



Pitt Community College is one of many community colleges across the state that are working with high schoolers to develop them for jobs that need advanced training, but not necessarily a four-year degree, by working directly with the Pitt County Economic Development Commission.

FOCUS ON: CONTINUING EDUCATION

FROM COLLEGE TO CAREER

Nimble community colleges provide workforce development and enhance economic development.

For 60 years, the North Carolina Community College System has been a key partner with the state's economic development commissions in keeping workers trained in trades.

But the old manufacturing economy is giving way to 21st-century business and industry sectors that are heavily skewed toward technology. Local colleges have found they need to be agile in their offerings not only to ensure the state's residents have the tools they need to get a good job, but to make sure new and existing businesses have access to a skilled workforce to meet their unique, perpetually changing needs.

"We are in a disruptive economy now, and we are going to continue to be in a disruptive economy in the future," says Tony Copeland, secretary of the North Carolina Department of Commerce. "We have to be flexible and adaptable or we will lose our relevance."

As North Carolina's labor markets evolve, jobs will require advanced training or education beyond high school but not necessarily a four-year college degree.

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This shift will increase demands on the state's community colleges, whose leaders will need to maintain the knowledge, skills and tools necessary for local employers.

This isn't new for North Carolina. In 1958, the state pioneered the nation's first customized training program. That background still influences the community college system, which is recognized as one of the most industry-focused in the U.S., according to system President Peter Hans.

"Preparing the workforce is at the heart of all that our community colleges do," he says.

Retraining workers, or helping them add skills in their current occupations, is going to be an ongoing obligation, but community colleges are uniquely positioned to quickly respond to the need for workers in high-demand fields, such as transportation, construction, information technology, public safety, advanced manufacturing, health care and life

sciences, according to Hans. These fields offer good jobs and through short-term training programs at community colleges, workers can get the education needed to get hired.

Outside providing well-trained workers to existing businesses, the state's community college system also helps attract new business and industry. For example, Stanly Community College President John Enamait is a voting member of the Stanly County Economic Development Commission.

"I believe the college should work hard to support existing businesses, but I also want to ensure the college is strategically aligned with the EDC as they try to recruit new business into the county," he says.

This investment of time and effort is starting to pay off for the Stanly institution. Last summer, the National Science Foundation awarded the college a \$300,000 grant to conduct research into developing learning material that

covers essential informational technology domains, including credentialing. The project will create a pathway for students to move from secondary schools to two-year colleges and on to four-year universities and an internship program, to build relationships between the college and local employers.

Stanly also installed the largest virtualization data center of any community college in the state, according to Enamait. The result of a \$325,000 Golden LEAF Foundation grant, this also provides training for students interested in IT.

In Kinston, Lenoir Community College recently rolled out its Quick Jobs initiative, a short-term training program that gives workers a chance to boost their careers by earning a professional certificate. Partnerships with local businesses and industries then helps them find jobs.

Additionally, Lenoir's Manufacturing Academy prepares qualified applicants

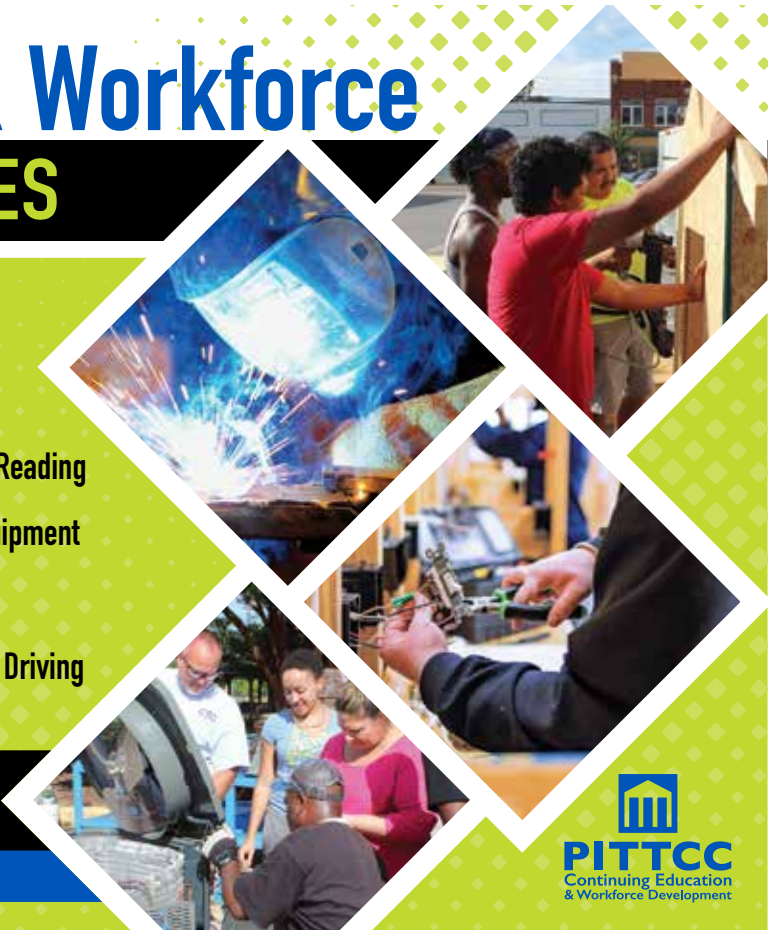
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for work in specific industries, college President Rusty Hunt says. It is a collaboration with industry and workforce development partners to gain access to trained and certified production technicians.

Hunt says Lenoir plays a critical role in economic development and is usually at the table in local recruiting efforts.

"We can move rapidly and adapt to their needs quickly. We can create customized training exactly as organizations need it, because it is our role to provide a well-trained workforce," he says.

The best colleges are located close to their students, residents and the business community, Hans says. "That's the kind of institution that will help an area grow, prosper and keep people close to home with good jobs."

Pitt Community College's Gail Nichols helps bridge gaps between local

residents who need jobs and employers who need workers. Nichols, director of entrepreneurial development at the college, works closely with local small businesses to develop employees for jobs such as framing, carpentry, HVAC and welding.

"We have a dual focus on what employers need and getting people hired," she says. "And I think we are making a difference."

The Pitt County Economic Development Commission has a close relationship with Pitt Community College. "They touch every facet of what we do," says Kelly Andrews, associate director for marketing and recruitment. "We rely on them as allies and supporters, and they are our biggest resource."

Community colleges across the state are also involved with MyFutureNC, a statewide organization working to close the educational attainment gap. The group's goal is to

have 2 million North Carolinians with a postsecondary degree or credential by 2030.

The North Carolina Community College System serves 700,000 students, says Hans, who is a co-chairman of MyFutureNC. He predicts that number will grow, and for North Carolina to prosper it will require community colleges that provided essential training for students and the resources needed for them to succeed.

"Community colleges have always been a tool for economic development. There is no economic development without the workforce and no workforce without the community colleges," he says. "I don't think that part of our mission will ever change. The challenge for us is to keep pace and to move at the speed of business." ■

— Teri Saylor is a freelance writer based in Raleigh.



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THE MBA TRANSFORMATION

Graduate business schools offer tailored programs to counteract declining enrollments.



After a long history of standardized programming, the traditional MBA is getting a makeover.

Driven by competition for a shrinking applicant pool, a demand for flexibility, changing workforce needs and technology that enables different ways to deliver coursework, business schools in North Carolina are looking for opportunities to carve out their niches.

Nationally, enrollment in MBA programs are experiencing a downward trend, according to a 2018 report by the Graduate Management Admission Council, a nonprofit association serving graduate business schools.

In an effort to make MBA degrees even more attractive to potential students, programs like the one at University of North Carolina Wilmington offer online courses to meet students where they are, as well as flexible school-year models.

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“There is a real effort, more than ever before, to meet the student where the student is,” says Hope Williams, president of North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities. One way is through online classes, which more than half of the state’s 14 private university MBA programs offer.

Queens University in Charlotte, for example, launched a flexible MBA in 2017, giving students a chance to choose between online, face-to-face or combined delivery options. The university also offers five different concentrations and gives MBA candidates the ability to finish the program in 14 or 36 months.

This fall, 36 students will make up Queens’ largest class of full-time MBA students since 2011, according to Rick Matthieu, the business school’s dean. The college has 182 students enrolled in its fall flexible MBA program.

While a smaller MBA program, Queens is fortunate to operate in one of the nation’s hottest business cities, “Our biggest strength and our value proposition lie in our unmatched connections to our business community,” Matthieu says. “Last year alone, over 170 business leaders engaged with our students as guest lecturers, case competition judges, executives in residence and as mentors.”

The Fuqua School of Business at Duke University serves 850 students, according to Russ Morgan, a marketing professor and senior associate dean. The school, which ranked 10th in U.S. World News & Report’s 2020 rankings of best U.S. business schools, offers students formats including online, weekends, full-time and hybrid programs, which combines online and in-person classes.

The Fuqua MBA also offers an international executive program to a worldwide audience with opportunities for collaboration, a critical element in the MBA program. “Through technology, we can provide coursework online and bring people together into a virtual classroom,” Morgan says.

The University of North Carolina Wilmington’s Cameron School of Business also offers students a global experience. As part of the International

Business School Alliance, the school allows opportunities to study in two countries and earn a dual MBA, according to Dean Robert Burrus. Additionally, UNCW offers online classes, classroom work and a school year divided into mini-semester of seven weeks, each with rolling admissions. “In the traditional school-year model, students had to wait until August to be admitted, and now, they can move in and out of the program based on the needs they have in their working lives,” Burrus says.

Meanwhile, UNC-Chapel Hill’s Kenan-Flagler Business School serves 600 full-time MBA students, 200 part-time students and more than 1,000 students who take classes online. It’s one of the universities providing specialized MBAs. It was ranked 19th by U.S. News.

“An MBA is a great degree, but it doesn’t fit every profession. We are offering deeper concentrations in chosen fields or industries,” says Brad Staats, associate dean of MBA programs.

Appalachian State’s Walker College of Business offers concentrations in business analytics, economics, international business, supply chain management, sustainable business and more.

The Fuqua School at Duke University is also moving toward concentrations, and was one of the first schools to offer management science and technology management as a second major.

Next year, Queens University will add a cybersecurity concentration in response to local demand.

According to statistics provided by the independent college’s group, 95% of Queens’ MBA graduates indicated that their degree was helpful in furthering their career. That is the main thrust of the MBA program, Matthieu says. “We are making a difference in the lives of students, giving them a return on their investment by translating that investment into success.” ■



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