

Collaborative Conversations with Carlos Transcript

Workforce Continuing Education (Part 1)

Carlos McCormick

Hi, I'm Dr. Carlos McCormick and this is Collaborative Conversations with Carlos, a podcast where we discuss various aspects of Wake Technical Community College and the community college movement. If you want to find out more about the magnificent work Wake Tech is engaged in and also learn about the many facets of the community college movement. Keep listening, as we will have a diverse collection of guests, from students to community college presidents. Let's get started.

Carlos McCormick

Joining us today is the Vice President of Workforce Continuing Education at Wake Technical Community College, Mr. Anthony Caison. VP Caison how are you doing today?

Anthony Caison

Great, Carlos, how about yourself?

Carlos McCormick

Doing well, and I can't thank you enough for joining us on this episode of Collaborative Conversations with Carlos. And before we start talking about the massive Workforce Continuing Education program at Wake Technical Community College, let's get to know you a little bit. Tell us a little bit about yourself. How long have you been at Wake Tech? How long have you worked in Workforce Continuing Education? And what kind of drives you in this current position?

Anthony Caison

Well, thanks again for the introduction, Carlos. So yes, I'm Anthony Caison, Vice President of Workforce Continuing Education and I am a native, Southern Illinois. So born and raised in Southern Illinois, which is right on the border of Illinois, Missouri, and Kentucky, right where the Mississippi and Ohio rivers converge. So born and raised there and lived in North Carolina, Raleigh, North Carolina area since 1997, which is when I relocated to first begin working at Wake Technical Community College. So I'm married with two children. One is a sophomore in college and one is a senior in high school. And I've been working in workforce continuous education since I came to Wake Technical Community College back in 1997. So I've been kind of born and raised in this area for going on 23 years now, and seeing individuals fulfill their dreams and obtain their goals of enhancing their lives and the lives of their families. Through the training and education that we provide at the college is what drives me. You know, everyone is on their own unique journey. And when we can positively assist with that journey, then that's what keeps me going at full speed.

Carlos McCormick

Thank you for that introduction, and we'll kick things off. Talk to us a little bit about Workforce Continuing Education. I know I started at the college 15 years ago, and the buzz words that I heard on campus, it was a change of career for me work, curriculum, education, services, and Workforce

Continuing Education. And I had no idea what Workforce Continuing Education is. So can you kind of elaborate what the goal and the vision and what Workforce Continuing Education is all about?

Anthony Caison

So our mission here is pretty much the same as the college as a whole but we we serve to provide equitable access to education that transforms lives through economic mobility and personal fulfillment. So all areas of the college have have their own approach to achieving this mission, but ours, the Workforce Continuing Education, is done through non degree training and education. And, you know, with that ultimate goal of getting the person from you know where they are today to where they want to be in the future.

Carlos McCormick

Thanks for sharing that and you talk about economic mobility. What would you say is the impact of Workforce Continuing Education on Wake County our, community?

Anthony Caison

Well, that's a great question. Because Workforce Continuing Education, we provide opportunities for several people for for those who may already possess an associate's degree, bachelor's, or even master's degree. We assist them with obtaining skills that they need to obtain new employment or advancing their current field of work, you know, in this training helps keep a skilled workforce in Wake County which is which is very attractive to current and prospective employers to the area. And you know, even those who haven't even graduated from high school yet we have pathways for those students, so they can be active members of the workforce, in Wake County.

Carlos McCormick

And you talk a little bit about those relationships with our community and business and industry. What types of partnerships do you currently have or you've had in the past with entities here in Wake County?

Anthony Caison

Well, so so we partnered with several industries and organizations. We have we have strong collaborative ties with Capitol Area Workforce Development, Wake County Economic Development, the greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce, as well as all other chambers in Wake County to help provide the education and training that the citizens of Wake County need. We also partner with community organizations to help them provide training for the populations that they serve. We are very embedded into the community to meet those needs. So we readily partner also with area companies to help develop new programs that meet the needs of the industry. We develop programs in partnership with local employers in the areas of hospitality, healthcare, skilled trades, biotechnology, and information technology. So many times companies reach out to us and say, "Look, we have a specific need. We need trained individuals, that know how to do a specific skill," and that's a program that we currently have them in existence. We can market and promote that program to get more students interested in that line of work. If it's something that doesn't currently exist, we get with those employer partners. And we customize a program and develop a program that meets the needs that they specify. So that we can get individuals interested in that line of work and develop that pipeline of prospective employees, if you

will. So that's something that we've done for years. And it's a very effective model, when you're sitting in the same room with those employer partners to determine what those specific skills are, so we can build an appropriate program for their needs.

Carlos McCormick

And that segues right into the the next question here. You talked a little bit about IT, hospitality and healthcare, what are some of the other programs that you have in Workforce Continuing Education, because I know it goes on and on and on.

Anthony Caison

It does. So I think I'm gonna talk about a few here and as you said, it's pretty expansive and likely more expansive and broad than most people realize, but touching on server areas and give a little information on, you know, what those areas are involved in or what they entail. So I mentioned earlier, how we even work with individuals who may not have their high school diploma, we create pathways for them so so we have a college and career readiness division. That individual works that division works with students to help them improve their basic reading, writing and math skills, even helps individuals learn how to speak English, all for the goal to help them complete their high school education. And once they've done that piece, you know, this helps prepare them to transition to college or into the workforce and very successful, very impactful program. That many students take part in and this is really the first step to the rest of their lives when they're able to complete this program by by getting a high school diploma and realizing that they can enter the workforce and garnering a higher salary or preparing themselves for college, but sometimes they never thought it was possible. So very impactful area.

Anthony Caison

We also have a small business center. Very another very impactful area that many people aren't aware of, and many people who are trying to start their own business may not even be aware of but our small business center offers free business counseling and free seminars. So if there's someone who wants to start a business or maybe they started a business, but they're still not sure if they're going the right route, taking the next steps. We have counselors on hand, those free seminars that we offer on a monthly basis that can help steer your business idea in the right direction, we give free, you know, uncut advice to put you on that right path. And it's so valuable because it's free. And these are these are people who are experienced in the business field in small businesses, providing us counseling services. And helping out those who want to have a small business. So I always highly encourage anyone who wants to start a small business to reach out to our small business center to get those free resources because it's really some invaluable information that, you know, you could pay, you could pay to get it, but we're doing it for free as a part of the service from the state and Community College. And so I think everyone who has that interested take advantage of that. And we also have an area called entrepreneurship initiatives. This area promotes entrepreneurship as a way of thinking and I guess being if you will, as well as the process for creating new businesses and social ventures, this is something that many times existing business owners take advantage of. And entrepreneurship is like there's a way of thinking. And you know, an entrepreneur is not necessarily the same as a small business owner. And so they teach those techniques and skills that it takes to be an effective entrepreneur, and help those people who are in business or who wants to do multiple businesses on

what they need to do and the proper steps to make that happen. So very another another very dynamic program that I encourage anybody who has their own business, wants to start a business or several businesses should take advantage of those opportunities. And something that I'm pretty sure your community doesn't necessarily associate with, you know, non degree workforce, continuing education, but these are some of the fantastic resources that we offer.

Anthony Caison

We do training in hospitality. Right now it's taking a huge hit, of course because of the pandemic. But prior to that, lots of opportunities and eventually they those opportunity will come back. So in hospitality, we offer bartending classes. We also do craft brewing classes for those who wants to get into the craft brewing industry. We have a program called How to Start a Food Truck Business. So prior to the, pre pandemic, you know, we were offering this course and what we used to see as a trend is that, you know, a lot of food truck operators may start that way, but they, they had a ultimate goal of having a brick and mortar business at some point all in a restaurant and just getting their feet wet and getting off the ground with a food truck business. We've seen a shift with the pandemic. And that, you know, we're now seeing that some owners who had a brick and mortar business now wants to do a food truck business. So this is a great opportunity. It tells you all the steps involved and how to run a food truck business effectively. We even have collaborations with Wake County, who is a key partner to make sure you did everything you need to do to legally operate a food truck business in Wake County. So that's another great program. We offer a Hospitality Certification Program. This program is basically teaching someone all the line level things they would need to know to work in the hospitality business. More so if you are working for a hotel, you may teach aspects of you know how to do some light catering, how to do bartending, how to manage the front desk, how to do customer service effectively. So we all know this is bundled into one certification, very effective program. And once again, pre-pandemic. Individuals taking this program typically have found employment at the end of that program or before the program is even completed because we bring in representatives from the industry to do interviews with the students, and often in employment they do and as a good match, and we have a very high placement rate of that program, pre-pandemic, of course, somewhere around 70-75% placement rate in that program, so it's very, very effective. And also in hospitality. We do barista training, barista and cafe training, so lots of opportunities in the hospitality area. That someone may not have noticed before.

Anthony Caison

So another area that we do training in is skilled trades. So your heating and air courses, electrical courses. We have a very popular and effective Apartment Maintenance Technician Program for those individuals who want to work in an apartment community as the maintenance technician for that apartment community. Those individuals are still in high demand. And we have a very effective program for that. We also do building code inspector training. All municipalities have building code inspectors in Wake County, they don't have enough of them. So this is another good avenue for someone who wants to get into the skilled trades. And so though all those skilled trades programs are very effective. And you know, we can't get enough people you know, so those were interested in it and as a very, very good line on work always thing but the skilled trades is something that you cannot export. Because when your air conditioner breaks down, or your heating unit breaks down, you need someone there right away, want to come and take care of it for you. So that's a very good line of work.

Anthony Caison

We also have a cosmetology program, natural hair and barbering. These are very popular programs. And in those programs, we also embed our entrepreneurship training, if you will, and small business concept into the program because we want to encourage the individuals going into that field and let them know that you can not only, don't only have to work for somebody in their shop, you can own your own shop and run your own business. So we embed those entrepreneurship and small business concepts into those programs as part of their overall training to make them more well rounded, just had a barbering graduation natural hair graduation. So those students, you know, they take a lot of hours and get those certifications and somewhere around 1500 hours of work that they put in, but when they finish those programs, they're ready. And once again, you know, we'd like people to own their own business, that's your fastest route to self-sufficiency. And if you can complete those programs, we think you'll be much better off for that.

Anthony Caison

We do a lot of things and healthcare. We offer CPR training, Nurse Aide training, traing to become an EMT. We have billing, medical billing and coding. Let's see medical office assisting medication aide, central sterile processing, even EKG technician training, and we also have a personal training program that's, you know, public healthcare where as well you want to stay healthy. So those are all avenues of healthcare. Healthcare is only growing as the population ages. We need more and more people who are proficient in these areas because, you know, the population ages these services are needed more and more. And we do all of those trainings. Here in Workforce Continuing Education.

Anthony Caison

We have we have an area Carlos called Human Resources Development. And what that means is if there's a program then provide some training, if you will, for individuals who are unemployed or underemployed, just lost a job. And what it does is a few things. We, we offer training and services on, you know, writing resumes, you know how to do a job interview, how to get back into the workforce when you haven't been in there for a while, but we also offer some career exploration courses to give students a, you know, look into what a particular career may be like. And, you know, and I'll use hospitality as an example. Before we had a full blown hospitality program we had a career exploration program in our Human Resources Development Program, to give students an idea of how it is to work in the hospitality industry, and ended up you know, transforming into an actual hospitality program because it was seeing such a huge interest in going that route and we developed a program. And as I mentioned earlier, you know, it's turned out to be very successful because of the high placement rate that our students have received from us. So the Human Resource Development, and once again, if you are unemployed or underemployed, or just laid off, and Human Resource Development Program is free of charge.

Anthony Caison

And if I go back a few minutes, the College and Career Readiness will will assist individuals with getting a high school diploma. That program is free of charge as well. So just something to remember for individuals in those two programs.

Anthony Caison

Let's see, we have a what's called biowork. biowork is a 136 hour non credit certification course and that can lead to an entry level position as a process technician, many individuals take this program and they go into the field of biopharma or biotechnology and some of those entry level positions but it's usually a good pathway to higher positions and further training. So a very good entry point if you want to work in the field of biotechnology, and this program was intended for you know, most anybody but you know, high school graduates, individuals in manufacturing industries who just lost a job. People who want to start a new career it's a good avenue to get through this program and get into the biotechnology field. And we do have a what we call BioNetwork Capstone Center, they focus on biotechnology. This Capstone Center is located on the North Carolina State University's Centennial Campus and this program provides very affordable but high quality hands on training in biotechnology, biomanufacturing, and biopharmaceutical and pharmaceutical operations and is done in a simulated industrial environment. It sees things such as aseptic processing. They have a biomanufacturing bootcamp, they provide an overview of medical devices and overview for pharmaceuticals. So, a lot of training there in that area also works with area, biopharmaceutical companies, biotechnology companies to also train up some of their employees. So, anyone interested in biotechnology, we have training available for that avenue.

Anthony Caison

And of course, we have information technology, of course, we do a lot of courses that lead to certifications and Cisco as well as comptia and so see a lot of success in information technology courses are a great area for individuals who want to be in that field. There, there continues to be lots of IT openings in the Wake County area. So you know, it's almost like we can't train enough people because the need is so great. And there's no anticipation that that need is going to decline in the next several years. So definitely a good avenue for a very solid and fulfilling career in the field of information technology.

Anthony Caison

And that to think of one more area of the area. We do public safety training as well. So public safety spans around you know, a broad area but we do have a basic law enforcement training program for individuals who are interested in coming becoming law enforcement officers. Very important field right now. We are always looking for diversity in law enforcement and encourage anyone interested in that to take part in in Basic Law Enforcement Program is a very intensive and long program usually takes a period of about, well, it's about 744 hours of training total that we offer. So programs. The next program starts in about a week. As a matter of fact, I believe August 25. And that one go through December. A lot of work but a very important field, nonetheless. We also provide training for Wake County's local law enforcement. We provide training for fire and rescue training for those who are current firefighters. We also do detention officer training for those who are working in detention officers setting and detention setting. We do detention officer training we also the correction officer training for those corrections officers who are currently working in the field, we do their ongoing training. We also do justice involved training that many people may not be aware of. And the purpose of this justice involved training is to assist in the reduction of recidivism, so that individuals who are released from incarceration, possess skills that they need to successfully transition back into society with job skills that can support themselves and their families. So that's a very important part of what we do, because we want

everyone to have the opportunity to get some work skills so that we can be productive members of society and supporting themselves and their families.

Anthony Caison

So as you can see, there's a lot of things that we're doing, and you know that that's a good, that's a good step and if you will, but underneath all of that there's a lot more that's going on, but that gives you a very good overview and should demonstrate that, you know, we do try to cover the realm of everything that we can do. We're always interested in new programs if they are relevant if they are relevant to the labor market. And because you know, things are always new that are coming online, and we if we're made aware of that, and we know there's a job demand for that we want to look at those and its likelihood for offerings of programs as well. So I hope that gives you a good overview of some of the programs that we offer in Workforce Continuing Education.

Carlos McCormick

Yeah, that was excellent. And thanks for sharing and you just kind of went into my next question you talking about always looking for for new programs, kind of walk me through. I live here in Wake County, and perhaps I want to develop a program or possibly teach a program. Walk me through how that process works. And is that an option?

Anthony Caison

So so we typically vet requests, you know, rather they come from employees or from the community to conduct courses or programs that aren't already offered, we try to put them through a vetting process. And, and this is in order for us to provide relevant programming to the community. So we conduct a labor market analysis and determine, of course, what's being proposed is viable, or if it's a program that is in high demand from the public, and we need to get developed. And we will take a look at that and then take it through the review process before offering, you know, and that's a process that we had to implement years ago. Probably 10-15 years ago, we would basically entertain anyone who wants to offer a class and you know, we learned over the years and it's not always the best approach because you know, you may want to offer I don't know, you know, what it would be something new that we've never heard of? You think it sounds great, but nobody's interested in it. So we've gone through a whole exercise of getting something off, we're promoting and marketing it. Nobody's interested. But you thought it was a great idea. So that's why we try to vet it now. Because if it is a good idea, we'll have data to support that. We have data to support that. We can look at data on what populations may be interested in this particular program so we can direct our marketing efforts to make that program successful. So to answer your question is yes, if somebody wants to do a course, that's fine, but just understand we're running through a through a vetting process, and if it's a viable course, and absolutely, you can run with it. And you know, hopefully, it's something that is going to help develop jobs for individuals. But once again, that's not all we do, but, you know, we do want to put people to work and give them some training as long as it help towards that effort.

Carlos McCormick

And a couple of follow ups to that one, do you have to have a certain educational attainment to teach one of those courses? And secondly, is there an age limit because as you know, here in Wake County, we have a lot of talented youth? So is that an option for youth to create a program and teach it as well?

Anthony Caison

So if someone wants to teach, so in Workforce Continuing Education, we don't typically require that an instructor have a post secondary degree. Our requirements are that an instructor can demonstrate their subject matter expertise, either by possessing the necessary credentials will of course be able to teach or by demonstrating sufficient number of years of experience. Well, of course that doesn't require certification of industry-recognized credentials. And we're able to take that approach because we're not giving college credit, if you will. But we still want the validity and those who are teaching our courses. So if someone wants to teach, you know, if it was a nuclear biology class that we wouldn't typically teach in a non-degree classroom we'd expect to see appropriate credentials around that. You wouldn't want someone like me wanting to teach nuclear bombs, you might not turn out too well. So there has to be a vetting process, but we welcome anyone who wants to teach. If they come with the proper credentials, and they've got a program that is viable, then absolutely, we're all for it, in that respect. And as far as as the students, you know, if they're old enough, and they've got a great idea, that's something that's going to work and once again, we focus on programs with you know, industry recognized credentials, third-party credentials. But you know, I'd say once again, that's not always the case, it could be something like a photography class, if you will. And if someone has a lot of experience in that they can demonstrate that. And they've got a unique idea on getting people interested in taking that because they want to do it for personal fulfillment. That's fine as well. And there's a market for that because we do other things besides that, it could be a, you know, could be a baking course or it could be a cooking course those are fine as well. If it's a if there's a market for it. So that's typically the things I'm looking at Carlos.

Carlos McCormick

This conversation with VP Anthony Caison about Workforce Continuing Education will continue on the next episode of Collaborative Conversations with Carlos. Thanks for listening to Collaborative Conversations with Carlos. If you like the show and you want to know more, be sure to visit us at waketech.edu. See you next time!