

Lone Star College

Overview

Founded in 1972, Lone Star College (LSC) is the largest college in Texas. With an annual budget of over \$345 million, LSC serves over 95,000 students a year on six campuses and 10 training centers across the state.

Training

Primarily focused on the energy, computer technology, and advanced manufacturing sectors, LSC's Corporate College has developed partnerships with global corporations that have locations in the Houston region. The Corporate College assesses each business's workforce goals and designs training programs to leverage and grow employee talent.

In 2007, LSC centralized the oversight of its workforce education programs to ensure that the curricula addressed employers' changing needs. The college established an associate vice chancellor for workforce education and corporate partnerships to set the strategy for business development and to oversee the implementation of incumbent worker training. Recognizing the need for consistent marketing, LSC pulled all its workforce programming under a unified management unit and established a single point of contact for employers, making it easier for them to navigate the vast LSC system and connect with the most appropriate workforce department. Finally, in addition to traditional academic counselors, LSC hired workforce advisers and job developers to help training participants find employment. This was a critical step in executing the college's corporate partnership strategy. "Employers work directly with the job developers to help them find the right individual for their company culture and specific job needs. This focus on creating and aligning a skilled talent pipeline for employers increased their trust in LSC and opened doors to future partnerships—including donations to the college and jobs for our students," says Linda Head, associate vice chancellor of workforce education and corporate partnerships.

To improve its ability to respond to employers' needs, LSC made a strategic decision to establish five chancellor advisory councils to connect employers to high-level personnel at the college, empowering businesses to shape the college's workforce development efforts. These councils have been instrumental in building long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships between LSC and employers. The councils are structured around prominent regional sectors, including energy and manufacturing, construction, IT, and health care.

Through the councils, LSC has cultivated close relationships with businesses. One noteworthy relationship is with National Oilwell VARCO (NOV), a Houston-based global provider of equipment and components used in the oil and gas industry. The company has nearly 64,000 employees (with more than 14,500 in the Houston area) and operations in more than 1,200 locations across six continents.

Grant Almond, NOV's vice president of engineering, technology, and product development, says, "I was given the responsibility to overhaul a fairly dysfunctional training team and create a world-class training organization. In the beginning, I recognized that we were specialists in a very narrow set of skills. I wanted a partner that had a much broader

scope to help us design our training strategy. We chose Lone Star because we were intent on helping our frontline staff gain the skills they need to advance their careers and keep us competitive. Lone Star knew how to do that, and as the relationship developed we moved into curriculum development, delivery of training modules for specific skill sets, and competency training.”

LSC has developed approximately 60 different trainings for more than 300 NOV employees, including in mechanical skills, blueprint reading, hydraulics and pneumatics, and communication in the workplace. While these types of classes are not unusual for community and technical colleges, LSC’s extensive customization for NOV is unique. “They aren’t just a partner to us, but a friend to the college,” says Patty Woerner, executive director of corporate college operations at LSC. “Seventy percent of any training we develop is going to be hands-on, activity based, because employees only need a little bit of theory. They need to know the practical.” Because NOV cannot take its equipment offline during production work hours, NOV donated equipment to LSC to replicate the production environment. Both classroom instruction and equipment-based learning take place at LSC’s Energy and Manufacturing Workforce Training Center.

Funding

LSC has many funding sources for incumbent worker training, including state and federal grants and direct employer pay. NOV often pays for all of the costs of the training as well as employees’ wages while they are in class. As Almond explains: “We firmly believe that if we’re developing the skills of an employee that benefit us as a company, we should be compensating them for their time. Even if that skill is transportable, and they can take it and go to work someplace else, we feel that if it benefits the employee, it benefits us.”

LSC and NOV have utilized Texas’s one-year Skill Development Fund grants, administered by the Texas Workforce Commission, to support incumbent worker training. These performance-based grants cover a range of employer-defined training efforts. “In Texas, the governor supports economic and workforce development in numerous ways,” says Shannon Riley, senior analyst for workforce development at LSC. “The Texas Workforce Commission works closely with Texas community colleges on grant-funded training in order to benefit businesses by ensuring they have the talent they need while simultaneously raising workers’ wages within the state.” The impact of these grants has been significant for LSC and local businesses as they try to keep up with changing technology and customer needs.

Goals, Achievements, and Lessons Learned

“We recognize that we are training a workforce for global-scale competitiveness. Most of our corporate college partners are multinational corporations,” Head says. “We’ve learned that we have to understand the global nature of these businesses and their immediate and long-term talent needs. If we want to keep this industry in Houston—in the US—then we have to give them workers that are ready and equipped to meet their needs, and we have to develop customized training solutions that address skill gaps and propel their abilities.”

LSC effectively realigned the college’s structure by recognizing that meeting the needs of students was crucial to meeting the needs of local businesses. “It required us to overhaul how we think about student advising, credit versus noncredit offerings, employer

engagement, and how we design our technology centers. It changed the entire structure of our college,” Head says. Building and maintaining long-term relationships between local businesses and the college has been key.

Almond and his colleagues at NOV recognize the benefits of working with LSC: “Because of [LSC’s] relationships with community colleges across the country, we could then basically plant those programs in other community colleges where we had employees in the region and be able to deliver similar skill sets in those locations,” he says.

Additionally, LSC has gone to extraordinary lengths to ensure that it has cutting-edge training facilities available when trainings can’t take place at an employer’s location. For example, in 2014, LSC passed a \$485 million bond to build new Advanced Technology Centers. In addition to offering incumbent and new workers some of the best hands-on technical education in the region, these investments attract employers to LSC.



Economic Mobility Corporation
50 Broadway, Suite 1604
New York, NY 10004

@EconMobility

www.economicmobilitycorp.org