

Bryan Albrecht, President, Gateway Technical College

M: Today we welcome Bryan Albrecht, president of Gateway Technical College, which serves 25,000 students from three counties in southeast Wisconsin. Gateway is one of more than 700 community colleges that have received federal grants known as TAACCCT --The US Department of Labor's Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grant Program.

TAACCCT helps community colleges and other eligible institutions of higher education expand and improve their ability to deliver education and career training programs that can be completed in two years or less, and prepare program participants for employment in high-wage, high-skill occupations.

M: Can you tell me a little bit about Gateway Technical College and its involvement with the TAACCCT grant?

BRYAN ALBRECHT: I would be happy to. Just to kind of give our audience a little bit of context of who Gateway Technical College is and our history and our mission, I think it helps to set the stage a little bit to align our conversation around why TAACCCT is important to our students and to our community overall. Gateway was founded in 1911 with a very specific mission to help provide a skilled workforce for the region of southeast Wisconsin, and by that time our school was called the Continuation School and the legislation allowed us to provide educational services to individuals, youth and adults, but primarily adults that were reengaging and upskilling their skills in order to take part in a transformational workforce that was taking place in the early 1900s.

We are comprehensive in the sense that students can work toward their four year degree while going through a two year sequence, they can leverage the programs and skills of Gateway Technical College to go directly into the workforce, and they can also use Gateway as a stepping stone to advance their career if they already have a Baccalaureate degree and are maybe trying to excel in their profession or their employer might have asked them to come back to address new skills in software management or any type of technical area.

M: Describe how you foster a culture of innovation and openness to change at your college, specifically openness to the TAACCCT grant core strategic elements, like career

pathways, development of education reform, advance technology, enabled learning, employer engagement, and articulations with four year institutions.

That's a great question, because I think it really gets to the heart of why TAACCCT is so important and how we were able to leverage it in the three primary programs that we have under TAACCCT.

The idea of innovation is critical to all programs that we have at Gateway and it's actually kind of the DNA of what we try to exercise in our decision making.

It takes a broad sweeping approach around community development, so to stay engaged in our community is critical for us to understand what jobs are available today, but more importantly maybe what jobs are going to be available in the future.

So, innovation in cooperation with our community and our business partners to understand what changes are taking place in their world has had a direct impact on what changes are taking place in our world.

When I think about strategies and how to build a culture of excellence around those strategies, you mentioned some great examples, career pathways being one of those strategies, and as I think about the history of Gateway trying to build that pathway opportunity for people maybe going from more of an agriculture community into more an industrial community, there was an educational pathway that allowed them to be successful in that transition, and over the decades as our technologies change, building out programs that allowed individuals to move from one occupational area into another with some core skills and then maybe some specific technical skills, those build pathways for individuals.

And today we look at how do we build pathways that are portable across disciplines but also portable across industries, because our industries change so fast,

When I visit with young people about pathways I'm often reminded in the fact that it's in some context it's easy to talk about pathways in a structured sequence of experiences, like climbing a ladder, you take one step and then you look for the next step and take it, but in today's world it's more like climbing a tree in that oftentimes when you climb a tree

you don't always grab the branch that is right next to you, you have to search within the tree itself and look for the next sturdiest branch that is going to allow you to progress in your climb.

And then sometimes that means taking a step back to get a more sturdy branch and continue to build your platform.

We're open access with a lot of pathway opportunities for our students and the connectedness of the TAACCCT initiative allowed us to add one more element to that, including those wraparound support services like that tree, all of those branches are support services for that climb. Some people leveraged certain branches, other people leverage other branches, and so we have got to have the entire system in place in order to give everyone in our community a chance to rise.

I think the second item you brought up was education reform and how important that is. It's less about a reform movement and more about probably a progression of the importance of education in our daily lives.

As we developed the TAACCCT programs a lot of that content and curriculum is really designed around creating flexible options for individuals, so try to address their learning style at the time that they need it and really create new venues for that.

And I think the last one that we talked a little bit about was the employer engagement and how important that is to keep that as the core base.

What we have done at Gateway is create partnerships that allow us to have access to the most current technology that is taking place in an organization.

I just want to highlight one example very quick and how that works. About 10 years ago we created a partnership with Snap-On Incorporated. Snap-On had developed the diagnostics tools for the automobile, which is the computer integration of cars, how do you plug a laptop into a car and try to assess what performance the car is at and maybe troubleshoot some issues you might have.

Well, 10 years ago we had to create that platform, because we didn't have that type of skillset, so we invested in upgrading our faculty, but we upgraded faculty in a way that we allowed them to go to training programs with the professional experts at Snap-On on how these tools were designed, why they were designed, how you can leverage its capabilities to a greater extent and become more proficient as an instructor.

So that whole idea of the engagement with employers is absolutely critical. Otherwise we would always be a decade behind in most cases from where the industry is, so that is really important for us to keep our students current in those arenas.

M: How are the core elements of TAACCCT such as career pathways and employer engagement similar to other goals or initiatives that you have been pursuing at Gateway Technical College?

BRYAN ALBRECHT: When I think about the projects that we have been able to leverage under TAACCCT, the first one as an example was in the area of advanced manufacturing, and that entire focus was designed around a pretty simple concept and that was to help address workers who are eligible for the TAA funding to prepare for programs in high wage and high skill occupations. We partnered with SE Johnson Corporation six years ago to create a Bootcamp program which is complete wraparound services, because we know that a student coming into a degree program or a certificate program can only be as successful as all of the support systems around them, going back to that tree example.

It's one thing to be in a classroom and have good academic grades, leave that setting to go to a lab and able to perform, but what happens outside of that, what are all of the support systems that are necessary for a student to be successful? Do we have community based employers engaged in the conversation so they can help align the competencies and provide internships and work experience and sort of really bring some context to the learning environment for the student? Do we have a financial component to it? Is it affordable? Can their families afford to send someone to school and how do you build capacity around college affordability and skilled training affordability? Are we addressing the types of skills in our community that are going to link to jobs immediately upon graduation? are students taking the right programs? Have we designed the right

programs so that there is an employer need out there and we can assure that our graduates are going to be moving into the workforce?

Are there other economic conditions or even social conditions? Has the student been fully prepared for the math and science rigor that is necessary for computer numerical control or do we have to provide some remedial support systems in order to bring basic skillsets to a certain level to be successful in an occupational area? And are there other impacts within our community? And they're widespread. They could be from addressing family needs to addressing children in circumstances that maybe don't have all the support systems and a parent can't really leave them, leave them alone to go back to school, so we've got to find ways to address childcare, transportation, housing, health and safety, health and wellness, all of the things that many of us take for granted our students do not always have access to that.

So if we really are committed to helping our students be successful we would commit to the whole process of educational success, and that is what TAACCCT had brought to us. It gave us a chance to work closer with our workforce development centers, work closer with our employers, help create some bridges for college affordability, seed some new initiatives within our community to help people understand the types of needs that our students have, I believe those wraparound services have been absolutely essential and the partnerships helped to create that, workforce development partners, social service partners, and I mentioned the program we have going right now in healthcare with veterans' services.

And all of those elements coming together create a much broader safety net for students to not only do well in school, because that's what we want them to do, get the skills to get a job, but then once you get the job it's sustaining that job and making sure that you understand all of the capacity issues that a community has to keep leveraging yourself forward, because we don't want this to be your last job. We want you to begin to build that pathway of opportunity and excel and continue to grow within our region.

M: You've received three rounds of TAACCCT grants. What are some of your lessons learned from the implementation of the TAACCCT grant?

It's a good question, and we're just so appreciative to have the opportunity to receive TAACCCT funding. I think it has really helped us a great deal in building some infrastructure and capacity for our college.

One of the things I think we learned between healthcare, IT, and manufacturing. There are some integrations between all of those disciplines and just because someone studies health occupations as an example doesn't mean they won't be in a manufacturing setting. A lot of our manufacturers have health coordinators on their sites, on their locations. And if you're studying manufacturing it doesn't mean you might not be in a facility that is manufacturing something related to healthcare. So it's a combination of the different disciplines and how we bring all of that together. That's a real important lesson learned about making sure that we are as open-minded as possible about where students can take their skills and leverage those in other areas.

I think another important lesson that we learned is the whole idea of all of the support services that are necessary.

And I think maybe the third key piece that the takeaway for us is that while Gateway was one of the 16 colleges to receive funding, our project is isolated to southeast Wisconsin, so that is our major impact area, but collectively if you put all of the colleges together and took all of the number of people that have been served and the investment that has been made and how does that, what is the multiplier factor between the, across the entire state, and for us being so close to the Illinois border, what is happening in northern Illinois and how does that whole region of the Midwestern states in the United States, how have they benefitted around building a stronger economy.

M: In light of what you've learned, what, if anything, would you have done differently?

BRYAN ALBRECHT: I think there is always things that we learn and that we can grow upon. One of them I think probably is really starting to take a look at some of the strategies around what pathways did we select and were we able to leverage those pathways in extensive way as possible, and here is what I mean by that. You have to have some infrastructure at your college campus, first of all, so if you pick a pathway that you don't have a lot of current capacity in it could take a lot of time to build capacity. So if we

didn't have a real strong IT department or real strong Manufacturing department or real strong Health program it would have been more difficult for us to create the venues that we have. We had some infrastructure in place already which allowed us to leverage and grow upon and I think that is critical.

I think another key pathway is just ongoing communication with our community that these resources are available, so recruiting students, identifying students with the types of skillsets that are going to allow success in the classroom, and building bridges between our high school career prep coordinators and our college faculty that are doing the recruiting

maybe a third takeaway would be strengthening the relationship with all of the support providers, workforce development, community based organizations, K12 systems, university systems so that you can start having that dialogue in the beginning of a program like this and not at the end.

So, I think there is probably many things we can learn, but those are key things, strengthening our community partnerships, aligning the appropriate students or clients for the program, and really helping to build some infrastructure and capacity within the organizations that we're representing, in our case Gateway.

M: What would you have done differently to engage all the staff and faculty that need to be engaged over multiple TAACCCT rounds?

the more we can do that sharing between disciplines and across disciplines the better off our faculty will be in understanding some of the structural changes, we mentioned education reform a little bit earlier, but it is different. It's a different workload schedule for faculty. It's a different model for aligning competencies to give credit, to recognize credit that is coming in, to advance a degree into a pathway into another college or university, and those are all structural changes that could have a lot of barriers at any one given point in time, but as a result of a TAACCCT initiative we've got this umbrella approach to say, "Look, we've got additional support through funding. Here are the goals that have been established. How do we get everybody on the same page? And then how can we quickly deploy this model so that we're able to show progress within a short time,"

including months and a couple of years, because we've had extended grants, but the faculty and staff are critical.

M: Scale and sustainability are challenges many TAACCCT grantees are now facing. What is your long-term vision to scale and sustain the great work that Gateway has done so far?

BRYAN ALBRECHT: That's a great question, because that is always one of the biggest challenges with any grant program. There is a lot of excitement in writing it, there is even more excitement once you receive a grant, there is a little bit of a celebration, and then there is like, "Oh no, we've got all these people excited and they're in the program and how do we sustain it over time?"

One way that is critical, in the sustaining conversation around programs like this it's the partnerships. So not any one entity can do this alone, all the partners have some skin in the game in order for the grant to be successful, so they all have to maintain their level of commitment beyond the grant program.

And that takes a lot of conversations, what is the funding model and can funding, current funding be adjusted in different ways.

Business partnerships have been key for us. Our SE Johnson partnership right now funds the tuition and fees for all of our Bootcamp programs in advanced manufacturing, so we have been able to bring community partners in to help provide the financial support for that, partner with other grant programs that might be coming through workforce development or other initiatives in the state that can enhance that industry partnership funding. I mentioned we built the Gateway Promise initiative, which is all private sector dollars in a foundation account so that families can leverage federal financial aid in partnership with the Gateway Foundation to build the bridge for a financial affordability.

We have really embraced our community based organizations to make sure that we are engaged in conversations within our community around stable families and healthy living and really finding ways to leverage the college to make sure that students are aware of

those resources, even though we didn't have those on campus ourselves but where could you get help for that. So, partnerships is absolutely critical.

Another I think a key piece for leveraging and sustaining over time is this whole idea of learning from each other, so the idea of best practices.

So we learn from other states, we learn from other colleges, and we take the best of those practices and bring those to our daily responsibilities here at the college.

Those are things that are probably best learned as best practices, because it's way too expensive to try to learn those on your own as you go through the programs, and if we can shortcut that whole effort it reduces our overall cost and we have already got demonstrated success and ultimately we can revitalize our programs.

M: What advice do you have for others about how to leverage grants like TAACCCT to have the greatest impact on institutional change?

I think the grant opportunity gives you a chance to have a deeper conversation around taking risks and being a part of more of an entrepreneurial spirit, because we had to change some things, the way that we always had done them, and we had, that took a little bit of financial capital investment and risk in making that happen, but it has proven to be a value to our community and now has changed for the long term the way that we think about these occupational areas and how we can strengthen the services of the college.

I think a second big takeaway of what, why I would think college leadership would want to get involved in programs like this is because it helps to assure that what your mission is all about in servicing our community is valid in today's world, that is you have a deeper understanding of the workforce needs, you're connected closer to the supply chain, your industry partners help leverage a little bit more the types of skills that are being taught, and it helps to assure that what you are delivering is really what is intended and needed within the community, because you're measured a little different.

And then another, I think a key piece for Gateway at least and hope for other colleges, it is a way to motivate and engage faculty and staff in a different way. So, everyone likes a challenge and the challenge of being a teacher or an instructor, a faculty member, if they do the same thing every semester, same set of classes, "Here is how we have always done it" type of thing, it too can get a little monotonous. So you want to keep highly engaged faculty, learning new things, spending time in industry, working with new partners in the community that maybe they hadn't worked with before, challenging their status quo as far as the content that is being taught, bringing new equipment into their lab so they get to experience all of those exciting new technologies just like the students will. That elevates the engagement level of your faculty, which then elevates the enthusiasm and engagement of your students.

M: Thank you for sharing your perspective on the work you have done at Gateway through the TAACCCT grants.

We're proud and appreciative of the fact that in the state of Wisconsin we have colleges that collaborate on developing programs like TAACCCT initiatives and others to be able to support our state, state's economy, and really be able to kind of leverage that at the local economy level.

So thank you. It's my pleasure being with you.

M: Thank you to Bryan Albrecht, President of Gateway Technical College in Wisconsin. This is the final podcast in our series of conversations about the impact of TAACCCT with community college presidents. The US Department of Labor implements the TAACCCT program in partnership with the Department of Education. One point nine billion dollars (\$1.9 Billion) in grants were awarded under the TAACCCT program. For more information or to listen to the other podcast in this series, visit TAACCCT.org.