

Career Education Review

A Publication of CECU, the Voice of Career Education

**CAREER
EDUCATION
REVIEW
AWARDS**

2025



Florida Education Institute Culinary Arts
student showcases a finished dish.

Fall 2025

A vintage beige computer monitor and system unit with a keyboard. The monitor screen is black and displays the text "Enrollment still stuck in 1990's?" in a bright green, sans-serif font. The system unit below the monitor has a floppy disk drive. The keyboard is also beige and matches the rest of the computer.

**Enrollment
still stuck
in 1990's?**

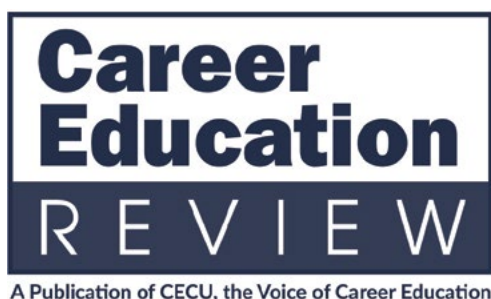
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Editor

Jenny Faubert

About Career Education Review

Career Education Review (CER), a publication of CECU, the Voice of Career Education, is dedicated to providing top management, owners, sector leaders, and other stakeholders with the in-depth information required to operate a successful educational institution. With nearly 100 years in circulation, CER is a trusted ally in the admission, retention, placement, and education of millions of prospective students every year. CER serves as the daily pulse of the career education sector — bringing a snapshot of the news, trends, research, and upcoming events.

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Community Impact Award

Legacy Education

Post University

The Salon Professional Academy

Innovation in Employer Collaboration Award

ECPI University

Western Technical College

West Virginia Junior College (WVJC)

Exceptional Educator Award

Chad Hinton, Delta Technical College

Ceferino Ibarra, The College of Health Care Professions

Jacklyn Otero, NUC University Florida Technical College

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Top People Changing Career Education Award

Linda Fedrizzi-Williams, Ed.D., Central Penn College

Larry Foster, Ed.D., Tricoci University of Beauty Culture

CECU AI Task Force: Co-Chairs, Stephen Arthur, ECPI University; Dana B.

Hutton, Southeastern College; and Mitch Talenfeld, MDT Marketing

Community Impact Award



Six campuses across the state of California

For more than 15 years, Legacy Education has demonstrated how career training and community service can go hand in hand. Across its schools – High Desert Medical College (HDMC), Central Coast College (CCC), Integrity College of Health (ICH), and Contra Costa Medical Career College (CCMCC) – students and faculty partner with local organizations to deliver essential services, provide care, and strengthen the communities they call home.

At HDMC, students contribute to community health in multiple ways. Through a partnership with the California Dental Association, they provide free dental care for children and adults throughout the year. Veterinary technology students from HDMC and CCC volunteer at Celebrity Ranch, Sugarplum Zoo & Chocolates, SC Western, Bellarian Farm, Hidden Hills Ranch, and Wonder Wood Ranch, treating rescue animals and assisting with the maintenance of facilities that serve both animals and people. Each Thanksgiving, HDMC also supports families by leading a food drive for Community Mission of Hope and Grace Resources, donating canned goods and packaged food to local food banks.

HDMC students and staff also take part in a range of fundraising and outreach activities. They raise funds for Rancho Damacitas, supporting former foster youth and single mothers. Annual fundraisers benefit Jacob's House and Habitat for Humanity, providing resources for families of hospitalized patients and for housing projects. Through month-long efforts, the school raises funds and awareness for Michelle's Place, an organization dedicated to cancer services. During the holiday season, HDMC joins the Temecula Fire Department's Spark of Love Toy Drive, collecting toys for local families in need. In addition, the campus partners with the American Red Cross and Houchin Community Blood Bank to host regular blood drives, and supports the National Marrow Donor Program by expanding the stem cell registry through student donations.

The commitment extends beyond health to maternal care and support for women. HDMC students participate in the CareNet Annual Walk, raising funds for women in need of maternal services. Legacy Education CEO LeeAnn Rohmann also serves as a long-time board member of CareNet, reinforcing the institution's leadership



Left: High Desert Medical College hosting a blood drive with Houchin Community Blood Bank. **Right:** Central Coast College Veterinary Assistant students lending a hand at Wonder Wood Ranch.

in this work.

Integrity College of Health (ICH) focuses on meeting the needs of underserved populations in Los Angeles. In partnership with T'Ena Health, students provide free healthcare screenings to homeless and low-income communities. ICH also works with the Pasadena Humane Society through its Wiggle Waggle Wagon program, supporting animal adoptions and outreach events. Additionally, ICH collaborates with Polishing the Professional, where staff assist students and community members with significant disabilities in preparing for employment.

Contra Costa Medical Career College (CCMCC) emphasizes mental health awareness and support. Each year, students and staff participate in the Out of the Darkness Walk organized by the American Foundation for

Suicide Prevention, raising funds and awareness for suicide prevention efforts.

These partnerships provide students with opportunities to apply their classroom learning directly in the community. They deliver healthcare, support vulnerable populations, contribute to housing initiatives, and engage in meaningful service projects that meet pressing needs. In turn, students develop interpersonal skills, confidence, and compassion while preparing for careers in healthcare and related fields.

Legacy Education's approach reflects a simple principle: every act of service strengthens both the student and the community. By working with organizations ranging from food banks and health clinics to animal rescues and national health networks, Legacy schools create a lasting impact that extends far beyond the classroom.



Left: High Desert Medical College collecting Toys for Tots holiday donations. **Right:** Contra Costa Medical Career College proudly sponsoring the Out of the Darkness Walk.

Community Impact Award



Waterbury, Connecticut

At Post University, community service is woven into the institution's identity. Located in Waterbury, Connecticut, the University views the city not only as its home but also as a partner. Through philanthropy, volunteerism, and innovative educational programs, Post has created a lasting impact on Greater Waterbury while giving students, faculty, and staff meaningful opportunities to serve.

Post University's philanthropic reach is significant. In 2024, associates raised \$317,000 through the Find it in Your Heart campaign for the United Way of Greater Waterbury. Between 2018 and 2024, the University has contributed more than \$1.4 million to the United Way, supporting programs across 10 towns in the region. During the 2024 holiday season, faculty and staff also adopted 12 families through the United Way and Salvation Army's Adopt-A-Family program, providing gifts and support. In addition, Post

has sponsored Waterbury's annual New Year's Day fireworks since 2020, a tradition launched from Holy Land atop Pine Hill that brings the community together each year.

The University also integrates service directly into its academic programs. Since 2021, students have participated in the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, offering free tax preparation for low- and moderate-income residents after completing IRS certification. Students in the Advanced Accounting course support the United Way by analyzing nonprofit financial statements, budgets, and IRS Form 990s. Their reviews are used by the United Way's Community Impact Council to inform funding recommendations for 22 nonprofit agencies running 43 programs in Greater Waterbury.

Post's response during the COVID-19 pandemic further underscores its role as a community partner. In spring 2020, with the



Left: Post University's annual Stuff-A-Cruiser toy drive brings students and associates together to collect gifts for Waterbury children. **Right:** The men's soccer team signed a jersey for the player they adopted via Team Impact.

campus closed to students, residence halls were opened to house first responders and healthcare workers who could not return home due to exposure risks. In January 2021, Post hosted a drive-thru vaccination clinic in partnership with Waterbury Health, where more than 32,000 vaccines were administered. Students and associates volunteered at the site, assisting with traffic flow and check-ins. Faculty and staff took pride in the University's contribution to keeping the community safe.

In addition to community service and pandemic response, Post has expanded access to education through innovative programs. In 2020, the University partnered with Waterbury Public Schools to create the Early College High School at Crosby High School. Today, over 200 students are enrolled in the High School Academy, pursuing dual degrees that let them complete an associate degree alongside their high school diploma. Since its launch, 26 students, many of them first-generation, have earned an associate

degree before graduating from high school.

Post also provides pathways for students with learning exceptionalities through its University Pathways program, developed in partnership with EdAdvance, a regional education service center. Each year, about 30 students ages 17–22 participate. These students have completed high school requirements but continue to need support with Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals. The program offers non-degree academic experiences and campus integration that help students build skills, independence, and confidence. Most participants come from districts in Greater Waterbury, with EdAdvance and school districts funding the program.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate Post University's commitment to building stronger communities while enriching the student experience. By combining philanthropy, service, education, and civic responsibility, the University has created a model that benefits both Waterbury and the students it serves.



Post University associates shopping for Adopt-A-Family, spreading cheer one cart at a time.

Community Impact Award

Evansville, Indiana



At The Salon Professional Academy (TSPA) in Evansville, IN, service is a year-round commitment that has defined the Academy for more than 17 years. By combining professional training with community service, TSPA ensures students gain valuable real-world experience while contributing to causes that strengthen their community.

Each year, TSPA students and educators provide hundreds of free services at community events. At Homeless Connect, for example, they offer haircuts, manicures, waxing, and makeup applications, delivering more than 800 services annually to individuals experiencing homelessness. At back-to-school drives and the Isaiah Project, students provide haircuts, face painting, and hair tinsel for foster children and families preparing for a new school year. These events give participants renewed confidence and provide students with meaningful, hands-on learning opportunities.

TSPA's partnerships extend into health and wellness initiatives. Students support Wellness Substance Abuse Counseling programs, raise funds for the Southwest Mental Health Center, and donate to organizations like Cancer Pathways. They also volunteer to serve patients and caregivers living with multiple sclerosis, providing comfort and care during community outreach events.

Food and supply drives are another long-standing tradition. For 17 years, TSPA has collected non-perishable items to benefit local food banks, offering service discounts for guests who contribute and encouraging staff and students to

participate. In addition, the Academy has organized hygiene supply drives for the homeless community collecting 1,700 items and contributed more than 400 items directly to the Isaiah Project to support foster youth. Animal welfare is also part of its mission, with donations of food and supplies to It Takes a Village No-Kill Animal Rescue.

Youth and family engagement remain central to TSPA's outreach. Students participate in Spark, an annual event for eighth graders, where they provide face painting, nail art, and hair tinsel for 800 local students. During the holiday season, they collect toys for the Toys for Tots Drive, ensuring children across the region receive gifts.

Beyond direct service, TSPA reinforces its commitment through sustainability. A campus-wide recycling program demonstrates the Academy's focus not only on today's needs but also on creating a healthier environment for the future.

For students, these experiences foster growth in professionalism, confidence, and compassion. Faculty and staff model the same spirit of service, showing students that careers in beauty and wellness extend beyond technical skill; they are also about uplifting others.

Through ongoing partnerships with organizations such as Homeless Connect, the Isaiah Project, Southwest Mental Health Center, Cancer Pathways, It Takes a Village No-Kill Animal Rescue, and Toys for Tots, The Salon Professional Academy consistently demonstrates its dedication to community service.



Left: TSPA proudly supports Black Nurses of Evansville and the vital work they do in the community.
Right: At the annual Homeless Connect event, TSPA closes for six hours providing free haircuts, manicures, waxing, and makeup.

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Post University for Community Impact Award

West Virginia Junior College for Innovation in
Employer Collaboration Award

Ceferino Ibarra of CHCP for Exceptional Educator Award



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Innovation in Employer Collaboration Award

*Eighteen campuses across the Southeast
with a nationwide online presence*

Innovation in career education is defined by how well schools connect learning with real workforce opportunities. ECPI University has made this connection a central part of its mission. With 18 campuses across the Southeast and a nationwide online presence, the University has built an extensive network of more than 2,100 employer partners. These collaborations create pathways that lower the cost of education, accelerate graduation, and link students directly to careers in high-demand fields.

Since the creation of its University Partnerships (UP) department in 2015, ECPI has offered employers a dollar-for-dollar scholarship match on private cash payments made by employees or their dependents. This approach provides companies with a no-cost education benefit that supports employee recruitment and retention while reducing the financial burden of education for working adults and their families. To date, these partnerships have saved ECPI students more than \$20 million in educational costs.

A leading example of ECPI's innovation in

collaboration is its registered apprenticeship program with Volvo Cars USA. Together, the partners created a U.S. Department of Labor-approved Maintenance Technician Apprenticeship to address shortages of skilled multi-craft maintenance technicians in advanced manufacturing. Based at Volvo's Charleston, South Carolina facility, the program blends classroom instruction with paid, on-the-job training. In just two years employees earn stackable credentials, a state-recognized certificate, a Department of Labor credential, and a promotion. The partnership has since expanded to cover HVAC and facilities maintenance, and Nucor Steel has added a cohort to the program, demonstrating its adaptability across industries.

ECPI's partnerships are designed for long-term impact. Every employer partner receives a structured engagement plan that includes quarterly hiring events, career fairs, lunch-and-learns, and campus visits. Career Services provides direct support, from pre-screening candidates to coordinating interviews, ensuring employers remain closely connected with students



Left: An ECPI University student connects with a recruiter to explore career opportunities during a career fair. **Right:** ECPI University students listen to industry professionals share career insights and opportunities.

throughout their studies. By working with national education benefit providers, ECPI also makes tuition support easier to access for employees across large corporations and franchise networks. The University has streamlined benefit verification to reduce administrative steps for both students and employers.

Curriculum alignment is guided by more than 600 advisory boards that meet twice each year. Each board includes hiring managers, alumni, and subject matter experts, who provide feedback on program content, lab technologies, software platforms, certifications, and clinical skills. These meetings ensure that ECPI programs evolve continuously with industry needs. Employers also emphasize soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and professionalism, which ECPI embeds directly into its curriculum alongside technical training.

Students benefit from accelerated degree pathways and structured support services. With year-round schedules, associate degrees can be completed in 14-18 months and bachelor's degrees in 30 months. Programs are supported by more than 80 certifications, taught in simulation-based labs, and delivered in small classes with a faculty-to-student ratio of under 15:1. To help students persist through challenges, ECPI provides free tutoring for every course, Student Success Coordinators, and 24/7 personal support through WellConnect. Career Services remain available after graduation, offering lifelong assistance for alumni navigating career changes or advancement.

Through these efforts, ECPI University has established a model of collaboration that connects students, employers, and industry leaders. Its partnerships reduce barriers to education, align academic programs with workforce needs, and create direct pathways to employment.



Derek Danner and Zoé Walker, Development Managers from ECPI University's Partnership Team, connect with employer partners during an employee engagement event.

Innovation in Employer Collaboration Award

El Paso, Texas



For more than 50 years, Western Technical College in El Paso, Texas, has partnered with local businesses to provide students with hands-on experience through internships and direct employment opportunities. In 2022, the institution expanded this approach, creating a new model of collaboration that reaches not only students preparing to enter the workforce but also employees already working in regional industries. The goal was to provide upskilling opportunities for current workers while continuing to prepare new graduates for career-ready roles.

To launch this effort, Western Tech reintroduced the position of Customized Training Director. The role was tasked with connecting directly with business owners and supervisors to explain how the college could design and deliver training programs tailored to employer needs. This approach ensured that companies could strengthen the skills of their existing employees while also gaining access to new students ready to begin their careers.

Two of the largest utility companies in the region were among the first to participate. The El Paso water utility worked with Western Tech to create a customized training program for water utility technicians. The college developed the curriculum, assigned classrooms across both campuses, and identified faculty from within its ranks. By the end of 2023, multiple cohorts had completed the program and entered the field.

At the same time, the local electric company faced a shortage of lineworkers. Western Tech partnered with the company to design a training program modeled on its work with the water utility. The company announced the opportunity to the community, while the college recruited a retired lineworker as instructor, built the curriculum, and supplied the technology needed for instruction. The first cohort graduated in August 2023, producing 12 trained workers prepared to enter the electric utility workforce. A second cohort quickly followed, continuing to meet demand in a high-need industry.

These customized training programs complement Western Tech's long-standing tradition of preparing students for skilled trades. Founded in 1970 as a welding school, the college has expanded its offerings to include HVAC, welding, automotive and diesel mechanics, electronics, and computer science. The school also offers healthcare training

in medical assisting, physical therapy, billing and coding, and nursing.

As these collaborations grew, Western Tech graduates began to find opportunities beyond El Paso. Electronics engineering students secured positions at White Sands Missile Range, and Exxon Mobil, while aerospace students were recruited by Lockheed Martin, Blue Origin, Los Alamos, and other major employers.

Western Tech's ability to adapt to industry needs has shaped its evolution for more than five decades. Leadership has consistently recruited instructors with direct industry experience to ensure students gain practical skills aligned with employer expectations. From its early focus on trades like welding and automotive repair to its more recent connections with aerospace, semiconductors, and cybersecurity, the college has evolved alongside the industries it serves.

By creating new opportunities for both current employees and future graduates, Western Technical College has demonstrated the power of employer collaboration to expand access to education, address critical workforce shortages, and prepare students for success in industries old and new.



The El Paso water utility worked with Western Tech to create a customized training program for water utility technicians.



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Innovation in Employer Collaboration Award

Four campuses and online/hybrid locations across the state of West Virginia

True innovation in career education is measured not only by what happens inside the classroom alone, but also by how effectively schools partner with employers to meet the evolving needs of their communities. Few institutions embody this better than West Virginia Junior College (WVJC). With four campuses and multiple online/hybrid locations across the state, WVJC has developed a model of employer engagement that is transforming healthcare education and ensuring that students, hospitals, and communities all benefit.

At the heart of WVJC's success is its ability to rethink traditional nursing education. Recognizing that rural communities across West Virginia faced critical nursing shortages, WVJC created a statewide system of online/hybrid Nursing programs coupled with Mobile Nursing Labs (MNLs), a fleet of three 38-foot RVs equipped with fully functioning patient care rooms. These mobile labs bring high-fidelity simulations directly to students, eliminating barriers of geography and access. By leveraging both technology and mobility, WVJC has enabled aspiring nurses to complete their training in less

than two years and transition quickly into hospitals in need.

This innovation would not be possible without WVJC's close collaborations with employers. Partnerships with the Vandalia Health System, also known as the Mon Health System and Charleston Area Medical Center (CAMC), ensure that students not only receive their clinical training in real hospital environments but also enter into tuition assistance programs tied to employment commitments. The result is a seamless bridge from classroom to career: students graduate ready to step into the workforce, already familiar with the hospitals they will serve.

WVJC has also expanded collaboration into new, forward-thinking areas. In 2024, the college partnered with Moodr Health to integrate mental health resources into its Nursing programs. Recognizing the intense pressures faced by nursing students, WVJC launched a pilot program at its Charleston campus to provide assessments, treatment, and ongoing support. This investment in student well-being demonstrates WVJC's holistic



Left: WVJC accepting Moodr Health's Early Innovator grant award to assist in integrating mental health resources in the online hybrid Nursing program. **Right:** Leaders from WVJC and Mon Health commemorate the launch of a collaborative online hybrid Nursing program aimed at addressing the region's healthcare needs.

approach, understanding that preparing effective nurses means addressing both academic and emotional resilience.

Listening has become a defining strategy for WVJC's leadership. Rather than dictating what programs should look like, they engage in constant dialogue with employer partners, asking where shortages are most acute and what skills are most urgently needed. This proactive approach has already sparked the development of WVJC's next program: a Respiratory Therapy online/hybrid degree. By anticipating needs and creating solutions in partnership with employers, WVJC continues to expand its impact beyond nursing into other critical healthcare fields.

The outcomes speak for themselves. Students from WVJC's Nursing programs are graduating, passing the NCLEX-RN exam, and entering the workforce across regions including Elkins, Beckley, Huntington, Martinsburg, and Parkersburg. Rural hospitals that once struggled to recruit nurses now benefit from a steady pipeline of skilled, committed graduates. Students who once thought nursing school was out of reach now see a tangible path to

a career without leaving their communities.

At its core, WVJC's work reflects a commitment to serving not only its students but also the communities of West Virginia. By aligning employer needs with student opportunity, the college has created a model that addresses healthcare shortages while uplifting families and strengthening local economies. It is this kind of vision that sets WVJC apart.

Innovation in employer collaboration is not about one-time initiatives; it is about building sustainable partnerships that evolve with the needs of the workforce. WVJC has shown that by pairing flexibility with accountability, and innovation with compassion, schools can reshape what career education looks like in practice.

For students across West Virginia, WVJC has made the promise of nursing careers attainable. For hospitals across the state, it has provided a lifeline of new talent. And for the future of career education, WVJC has proven that true collaboration can change lives, communities, and entire industries.



Left: WVJC's Mobile Nursing Lab (MNL) fleet consists of three 38-foot RVs, each configured with two fully functioning patient care rooms for students to complete high-fidelity simulations. **Right:** Leaders from WVJC and CAMC commemorate the launch of a collaborative online hybrid Nursing program aimed at addressing the region's healthcare needs.

Exceptional Educator Award

Chad Hinton
Lead HVAC Instructor
Delta Technical College
Ridgeland, MS



Through his commitment to Delta Technical College as its lead instructor of heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC), Chad Hinton exemplifies what it means to be an exceptional educator. His passion for the HVAC trade shines in his engaging, hands-on approach, which bridges the gap between classroom instruction and real-world application.

To Hinton, helping students succeed means preparing them for their careers after college. Starting in the classroom, he employs innovative teaching methods to engage students with the curriculum, and has implemented a competency check-off system to track their progress and ensure mastery of core curriculum objectives. In addition to his regular classroom schedule, he volunteers his time once a week to offer personalized, one-on-one support to eager students, demonstrating his unwavering dedication to helping every student thrive. Even while on military leave with the Air Force Reserves, he remained actively engaged

Even while on military leave with the Air Force Reserves, he remained actively engaged by virtually attending program meetings and maintaining regular communication with the director of education.

by virtually attending program meetings and maintaining regular communication with the director of education.

Going beyond curriculum objectives, Hinton integrated CPR certification into the HVAC program, ensuring his students graduate with life-saving skills as well as job-ready ones. The additional certification makes students stand out to potential employers, with whom Hinton advocates for students by establishing apprenticeship opportunities. In collaboration with local industry

partners, these apprenticeships give students advanced experience and networking contacts to launch their careers.

Hinton gives his students further opportunities to familiarize themselves with relevant industries by organizing and leading site visits. The visits are a prime time for students to observe real-world HVAC operations and gain insights into career pathways and workplace expectations, a window into the outcomes made possible through their education.

Even when he's not leading his classroom, Hinton is paving the way to growth, both for his students and the college. At a recent HVAC Excellence Conference, he viewed the conference not just as a learning opportunity, but as a platform to advance the college's HVAC program. Actively engaging with industry leaders, he explored innovative instructional tools and initiated conversations around scholarship and program enhancements that could benefit students directly. His proactive mindset was evident as he gathered resources and insights to bring back to campus, reinforcing his role as an educator and advocate for continuous improvement.

Hinton's energy in student advocacy efforts and career and industry advancement sets a powerful example for his peers. As lead instructor, he plays a pivotal role in fostering a culture of collaboration, support, and continuous improvement. His leadership approach is defined by a team-first mentality, which he reinforces by actively participating in the hiring process of new instructors to ensure they align with the program's values and standards. He shares his ideas in visits to the college's sister campus, partnering with the instructors there to develop their vision for the program and identify aspects that could be enhanced. In each setting, he cultivates a positive, unified learning environment where instructors feel supported, valued and empowered to grow, ultimately enriching the academic environment for both faculty and students alike.



Ceferino Ibarra
Pharmacy Technician Instructor
The College of Health Care Professions
McAllen, TX

Exceptional Educator Award

Ceferino Ibarra, pharmacy technician instructor at The College of Health Care Professions, is constantly seeking innovative ways to enhance his lessons and engage all learners. Seeing himself as a curator of knowledge, he goes beyond delivering content to craft experiences that motivate learners to connect with course material on a deeper level.

Ibarra exemplifies his values as a teaching professional through his lifelong commitment to learning and enhancing teaching effectiveness. His graduate degree in educational technology equips him with the knowledge to effectively integrate digital tools and modern pedagogical strategies into his classroom, a specialization he anticipates developing as a doctoral candidate of education in curriculum and instruction. His status as a fellow learner as well as an instructor, professional mentor and U.S. Army veteran, gives him the ability to relate to students on multiple levels and inspires them to stay motivated and committed to their own educational journeys.

In today's digital age, where facts can be easily verified online, Ibarra believes students must view their instructor as a credible and trustworthy source of information. He seeks to establish a foundation of trust and mutual respect at the start of each semester, and provides the tools and necessary space for students to explore, question and apply what they are learning in his classroom. He also connects what they are learning to future career paths using a particular tactic.

Ibarra's principal teaching tactic centers on fostering meaningful conversations that bridge the gap between theoretical content and real-world application, sating students' hunger for relevance and meaning in their education. He actively encourages students to share their perspectives on study material, guiding their curiosity in a way that aligns with core learning objectives. This participatory classroom environment is energized by innovations such as gamification, in which Ibarra incorporates platforms such as Kahoot, Quizziz and GimKit, and a flipped classroom model, where students utilize lecture content outside of class through videos and other digital materials. The latter approach maximizes in-class time for discussion, collaboration and hands-on activities,

creating a richer, more personalized learning experience.

Behind-the-scenes insight into the credentialing processes for graduating students informs Ibarra's innovative pedagogical methods. As a subject matter expert contracted with the National Healthcareer Association, he contributes to the development and revision of ExCPT certification exam items. He is also an active member of the Pharmacy Technician Society, a division of the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists and remains closely connected to the evolving landscape of pharmacy education.

Although his expertise lies in pharmacy, Ibarra doesn't let his field restrict his collaboration with instructors from other programs. As an educator, he believes that effective teaching transcends subject matter and emphasizes pedagogy and instructional strategies as the most profound influencers in student learning. He frequently engages in brainstorming sessions with colleagues from various disciplines, sharing and developing innovative teaching approaches to enhance student understanding and engagement across the curriculum. By fostering an environment where students are empowered to succeed, he is equipping the next generation of professionals to enter their careers with confidence.

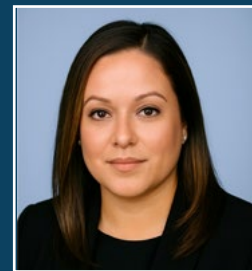


Ceferino Ibarra with his Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (PTCB) certificate.

Exceptional Educator Award

Jacklyn Otero

*Regional Program Manager for the
Bachelor's in Allied Health Program
NUC University Florida Technical College*



In her four years as the regional program manager for the bachelor's in allied health at NUC University Florida Technical College (NUC FTC), Jacklyn Otero has exemplified the highest ideals of service, leadership and impact, both within the institution and in the broader community. Her leadership is defined by heart and vision, and impacts the academic journey of more than 700 students across campuses.

Holding a medical assistant certification (CMA) through the American Association of Medical Assistants, along with degrees in allied health and medical assisting, Otero brings over two decades of clinical and instructional experience to every student interaction. She also earned her MBA while managing one of NUC University's highest-enrollment medical assisting programs, through which she demonstrated her deep commitment to student achievement while advancing her own education.

Her commitment is likewise evident in her role developing and teaching NUC University's Bilingual

Her commitment is likewise evident in her role developing and teaching NUC University's Bilingual Medical Assistant Program, a groundbreaking initiative designed to empower bilingual students through translanguaging techniques.

Medical Assistant Program, a groundbreaking initiative designed to empower bilingual students through translanguaging techniques. This innovative approach allows learners to seamlessly integrate their language skills while mastering a complex medical curriculum, significantly

enhancing both comprehension and career readiness.

Her innovative efforts extend into institutional leadership, where she has built a dynamic history of serving on key committees, leading curriculum reform, advancing equity and mentoring hundreds of students into healthcare careers. Encouraging the outreach of the school, she also leads events such as the Back-to-School Drive, Spring Festival and Christmas Party, which unite the community and show the school's ability to deliver essential healthcare services where they are needed most.

Over the past decade, her expertise has been particularly applied to curriculum development and academic planning, serving on NUC University's Academic Board and contributing to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) accreditation process, specifically focusing on Standard II, which upholds institutional integrity and educational quality. With its accreditation, NUC FTC can offer career-focused, postsecondary training in high-demand business and technical fields. With eight campuses across the state, its programs continue to evolve to meet the urgent and ever-changing needs of Florida's workforce. It serves as a catalyst for positive change, championing diversity, supporting underserved communities, and fostering inclusive economic growth. Collaborations with mission-aligned organizations reinforce the school's role as a trusted and impactful community partner.

The scope of Otero's meaningful contributions shows her influence in every corner. From her work developing the Bilingual Medical Assistant Program to her active contributions on the Academic Board and MSCHE accreditation team, Otero has helped shape a stronger, more inclusive academic environment. Through her visionary leadership, mentorship, and dedication to academic excellence, she has redefined what it means to innovate in healthcare education – creating inclusive, practical, and empowering pathways for the next generation of healthcare professionals.



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Linda Fedrizzi-Williams, Ed.D.
President
Central Penn College - Enola, PA

Top People Changing Career Education Award

If you were to poll students at Central Penn College about their school's president, they would describe Linda Fedrizzi-Williams, Ed.D., as beloved and inspiring. Not only an energetic fan at the school's games and competitions, she is hailed as a driven leader in expanding opportunities for students before and after graduation.

During her nine years at Central Penn College, seven of those years as its president, she has strategically adapted its educational offerings to meet evolving workforce needs, such as dental assisting, surgical technology, legal studies, criminal justice, and behavioral health. Developing these programs has established a college-to-career pipeline for students, giving them the opportunity to step into a secure future by building skills that equip them to fill economic gaps and attract future employers.

Bringing her attention to the other side of career engagement, Fedrizzi-Williams is proactive in building mutually productive relationships with leading employers, including the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania State Police, GIANT Foods, and high schools and workforce development groups. Her advocacy has prepared these groups and others to consider Central Penn College graduates as potential employees ready to help organizations achieve new potential.

Fedrizzi-Williams' relationships extend to area leaders, as well, appearing in circles beyond the immediate scope of education. Alongside these leaders, she has presented on a business panel, sharing her advice with poised professionalism

and expertise. Her career insights have also been shared in popular journals, including Pennlive and Central Penn Business Journal, which featured one of her most recognized speeches, "10 ideas in 10 minutes." Her investment and influence earned her a spot as one of the area's "Power 100," a recognition she has maintained for several consecutive years, and awards celebrating her for "Empowering Women" and as a "Woman of Influence."

Through her outreach, Central Penn College has experienced an enriched reputation reaching state and federal levels, where Fedrizzi-Williams has garnered support in policy and funding. By positioning the college as a launchpad for students to enter their careers with confidence, it sets an example for those invested in career education to see how supporting that focus will help both students and their institutions thrive.

Of all the relationships Fedrizzi-Williams cultivates, the ones with her students matter most. Her work is energized by a focus on supporting students both academically and individually, and she leans into inclusivity by embracing first-generation students and expanding athletic offerings for both men and women.

Emphasizing career education in the curriculum at Central Penn College is perhaps the most impactful way Fedrizzi-Williams helps students succeed. Students in any program can expect immersion in a curriculum that will foster diverse skillsets translatable to the "real world." Under Fedrizzi-Williams' leadership, they are prepared for life after graduation and fruitful careers.



Left: Dr. Linda Fedrizzi-Williams welcomes students from The Nativity School of Harrisburg to campus.



Right: Central Penn College's baseball team celebrates their conference championship victory at City Island in Harrisburg, PA.

Top People Changing Career Education Award

Larry Foster, Ed.D.
Chief Operating Officer
Tricoci University of Beauty Culture
(Locations across IL, IN & WI)



Larry Foster models transformational leadership in his role as chief operating officer of Tricoci University of Beauty Culture. While most makeovers don't happen overnight, his initiatives are reshaping the landscape of beauty and career education through innovation, inclusion, and industry collaboration.

Working from the inside out, Foster reimagined Tricoci University's curriculum by leading the removal of age, gender, and race from curriculum language and service menus, ensuring students and clients can anticipate an environment where they will be treated with dignity and respect. Foster reinforced this inclusive stance by initiating a groundbreaking partnership with the Vitality Wellness Project to bring student mental health education and wellness practices into the classroom, and with Sensory Safe to train educators and students on effectively and compassionately serving neurodiverse clients.

High school outreach initiatives such as Beauty Boot Camps are one of Foster's strategies for attracting potential students. These camps serve the dual purpose of driving enrollment from a wider, more diverse pipeline of students and providing early exposure to career education. Whether or not campers choose to enroll at Tricoci University, they will have grasped what it means to pursue a career-minded education that will strengthen their abilities and open doors to trades they may not have previously considered.

Bridging his work at Tricoci University into industry expansion, Foster launched Beauty Blitz, one of the largest independent student events in beauty education with over 3,000 attendees, 25-plus vendors, two education stages, and salon hiring partners. His industry-facing podcast engages virtual audiences, too, by sharing cutting-edge practices in beauty education and career pathways with educators, industry leaders, and prospective students nationwide.

He further demonstrates his dedication to the broader scope of career education by advocating against harmful deregulation in licensure and educational standards across the states, developing unified messages, engaging policymakers, and building coalitions with peer

institutions to protect both educational quality and consumer safety. Through his expansive efforts, he elevates awareness of the critical role career education plays in economic mobility and workforce development.

Foster regularly shares his experience and field-wide insights by speaking at conferences and events. He also co-hosts the "Daymakers" podcast with Daved Dolce, an inspirational platform for educators and industry professionals to hear the latest innovations in teaching, inclusion, student mental health, alumni success, and career outcomes.

Career education gains power as a dynamic and relevant force in today's workforce ecosystem, thanks to Foster's initiatives. By creating and utilizing diverse avenues of growth and engaging with partners like the Vitality Wellness Project and Sensory Safe, Foster has broadened the visibility of career education. Improved enrollment, retention, student wellbeing, licensure outcomes, and career readiness prove the effectiveness of his model, positioning Foster as a leader in both beauty and career education.



Larry Foster with Tricoci University of Beauty Culture colleagues at the 2025 Next Gen Beauty Camp showcase in Indianapolis.

Top People Changing Career Education Award

CECU AI Task Force



Stephen Arthur
Co-chair
Director of AI and Analytics
ECPI University



Dana B. Hutton
Co-chair
Chief Marketing & Enrollment Management Officer
Southeastern College



Mitch Talenfeld
Co-chair
CEO
MDT Marketing

When ChatGPT was launched in November 2022, it became clear that generative artificial intelligence (AI) would reshape every facet of business and education. Recognizing both its promise and risk, Career Education Colleges and Universities (CECU) proactively moved to safeguard career schools and their students. By summer 2024, CECU's board of directors had authorized the formation of an AI Task Force charged with developing a best practices guide to help member institutions adopt AI tools responsibly, protect consumer trust and comply with emerging laws and regulations.

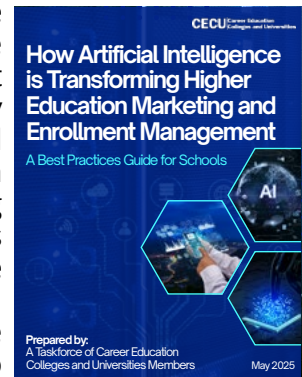
The AI Task Force was comprised of nearly 40 volunteers and co-chaired by Stephen Arthur, director of AI and Analytics at ECPI University, Dana B. Hutton, Chief Marketing and Enrollment Management Officer at Southeastern College, and Mitch Talenfeld, CEO of MDT Marketing. After investing countless personal hours over the past year, volunteers released the guide at the 2025 North American Career Education Convention this summer. The co-chairs also wrote articles, posted on LinkedIn, appeared on higher-education podcasts, and more.

The comprehensive guide, "[How Artificial Intelligence is Transforming Higher Education Marketing and Enrollment Management: A Best Practices Guide for Schools](#)," serves as both a roadmap and a cautionary framework for higher education institutions. Delving into marketing and enrollment, it illustrates how AI can be used as a tool to enhance human oversight in these areas, using predictive analytics and generative tools to attract, engage, and enroll students. Both opportunities

and challenges are addressed, including the ability to personalize at scale, improve efficiency in communication, and data for informed decision making, while considering the technology's risks around bias, compliance and privacy.

Within the guide are ideas on how to implement AI according to its strengths, with the ultimate goal of improving student success and institutional outcomes. Ideas include the endorsement of using AI tools to create highly tailored marketing campaigns, generating text for emails, blogs and social media, chatbots for instant student support, and visual generation for compelling storytelling. Generating predictive and descriptive analytics can further empower marketing efforts by identifying prospective students and optimizing outreach timing and support enrollment management by forecasting enrollment trends and informing financial aid communication.

Implementing these AI tools will help institutions harness the technology to best serve their purposes. Through the guide, institutions will have their questions answered on how to maximize the technology's creative and administrative abilities while balancing legal and ethical considerations, an extensive overview of which can be found in the appendices. As a bonus, the guide also offers a framework for successful AI adoption that keeps



student outcomes at the center.

“By issuing this report and recommendations, we are stepping forward to help lead this effort with transparency and accountability,” said Jason Altmire, CEO and President of CECU. “It is our hope that the information presented in this report will help drive student success and maximize educational outcomes, positioning our graduates to continue to succeed in the ever-changing workforce.”

Through swift action, thoughtful collaboration and transparent advocacy, the CECU AI Task Force exemplified visionary leadership, equipping career education institutions with the guidance needed to harness AI’s benefits while safeguarding student outcomes and industry integrity. Their dedication and persistence through challenges such as evolving technologies and shifting regulations exemplify the passion and professionalism that have made this best-practices guide possible.

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What Are You Doing to Save Money on Course Materials?

Cost Savings Strategies that Have the Biggest Impact

By Marc Konesco, Senior Vice President of Sales, Ambassador Education Solutions



Course materials affordability remains a constant concern for students and schools, especially when you consider that students who skip purchasing materials are also more likely to think about dropping out, impacting their success and campus retention rates.

There are several ways your school can help reduce course materials costs, easing the financial burden students face while also improving your bottom line. Awareness and transparency are key – from operational considerations like various delivery models and duplicate prevention controls, to understanding pricing models, applying data analytics, and accurately reconciling invoices.

Under the current administration, career schools have more opportunities to grow. Helping students save money is one such way schools can better serve students and, ultimately, grow their programs. If you are looking for new and better ways to save money on course materials, there is a myriad of strategies to consider. We've seen the biggest impact come from the following:

Make sure you are not paying for duplicate materials and items for dropped students

We see it time and time again – charges on invoices for duplicate materials where students purchase an item again without realizing they already have an active license from a prior term or course, as well as charges for dropped students who never even accessed their materials. Unfortunately, schools and students end up paying for materials they don't need or use. It's imperative you only pay for net items that are accurately provisioned. When the controls are in place to verify licenses, access, and drops, we've seen schools save up to 40% on course materials costs.

Offer automatic fulfillment and access programs

Automatic fulfillment and access programs provide students with print, digital and other materials by the first day of class, and all students need to do is enroll. These programs are not only convenient, but they save money too. Oftentimes discount pricing is available, and more students obtaining more materials means lower costs all around. We've even seen these kinds of programs yield savings of 40% to 60% off publisher list price. Automatic fulfillment and access programs can be done at the course and program level, depending on the needs of your students and school. It's important that your faculty understand how these programs work and when materials are available. You also want to make sure you have the processes

in place to apply financial credits for students who opt-out – employing checks and balances to make sure students are not overpaying.

Use your data and verify your course materials invoices

Course materials data can be a powerful asset. When you can track exactly what is being purchased and what is being used, then you'll know exactly what you owe – no more blindly relying on third-party invoices. Again, the checks and balances are important, so you and your students don't overpay. You can also use your course materials financial data to support publisher negotiations, ensuring you get the best price possible, and that the prices quoted are the prices reflected on the invoices.

Leverage performance reports to gauge savings and compare metrics and terms

From general sales, inventory, and financial reports, to booklist and affordability reports, make sure you have easy access to all analytics and that they are presented in applicable ways so you can better understand your true costs. For example, a semester summary report can provide insights into all course materials metrics over a term, including number of courses, number of SKU's, number of distinct titles, number of distinct student orders, sales, returns, credit card purchases, voucher purchases, items shipped by each method, and more. You can compare terms, identify trends, and assess indicators and turning points in pricing, purchases, and revenue, all in an effort to keep course materials costs down.

Educate your faculty and staff on course materials formats and costs

When faculty and staff can clearly see the costs of course materials during the booklist adoption process, some may decide against using a particular item because of the increasing cost to students. Or, some may choose a different format if it means it can save students money. Also, when faculty and staff select items that will be used again in a subsequent term, students can recoup more money for those items through buyback programs.

No matter your course materials approach, costs must be kept in check in order to increase the likelihood that students will comfortably and confidently purchase course materials, ultimately strengthening engagement and success. After all, students who obtain materials are more likely to be prepared for class and retained in their courses and programs – both of which lead to better learning experiences and a healthier bottom line.

About Ambassador Education Solutions

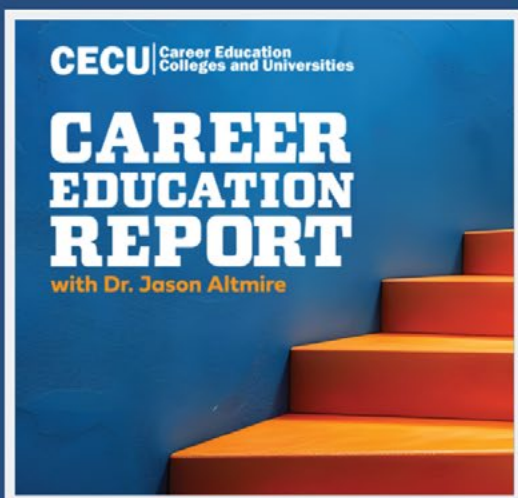
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Marc Konesco

At Ambassador Education Solutions, Marc is charged with helping schools understand and deliver effective, affordable course materials models that adapt to the changing needs of students. Marc has a long tenured run in school, technology, and publisher management. He has held leadership positions at publishing, online learning, and enrollment marketing companies, and led strategy and operations for a career school. Marc is an active member of CECU and sits on the CECU Exhibitor Taskforce.

CECU | Career Education Colleges and Universities



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DRIVE STUDENT ENROLLMENT WITH COURSES ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

While there is a great deal of uncertainty over how artificial intelligence technologies are going to evolve in the coming years, there is broad agreement that their collective economic impact is going to be massive. Summarizing a recent study by the International Monetary Fund, economist and IMF director Kristalina Georgieva predicts that “we may see polarization within income brackets, with workers who can harness AI seeing an increase in their productivity and wages—and those who cannot falling behind”.

These kinds of claims and predictions have been widely circulated in the online discourse surrounding artificial intelligence. Everyone wants to know how artificial intelligence may impact their job. Thanks to the growing capacities of large language models and generative AI, there is a growing sense that no jobs will be left unaffected. For that reason, it is no surprise that students at the beginning of their career journey are prioritizing programs that can help them understand how AI tools will impact their industry, regardless of what that industry may be.

By offering AI-focused courses in their programs, colleges can position themselves as leaders in preparing students for the future. What this offering will look like can vary based on the program: For instance, digital marketing programs can be supplemented with courses on working with generative AI tools for developing and editing marketing content. Conversely, a business management program might offer courses exploring the role that AI-powered analytics tools can play in everything from project management to budget forecasting. More broadly, courses on artificial intelligence literacy can ensure that students looking to start careers in any industry are equipped with the knowledge and skills to evaluate and leverage AI-powered tools in their work.

Of course, developing and maintaining courses on AI can be challenging. Artificial intelligence technologies are constantly evolving, as are the tactics and strategies that professionals use to work with AI tools. It's with these challenges in mind that Mujo Learning Systems developed our AI for Business program. Our textbooks provide students with up-to-date coverage on artificial

intelligence and its application in a wide range of business contexts. Our course packages also include evaluation materials, presentation slides, course projects, discussion questions, and hands-on activities, and lecture videos, giving colleges the flexibility to deliver our courses in-person or online.

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1. Georgieva, Kristalina. “AI Will Transform The Global Economy. Let’s Make Sure It Benefits Humanity. IMF Blog, 2024, <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2024/01/14/ai-will-transform-the-global-economy-lets-make-sure-it-benefits-humanity>

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Florida Education Institute's Culinary Program Blends Tradition, Creativity, and Community

*Written from an interview with Chef Isamar Leal,
Culinary School Director, Florida Education Institute*

In Miami's vibrant culinary landscape, Florida Education Institute (FEI) has carved out a reputation for preparing students to thrive in kitchens, bakeries, media studios, and entrepreneurial ventures. Known for its hands-on programs in Culinary Arts and Pastry and Baking Arts, the school provides more than technical training; it offers students a foundation in creativity, sustainability, and entrepreneurship.

At the heart of the program is Chef Isamar Leal, affectionately called Chef Isa by her students. As Culinary School Director, she brings an unmistakable energy to the kitchen classroom. Her philosophy is simple but powerful: chefs are born with a calling, and education gives them the tools to turn passion into possibility.

"You either have it or you don't," she often tells her students, recalling her own childhood memories cooking alongside her grandmother and father in Venezuela. Though her mother hoped she would pursue another career, Isa followed her instincts and blended her business education with culinary training. That combination, she says, gave her the perfect foundation to eventually lead a culinary school.

Her career path has been as diverse as the opportunities she now highlights for her students. Isa has opened restaurants, worked in food media, managed branding and marketing, taught children in culinary camps, and developed curriculum. Each

experience deepened her understanding of the many ways culinary professionals can make their mark. "You just have to be creative and take what you love and build it," she says.

That philosophy is at the core of FEI's culinary programs. Students begin with diploma programs in Culinary Arts or Pastry and Baking Arts. These intensive, skill-driven courses cover everything from knife techniques to food service entrepreneurship, from laminated dough to modern gastronomy. Once students complete the diploma, they can seamlessly transfer credits toward an associate degree in either Culinary Hospitality Management or Baking and Pastry Management.

The curriculum is designed with industry needs in mind. Students master foundational techniques like sauces, artisan breads, and pastry laminations, while also learning sustainable culinary production, food safety, and modern culinary innovations. Entrepreneurship is built into the program as well. Students explore how to open food trucks, launch catering businesses, or develop personal brands through social media. As Isa puts it, "We're training human beings, not just teaching them how to cook."

One of the features that distinguishes FEI is its commitment to sustainability and community engagement. Students take field trips to local farms, sustainable fisheries, and markets to see where food comes from and to understand the value of seasonal products. They are introduced



After a day of working in the kitchen, students in FEI's Culinary Arts program present their creations, showcasing the lessons and techniques they have learned.



CECU's Jason Altmire, joined by FEI leadership: Ramon Valenti IV, Ramon Valenti III, Alejandro Hernandez, M.D., and Chef Isamar Leal, MDM, M.E.



Young chefs make their own pizzas at FEI's summer camp, fostering community engagement and giving kids a glimpse into their parents' school.

to farm-to-table concepts not as a trend but as a responsibility. "Food in season tastes better, costs less, and supports our local community," Isa explains.

The school also emphasizes Miami's unique multicultural environment. Students hail from across the Caribbean, Latin America, and beyond, bringing their culinary traditions into the classroom. For Isa, food is a universal language. "Everybody here speaks different languages, but I know everybody speaks the same that I do, which is food," she says. This cultural richness not only enhances the learning environment but also reflects the global nature of Miami's culinary industry.

FEI's student body is also diverse in age and experience. While some arrive straight from high school, many are working adults, veterans, or second-career professionals. Isa proudly recalls recent graduates in their 50s, 60s, and even 70s. For some, culinary school is a lifelong dream; for others, it is a way to reinvent themselves. No matter their background, the program offers them tools to succeed.

Hands-on learning extends beyond the

classroom. Students regularly participate in community events, catering opportunities, and even television appearances with partners like Univision and Channel 10. These experiences allow them to practice under real-world conditions like transporting food, setting up quickly, and serving under tight deadlines. They also build confidence in networking and presenting themselves professionally.

Guest chefs from Miami and around the world are another highlight. Isa ensures that students learn from both seasoned international chefs and rising local entrepreneurs. One week they may attend a master class on laminated dough from a Spanish pastry expert; another week they might hear from a young food truck owner who built a thriving business in just a few years. "I want them to see role models at every level," Isa says.

The impact of this approach can be seen in the students' successes. Isa proudly shares the story of a young woman who presented a food truck concept in her entrepreneurship class and, within a month, turned it into a reality. "She came from Cuba just two years ago with no money and no English, but she found a way," Isa recalls. "That's the

power of combining passion with the right tools.”

FEI also hosts workshops and summer camps for families, children, and teens, reinforcing Isa’s belief that food education should start early. For adult students balancing family responsibilities, these camps provide opportunities for their children to see firsthand what their parents are studying. The program culminates in a unique capstone: each graduating student creates a pop-up restaurant where they design a concept, prepare a menu, and serve family, friends, and industry guests. It is both a celebration and a demonstration of the skills they have mastered.

Isa’s passion for teaching is palpable, and her students often reflect that energy back. She insists on instilling what she calls “success habits,” ten guiding principles that align with each month of the program. From adaptability to teamwork, these habits are meant to prepare students not only for the kitchen but also for life. “We give them everything,” she says. “But it’s up to them, too.”

For Isa, the ultimate goal is not just to create chefs but to help individuals discover their unique paths within the vast food industry. Opportunities extend far beyond restaurant kitchens. Graduates can become food stylists, social media influencers,

culinary educators, product developers, or entrepreneurs. Some will enter corporate food research, while others may dedicate themselves to community nutrition or senior care. “We inspire our students to show who they really are,” Isa explains. “As chefs, we showcase our art through food.”

Miami is an ideal backdrop for such training. With its international influences, dynamic restaurant scene, and opportunities in hospitality, media, and events, the city offers students countless avenues to explore. FEI leverages these connections to help place students in internships and jobs that match their skills and aspirations.

For Chef Isa, leading the culinary school is not just a job it is the fulfillment of her lifelong passion. From her grandmother’s kitchen in Venezuela to Miami’s classrooms and studios, she has embraced every opportunity to learn, create, and share. Now, she channels that same spirit into guiding her students.

At Florida Education Institute, that passion translates into a program that prepares students for more than a career. It prepares them for a future where their creativity, resilience, and love of food can shape not only their lives but also their communities.

In FEI’s Pastry and Baking Arts labs, students perfect techniques from dough work to decorative finishes.



AI With a S.H.I.F.T.S. Mindset: Rethinking Admissions Through Relationship-First Recruitment

By Dallin Palmer, Co-Founder and COO, Halda



Is your admissions team ready to tackle the future of recruitment?

AI is shaking up industries everywhere, and higher education is no exception. For career and technical colleges, this couldn't come at a better time. With ongoing enrollment challenges and changing student expectations, adopting AI is a must.

But here's the thing: AI alone won't solve everything. If it's not used thoughtfully, it could actually damage trust with students who are already feeling wary. To really make a difference, AI needs to be used in a way that puts relationships first, focusing on meaningful connections throughout the admissions process.

That's where Halda's S.H.I.F.T.S. Framework comes in. It's a relationship-first admissions model designed to help colleges get the most out of AI while building stronger, more trusted relationships with students.

Two Forces Reshaping Admissions Strategy

1. The Rise of AI in Admissions

One of the most obvious benefits of using AI is automation — from tasks like transcript evaluations, essay reviews, and even recognizing behavioral patterns. It's making life easier and reducing unconscious biases in admission (when used thoughtfully).

The perks are hard to ignore:

- Quicker responses to student questions
- Personalized interactions, even at scale
- More time for staff to focus on meaningful work

However, if automation focuses too much on efficiency, it can feel cold and impersonal. For career education institutions, especially those working with nontraditional students, that's a risk you just can't take.

2. The ROI-Focused Student Mindset

Students today are approaching college like savvy consumers, and their focus is clear: ROI. They want to know that their education will lead to real results, like landing a good-paying job or advancing their career.

This "consumer mindset" brings new expectations for colleges and universities:

- Programs that prepare students for a changing job market
- Personalized, value-driven

communication that feels relevant to prospective students

- Trust and authenticity from the very first interaction with admissions

To set themselves apart, institutions need to rethink how they communicate and engage with students. And this is where AI can make all the difference through a more personal, relational approach.

Why AI Needs a Relationship-First Framework

The Pitfalls of Efficiency-First AI

When AI is used only for operational efficiency, it risks:

- Dehumanizing processes that lead students to feel like just another number
- Mistrust, particularly among first-generation and working adult students who rely on personal support
- Lower engagement, as students become disengaged from impersonal interactions

Career education institutions often serve students who are making life-changing decisions about their future. These students deserve more than transactional interactions; they need empathetic, personalized support at every stage of the process.

Introducing Halda's S.H.I.F.T.S. Framework

Halda's S.H.I.F.T.S. Framework provides a roadmap for using AI in a way that fosters meaningful, relationship-first recruitment. Each letter in the framework addresses a pillar of effective, empathetic admissions practices:

S - Survey

Ask, don't just tell. Skip the one-sided communications and engage students in meaningful dialogue.

H - Help

Make every interaction valuable by providing guidance, solutions, or resources tailored to students' needs. The most helpful brands during the admissions process will win the student in the coming years.

I - Individualize

Go beyond personalization to individualize every touchpoint and show students they are uniquely understood. AI finally makes this possible at scale.

F - Face

Ensure every interaction feels human by using authentic language and connecting students with real people.

T - Trigger

Reach out when students are most receptive, not when it's most convenient for you. Set up your enrollment marketing tech stack to be able to detect and take action when the window of influence is open.

S - Speed

Respond quickly and consistently to build trust and maintain engagement.

Applying S.H.I.F.T.S. to AI Strategy

How can institutions deploy AI to align with the S.H.I.F.T.S. Framework? Let's break it down by pillar:

1. Survey

Turn passive calls-to-action into interactive dialogues.

- Use AI-powered interfaces that actively engage students ("Is this program right for me?").
- Move from "Apply Now" to "Let's explore this together." Skip the hard sell and invite students into exploratory conversations about their goals, challenges, and aspirations.

2. Help

Offer value in every interaction.

- Deploy AI to deliver resources like program-specific career guides or tuition calculators instantly.
- Replace generic floor brochures with dynamic, customized content tailored to the student's interests and needs.

3. Individualized

Build Amazon-style journeys with AI-based personalization.

- Track student behavior to recommend

content and programs relevant to their goals.

- Use tailored re-engagement tactics, like sending follow-up messages based on abandoned application forms or interest in specific fields.

4. Face

Make it feel like a conversation, not a campaign.

- Plain-text emails from counselors (even AI-assisted) outperform flashy templates and generic senders.
- Train AI systems to replicate the tone of human advisors, ensuring every interaction feels genuine and supportive.

5. Trigger

Engage students when they are most receptive.

- Use AI to analyze student habits and trigger messages at key moments of intent (e.g., after they view job placement data).
- Implement dynamic retargeting campaigns to meet students exactly where they are in their decision process.

6. Speed

Be fast, but be consistent.

- AI search tools and agents can provide instant answers to FAQs, helping students get the information they need without delay, 24/7. Think about having a helpful assistant available when your call center reps are sleeping.
- Follow interactions with agents with personal outreach from counselors to maintain a human touch. Offer transfers to human staff upon request. The headline? Use AI to get questions answered; use humans to build relationships.

Combining AI with the S.H.I.F.T.S. Framework allows career education institutions to:

- Map labor market trends to program offerings dynamically
- Personalize ROI-driven messaging to address students' financial concerns
- Build confidence in career-aligned programs, making them feel like low-risk, high-reward opportunities

Implementing AI the S.H.I.F.T.S. Way

Whether you're new to exploring how AI can

support your enrollment efforts or you want to take a fresh look at your current approach, here's how to get started with Halda's Framework in mind:

1. Audit Your Funnel

Evaluate where personalization, timeliness, or speed are lacking in your admissions process.

2. Start Small and Scale Up

Pilot AI-enhanced tools like upgraded inquiry forms or dynamic FAQs before rolling out full-scale changes.

3. Train Your Admissions Team

Make sure your team has the skills to use AI as an enhancer, not a replacement, for their expertise.

4. Choose the Right Tools

It might be tempting to use several different tools with AI features, but the smarter move is to go for a platform that covers more of your needs. The real power of AI comes from working with one strong, unified database. If your data and insights are spread out across ten different tools, you're not just creating a messy setup – you're setting yourself up for a fragmented student experience and a lot of headaches down the road.

Technology With Heart Wins the Future

AI doesn't have to make admissions impersonal. And when it's paired with Halda's S.H.I.F.T.S. Framework, it becomes a relationship multiplier. The institutions that succeed in this environment will be the ones that use technology to augment, not diminish, their human touch.

Halda is rewriting the rules of student recruitment. Purpose-built for education, Halda combines multiple communication channels – web, email, phone, and SMS – into one smart, full-funnel platform, empowering you to achieve more, faster.

Ready to learn more? Visit Halda.ai.



Dallin Palmer is the Co-Founder and COO of Halda, the only AI-powered enrollment platform built to engage students at every moment of high intent.

Halda helps institutions individualize the enrollment experience across web, email, video, voice and SMS—automating the process of guiding prospective students from first click to enrollment.

A seasoned entrepreneur with deep experience in education technology and student engagement, Dallin is passionate about making access to education simpler, more human, and more effective. Prior to Halda, he held leadership roles at Chegg and Zinch China, working at the intersection of global education and student recruitment.

Dallin holds a BA in International Relations, Economics, and Chinese from Brigham Young University and is an alumnus of Y Combinator, the selective startup accelerator that accepts less than 1% of applicants.



From Welding Sparks to Changing Lives MTI and DTC Forge Futures

*Written from an interview with Brian Huff, CEO and owner of Midwest
Technical Institute (MTI) and Delta Technical College (DTC)*

For Brian Huff, CEO and owner of Midwest Technical Institute (MTI) and Delta Technical College (DTC), the spark for creating a school began while he was nearly a decade into his welding career. Working at an ADM processing plant, he noticed the absence of local training opportunities. “Man, I can’t believe there’s not a welding school here,” he recalled thinking at the time. Employees were being sent from Illinois to Ohio or even further to train in pipe welding. What started as a joke about building a welding school led to research, business planning, and a partnership. The belief was simple: if they could teach others what they knew, they could get them jobs.

The early days were filled with uncertainty. Huff admits that the biggest challenge was finding anyone willing to believe in the idea. At only 28, he had little experience with banks or loans and was eager for a single investor. With support from the Small Business Administration, financing was secured, and Huff assured the bank that enrolling 20 students would be enough to get by. Instead, 60 students signed up in the first year, and within another year enrollment reached 200.

From the outset, job placement defined the mission. Calls were made to employers, weld tests were arranged, and graduates were placed into jobs. That focus quickly spread by word of mouth, and local agencies began sending students for training. When shops requested more production welders, the school expanded into MIG welding to meet demand. Graduates were starting stable careers, increasing their incomes, and supporting their families.

Today, MTI and DTC operate six campuses across the Midwest and Mid-South, offering programs in welding and pipefitting, HVAC and refrigeration, electrical, dental assisting, medical assisting, medical coding, trucking, cosmetology, and more. The schools monitor labor market needs and expand programs to meet local demand. Most offerings are certificate-based, built to prepare students for the certifications and qualifications necessary to enter the workforce. The majority of programs can be completed in under a year, with training focused only on job-relevant skills rather than general education classes.

Although the schools began with skilled trades, they later expanded into allied health fields. Huff admits that at first, he questioned the decision. “We’re welders, how is this going to work?” he thought. But with the right faculty and staff in place, MTI and DTC successfully grew into the medical field, where graduates make immediate contributions to their communities.

The demand for skilled trades has only strengthened enrollment. Since 2020, the schools have seen steady growth, enrolling a record number of students last year. Huff has noticed a generational shift. Gen Z students are increasingly moving away from traditional college paths, concerned about accumulating debt and struggling to find jobs afterward. They see the skilled trades as reliable, “replacement resistant” careers in a world reshaped by AI and automation. As Huff explained, you cannot automate someone fixing an air conditioner. While technology may change how trades operate, the human element for precision



Right: Gloved up in the lab, an MTI Dental Assisting student practices chair side techniques. **Middle:** MTI's CDL student takes the driver's seat toward a high-demand career. **Left:** A DTI electrician-in-training is mastering the craft.



Future drivers at MTI pose in front of the truck and smiles all around as MTI graduates mark their achievement.



and safety remains essential.

The student body is diverse, including those fresh out of high school, military veterans, parents, and working adults pursuing new careers. After more than three decades in operation, the schools are now seeing second-generation students, the children of graduates from the 1990s. For Huff, this continuity reflects the confidence families have in the education offered.

Job placement continues to be the measure of success. Nearly 3,000 students were placed into jobs last year through dedicated placement coordinators who provide resume workshops, tutoring, career fairs, and one-on-one connections with employers. From the moment students enroll, they have access to resources and guidance to help them transition into careers.

The schools are equally committed to their communities. Students and faculty regularly contribute their skills to local projects, from HVAC students working on Habitat for Humanity builds in Illinois to medical assisting students offering free blood pressure checks for seniors in Tennessee. During natural disasters, MTI and DTC mobilize across all campuses. After hurricanes Harvey and Helene, supplies were collected, loaded into semi-trucks, and delivered directly to affected areas by the trucking department. Community service has become a central part of the student experience, reinforcing the belief that technical skills can also serve the greater good.

Another hallmark of the schools is the High School Scholarship Program. Designed to reach students who want to pursue the trades, the scholarship is not based on test scores or academics. Huff describes it as an opportunity for seniors who demonstrate passion, dedication, and initiative. The application process is simple, and awards range from \$2,000 up to full tuition. In 2025, nearly 250 seniors received scholarships totaling almost \$715,000. For many, the program provides a pathway they might otherwise miss.

Since their founding, MTI and DTC have graduated more than 35,000 students. Huff points to their accomplishments with pride, noting that they entered without skills and left with the ability to provide for themselves and their families. "We believe learning a skilled trade can change someone's life," he said. For Huff, the mission has always been about more than filling jobs. "We know the foundation of everything is built from the skilled trades. And we are honored to be a part of training the next generation of skilled workers who make our country and our world a better place."



Brian Huff is the CEO of Midwest Technical Institute (MTI) and Delta Technical College (DTC), two nationally accredited institutions with six locations across the Midwest and Mid-South. The school's mission is

to change lives through hands-on workforce training. A welder by trade, his journey is a testament to the power of skilled trades and the life-changing opportunities they provide. With decades of experience in workforce development and technical education, he now leads with a mission to close the skills gap, empower the next generation of skilled workers, and place graduates in jobs. His passion for real-world training, student success, and industry growth continues to drive innovative programs that meet the needs of both employers and communities across the country. MTI & DTC's mission is to offer workforce training and to provide graduates with the skills necessary to gain entry-level employment in their chosen career field.

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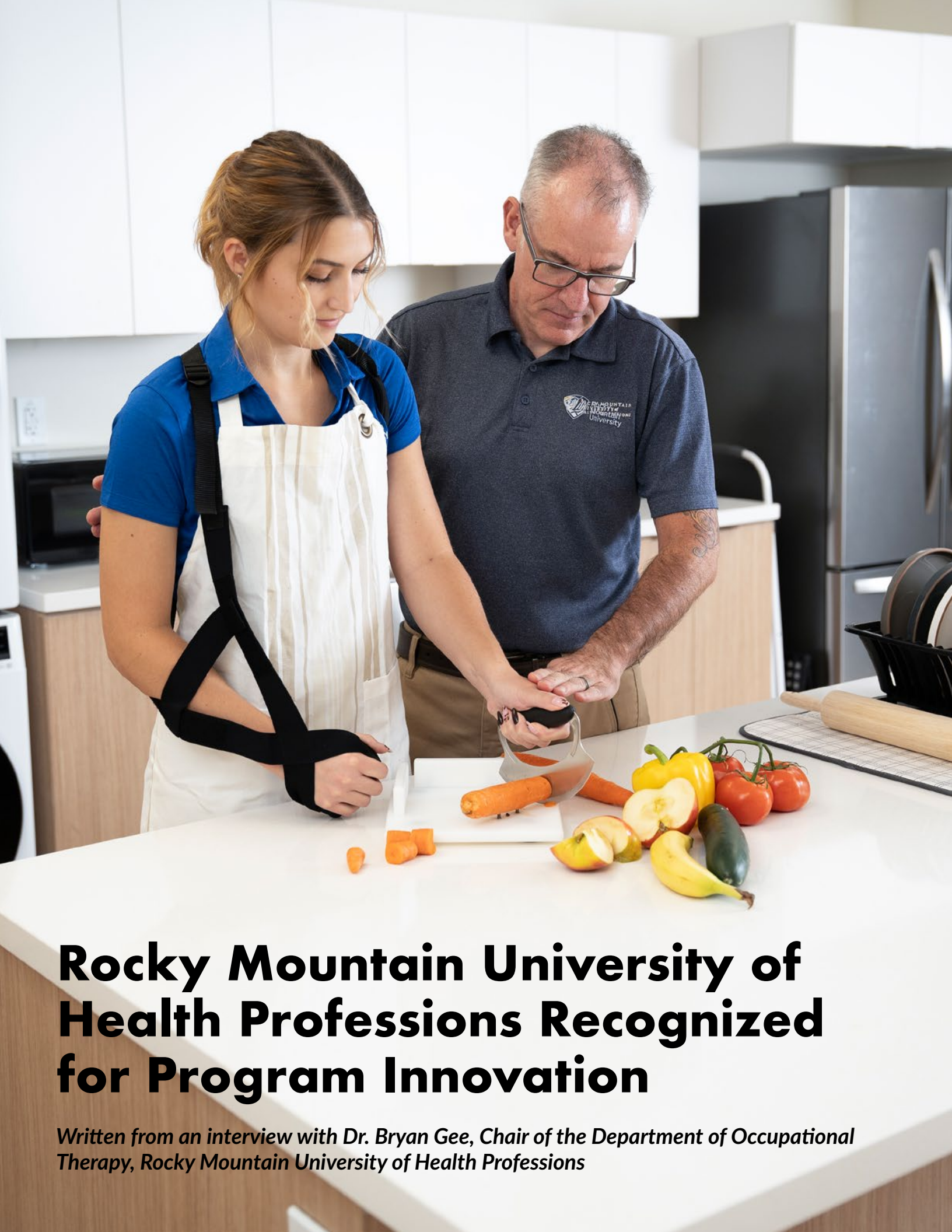
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Rocky Mountain University of Health Professions Recognized for Program Innovation

Written from an interview with Dr. Bryan Gee, Chair of the Department of Occupational Therapy, Rocky Mountain University of Health Professions

Founded in Provo, Utah, in 1998, Rocky Mountain University of Health Professions (RMU) has steadily grown into a national leader in healthcare education. Established by two visionary physical therapists, Dr. Richard Nielsen and Dr. Michael Skurges, the university was built on the idea that technology could transform health sciences training. Long before remote and hybrid learning became common, RMU embraced online education to broaden access to professional degrees. Today, the university offers programs across eight healthcare disciplines, including physical therapy, speech-language pathology, nursing, optometry, physician assistant studies, and occupational therapy.

RMU has built a reputation for adapting quickly to workforce needs. When administrators saw a shortage of optometrists in the Intermountain West, they launched the region's first optometry program. The same spirit of responsiveness has guided RMU's occupational therapy programs, which were recently recognized with the 2025 Utah Best of State Award for Curriculum Development.

Dr. Bryan Gee, Chair of the Department of Occupational Therapy, credits the award to the forward-looking design of programs like the MOT Bridge and the 3+3 program with Utah Valley University. Both are examples of how RMU addresses urgent healthcare shortages with innovative educational pathways.

Occupational therapy itself is in high demand. Nationally, the profession faces a 20 to 22 percent shortage that is expected to persist for decades, driven largely by an aging population. People

are living longer, want to remain independent, and rely on occupational therapists to help them adapt, recover, or continue engaging in meaningful daily activities. In Utah and neighboring states, the shortage is even more pronounced, given fewer local training options.

For those unfamiliar with occupational therapy, Dr. Gee describes it as the "functional profession." Unlike medicine, which measures outcomes in lab values or imaging, OT is concerned with whether people can do what they need and want to do in life safely and independently. Its scope ranges from rehabilitation after injury to supporting people with disabilities, helping older adults remain at home, and addressing psychosocial needs. OT's roots in mental health remain a defining characteristic. Practitioners are recognized as mental health professionals at the federal level and work in diverse settings from substance abuse clinics to community shelters.

RMU's entry-level occupational therapy programs are hybrid, blending online coursework with in-person labs and clinical placements. Students participate in synchronous lectures via video platforms, complete asynchronous modules, and then travel to campus twice each semester for intensive lab sessions. These visits allow students to demonstrate competencies in assessments, interventions, and psychomotor skills.

To ensure students are prepared before they arrive, faculty use tools like GoReact, a video-based feedback platform. Instructors review student submissions, provide detailed commentary, and correct techniques before students practice in



Whether it is folding laundry or returning to daily routines, OTs empower individuals to regain independence and confidence in everyday life. Occupational therapy is all about finding ways to do daily tasks.

person. Clinical experiences begin as early as the second semester, with fieldwork embedded into coursework. Students pursuing the OTD complete a doctoral capstone, developing advanced practice skills or contributing to research and program development.

The program also weaves mental health into every stage of training. “In every intervention-based course, students are taught to recognize and address psychosocial factors,” Dr. Gee said. Whether working with pediatric clients, adults, or caregivers, students learn to account for mental health influences on recovery and adaptation. This holistic perspective is one of RMU’s hallmarks.

The Best of State award highlighted two standout innovations. The first is the 3+3 program with Utah Valley University. Under this model, students spend three years completing their undergraduate studies at UVU before transitioning to RMU in what would traditionally be their senior year. Courses at RMU substitute for UVU’s final-year requirements, enabling students to finish both their bachelor’s and doctorate degrees in just over five years instead of seven. The acceleration saves students time and an estimated \$15,000 to \$20,000 in tuition while getting them into the workforce a year earlier with a starting salary that averages between \$85,000 and \$90,000.

The second innovation is RMU’s Master of Occupational Therapy Bridge Program. One of only two programs west of the Mississippi, it provides

The second innovation is RMU’s Master of Occupational Therapy Bridge Program. One of only two programs west of the Mississippi, it provides a pathway for certified occupational therapy assistants (COTAs) to advance into full OT practice.

a pathway for certified occupational therapy assistants (COTAs) to advance into full OT practice. Many assistants enter the profession intending to pursue higher credentials, and this program offers them a streamlined route. It also responds to



Rocky Mountain University of Health Professions is a graduate healthcare institution that offers high-quality and evidence-based master’s and doctoral degree programs in various healthcare specialties with a diverse student body and faculty.

market shifts, as reimbursement changes in some care settings have limited opportunities for COTAs. “Some skilled nursing facilities are relying more on group therapy models, which means fewer jobs for assistants,” Dr. Gee explained. “The bridge program ensures these professionals can continue growing in their careers.”

RMU’s hybrid model not only benefits students but also helps attract faculty. Because instructors can teach remotely, the university draws experts from across the country and even internationally. This diversity enriches the classroom with varied perspectives on practice, policy, and patient needs. It also reflects RMU’s commitment to inclusive education. About half of OT students come from outside Utah, bringing different cultural and life experiences that broaden classroom discussions and clinical approaches.

The university’s community clinics further connect students to real-world practice while serving local residents. RMU operates clinics in Provo and surrounding areas, offering services on a sliding scale or pro bono. These clinics provide essential access to healthcare for underinsured and uninsured populations while also functioning as clinical training sites for students. Plans are underway to expand collaborations between the optometry and OT programs to better serve individuals with low vision, demonstrating how

RMU integrates education with community impact.

The occupational therapy department, like all of RMU, is also preparing students for the realities of practicing in a rapidly changing healthcare environment. Artificial intelligence is one area of both opportunity and concern. While AI is increasingly used in clinical documentation and planning, RMU emphasizes the importance of ethical use and clinical reasoning. Students may experiment with AI-generated treatment plans but are required to identify flaws and supplement them with evidence-based corrections. The exercise illustrates both the potential and limitations of technology in healthcare.

Dr. Gee sees the future of healthcare education leaning further toward hybrid and competency-based models. He anticipates more programs moving away from rigid semester schedules to approaches that allow students to advance as soon as they demonstrate proficiency. This flexibility, combined with innovative curricula, will be essential in addressing national workforce shortages.

RMU's recognition with the Utah Best of State Award underscores the university's ability to anticipate and respond to the needs of healthcare and higher education. By accelerating pathways, bridging professional roles, and embracing hybrid delivery, RMU is creating models that not only prepare students for meaningful careers but also strengthen the communities they serve.

"We look at what the workforce needs and then tailor our programs to meet that demand," Dr. Gee said. "That's why students come to RMU and why they succeed."



Dr. Bryan M. Gee, Ph.D., OTD, OTR/L, BCP, CLA, FAOTA, holds degrees from Idaho State University (Ph.D. & M.Ed.), the University of St. Augustine (OTD), and D'Youville University (BS/MS). He is board-certified

in Pediatrics by the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) and has an extensive research background, with over 40 peer-reviewed publications and more than 80 national presentations. His scholarship focuses on teaching and learning, sensory-based interventions, therapy dosage and practice patterns, parent education and training, and sensory processing.

Dr. Gee has been with Rocky Mountain University of Health Professions (RMUoHP) since 2014, initially serving as an adjunct instructor in the Post-Professional Doctor of Occupational Therapy Program. In 2020, he transitioned to a full-time role as the program's director. In January 2022, he became the founding director of the entry-level Doctor of Occupational Therapy Program and the founding chair of the Department of Occupational Therapy.

In addition to his academic roles, Dr. Gee has held various volunteer positions with AOTA and NBCOT. He currently serves as an assistant editor for the Open Journal of Occupational Therapy, a member of AOTA's Commission on Education, and chair of the Representative Assembly's Competency-Based Education Task Force. In recognition of his contributions to the profession, Dr. Gee was inducted as a Fellow of the American Occupational Therapy Association in 2023.

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