

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

How To Use the State University System To Build Your Business

When the financial crisis hit last year it set in motion a cycle of increasing unemployment, bringing the nation and Connecticut to the highest jobless levels in more than two decades. Businesses have found that the cost of retaining all their full-time employees and keeping their training up-to-date increasingly difficult as markets shift and often contract. New strategies are necessary, and utilizing the Connecticut State University system is one that should be considered.

During the past ten years, many hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent in Connecticut to improve the facilities, laboratories and programs at each of the four state universities. The CSU schools are distinct from the perhaps better recognized flagship University of Connecticut in Storrs, although many of these schools also have excellent sports programs like Southern Connecticut State University's NCAA Division II champion women's basketball team of 2007.

More important than sports to business people is the impact of these campuses. With more than 36,000 students, the four campuses provide a resource to businesses and families throughout Connecticut in literally dozens of fields. More than 86 percent of CSU students surveyed say they plan to stay in Connecticut following graduation.

While the economy may be tight in terms of employment, the need for educated and skilled employees is still very significant. Each of the four campuses have a large number of undergraduate and degree programs.

Students can benefit from job fairs run by the schools, but businesses also can reduce recruiting costs and meet career-minded undergraduates and graduate students who are looking for a solid career choices here in Connecticut. One accounting career fair held at Eastern Connecticut State University attracted more than 250 students



to meet with representatives of the 34 companies in attendance.

Internships are another powerful tool for businesses today. A co-op internship can reduce costs for an employer — and potentially reduce risk in finding a new employee. Student interns often have expertise that is very expensive to obtain in the marketplace. Clearly, information technology (IT) services come to mind, but additionally, there are award-winning CSU programs in graphic arts, business communications, engineering and health care.

Surveys and market research represent another area of great benefit to many typical businesses, where interns often have solid knowledge. Rather than a lack of experience, many interns bring a great work ethic and their knowledge as consumers can greatly benefit companies. Interns can be brought in on a project basis, for a semester or with the goal of later employment following graduation.

Each campus has a Career Services Department that will work with potential employers or may help an employee that may have to be laid off. Like current students, alumni have access to career fairs, workshops (when available) and online job-search tools.

For many observers, the physical improvements to the campuses are the most obvious result of the investments made in the CSU schools, but

more important to business is the expansion of programs and faculty. Central Connecticut, for example, has added degree programs in mechanical and civil engineering. In June 148 students became licensed mechanical engineers and 24 civil engineers.

To serve the state's need for aerospace engineers, Central also offers the state's only degree program in aerospace engineering. In New Haven, Southern has had a profound effect on management expertise in the health-care industry — the

leading employer in the south-central region. One initiative, an accelerated degree program in nursing, is an effort that is paying off by providing Connecticut and this region the employees needed to sustain the health-care industry. More than 95 percent of graduating nurses from Southern and WestConn remain in Connecticut.

Accounting, health care, computer science, business communications, engineering — hey, even journalism. Among the CSU schools' 36,000 students, the vast majority are hoping to build their career in Connecticut at your organization or company. This is a powerful tool to get your business and Connecticut back to employment growth. Seize a competitive advantage and develop your relationship through interns, job fairs, tuition assistance — and you'll have a true winning edge as your business moves forward.

— Mitchell Young