many types of partnerships that employers, employees, and schools can explore to the benefit of all, says UniversityNow’s Wade. He points to one easy place to start: creating certificate programs that both address employer training needs and count toward college credit. Employers benefit by training employees through programs that count toward a degree program (thereby saving dollars on tuition assistance).

The student benefits by gaining valuable training and a quicker path to a degree. This kind of program works well with both front-line workers and senior managers, who are seeking advanced degrees such as MBAs, Wade says.

Another type of partnership would involve creating technical training programs at schools that prepare students for industry. “This type of partnership is best developed by community colleges,” Wade says. “Many of them specialize in this kind of partnership and will work with new and emerging industries to develop programs for jobs that are being created. Research has shown that, over the long run, technical training programs are most effective when they are coupled with (or connected to) programs that teach broad thinking skills.”

Higher education, employers, graduates, and current students need the opportunity to share their respective efforts, needs, concerns, and aspirations to better inform the process of preparing college graduates for the workplace, says Excelsior College President John Ebersole. Such communication, he notes, should extend to both those already in the workforce (who may need retraining), as well as those about to enter.

“Most business schools and continuing education units have advisory boards that assist with periodic curricula reviews, new program creation, and/or revision efforts,” he explains. “Such groups help to ensure program relevance and give major stakeholders both a voice and a share of the responsibility for closing skill gaps.”

American Public University, for example, hosts annual industry advisory councils (IACs) for its academic programs

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that consist of subject matter experts across industries and academic scholars from APU and other learning institutions. In other venues, Maldonado says, organizations may partner with academic institutions to form educational alliances to support various phases of their talent management, leadership development, and succession planning efforts. “Similar to the conversations and positive results experienced with IAC-type collaborations, schools and companies may engage in conversations around critical touch points such as onboarding, developing middle managers, or creating a strong leadership pipeline,” Maldonado says.

Alliances also can be formed around leadership development programs blended with multi-institutional service partnerships (e.g., a school and corporation could share a Habitat for Humanity commitment and incorporate a leadership training component), say CCL’s Wright and Yarborough. CCL and the YMCA of Greater Greensboro collaborated on a mentoring program focused on African-American and Latino youth.

“Relationships with local universities and corporations produced mentors who worked with ‘family groups’ comprising six young people, one college mentor, and one professional mentor. These groups met and trained together for approximately eight months a year. The program has served more than 175 youth and mentors,” Wright and Yarborough say.

Other opportunities such as service-learning partnerships between nonprofits and universities are fertile ground for collaboration, as well, Wright says. “We recommend partnership initiatives have some sort of action, service, or experience-based component. It can be tempting to organize a speaking series where professionals lecture to students, but we would recommend using these to supplement a broader, experiential initiative.”

“I have always viewed the role of higher education as a VAR (value-added reseller), meaning colleges and universities enroll adult learners who already possess some skills, knowledge, and tools,” says Ray Compari, associate dean and director of

Executive Education, Rutgers School of Business–Camden, which has established numerous educational/academic partnerships with global organizations such as Cisco, Caterpillar, Graybar, and Thomas & Betts. “We then ‘add value’ to learners by expanding their base, depth, scope, reach, and limits in foundational areas (comprehension, application, etc.), as well as in areas in which they wish to pursue a career (finance, engineering, etc.)”

As such, Compari says, critical conversation among all parties should be taking place regularly around questions such as: What are the key “values” to add to the product? What baseline skills, knowledge, and tools should a learner begin the process with? How can the partnership ensure that the learner can practice and the employer can test the product before creating an employment situation?

Both credit and non-credit higher education programs must, among other things, remain adaptive to the ever-changing learning styles of adult learners, Compari adds. “The academic sector as a whole has some catching up to do in order to adequately provide training and education when and where learners desire it. Fortunately, we are making broad and lasting changes, driven by technology, in training and education delivery.”

Ultimately, in order to proactively work at addressing a skills gap, both

QUICK TIPS

- “Identifying the best educational partner must begin with an organization’s clear definition of the problem it is facing,” says Daniel Szpiro, Ph.D., dean of the Jack Welch Management Institute at Strayer University. “Is it having trouble recruiting and retaining the right talent or establishing a common understanding of the company’s mission and values? With that clarity in place, the key skills or strengths of an educational partner can be identified.”
- “Organizations looking for an academic partner should consider a school’s overall approach to executive education and leadership development,” recommends Susan E. Cates, president of Executive Development at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Kenan-Flagler Business School and executive director of the MBA@UNC program. “Some universities offer traditional classroom education with a focus on case studies, while others offer non-traditional teaching methodology and experiential learning. At UNC, we start with the underlying business needs and evaluate what gaps in skills or changes in behavior need to be addressed to deliver that business impact.”
- “Consider the reputation and capability of the potential partner, as well as issues of cost,” advises Excelsior College President John Ebersole. “Ask if the institution is regionally accredited. Remember, in the U.S., ‘regional’ accreditation is superior to ‘national.’ Also, institutions with specialized programmatic accreditation (i.e., business, engineering, nursing, etc.) tend to be more highly regarded than those that offer programs without such secondary review.”
- “Satisfied organizations that speak highly of powerful educational partnerships typically rank flexibility, creativity, and expertise at the top of their lists,” points out Ray Compari, associate dean and director of Executive Education, Rutgers School of Business-Camden. “Many higher education institutions have well-established and competent externally focused executive education or continuing education units in place to serve as the conduit for establishing academic/employer partnerships. These units tend to have a bit more entrepreneurial authority and can be the genesis for powerful and expansive academic/employer partnerships.”
- “Look for a good return on investment: a partner who can deliver quality education that is workforce relevant, flexible enough to accommodate the schedules and demands of working adults, and cost-effective enough that it won’t put working adult learners (most of whom will not qualify for state or federal need-based grants) into a significant amount of student loan debt,” says Gene Wade, CEO, UniversityNow.

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employers and academic institutions must commit explicit effort and resources toward this goal, stresses Strayer's Szpiro. "This begins by having dedicated managers on both sides who 'own' the relationships and are accountable for their success."

TRAINING'S ROLE

The Training or Learning & Development department is an essential partner in the corporate/academic relationship, UNC's Cates emphasizes. "They help to define the competencies, skills, and behaviors the organization needs. They measure and monitor employee performance. They understand the IT capabilities of their organization. They know the culture and history of their organization. They set the goals and benchmarks. They manage the overall training and development budget. Ultimately, they know where and when an academic partner can provide value. Our primary goal as the academic partner is to support the Training team, helping them to achieve their learning and development objectives."

Szpiro also points out that academic institutions have invested their time and effort in understanding how people learn and the best way to deliver learning experiences. "These are not skills a Training department has to copy or try to mimic," he says. "The Training department can be a logical place for the 'ownership' of the partnership between the employer and the academic institution and can help drive its success."

KEY QUESTIONS

- Is the education or training relevant and/or customized to meet the specific business needs and objectives of my organization and employees? Is there opportunity to evaluate on-the-job training for the potential award of academic credit?
- Is the college/university recognized for academic rigor, curriculum quality, and continuous improvement? What is its history in working with non-traditional (adult) learners?
- Does the college/university offer the type of instruction required? What is its level of innovation and technology in the classroom?
- Does it have sufficient "bench strength" in its faculty to ensure consistent depth and breadth of instruction? Are employees learning relevant curriculum from industry practitioners, as well as academic scholars?
- Is instruction easily accessible and flexible for employees (nights, weekends, online) who may wish to participate and evaluate? What are the methods and frequency of interaction and test taking?
- What is the true cost (including fees) of a course, certificate, or degree program? How do costs compare to available employer-funded tuition assistance allotments and/or employee salaries?
- What is the ROI on the investment my organization will be making with this educational partner?

MEASURING SUCCESS

The success of corporate/academic relationships is measured in different ways, says Excelsior College's Ebersole. "For the academic institution, 'success' will mean substantial enrollment in any joint or sponsored programs, as well as feedback that results in real enhancement to course offerings or degree requirements, and finally, increases in internships and/or hiring of graduates."

For the employer, he says, success indicators will include:

1. The need for less supplemental training of new hires from the partner institution.
2. Reduced cost of special, new skill instruction from the partner (as opposed to having to conduct internally).
3. Synergies for degree completion by individual employees (along with recognition of internal training for college credit).

With programs specifically designed to accelerate high-potential talent, "we pay attention to the career progress of the participants who come through those programs," UNC's Cates says. "We seek feedback from our clients on the changes they're seeing in their business results and organizational culture tied to the work we do with them. At the program level, evaluations help us to assess the program and identify opportunities for improvement. We also measure our clients' satisfaction to ensure that we are meeting and exceeding their expectations. Our partners provide feedback on our ability to drive specific learning outcomes and our ability to move the business forward in a meaningful way."

Clearly, each organization has its own set of unique key performance indicators (KPIs) or success metrics. However, Maldonado points to some that tend to be consistently valued by businesses such as:

- Enhanced employee engagement, retention, performance
- Identification of top talent and a strengthened leadership pipeline
- Increased organizational agility
- Enhanced risk mitigation
- Increased revenue generation and market share
- Training and development cost savings

As an education provider, she says APU also values successes such as:

- Positive student outcomes and experiences
- Leadership preparedness and advancement
- Student persistence and successful degree attainment
- Successful alignment with business partner talent learning and development objectives

APU currently provides 2013 Training Top 125 winner Dollar General's employees with access to more than 170 online certificate and degree programs, highlighting those that are particularly relevant to the roles, responsibilities, and duties of each employee segment. "We also collaborate with their training and organizational development teams to identify course alignments, leadership development resources, and opportunities," Maldonado says, "as well as to provide other benefits that align with larger HR and organizational strategies and objectives."

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CASE STUDIES

An overwhelming number of 2013 Training Top 125ers, plus Top 10 Hall of Famer IBM, eagerly responded to *Training's* request for details about their partnerships with colleges and universities. See what they are doing and how your organization may be able to implement similar strategies and partnerships.

AAA - THE AUTO CLUB GROUP

AAA - The Auto Club Group has established a strong partnership with Oakland University in the Detroit Michigan area. "We were trying to recruit instructional design interns (paid) from Oakland's Master's of Learning and Development program with little success," explains Chief Learning Officer Dan Hill. "After I had given a few presentations to students, the department head asked me if I would teach one of the evening courses on training program evaluation. I have taught for the

last three years and passed the assignment on to one of my co-workers, who is teaching this year. It now has become easy to recruit paid interns and contractors from the university. We have filled several permanent open positions with graduates who have proven themselves as interns or contractors, and we use this as a feeder pool for talent."

The teaching relationship is beneficial, Hill says, "because we can teach the skills that are required in a corporate environment and the students come on site to evaluate courses being taught in the classroom and follow up with observation of the learners performing on the job to see if the learning transferred."

AFNI, INC.

Afni partners with university Ph.D. faculty to deliver a cohort-style leadership development experience to high-potential managers through the LeadershipFOCUS program.

In the program, 12 to 15 managers are selected (via a formalized process of director nominations and Executive Committee approval) for participation in a year-long program anchored by quarterly multi-day classroom education sessions (sessions are held in-person at a centralized location). Participants represent multiple Afni locations, functions, and positions in the organization, and are identified as having the potential to move into higher-level positions within the company.

Session content is driven by Afni business needs and university recommendations, focusing on topics such as business strategy, financial decision-making, workplace culture, and individual leadership and self-reflection. Participants are grouped into sub-teams, each tasked with evaluating an Afni business issue, creating a solution, and presenting their results to the Afni Executive Committee (CEO and vice presidents) at the program's conclusion.

The 2011-2012 program was conducted in partnership with the Executive Development Center (EDC) at Bradley University in Peoria, IL. Bradley's EDC is the only Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) affiliate in the Midwest. Some 56 percent of past (pre-2011-2012) participants have received promotions or other career-enhancing positions within the organization.

AMERICAN INFRASTRUCTURE

The Drexel University/American Infrastructure (AI) Construction Management Certificate Program has been running successfully for the last 11 years. The program currently includes seven courses selected and customized to emphasize the work operations, practices, and processes used at American Infrastructure and increase

HOW TO DEVELOP A MOOC

By Alison Farmer, VP, AQUENT Learning & Development

Many colleges and universities and even organizations are exploring Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for thousands or more learners. These can be an intimidating undertaking at first glance. However, if you work past the trepidation of creating a learning experience that's not entirely within your control, it's worth it.

Last year at Aquent, we launched a pilot course on HTML5 and were overwhelmed when 10,000 students enrolled. We wanted to focus on providing courses that correlated with the in-demand skills companies are looking for in employees. We now are getting ready to launch Gymnasium, a site where we will host multiple courses geared toward digital and creative professionals.

Here are five top MOOC development tips from our experience:

- 1. CHOOSE A GOOD INSTRUCTOR.** These instructors need to be able to teach an audience they can't personally interact with and develop assignments that advance students without a lot of handholding. Don't cut corners on this step.
- 2. TARGET A SPECIFIC AUDIENCE.** It's all about the experience—alignment between audience and topic should be more desirable than the enrollment numbers. To achieve that, define a specific audience, establish prerequisites, and market the class to those specific people.
- 3. ESTABLISH A FORUM.** It is difficult to create a live, interactive classroom experience when you have a student-to-instructor ratio of 10,000:1. Create a forum for each individual course where students can easily connect, ask questions, and seek feedback.
- 4. DON'T SKIMP ON SUPPORT.** Since students are tackling lessons on their own schedules, it's hard to anticipate what questions or issues will bubble up and when. Hire teaching assistants who are knowledgeable on the specific topic being taught and can monitor the forum to address any issues students can't resolve for each other.
- 5. ASK FOR GENEROSITY.** Make sure your students understand you have a learning curve with delivering a class this way. By asking for patience up front, you'll find it's easier to keep mountains from becoming molehills.

knowledge within AI's critical skill competency areas for field management employees. Each course within the program is worth up to 3.0 units of undergraduate credit that can be applied toward any degree or certificate program at any college or university. Participants must complete any six of the courses to earn a Certificate of Completion from Drexel University. All Drexel Certificate Program courses are facilitated via a virtual training Internet platform. AI pays for all expenses related to this program, including the cost of the Drexel course credits, textbooks, and course materials. Employees and their family members get reduced tuition rates for all degree and certificate programs Drexel offers online. AI senior managers (certified as Drexel adjunct professors) and Drexel adjunct professors facilitate the courses.

In 2012 alone, participation within this program increased 73 percent over the prior year, according to Jamie Leitch, director, Career Development and Training, and metrics indicate 90 percent-plus employee satisfaction with the program year over year. American Infrastructure currently is developing a Master's-level Construction Management certificate program with Drexel University.

CAPITAL BLUECROSS

A primary goal for 2013 for the Talent Management division of Capital BlueCross (CBC) is to broaden its pool of qualified candidates and ensure its current and projected future critical needs are fulfilled. As a result, CBC has been proactive in finding feasible solutions in its search for talent through its Internship Program. As part of this program, CBC established a partnership with Harrisburg University in which the organizations collaborated to create a customized curriculum in which students may obtain a joint B.S./M.S. degree in Analytics. Analytics & Reporting, a subdivision of Information Technology, is expected to play a key role in business in upcoming years, particularly as health-care reform changes take effect.

Students who participate in this partnership are exposed to both classroom learning at Harrisburg University and real-life work experience learning through internships at CBC. Assignments are designed to train students in hard skills such as business intelligence, data warehousing, and SQL. Examples of soft skill training opportunities include presentation and communication skills, empowerment, and how to work effectively with diverse personalities. "This will allow students to obtain the much needed combination of academic background and applied corporate experience," says Jodi Lynne Blanch, director, Talent Management, Human Resources, "and will narrow the perceived skills gap by enabling a smooth transition between academic knowledge and applicable business projects."

EMC CORPORATION

EMC Academic Alliance is a collaboration with global educational institutions that is working to prepare the next generation of IT professionals and provide the industry with a strong pipeline of graduates who will be well-positioned for IT roles as the landscape of storage, cloud computing, and big data continues to grow and evolve. Officially launched in 2006, the program has attracted more than 1,000 institutions

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from 60-plus countries. More than 150,000 students have been educated through the program, introducing them to a key pillar of IT that had not previously been addressed in most IT-related college programs.

Faculties receive video instructor-led training as the first step in their readiness plan. They also are given access to a secure online portal containing course presentation materials, lesson planning, case studies, exercises, and other resources to help them easily deploy the courses in their programs.

The free “open” courses offered directly align to associate-level certifications in the EMC Proven Professional certification program. Students are offered deep discounts on certification exams. Registered students have access to an online portal that includes free e-learning, case studies, videos, podcasts, and white papers. Students also are encouraged to connect with their global peers and industry experts through EMC’s social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, and the EMC Proven Professional online community.

EMC employees, customers, partners, and industry professionals benefit from the program as a hiring resource. Since the “open” course offerings focus on technology concepts and principles rather than products, says Karen Mancini, Global Program manager, EMC Academic Alliance, “graduates can immediately contribute to a variety of infrastructure projects, reducing time to readiness and increasing productivity.”

FARMERS INSURANCE

Many employees come to Farmers Insurance in entry-level call center positions that do not require a Bachelor’s degree. Some members of this group determine they would like to seek other positions in the organization that require a degree. They seek degrees from the accredited institution of their choice. About 10 years ago, the University of Farmers took the initiative to determine which schools its employees are attending. It then opened negotiations with these schools seeking two things:

1. Tuition discounts for its employees.
2. “Articulation” agreements under which the schools grant college credits for courses taken through the University of Farmers. To date, Farmers has implemented 14 of these agreements with colleges, according to Steve Mulder, director of Employee Development.

The college second-most utilized by Farmers employees is Davenport University, a regional college whose main campus is located across from one of Farmers’ largest corporate campuses in Caledonia, MI. Farmers partnered with DU to design an insurance major for the university’s curriculum. In fall 2012, DU launched the Risk Management and Insurance Specialty (BBA: Management Major). Farmers further supported the effort by creating a scholarship program that will benefit two students engaged in the program, annually. Mulder says there already are 14 students in the RMI Specialty program.

Farmers Insurance also long has been a user and supporter of the training and education programs developed and offered by The American College, including the Life Underwriter Training Council (LUTC) courses. For years, LUTC courses 201:

Exploring Personal Markets and 202: Meeting Client’s Needs were a cornerstone of Farmers’ new agent training. But Farmers faced a three-legged challenge, according to Dave Nystrom, LUTCF head of Field Training, University of Farmers: Most new agents were not participating; classes weren’t always offered when agents needed them; and the courses weren’t available everywhere they had new agents.

In response, Farmers established a partnership with The American College in which the college’s content for LUTC 201 and 202 was incorporated into Farmers’ training program for all newly appointed Farmers agents. Farmers and its approximately 450 district managers were accredited to use and deliver the content to their new agents locally as part of Farmers’ new agent training program. By creating this partnership, Nystrom says, Farmers was able to assure that all new agents received this training and they received it when it would benefit most—in their first six months.

FIRST HORIZON NATIONAL CORPORATION

First Horizon National Corporation experts volunteer to deliver Professionalism First courses (i.e., resume building, interviewing, work ethics, emotional intelligence, business communications) to students at the University of Memphis. Individuals completing the series are considered for internships. The results help students obtain needed business skills and First Horizon to identify high potentials within the university. First Horizon also delivers keynote addresses at leadership forums at the university.

G4S SECURE SOLUTIONS (USA) INC.

G4S Secure Solutions (USA) Inc. clients and employees receive training solutions and services from the G4S North America Training Institute (NATI) Corporate University, and its academic affiliates. “We have formed six educational partnerships for the purposes of establishing objective oversight of our training solutions, and offering our employees academic credit for specific American Council on Education (ACE)-certified NATI courses,” says Deena J. Harkins, M.Ed., manager, Special Programs.

G4S North America Business Leadership Program-Cornell University is a 1.5-year intensive, hands-on learning event hosted by Cornell University’s Samuel B. Johnson School of Management. The program aims to prepare individuals with both the capability and motivation to move into executive management roles at top operational or functional positions at G4S.

Thomas Edison State College and Colorado Technical University offer educational opportunities for G4S employees interested in earning a college degree or professional program certificate. The University of Maryland University College regularly reviews NATI’s programs and awards continuing education units (CEUs) and continuing professional education credits (CPEs) to participants.

In 2009, G4S became an American Heart Association (AHA) Corporate Training Center. G4S employees are trained and certified to meet client-specific contract requirements of first aid, CPR, AED, and blood-borne pathogens by certified G4S AHA instructors.

IBM

IBM's Academic Initiative is a global program facilitating the collaboration between IBM and educators to teach students the information technology skills they need to be competitive and keep pace with changes in the workplace. Faculty members, research professionals at accredited institutions, qualifying members of standards organizations, and IBM employees whose work supports the Academic Initiative can join free of charge. To date, 43,355 faculty members and nearly 4 million students from higher education institutions around the globe have participated in IBM Academic Initiative Programs, according to Jim Spohrer, director of IBM University Programs.

Within the last year, IBM announced the most significant expansion of the company's Academic Initiative since the program launched in 2004, Spohrer says. "The expansion included new training courses, curriculum materials for faculty, and expanded programs to directly engage students with real-world business challenges."

Other examples of IBM's work with higher education and K-12 schools include:

- Brooklyn's Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH), a collaboration between New York public schools, The City University of New York, and IBM. P-TECH is an integrated six-year, grades 9

through 14 school that provides students with both a high school diploma and an Associate's degree in computers or engineering. All students are given an IBM mentor, and successful graduates are first in line for a job at IBM.

- With IBM's help, San Jose State University is spearheading a new social business curriculum, adding it to business, marketing, and technology courses, teaching students how to utilize their social savvy in the workplace to increase efficiencies and connect with colleagues across the globe to better serve customers.

JIFFY LUBE INTERNATIONAL

Jiffy Lube has an association with the University of Maryland University College (UMUC) where Jiffy Lube employees can apply their seven hours of college credits (ACE accredited) toward their further education. UMUC offers a discounted rate for employees and their family members. The organization has established a Certificate in Business Fundamentals as the starting point. Currently, it is receiving nominations for the initial pilot class of up to 25 Jiffy Lube students to go through the three UMUC courses that make up the balance of the requirements. Jiffy Lube is funding the total cost for the initial pilot group.

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MCDONALD'S USA, LLC

For close to 30 years, McDonald's has seen value in having its training curriculum evaluated by the American Council on Education (ACE), according to Kevin Clark, Education Programs lead, Hamburger University. The ACE verifies that 100 percent of McDonald's restaurant management and mid-management curriculum receives college credit recommendations. On average, a McDonald's restaurant manager has completed the equivalent of approximately 18 credit hours that can be transferred to more than 1,800 colleges and universities (both private and public) and applied toward a two- or four-year degree, Clark notes. ACE's review of McDonald's mid-management curriculum has netted an additional 27 recommended credit hours.

Additionally, for the last seven years, McDonald's has created articulation relationships with a dozen institutions with the following in mind: These institutions accept the McDonald's credit recommendations into a degree program; they provide employees a tuition discount; and they provide one point of admission entry through a micro site.

McDonald's also has forged relationships with community colleges across the country as it provides English as a Second Language programs for its restaurant managers.

MIAMI CEREBRAL PALSY RESIDENTIAL SERVICES, INC.

Miami Cerebral Palsy Residential Services, Inc., hosts a variety of interns and students (behaviorists, physical therapists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, nursing, dietary, and other disciplines) from local universities and colleges for mentoring and preceptorship opportunities. A local college routinely sends its freshman nursing class to MCP for preceptorships. "These student nurses are closely mentored by our licensed nurses while they learn the nursing role in the field of developmental disabilities," says Staff Development Director Elizabeth Das. "In addition, they are invited to attend our orientation sessions to gain a fuller understanding of what we are about, our mission and vision, and our organizational principles." Many of these interns eventually seek and obtain employment with MCP. This last year, MCP hosted six behavioral analysts, three dietetic interns, and 36 student nurses.

MOHAWK INDUSTRIES, INC.

In West Virginia, the Governor's Guaranteed Work Force Program reimburses employers for a portion of eligible training costs, which serves as a further incentive to partner with institutions of higher learning as a means of providing professional development opportunities for employees. Mohawk Industries engaged the Robert C. Byrd Institute in Huntington to develop an on-site Maintenance Training program for technicians at its Holden, WV, hard wood flooring manufacturing facility. Mohawk's Training Department worked with the Institute's Lucinda Curry to complete a gap analysis and identify training needs. As a result, specific training was provided for Holden employees in Programmable Logic

Controls and Electrical Blueprints, and Mohawk will expand the program as needed, according to Training Director Amanda Arnwine.

Mohawk's Training team also built a relationship with Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College to meet with its Holden employees on a quarterly basis. Holden is in a low-density population area, which creates challenges for individuals seeking to continue their educations. To date, the college team led by Rita Roberson, director of Campus Operations, Williamson Campus, and Professor Bill Alderman from the Logan Campus has helped employees sign up for college classes, obtain financial advice, and receive general information on areas of academic interest.

NOVO NORDISK INC.

In June 2010, Novo Nordisk's Executive & Professional Development team rolled out My Leadership Journey (MLJ), a year-long custom executive development program in partnership with Wharton Executive Education and numerous executive coaches. The target audience was directors and above, comprising the top 100-plus leaders, who were divided into cohorts of 18 to 22 people.

Participants visit Wharton three times during the year for three distinct modules: Self Leadership, Team Leadership, and Business Leadership. The program incorporates several best practices, such as pre- and post-assessments focused on emotional intelligence, 360-degree feedback, personality profile, and the skills/behaviors required for success; a required executive coaching engagement during the program with a tailored Individual Development Plan (IDP); and customized courses for each of the three main modules of the program.

Members of each MLJ cohort "peer mentor" and support each other throughout the year. A variety of regular events brings the cohorts together, including monthly best practice meetings, an annual leadership breakfast, and alumni lunches.

Five cohorts have graduated from MLJ, with another initiating in 2013, according to Cara Bauer, director, Executive & Professional Development. Results:

- The program sees average ratings of 6.61 (out of 7.0) for questions such as "To what extent do you think the program will help you perform your job more effectively?"
- The first wave targeted direct reports to the senior leadership team. Response was so positive that the top executive leaders requested their own specially customized version of MLJ; the president and his direct reports all have participated in the program.
- Nineteen MLJ alumni either have been promoted or moved into advanced leadership roles, and Novo Nordisk has retained 98 percent of MLJ participants.

SACRAMENTO MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT (SMUD)

For seven years, Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) has hosted California State University of Sacramento's

Executive MBA program biennially on its campus. In exchange, SMUD receives two 50 percent scholarships for its employees; the university ranks SMUD employees based on their academic criteria and the top two receive the scholarships. In addition, they can receive \$5,000 per year tuition reimbursement from SMUD. To date, 15 SMUD employees have gone through the EMBA program.

SMUD also participates in University of California – Davis’ Graduate School of Management Business Partnership program. In exchange for SMUD’s corporate sponsorship, it receives networking and educational opportunities through invitations to speaker engagements and complimentary use of educational facilities in Sacramento. SMUD provides feedback to UC Davis on its programs, which has resulted in changes to their approach, including more applied learning experiences in leadership development programs, according to Krishna Khalsa, Ed.D., area head supervisor, Corporate Learning & Development, Organization & Workforce Development.

In 2012, SMUD established a joint memorandum of understanding with the University of Phoenix that provides a 4 percent tuition reduction for its employees and gives credit for SMUD internal credits employees previously had taken.

In 2012 and 2013, American River College reached out to SMUD to provide curriculum in support of its pre-apprentice utility worker program for recently separated

military veterans. SMUD developed and delivered curriculum that provided hands-on learning in utility pole climbing and electrical substation. SMUD hired three of the 25 graduates from the 2012 program, and 21 of the 25 veterans found new, higher-paying positions as a result of completing this program.

SPECIAL PEOPLE IN NORTHEAST, INC. (SPIN)

In 1998 SPIN realized that rapid expansion over the previous five years had resulted in all degreed staff being promoted into management, leaving only two direct support professionals who had college degrees, says Judith Dotzman, executive director. In response, SPIN collaborated with the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP) to establish an on-site Certificate Program within CCP’s Behavioral Health and Human Services School. A two-tier program was developed, offering a Certificate of Recognition at 18 credits earned and an Academic Certificate at 36 credits earned—all leading to the Associate’s degree within the Behavioral Health and Human Services School (BHHS). Also, SPIN and CCP developed courses for a “Disabilities Track” within the BHHS curriculum to customize the needs of the human service field and SPIN’s services.

The program was presented to all direct support professional employees. A day and evening class were implemented to accommodate diverse employee schedules. SPIN has a tuition



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assistance policy for all employees who are employed at 30 hours a week or more; it was decided SPIN would pre-pay the tuition for enrolled employees. Each student also was matched with a mentor from SPIN's management team. In addition, study skill workshops, babysitting, and computer workshops were offered to program participants.

Since 2000, Dotzman says, 321 SPIN employees have attended on-site college programs at SPIN; 44 SPIN direct support employees have attained their Associate's degree; 82 have earned their Bachelor's degree; and nine have attained a Master's degree. Based upon this success, SPIN sought advanced degree partnerships at the Bachelor's and Master's degree level with Arcadia University in Philadelphia. Currently, SPIN offers on-site Certificate, Associate's, Bachelor's, and Master's degree programs.

TECH MAHINDRA

Since August 2003, Tech Mahindra has partnered with BITS Pilani, enabling collaborative education for Tech Mahindra associates and providing practice school for BITS student interns. Branded under the Learn While You Earn scheme, these programs cater to engineering graduates (partly financed) and science graduates (fully financed).

Current offerings include a 4-year M.S. in Software Engineering at select locations, a 2-year M.S. in Telecommunication and Software Engineering at all locations, and a 2-year M.S. in Embedded Systems only at Pune. Students are trained in classrooms and via live sessions using Interwise with access to recorded sessions. Faculty is drawn from the BITS off-campus pool, as well as Tech Mahindra senior associates. Typically, 10 to 15 percent of the participants score a CGPA of 8.00 out of 10.00 or above. The success rate for 4MS is nearly 98 percent, and it is above 90 percent for 2MS.

THE PNC FINANCIAL SERVICES GROUP, INC.

PNC's partnership with the North Carolina Community College network has been a multi-phased, strategic initiative to create a diverse set of beneficial opportunities to support its employees and the community throughout PNC's footprint in North Carolina, according to CLO Robin Connolly.

Specifically, the partnership with Nash Community College came to fruition at the time PNC Bank acquired RBC Bank, which was headquartered in Raleigh, NC, with a high volume of operational staff in Rocky Mount, NC. PNC Bank decided to make Rocky Mount one of its operational hubs, thus saving many employees from layoffs. PNC set out to find every way to increase the marketability of employees adversely affected by the acquisition and, as a result, partnered with NCC to offer five Business Skill Development courses to both retained and displaced employees prior to the acquisition. The average Level 1 score was 4.75 on a scale of 5.

PNC also partnered with NCC to build an Introduction to Banking course to equip employee prospects with skills such as resume writing, behavioral interviewing, banking fundamentals, and customer service skills. This course is

offered on a continuous basis. After successful completion of the program, candidates are guaranteed an interview with PNC. The firm now is in the process of franchising the work to community colleges outside of North Carolina, including setting up a partnership in Ohio to fill roles in Mortgage Servicing.

U.S. SECURITY ASSOCIATES, INC.

U.S. Security Associates, Inc., has established educational partnerships with the University of Phoenix and DeVry University. These partnerships provide tangible benefits to U.S. Security employees with learning opportunities available through online and campus-located programs, according to Katherine Nelson, Organizational Development specialist. Both institutions offer Associate's and Bachelor's degrees in Criminal Justice, which provide enhanced knowledge and comprehension concerning crime prevention and the judicial system. The University of Phoenix also offers a Bachelor's degree in Organizational Security Management, which is aligned with the ASIS International Chief Security Officer Competencies and Skills. This program addresses a specific need in the security industry: the skill gap between the lower management level and the role of the branch manager, Nelson says.

DeVry University offers Master's programs, including Business Administration and Project Management that are targeted to upper management associates.

"At the completion of our credentialing review, which is currently in process, our in-house training offerings will be eligible as credit hours that can be applied toward the educational certifications and degrees," Nelson says. "Despite the recent implementation of these programs, enrollment has increased by 144 percent within the last six months."

VERIZON WIRELESS

Verizon Wireless has established partnerships with 15 colleges and universities, including Strayer University, Bellevue University, Stevens Institute of Technology, and Fayetteville Technical Community College. "After several years of in-depth measurement, we found that participation in our company's tuition assistance program resulted in reduced turnover, increased job performance, and enhanced career mobility," says Dorothy Martin, Verizon LearningLINK National Program manager.

As such, Verizon began to more aggressively promote participation in its tuition assistance program. "Since our call center locations have the highest concentrations of employees, it was here that we established on-site college degree programs hosted by Strayer University," Martin says. There are 31 centers with on-site degree programs. The college courses are offered in the corporate training rooms after normal work hours. Employees can earn Associate's, Bachelor's, and MBA degrees in these locations, and Verizon pre-pays the tuition cost.

Verizon also has developed customized certificate programs in management and leadership through the

partnership with Strayer University, which recently acquired the Jack Welch Management Institute. That means Verizon employees can take advantage of additional leadership development courses, as well as the Jack Welch Executive MBA program.

Verizon Wireless co-created two customized online certificate programs with Bellevue University: the Call Center Operations & Management (CCOM) and Professional Retail Sales & Management (PRSM) programs. The ROI for the PRSM study was 280 percent, according to Martin.

For 12 years, Stevens Institute of Technology has offered Verizon Wireless employees customized Master's and Bachelor's degrees in Information Sciences and Technology Management. In addition, Martin says, "we set up partnerships between local Computer Learning Centers and Fayetteville Technical Community College to allow our employees to get the technical certifications they need to better serve our growing customer base using smart phone technologies."

VI

Blurring the line between senior and resort living, luxury senior living provider Vi desires to attract and retain the best culinary and fine dining talent, according to Judy Whitcomb, VP, HR and Learning and OD. Toward this goal, Vi has a longstanding partnership with The Culinary Institute of America (CIA). Vi's culinary and dining teams not only attend the CIA as students, but for many years, Vi's chefs, functional leaders, and executives have been guest lecturers in courses at the CIA to attract talent to the senior living industry.

The senior-level Foodservice Management in Health Care course, for example, covers topics ranging from kitchen operations, nutrition principles, and menu planning to procurement and purchasing, patient confidentiality, and even the effect of new health-care reform laws, says CIA Assistant Professor Lynne Eddy, a registered dietitian and previous hospital foodservice director.

"Providing our residents with cuisine that satisfies nutritional needs, tastes

good, and is delivered by our fine staff of dining service professionals is especially important because we know that aging has an effect on taste buds, which can cause older adults to improperly change their diet," says Bill Sciortino, SVP, Operations at Vi.

VSP

As a not-for-profit vision insurance company, VSP is partnering with optometry students to ensure private practice success. "We provide the support—both within college and within the practice—for recent graduates who choose to go into the private practice field," explains Diane Lane, employee communications specialist. "Through university and student relations programs, we're helping transform recent optometric graduates into business-savvy private practice doctors."

As such, VSP has partnered with 21 schools of optometry nationwide to

establish on-campus private practice clubs and help business-minded students acquire the education, skills, and confidence needed to become excellent clinicians and small business owners. VSP also donates \$160,000 annually in scholarships to optometric students preparing for careers in private practice optometry; provides the textbook, "Business Aspects of Optometry," used in optometric business courses to all optometry students, free of charge; and has a job-matching service that helps new graduates find employment opportunities as independent eyecare professionals within the VSP network.

Don't miss Part 3 of the Skills Gap series in the July/August 2013 issue, which will explore how organizations can motivate employees (who often are overworked) to take additional skills training and ensure they retain what they learned as opposed to just going through the motions to earn a bonus. **T**

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