MAPPING COMMUNITY COLLEGES
AROUND THE WORLD
Comparative Perspectives and Collaborative Pathways

Preparing a Global Workforce:
Curriculum Design and Learning Outcomes
ISSUE 2

About ACCT

The Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) is a non-profit educational organization of governing boards, representing more than 6,500 elected and appointed trustees who serve on over 500 governing boards of community, technical, and junior colleges in the United States and beyond.

ACCT's mission is to foster the principles and practices of exemplary governance while promoting high quality and affordable higher education, cutting-edge workforce and development training, student success, and the opportunity for all individuals to achieve economic self-sufficiency and security.

In accordance with this mission, ACCT seeks to facilitate global learning and engagement by its member institutions in order to prepare students to succeed in an increasingly interconnected world and globalized workforce. With staff expertise in international education and a network of institutional leaders and practitioners, ACCT's global education programs are designed to broaden access to international education for an underserved sector and student population; provide needed technical and capacity building assistance; and identify and disseminate innovative solutions and good practices.

About STAR Scholars Network

The STAR Scholars Network is a global consortium of researchers, scholars, and academic leaders committed to advancing transnational research, academic mobility, and international collaboration. With over 33, 000 members across more than 100 countries, the network supports scholarly exchange through publications, conferences, and mentoring programs. Our mission is to promote inclusive global scholarship and foster equitable partnerships that uplift historically underrepresented voices in academia.

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

Mapping Community Colleges Around the World: Comparative Perspectives and Collaborative Pathways reflects a strategic collaboration between the Association of Community College Trustees and the STAR Scholars Network. This series of briefs:

- Highlights effective regional, national, local, and institutional policies and programs that support, fund, evaluate, and strengthen community colleges and similar institutions, and enable them to fulfill their missions and goals.

- Identifies structural, operational, programmatic, and curricular frameworks and good practices around the world that can serve as models for the development of institutions and educational systems in other geographic contexts.

- Investigates the challenges facing community colleges and their global counterparts, as a means toward developing shared solutions as well as contextually specific approaches.

- Explores synergies that can serve as the basis for mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborations that engage institutions, industry, and government to promote student success and socioeconomic development.

- Celebrates the successes and contributions of this unique educational sector, amplifies its visibility, adds to the body of scholarly literature and knowledge, and identifies areas for additional research.

In designing this publication, we have adopted a true community college ethos. Like our institutions, we've emphasized access, proactively tapping our collective networks to invite a wide array of contributions and voices and enabling wide distribution. Throughout the series, you'll find articles written by trustees, institution presidents and leaders, scholars, practitioners, and industry partners, which collectively provide a rich and nuanced array of insights and represent a unique contribution to scholarship and our collective understanding of community colleges and their impact worldwide.

We encourage you to share the publication widely, and hope it inspires continued dialogue and innovation that benefit our students, institutions, local economies, and ultimately, our shared global community.

Robin Matross Helms, Ph.D.
Vice President for Membership and Educational Services
Association of Community College Trustees
rhelms@acct.org

Krishna Bista, Ed.D.
Executive Vice President
STAR Scholars Network
krishna.bista@morgan.edu

Editors' Introduction

Welcome to the second installment of *Mapping Community Colleges Around the World: Comparative Perspectives and Collaborative Pathways*. We've been thrilled by the enthusiastic response to the series so far, and have received great feedback on the first issue featuring "global snapshots" of community colleges in an array of countries and regional contexts.

The overview provided in our first installment set the stage for further exploration of priorities, programs, and approaches shared by the global community college sector. This second issue takes a deep dive into curriculum and student learning, highlighting the skills employers need to meet the demands of today's global economy, and examples of how colleges are ensuring their graduates enter the workforce equipped for short- and long-term success.

A hallmark of the *Mapping* series is the wide array of author expertise and geographic representation in the articles. This installment features case examples of innovative curricula and programs from around the world, as well as cross-cutting frameworks and analyses. Each article includes key lessons learned and takeaways for other colleges and contexts, as well as recommendations for policy approaches and future research.

Looking across articles and examples, some key themes emerge:

- No matter what the academic field, industry, or location, employers need **"enduring" skills**. Sometimes known as "soft" skills, these include the ability to communicate effectively with people (peers, colleagues, co-workers, clients, etc.) from a diverse array of backgrounds, critical thinking, problem solving, and empathy.

- Along similar lines, a number of articles highlight the importance of **holistic educational approaches** that provide opportunities for students' self-development, in addition to the acquisition of skills. Self-awareness, self-motivation, and a sense of purpose are integral not only to personal development, but to workforce success and, ultimately, to broader economic and social progress.

- **Technology and digital literacy** are paramount. Students not only need training on the most up-to-date technology in their respective fields but they must also become comfortable with assessing and adopting new technologies as they emerge. For colleges, infrastructure and the physical environment on campus are a critical component of students' education in these areas.

- **Experiential learning** is a hallmark of innovative programs, ensuring that students have opportunities to apply newly acquired knowledge in real-world situations in real time. Technology enabled simulations, internships, practica, and community engagement programs facilitate students' self-efficacy, teamwork, and other key outcomes.

- Student success relies on an **"ecosystem"** of stakeholders — institutions, faculty, alumni, industry partners, governments, and others. In a rapidly evolving global economy where workforce needs are continually shifting, ongoing communication and engagement ensures curricular relevance and innovation.

Our hope is that this publication contributes to the existing research base and catalyzes further research to support the community college sector worldwide. We hope you enjoy this installment and that you are inspired by the insights and examples provided by our authors. Subsequent installments will pick up on some of the themes highlighted in this issue's articles, including the power of global collaborations and an "ecosystems" approach.

Thank you for reading and stay tuned!

Community College Architecture and Design: Shaping the Learning Experience

Dian Nafiatul Awaliyah
Sultan Fatah University, Indonesia

Introduction

Community colleges play a pivotal role in the global education landscape, providing accessible and affordable pathways for a diverse range of learners. These institutions are not only centers of academic learning but also spaces that foster collaboration, innovation, and cultural exchange. The architectural design of community colleges is a crucial factor that shapes the learning environment, influencing how students, faculty, and staff interact, collaborate, and engage with their surroundings.

As education systems evolve to meet the needs of an increasingly interconnected world, understanding how the built environment supports these educational goals becomes essential. In order to explore this relationship, our research team (composed of Indonesian researchers in the fields of architecture, environmental literacy, and culture) conducted a descriptive design-based study examining the architectural diversity of community colleges across different countries and how these spaces facilitate collaborative learning and cross-cultural exchange.

A diverse sample of five community colleges from various regions, including both large and small institutions with unique or modern designs, were chosen for inclusion in the study. Data were collected from a variety of sources, including: 1) a literature review to explore existing research on the relationship between architecture and learning, with a particular focus on how the design of community colleges influences collaboration, 2) online surveys sent to students, teachers, and administrators at the selected community colleges, asking them about their perceptions of how their college's architecture supports teamwork, learning, and cultural exchange, 3) photos and virtual tours of selected colleges gathered from online resources, 4) short interviews with faculty members and students to provide further insights into how architecture impacts their learning environment. Data analysis included qualitative coding of survey responses and interviews to identify common themes, as well as basic statistical analysis of survey data.

Results of our study indicate that institutional architecture plays a critical role in both shaping the overall educational experience at community colleges, and specifically in facilitating global collaboration, learning, and engagement.

Shaping the educational experience

Collaborative spaces foster inclusion and belonging. Our research found that community colleges are increasingly creating flexible and open spaces that encourage informal, outside-of-class interactions between students and faculty. Examples include open lounges, study areas, and technology hubs where students can interact freely, share ideas, and collaborate on projects, both academically and socially. Feedback gathered in our research indicates that such interactions in turn contribute substantively to an inclusive learning environment where students from diverse backgrounds feel a sense of belonging.

Integration of academic and student affairs offices helps create a holistic educational environment.
Research indicates that for institutions serving diverse, often commuter-based populations, a connection
between the academic and student affairs domains is crucial for student success (Ozaki & Hornak, 2014).
A notable finding of our study is that the physical integration/co-location of academic and student affairs
offices on campus positively impacts the overall student experience. Strategic placement of shared spaces
such as lounges, study areas, and technology hubs in relation to these offices further contributes to an
educational environment in which resources to support academic learning and student development are easily
accessible and interconnected. Our data indicate that this approach enhances the overall sense of a campus
community, which is essential for the social and emotional well-being of students – particularly those from
underrepresented or marginalized groups.

Classroom design facilitates learning communities and intercultural competence. Recognizing that
coursework is at the core of student learning, it is not surprising that the design of classrooms, in particular,
plays a key role in shaping the overall learning experience. Our data indicate that the concept of learning
communities is gaining traction in community colleges, and that architectural features that support such
communities—such as group work-friendly classrooms and communal discussion areas—are vital for student
engagement and success. Such spaces not only enhance academic collaboration but also create opportunities
for intercultural exchanges through which students from various backgrounds can engage with one another,
share experiences, and develop an appreciation for the value of diverse perspectives.

Dedicated spaces enable community engagement and real-world learning. In addition to fostering
collaboration within the academic realm, community colleges also engage in partnerships with local
businesses, organizations, and global entities to provide real-world learning opportunities. The architectural
design of the institutions we studied reflects this focus on community engagement, with spaces such as
conference rooms and event venues that invite industry and community partners onto campus to network
and build relationships that lead to internships, shared projects, and other opportunities for students to
apply their knowledge in real-world settings. The intentional interconnection between education and the
broader community not only enhances the learning experience but also promotes community engagement
and development by encouraging students to participate in initiatives that have a broader social impact
(Devereux & Glenn, 2022; Watla-iad & Hartwell, 2022).

Facilitating global learning and engagement

Integrating key technology into infrastructure enables global collaboration. The integration of digital platforms
and social networking sites into the physical infrastructure of campuses has proven to be an effective tool
for fostering global connections among students and faculty (Ahmed, 2023). Virtual campuses and online
platforms allow institutions to expand their educational offerings beyond geographical constraints, enabling
students and faculty to collaborate across borders and engage in real-time discussions. These technologies
create an interconnected ecosystem that facilitates the exchange of knowledge and resources between
institutions in different parts of the world. The blending of physical spaces with digital technology thus creates
a hybrid learning environment that transcends traditional campus boundaries.

Sustainability in campus design contributes to global environmental efforts. Our findings indicate an increasing focus on sustainability by community colleges. By incorporating sustainable elements into campus design—such as energy-efficient buildings, green spaces, and renewable energy sources—colleges send a strong message about their commitment to environmental stewardship. Moreover, sustainability-focused spaces provide a tangible example for students, inspiring them to think critically about climate change, resource management, and other global sustainability challenges and their role in creating solutions. This approach not only enhances students' educational experiences but also prepares them to engage in global initiatives that require international cooperation and cultural sensitivity (Gupta & Singhal, 2017).

Experiential learning spaces equip students to solve global challenges. Our study findings underscored the importance of innovative educational models and experiential learning environments in fostering critical thinking and collaboration among students. Examples such as "escape rooms" were highlighted as spaces that encourage students to collaborate, problem-solve, and think creatively. These environments challenge students to engage with one another, work across disciplines and cultural backgrounds, and apply their knowledge in practical, real-world, solution-focused scenarios — skills that are crucial for students to become global citizens who can navigate the interconnected world in which they live (Hamilton et al., 2021).

Conclusion

Given its impact on the educational experience, community college architecture is much more than just an aesthetic or functional consideration. The design of these institutions, particularly through open and flexible spaces that encourage interaction, plays a vital role in fostering collaborative learning and holistic development. Spaces that support both formal and informal learning create environments that engage students, enhance academic success, and promote inclusivity.

The physical design of campuses is also instrumental in advancing international partnerships and bridging cultural divides. By incorporating spaces that encourage intercultural communication, integrating technology to connect students and faculty across borders, prioritizing sustainability, and supporting innovative educational models, community colleges enable global engagement and prepare students to work effectively with counterparts from an array of geographic and cultural backgrounds.

The design and use of physical spaces in higher education is evolving to meet the demands of an interconnected world, fostering collaboration, innovation, and the sharing of diverse perspectives that enrich the learning process and contribute to a more inclusive and globally aware society. Our hope is that this research will provide insights that can inform future architectural designs in community colleges, ensuring that these institutions continue to serve as hubs of learning, innovation, and cultural exchange in an increasingly globalized world.

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About the author

Dian Nafiatul Awaliyah, ST., MPP., is an architect, author, educator, and social advocate. A graduate of Diponegoro University (Architecture) with a Master's in Public Policy, she has authored dozens of books and anthologies published by over 20 Indonesian publishers. A trainer and public speaker active in over 50 cities, she mentors at WomenWill by Google, serves as a lecturer at Sultan Fatah University, and leads community development through Hasfa Publishing & Institute and Muslimat NU Demak. Email: dianhasfa@gmail.com

Career and Technical Education (CTE): A Pathway to Economic Empowerment

Cherie Meador
Moraine Valley Community College, USA

Economic empowerment strengthens communities, creates opportunities for families, and fuels local industries and colleges. Amid ongoing shifts in higher education around the world —including evolving perceptions of a degree's value, a shrinking and fragmented pipeline from primary to tertiary education, and in many countries, an aging population—community colleges are uniquely positioned to adapt.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs are a key mechanism to enable this adaptation. With a focus on short-term credentials, hands-on learning, and real-world applications, CTE programs are designed to meet immediate local workforce and community needs and effectively respond to emerging trends and technologies.

In the US, as an example, due to a growing elderly population, healthcare technical and support professions are projected to be among the fastest growing of all occupational groups. Many CTE programs have emerged to prepare students for roles such as certified nurse assistant (CNA), licensed practical nurse, medical assistant, patient care technician, phlebotomist, and surgical technologist. Additional high-demand areas for CTE include information technology (e.g., cybersecurity), green/renewable energy (e.g., solar photovoltaic installation and wind turbine service), transportation/distribution (e.g., semi-truck, tractor and concrete truck drivers, aircraft mechanics), and heating and air conditioning and refrigeration repair (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.).

To develop effective CTE programs, colleges must work closely with local employers to evaluate their community's educational needs alongside industry training requirements and workforce needs – and regularly re-evaluate and update programs as these needs evolve. CTE programs in the US context provide a number of lessons learned and good practices that might inform the development of similar programs, institutions, and higher education systems around the world seeking to provide flexible, responsive, industry-aligned programs, and enable economic empowerment in their national and local communities.

Offer short-term, stackable credentials

Short-term certifications that build toward advanced credentials or degrees enable students to enter the workforce quickly while continuing their education. When thoughtfully designed, stackable programs lead to higher completion rates, improved job placement, and long-term career growth.

A well-designed stackable credential program starts with a basic certificate where all required courses also count toward the next level—typically an advanced certificate. While the length and number of credit hours required for a basic certificate vary by US state, most can be completed in 12 weeks or less. As students move through each level of the program, the content becomes more advanced—much like climbing a ladder, with each rung building on the last. For example, a student pursuing a career as a licensed practical nurse (LPN) would first complete a certified nursing assistant (CNA) program, which usually takes less than eight weeks and allows for immediate employment in a healthcare setting. The CNA certification is a prerequisite for enrolling in an LPN program and can also serve as a steppingstone toward an associate degree in nursing.

As illustrated by the nursing example, stackable credentials are often designed to support both direct entry into the workforce and continued progress toward higher qualifications. This structure allows students to increase their earnings over a short period of time in high-need and/or higher paying career fields. The goal is to give students the flexibility to complete programs at their own pace, earn credentials along the way, and build toward more advanced certificates or degrees.

Numerical data on short-term credentials in the US context highlight their increasing appeal. In the 2022-23 academic year, public two-year US community colleges awarded 252,624 certificates completed in less than one year—an increase over 5% from the prior year (US Department of Education). Additionally, a study by the RAND Corporation found that earning a certificate and entering the workforce early does not deter students from later completing a degree. In fact, such students often return for additional certifications (Anderson & Daugherty, 2023), demonstrating the value of flexible, stackable programs to provide access and opportunities that accommodate students' nuanced life situations.

Prioritize affordability, accessibility, and ROI

Program content often drives students' enrollment decisions, but in the US as in many other parts of the world, affordability remains a critical barrier. A 2023 survey by Best Colleges found that over half of current undergraduate and graduate students surveyed ranked affordability as the most crucial factor in choosing a college, followed by accessibility and flexibility (36%) (Welding, 2023). For many prospective students, the promise of economic opportunity and financial stability is a primary motivation for pursuing a credential – thus underscoring the need for affordable, accessible, and high-quality programs.

Prospective students, especially those returning to college for career advancement, prioritize flexible certificate programs that accommodate both part-time and full-time enrollment, and allow students to continue earning wages while studying. Students also value a variety of course formats, including in-person and online options. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, online programs have grown in popularity among certain groups. However, traditional-age students (18-24) are increasingly favoring in-person learning. A study by Educause conducted over 10 months during 2024–2025 examined US student attitudes toward technology use and course delivery methods, comparing findings to a similar study from 2023. Results showed a clear link between age and course format preference: younger students increasingly prefer in-person classes, particularly for interactive activities and lab work. Colleges should therefore consider their student demographics carefully and ensure that CTE programs are accessible and adaptable to meet diverse needs, schedules, and preferences.

Colleges must also clearly communicate the value of a CTE credential and anticipated return on investment. Today's prospective students are weighing not only the cost of attendance but also the potential for long-term impact on their quality of life. To support informed decision-making, institutions should use diverse and strategic marketing efforts that highlight key data such as job placement rates, regional and national job outlooks, total program cost, and expected time to completion. When students can see the return on investment, they are more likely to enroll with purpose and confidence.

Seek support from government and industry partners

Many local, national, and international companies offer tuition assistance for employees or their dependents. Employers like Apple, Baxter International, and Paramount provide such support, often tied to specific fields of study such as business, culinary arts, or technology, or to designated institutions. Others, including McDonald's and UPS, offer broader tuition assistance to full- and part-time employees pursuing certificates or degrees across various disciplines. Beyond tuition support, some companies also serve as community or advisory partners for CTE programs, helping to shape curriculum and provide real-world connections.

Additionally, in the US, regional and state departments of commerce often fund tuition, fees, books, supplies, and wraparound services for students enrolled in high-demand programs. State and federal grant programs such as the Illinois RevUP Initiative, the US Department of Education's FastTrack grant for apprenticeships, and the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) also play a critical role in helping community college students earn industry-recognized credentials that lead to meaningful employment.

Identify outcomes metrics and rigorously evaluate programs

Regular evaluation is essential to the success of CTE programs. In the US, community colleges, through institutional, state, and federal initiatives or accreditation reviews, routinely evaluate program effectiveness by examining completion rates, job placements, and cost-benefit analyses. Federal and state reporting requirements and rubrics provide templates for colleges to identify and gather critical data, and use it to inform decision-making.

For example, the Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA) is an evaluation tool developed by the US Department of Education, which requires institutions that participate in certain federal funding programs to examine enrollment trends, equity gaps, and how well CTE programs align with workforce needs. In addition to the CLNA, at the state level, institutions may have separate or layered reporting requirements for CTE programs. The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), for instance, requires institutions to report on CTE programs using a CTE program review template, focusing on equity-driven metrics to address gaps in enrollment and inform budget allocation. Maryland's Performance Accountability Report (PAR) framework, administered by the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), requires annual reporting on learning benchmarks, degree progress, and other program performance metrics (Maryland Higher Education Commission, 2024).

While these data reporting systems encourage accountability and continuous improvement, their success depends on meaningful feedback and actionable recommendations. Peer-review mechanisms, whether state- or college-led, can enhance program quality by fostering constructive dialogue. Some states have established committees to support program review. In Illinois, the ICCB Program Review Advisory Committee (PRAC) recently launched a peer review process to provide feedback on annual program review reports submitted by the state's community colleges. Reviewers are faculty and staff from one of the 48 Illinois community colleges, selected for their expertise in CTE or related fields.

In addition to state-level processes, many colleges have their own internal accountability structures, including institutional peer review or designated offices responsible for reviewing reports before submitting them to the appropriate state agency. Whatever specific procedure is used, however, it is important to approach evaluation from a constructive — rather than punitive or compliance-driven — standpoint. Program reviews should examine performance holistically, take into account a variety of outcomes metrics, identify opportunities for improvement, celebrate strengths, and prioritize student and workforce needs.

Workforce outlook: Building for the future

Perhaps the most important take-away for higher education institutions and systems around the world is that effective CTE programs are necessarily a collective endeavor, engaging a wide range of stakeholders at every stage of program development, delivery, evaluation, and improvement. Advisory committees and employer feedback are crucial for ensuring that programs remain relevant and aligned with industry demands. National- and local-level policymakers and institutional leaders must advocate for increased and consistent funding, flexible program design, and robust program review processes to sustain and expand the impact of CTE programs, and help them fulfill their potential to enable economic empowerment.

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About the author

Dr. Cherie Meador is an experienced higher education leader with over 20 years of experience in academic services, institutional effectiveness, and strategic planning. She serves as Dean of Academic Services and Strategic Initiatives at Moraine Valley Community College and was the founding Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness at Malcolm X College. Dr. Meador has led accreditation, assessment, and curriculum initiatives, and has taught communication and leadership at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels.
Email: meadorc@morainevalley.edu

Purpose-Driven Workforce Development: Preparing Students for Career Satisfaction and Success

Solomon Tention
Morgan State University, USA

Economic growth is driven by people through innovation and productivity. Research indicates that a strong sense of purpose and a perception of one's work as meaningful correlate with higher job satisfaction. Higher job satisfaction, in turn, correlates with greater productivity and retention in the workforce.

This article will first inform leaders about the relationship between purpose, job satisfaction, and its impact on labor market outcomes. Secondly, the article will provide community college leaders and other economic developers who traditionally serve on the front lines of workforce development with program models, policy recommendations, and insights to help better prepare students to enter, persist, and succeed in today's workplace.

Life purpose, job satisfaction, and labor market outcomes

Traditionally, labor market and economics research has focused on structural factors (e.g. organizational design, workplace culture, AI integration) that impact productivity, quantifiable outcomes such as wage metrics, and skill mismatches. However, other subjective factors such as life purpose and job satisfaction have been increasingly recognized for their potential to shape labor market experiences and outcomes. According to Steger et al. (2006), life purpose, meaning, and direction have been linked to various psychological attributes, including greater resilience, motivation, and well-being, which contribute to success in the workforce. Judge & Bono (2001) also suggest that job satisfaction, i.e., the level of contentment and an individual's feelings about their work, directly correlates to important labor outcomes such as employee engagement, retention, performance, and individual career advancement.

Community colleges historically have served a vital role in meeting local and regional labor market needs. Often, the approach taken has been driven by short-term labor force needs and an emphasis on high-wage careers. Colleges that shift to instead ensuring that students make purpose driven choices about their fields of study may increase educational attainment rates and lay the foundation for long-term, sustainable careers for graduates, thus serving as catalysts for local and regional economic development and impact.

Purpose Driven Workforce Development Program

The Purpose Driven Workforce Development Program (PDWD), developed by the author, integrates life purpose, job satisfaction, and future labor market outcomes into community college workforce development programs, and promotes the idea of aligning students' values to potential career paths while also providing them with necessary technical skills and support. Leveraging staff and resources in academic and career advising, key components of the program include the following focus areas and activities:

- **Life purpose exploration.** Helping students understand their purpose and align with potential career paths. Activities and tools include workshops, seminars, personalized purpose mapping, and self-assessment instruments.

- **Career readiness and job satisfaction.** Equipping students with the skills and knowledge to achieve job satisfaction within their chosen careers. Activities include career coaching, mentorship, workshops, job shadowing, and internships.

- **Workforce skill development.** Providing students with the necessary technical and soft skills needed for short- and long-term success in today's labor market. Activities include industry-specific training and soft skills workshops.

- **Career development and alumni support.** Providing free career development services and job satisfaction assessments to help students and graduates continuously track personal values and career goals. Activities include career progression support, graduate mentorship, and other alumni engagement opportunities.

Institutional policy recommendations

Programmatic initiatives such as the PDWD are scaffolded by leadership commitment, a college-wide approach, and robust institutional policies to support their integration throughout the curriculum and co-curriculum. Such policies might include:

- **Incorporate courses and activities that help students explore their personal values, strengths, and life goals within the first term of study.** Students who immediately make the connection between their academic program and a sense of purpose will likely be more engaged and satisfied with their learning experience. This also translates to increased motivation and persistence in program completion, and serves as a foundation for future long-term career satisfaction.

- **Offer personalized career advising as a component of the program onboarding experience.** Career coaches can help students match their values to potential career opportunities instead of merely discussing earning potential.

- **Build partnerships with employers emphasizing purpose-driven roles**, e.g. meaningful internships, apprenticeships, and other employment opportunities. Students who gain entry-level work experience through opportunities that align with their purpose and values are more likely to see how those careers can be fulfilling over time. Strategic partnerships allow students to experience real-world examples of how meaningful work can improve career satisfaction and future labor market outcomes.

- **Develop data systems designed to track career outcomes of graduates with a focus on job satisfaction, retention, and alignment with life purpose.** Collecting data on labor market outcomes can help colleges refine their programs, identify gaps in job satisfaction among program alumni, and help students make better informed decisions during the career coaching process.

Conclusion

In the long term, the approaches discussed in this article have the potential to significantly benefit not only students, but also employers and the communities they serve. By creating a workforce of individuals who are both productive and personally connected to their work, the PDWD model and similar approaches can lead to greater productivity and broader economic development. As knowledge of the link between life purpose expands and good practices emerge, future research might focus on the intersection of work-life balance, career decision-making, organizational support, reducing workforce inequalities, mental health, and training.

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About the author

Dr. Solomon Tention is Assistant Professor of Advanced Studies, Leadership, & Policy at Morgan State University. His leadership experience spans various community college settings, and includes institutional advancement & development, academic affairs, student affairs, and enrollment management. Dr. Solomon is committed to building the next generation of mid-senior-level leaders and has served on various review and advisory boards. He has facilitated over 20+ national presentations and has authored several articles, book chapters, and other publications. Email: Solomon.tention@morgan.edu.

Preparing Today's Healthcare Workforce: Emotional Intelligence in Nursing Curricula

Tiago Horta Reis da Silva
King's College London, UK

The increasing complexity of healthcare needs around the world — particularly among older adults, who represent a growing demographic in many societies — necessitates a well-prepared nursing workforce that is equipped with the skills and knowledge to provide high-quality, holistic care (Reis da Silva, 2024). Emotional Intelligence (EI), defined as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others, is a critical component of preparation for today's healthcare careers.

In the context of nursing education, high EI can enhance communication, empathy, and interpersonal relationships among students and faculty, thereby creating a more inclusive learning environment (da Silva, 2022). By integrating EI training into nursing curricula, educators can equip students with the skills necessary to engage effectively with patients from a variety of backgrounds, navigate diverse healthcare settings where cultural sensitivity and emotional awareness are paramount, and ultimately improve patient care outcomes.

To develop robust, EI-informed nursing programs that enable inclusivity and prepare graduates for the contemporary healthcare workforce, a collaborative effort is needed by higher education institutions, oversight bodies, healthcare providers, and policymakers. Attention is needed to three key areas: curriculum and content, pedagogy, and infrastructure and support.

Curriculum and content

To effectively prepare nursing students for the complexities of modern healthcare, curricula must be adapted to meet the diverse needs of populations, and address health issues in a holistic manner. Elements of such a holistic approach include:

Gerontological content. The integration of gerontological content into healthcare curricula is essential for equipping nursing students with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide age-appropriate and dignified care)Reis da Silva, 2025). Key areas of focus include falls prevention, dementia care, mobility support, end-of-life communication, and polypharmacy management. Falls prevention is especially critical since falls are a leading cause of injury among older adults and often result in a diminished quality of life, increased morbidity, and mortality.

Cultural competence and sensitivity. As populations become increasingly multicultural, future nurses must be equipped to effectively communicate with and provide care for culturally and linguistically diverse populations (Bell, 2020). Training in cultural competence can enhance healthcare professionals' ability to deliver patient-centered care that respects the values and beliefs of their clients (Reis da Silva, 2025). Furthermore, language training or access to medical translation services can help bridge communication gaps and foster relationships built on mutual respect and understanding, thus improving health outcomes for marginalized groups (Reis da Silva, 2025).

Interdisciplinary training. Providing opportunities for nursing students to collaborate with professionals in fields such as social work, public health, and gerontology fosters a holistic, integrated approach to patient care (Davies, et al, 2025). Curricular collaborations can take various forms, including jointly taught courses and collaborative projects. Clinical placements in diverse settings, such as community health organizations or interprofessional teams, can further enrich nursing students' educational experiences and prepare them for the real-world complexities of patient care (Jarva et al, 2021).

Global health issues. Global health issues present opportunities for nursing students to understand the social determinants of health that influence health outcomes across communities and countries (Huffman et al, 2020). By engaging in discussions and projects related to global health, students can learn to apply their knowledge in diverse settings, fostering a comprehensive perspective on health equity (Reis da Silva, 2024). Collaborating with institutions in different countries can facilitate the exchange of ideas and best practices, ultimately promoting a more profound commitment to global health initiatives and policy advocacy (Reis da Silva, 2024).

Digital literacy training. In today's healthcare landscape, digital literacy training is necessary to ensure that nursing students can effectively utilize modern tools and resources (Reis da Silva, 2025). This includes training in electronic health records, telehealth platforms, and other digital communication tools (Reis da Silva, 2025). Learning to navigate these technologies is crucial as healthcare increasingly relies on digital interfaces for clinical practice and communication with patients and colleagues (Liu et al, 2025). Moreover, digital literacy enriches students' capabilities in providing comprehensive care across various platforms and geographic locations, supported by the integration of digital health tools into healthcare delivery models (Etminani et al, 2020).

Self-awareness and empathy. Developing self-awareness and empathy is vital for navigating the challenges of diverse learning environments and enhancing interactions with peers and patients (Reis da Silva, 2025). Educational content aimed at fostering these skills can include reflective practices, simulated patient interactions, and emotional intelligence training (Hayden et al, 2014) . Programs that incorporate creative reflection projects have been shown to enhance students' understanding of their biases and emotional responses, fostering empathy and improving patient care interactions (Levett-Jones et al, 2020). This focus on emotional intelligence promotes self-regulation and awareness while equipping students with the interpersonal skills needed to form trusting relationships with their patients (Bell, 2020).

Pedagogy

Research indicates that nursing students with higher levels of EI are more likely to engage in collaborative learning and demonstrate resilience in the face of challenges (Reis da Silva, 2025). Pedagogical approaches that incorporate and encourage the development of EI include:

Reflective practice, role-playing, and group discussions. These techniques can enhance students' emotional awareness and interpersonal skills (Reis da Silva, 2025), promote a deeper understanding of nursing concepts, and encourage students to develop the empathy and communication skills necessary for effective patient care.

Holistic assessment methods. Innovative assessment methodologies in nursing education stress the incorporation of social and emotional competencies (Reis da Silva, 2025). These methods can include reflective journaling, peer evaluations, and patient feedback mechanisms (CHPCA, 2022). Holistic assessments can be coupled with other forms of evaluation to promote critical thinking and personal insights, as noted in research that discusses how innovative assessments prepare students for real-world challenges by ensuring they develop a more robust understanding of holistic nursing practices (Devaki, 2024).

Hands-on training in real-world settings. This includes supervised clinical placements, simulation-based learning, and interprofessional collaborations in diverse healthcare environments. Such experiences allow students to apply emotional intelligence in practice and build self-efficacy.

Infrastructure and policy support

While curriculum and pedagogy are at the core of delivering EI competencies, broader systemic support, with engagement of stakeholders throughout the healthcare system, is required for the development and sustainability of EI-informed nursing programs and practice. The following areas merit particular attention, both for the challenges they present and emerging models and solutions.

Funding. Access to high-quality nursing education, particularly for students from underrepresented and minority groups, is inextricably linked to the availability and adequacy of funding (Zhang & Wood, 2021). While governments and healthcare providers in many countries offer direct financial support to students as part of broader workforce development strategies, funding initiatives specifically tied to EI-related competencies remain rare.

Among the existing examples of such funding, most thus far have come from the philanthropic sector. In the US, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), has supported leadership development programs for nurses that emphasize communication, resilience, and cultural humility—core components of emotional intelligence (RWJF, 2020). Similarly, in the UK, organizations such as the Health Foundation and the Wellcome Trust have funded research and educational pilots focused on enhancing compassion, communication, and self-awareness in health professionals, though these are not always framed explicitly as EI (The Heath Foundation, 2021).

Regulatory and accreditation frameworks. Regulatory frameworks exert significant influence on curriculum design, clinical learning environments, and assessment strategies. However, they may also inhibit innovation, especially when narrowly focused on traditional models of clinical competence.

In the United States, for example, state boards of nursing and accrediting bodies such as the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) and the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) mandate a specified number of clinical placement hours for licensure eligibility . These requirements are traditionally fulfilled through in-person clinical rotations in approved healthcare settings. Although the NCSBN National Simulation Study (Hayden et al, 2014) found that up to 50% of clinical hours could be effectively replaced with high-fidelity simulation without compromising outcomes, many jurisdictions have been slow to adopt flexible models. This creates a clinical bottleneck, limiting student enrollment and preventing the integration of innovative teaching methods, including EI-focused simulations and scenario-based reflective practice (Mills et al, 2021).

In contrast, the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) in the UK has allowed greater curricular flexibility, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2018 NMC standards emphasize core communication and teamwork skills, and allow for the partial substitution of clinical hours with simulation-based education (NMC, 2018). However, the standards do not explicitly include EI as a competency, nor do they provide frameworks for its assessment. Elsewhere, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council (ANMAC, 2021) and the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN, 2015) have begun integrating relational practice, empathy, and reflective capacity into their graduate outcome expectations. These align closely with EI constructs, offering international models for embedding emotional competencies into core professional standards.

Continuing education for practicing nurses. For nurses educated under traditional biomedical models, continuing professional development (CPD) is a key mechanism for retroactively integrating EI competencies into clinical practice. In Canada, EI and compassion-focused programs are part of national CPD curricula in palliative and oncology nursing (CASN, 2015). In the US, initiatives like the Mindful Nurse Leader Program aim to enhance self-regulation, team collaboration, and emotionally intelligent leadership (Shirey, 2021). The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) in the UK has issued policy guidance on supporting emotional wellbeing and resilience in the nursing workforce, recommending CPD courses on emotional self-management, especially for those in high-stress and leadership roles (RCN, 2022).

Despite these efforts, CPD access is not universal, and uptake remains uneven across demographic groups. Targeted EI CPD programs could help mitigate intergenerational and socio-educational disparities, particularly among nurses from minority backgrounds who may have faced systemic barriers to reflective and relational learning earlier in their training.

Conclusion and future directions

As healthcare systems grapple with rising complexity, emotional labor, and persistent health inequities, the integration of Emotional Intelligence into nursing education and professional development becomes not just desirable but necessary. For underrepresented and minority populations—both as patients and as members of the nursing workforce—EI competencies offer a pathway to more inclusive, ethical, and culturally responsive care. However, the success of EI-focused curricula and practice depends on strategic alignment between educational innovation and systemic infrastructure. The following priorities are proposed:

- **Funding alignment:** Expand financial aid and scholarship opportunities that explicitly support EI-based educational pathways, particularly for students from underrepresented groups.

- **Regulatory reform:** Encourage accreditation bodies to formally include EI as a competency area, while supporting curricular innovation such as simulation, narrative medicine, and interdisciplinary training.

- **Lifelong learning:** Develop and scale EI-focused CPD programs for the existing workforce, particularly targeting leadership, resilience, and reflective practice.

Future research should assess the longitudinal impact of EI education on patient outcomes, staff retention, and workplace culture, with attention to intersectional equity in access and outcomes. Cross-national comparative studies could also inform regulatory harmonization, while participatory action research may help center the voices of minoritized nurses in curriculum co-design.

Ultimately, Emotional Intelligence should be seen not as a peripheral attribute, but as a core professional capacity essential to justice, empathy, and quality care in the diverse, pluralistic settings where nurses operate.

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About the author

Tiago Horta Reis da Silva is a Lecturer in Nursing Education (Adult Nursing) at the Florence Nightingale Faculty, King's College London. A Registered Nurse and Senior Fellow of the HEA, he holds multiple postgraduate qualifications in clinical education, nursing, and traditional medicine.
Email: tiago.horta_reis_da_silva@kcl.ac.uk.

Innovative Approaches to Peace Officer Training: A Case Study from a Minnesota Tribal and Community College

Elsa Maxwell Bourdon and Michael Tusken
Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College, USA

Introduction

This article explores Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College's (Cloquet, Minnesota, USA) efforts to develop a comprehensive approach to intercultural training for Peace Officer (Law Enforcement) students. Drawing on research that questions the effectiveness of one-day diversity training, we examine how the College worked to embed intercultural development into the law enforcement program. In particular, the article focuses on the creation of an innovative experiential learning course, "Diversity and Intercultural Leadership", a semester-long course that combines service learning, intercultural development, and experiential learning. In our analysis, we reflect on the process of building the course; navigating the service-learning experience; and initial learning outcomes.

Origins of the course

Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College (FDLTCC) is a unique institution that came about because of the efforts of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. Founded and chartered as a tribal college by the Fond du Lac Band and recognized by the Minnesota Legislature in 1987, its commitment to meeting the educational needs of a diverse population is reflected in its mission statement. FDLTCC is the only community college in the nation that was established as a tribally chartered college and is a member of a state system (Minnesota State). FDLTCC's Criminal Justice and Peace Officer program is the only law enforcement program in the northeastern region of Minnesota. Many of its graduates are recruited by the surrounding municipal police departments, in particular, the city of Duluth.

Like many cities in the United States, Duluth has an increased rate of people experiencing homelessness, especially following the pandemic. The police force is regularly tasked with policing people experiencing homelessness, mental illness, and substance use, but rarely receives formal training on how to serve and protect these populations with dignity, respect, and empathy. The College's law enforcement leadership sought to address this issue via the development of a service learning course in which students actively engage with people experiencing homelessness to decrease stigma and bias.

In parallel, the 2020 murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, prompted major efforts to reform policing practices at a local and national level. Soon afterward the Chancellor of Minnesota State, the public system of community colleges and state universities, began discussing reforms to the law enforcement and criminal justice programs. The result was the Minnesota State Taskforce on Law Enforcement Education Reform, which sought to "directly address issues of racism and social justice, [in order to produce] graduates who are culturally competent and able to equitably respond to all of those whom they are charged to serve and protect regardless of skin color, national origin, or identity". Key recommendations included incorporating cultural competency, antiracist, and leadership content into the law enforcement curriculum.

Moving beyond isolated diversity trainings

Like many police academies and degree programs, Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College's law enforcement program historically included a two-day diversity training that covered topics such as bias, microaggressions, racism, and racial profiling, among others. However, program leadership believed that students needed more time, guidance, and practice in order to deeply understand the topics and make long term attitude and behavioral changes. Recent research examining the effectiveness of one-off diversity training for law enforcement later confirmed this sentiment (Lai & Lisnek 2023). In this context, program leadership began envisioning a mandatory semester-long course that would address not only racial diversity and anti-bias, but also how to serve and protect people experiencing homelessness with respect and dignity. An intercultural educator with expertise in experiential learning was hired to develop and facilitate the course under the guidance of program leadership.

Pedagogical approach

To maximize critical thinking and skill development, the course was developed in alignment with experiential learning, inclusive, and learner-centered practices. Experiential learning pairs active learning with metacognitive reflection. Instead of traditional lectures, class sessions consist of a variety of activities —short presentations, role plays, discussions, simulations, group activities, and service learning, etc.— that allow students to experience first-hand the topics covered in the course. The activities are complemented by frequent debriefing in which learners reflect on how their knowledge is expanding and how newly acquired knowledge relates to their future profession. Inclusive teaching means creating a safe learning environment in which all identities, cultures, and learning styles feel welcome, heard, and accepted. Students work together to develop safer space guidelines to ensure that everyone is respected and included. Finally, a learner-centered approach replaces the traditional classroom in which the professor dictates information with a model in which the instructor facilitates the co-creation of knowledge. In this sense, class sessions are designed so that students can actively engage and participate in the learning process.

Course design

The course is structured around four pillars: in-class content and discussion; guest speakers; service learning; and the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). As discussed previously, class sessions prioritize experiential learning activities and frequent discussion. Topics addressed include self-awareness, identity, perception, bias, frameshifting, perspective taking, suspending judgment, active listening, diversity dimensions, antiracism, emotional intelligence, self-care, and leadership. In addition to the instructor-led sessions, guest speakers are regularly invited to talk about law enforcement and policing from multiple perspectives. Guest speakers include shelter staff, current and former law enforcement, individuals who have experienced homelessness, human rights commissioners, and tribal social workers, among others. In alignment with experiential learning practices, the guest speaker's talk is followed by a reflection session that enhances and deepens learning. Together, the class sessions and the guest speakers frame the service-learning in which students directly engage with diverse populations in their community.

Service-learning was envisioned as a core component of the course to provide students with concrete experience engaging with diverse identities and backgrounds, in particular those who are stigmatized and marginalized. Following intercultural development theory, knowledge acquisition about cultural differences and similarities is not sufficient alone to develop intercultural skills. It must be combined with real life experience engaging across cultural differences (Hammer 2008, Wiersma-Mosley et al., 2023). As such, students complete a 16-hour volunteer service at a non-profit organization that serves people experiencing homelessness and housing instability. The volunteer role at the shelter is designed specifically so that students spend a significant amount of time conversing with the guests and supporting the shelter staff. Students then reflect on their experience in group discussions and in written assignments.

The last component of the course design is the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a researched-based assessment tool that measures and promotes intercultural growth. In the United States it is a widely used instrument to gauge intercultural growth. Students complete the assessment and then participate in a one-on-one debrief session with an IDI Qualified Administrator to discuss their results and identity steps to move forward. In this sense, the IDI is currently being used as a developmental tool, not as an assessment tool.

Assessment

Students are assessed on in-class participation, self-reflective written assignments, service learning completion, and a final reflection in which they articulate their key learnings. The written assignments encourage students to engage in metacognitive reflection about their own learning process. As mentioned, the IDI is not currently used as an assessment tool; however, in future versions of the course, the IDI could be used as a pre- and post-assessment to measure the students' overall progress. In this case, the students would not be graded on the IDI results, but would be required to take the assessment at the beginning and end of the semester to track the effectiveness of the course over time.

Learning outcomes

The first cohort of students completed the course in Fall 2024. In written reflections and comments, students reported feeling comfortable while in class thanks to the safer space guidelines established collectively at the beginning of the semester. They also noted their appreciation for the learner-centered approach, specifically the discussion and activity-based sessions. Some students initially expressed trepidation about the service-learning work, but after completing their shifts they expressed appreciation for this aspect of the course. In their writing, many students described an increasing awareness of their biases and assumptions while they were volunteering. They also recounted situations in which they actively practiced suspending judgment, frameshifting, and active listening.

Many students also wrote about recognizing the common values and aspirations they share with people experiencing homelessness, suggesting a shift from polarization toward minimization on the Intercultural Development Continuum. Students also discussed increased feelings of empathy, compassion, and understanding for people experiencing housing and job instability. Overall, students described the service-learning as a high impact and valuable opportunity that has contributed substantially to their learning and career readiness.

Conclusion

For public serving professions such as law enforcement, a semester-long intercultural and service-learning course provides sustained opportunities to develop cultural self-awareness and gain real life experience engaging across differences. An experiential and learner-centered curriculum empowers students to actively partake in the learning process, contribute to their local community, and cultivate essential career readiness skills.

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About the authors

Dr. Elsa Maxwell Bourdon has 20 years of experience as an educator, interculturalist, and scholar-practitioner. She holds a doctorate and a master's degree from the Universidad de Chile. She is currently Director of Academic Partnerships at CulturaGo, a role which brings together her passion for intercultural learning, career readiness, and assessment. She is also an adjunct faculty member at Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College, where she teaches intercultural leadership to law enforcement students. Email: elsamaxwell@gmail.com.

Michael Tusken is Retired Chief of Police for the Duluth, Minnesota Police Department, and Retired Law Enforcement Coordinator/Instructor at Fond Du Lac Tribal & Community College. His career has included three decades in law enforcement, combined with 8 years of training law enforcement students as a program coordinator & instructor, with an emphasis on community policing, ethical leadership, and intercultural development.

A Culture of Competence: Mindset, Skills, and Pedagogy for Workforce Success

Cosmas Masega Ongesa
University of Nairobi, Kenya

The articles presented in this installment of *Mapping Community Colleges Around the World* highlight examples of innovative programs, approaches, and initiatives in a variety of contexts that focus on workforce preparation. An analysis of related studies and academic literature underscores the need for community colleges to create a "culture of competence" to equip students with the mindset and skills required for immediate and long-term success in an evolving and interconnected global workforce.

Mindset and learning dispositions

A culture of competence cultivates personal responsibility, self-efficacy, and independence, side by side with the ability to work effectively with others. Attributes include:

- Commitment to learning
- Self-motivation
- Self-directedness
- Self-awareness
- Self-control
- Self-reflection
- Collaboration
- Accountability
- Open-mindedness

Skills

A culture of competence facilitates the development of "enduring" skills that cut across industries and geographical contexts, and allow students to evaluate and adapt to new technologies and innovation over time. These include:

- Developing and implementing work plans and strategies
- Problem-solving
- Task and time management
- Critical thinking
- Providing and receiving constructive feedback
- Evaluating outcomes
- Teamwork and collective problem-solving
- Digital literacy and deep learning

Pedagogy

A culture of competence enables students to develop the attitudes and skills needed for workforce success through hands-on learning, flexible but structured learning processes, and solutions-oriented decision-making. Elements include:

- Curricula grounded in practical scenarios.
- Problem-solving opportunities embedded throughout the learning process (rather than relaying solutions).
- Activities that center students' ideas, then guide them through a process of refining, reimagining, and arriving at solutions.
- Engaging students in a culture of inquiry, analysis and evaluation, proof, and constructive critique.
- Freedom throughout the learning process for students to make thoughtful and independent judgments.

About the author

Dr. Cosmas Masega Ongesa is a teacher and researcher by profession with the University of Nairobi, Kenya, Multimedia University, and Laikipia University. His research focuses on critical thinking, education, and information technology. He is a member of Philosophy Kenya, the Philosophy, STAR scholars, Mercy Kueda fellows, and the Teachers Service Commission of Kenya. Email: cosmaso81@gmail.com.

The Toyota Indonesia Community Academy:
A Curriculum for Industrial Revolution 4.0

Edy Susilo Darmawan, Praditya Alambara, Cintya, and Maula Siti Sarah
The Toyota Indonesia Community Academy (AKTI), Indonesia

The Toyota Indonesia Community Academy (AKTI) is a community college located near Jakarta, Indonesia, which is fully owned and operated by the Toyota corporation. Founded in 2015 and currently enrolling approximately 96 students, AKTI is a residential campus, co-located with a Toyota manufacturing plant. Students are recruited throughout Indonesia with a particular focus on populations that are traditionally underserved by higher education; approximately 80% of students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Admission is competitive, and tuition, housing and other expenses are fully funded by the Toyota Indonesia Foundation for those students who are accepted.

AKTI's curriculum and pedagogy are centered around The Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0), as described by the World Economic Forum:

> The Fourth Industrial Revolution represents a fundamental change in the way we live, work and relate to one another. It is a new chapter in human development, enabled by extraordinary technology advances commensurate with those of the first, second and third industrial revolutions. These advances are merging the physical, digital and biological worlds in ways that create both huge promise and potential peril.

> The Fourth Industrial Revolution is about more than just technology-driven change; it is an opportunity to help everyone, including leaders, policy-makers and people from all income groups and nations, to harness converging technologies in order to create an inclusive, human-centered future (World Economic Forum, n.d.)

Cornerstones of AKTI's programs include continual collaboration with industry, project-based learning, and a strong emphasis on soft/enduring skills, framed as "body and mind development" — a long-standing priority for Toyota's corporate culture and training programs. Courses are ordered systematically, starting with broad fundamental courses that introduce the concept of IR 4.0, which in turn prepare students for more specialized content on topics such as operational technology 4.0, green technology, and information technology. Throughout all coursework, technological, data, and human literacy are emphasized, as well as the ability to recognize and adapt to technological changes over time.

Beyond the classroom, all students complete a two-semester industrial work practice program at the adjacent Toyota plant, and are required to participate in co-curricular activities designed to build self-efficacy, collaborative skills, and a sense of responsibility.

While AKTI's structure, funding, and affiliation with Toyota uniquely position the institution to provide a holistic educational experience, as a case example, it provides a number of lessons learned for community colleges and similar institutions around the world seeking to align closely with industry partners and prepare students for IR 4.0.

Multi-stakeholder curriculum design

AKTI's curriculum is dynamic and continually evolving. The following stakeholders contribute to content and delivery:

- Parents. AKTI communicates regularly with parents about students' progress and accomplishments. Parents play a key role in motivating and encouraging students, and in reinforcing the AKTI model of character development – particularly when challenges arise.

- Government. Because AKTI is under the auspices of the Indonesian Ministry of Education, the curriculum must comply with national accreditation rules, curriculum guidelines, and higher education standards. AKTI officials meet periodically with Ministry officials to review content and ensure this compliance.

- Industry associations. In addition to Ministry standards, AKTI monitors changes to industry standards for training and competencies, and continually updates curricular content to meet industry needs and emerging good practices.

- Other education institutions. Within Indonesia, AKTI is collaborating with vocational high schools from which it recruits students to introduce elements of the AKTI curriculum at the secondary level, with the hope that upon enrollment, new students will already be familiar with key elements of AKTI and Toyota culture, such as a safety- and quality-first mindset. AKTI is also developing collaborations with institutions outside of Indonesia, including in Switzerland and the US, in order to bring global perspectives to the curriculum.

Campus and technology infrastructure

At ATKI, the physical environment is intentionally and thoughtfully integrated into the IR 4.0 curriculum and learning experience. Examples include:

- Campus layout, workshop and laboratory set-up, work uniforms, and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as safety shoes, helmets, and goggles in the classroom all reflect, as closely as possible, real-world industrial environments and standards.

- A variety of simulators are available for students to develop practical skills in key areas such as hydraulics, pneumatics, mechatronics, machine elements, robotics, and vehicle assembly.

- An Internet of Things (IoT) laboratory provides equipment for students to work with Arduino, an open source hardware and software platform used to create electronics and programming projects.

- Facial recognition equipment similar to that used in manufacturing facilities is located at classroom entrances to record attendance and detect physical symptoms such as elevated body temperature. The system is linked to AKTI's Academic Information System, and serves as an early warning system for concerns about health issues or other challenges that may cause students to miss class and jeopardize academic performance.

Project-based learning

Throughout the curriculum and co-curriculum, students participate in project-based learning activities designed to promote the "3 C mindsets": Connected, Creative, and Confident. Examples include:

- An IoT smart irrigation project. Using an IoT application, students designed and implemented plant watering procedures for the AKTI campus cafeteria's garden. Students were divided into project groups, each with a particular task or theme, and were guided by instructors to complete a series of collaborative assignments over the course of four weeks.

- IoT robot UV scanning. During the COVID-19 pandemic, students created a UV cleaning robot, operated by remote control, to assist campus maintenance staff in sanitizing work areas.

Industry-embedded evaluation

Student evaluation focuses on ensuring that AKTI graduates are qualified, competent, and able to comply with industry standards. Metrics are developed in collaboration with industry and business sector partners, and competency is assessed through interviews with students and observation of their work on-site in manufacturing facilities, including the adjacent Toyota plant and various Toyota suppliers.

Outcomes and lessons learned

Student outcomes indicate the success of the AKTI model. Thus far, a full 100% of graduates have obtained employment within three months of graduation. Of AKTI's 342 graduates as of 2024, 95% were hired by Toyota Motor Manufacturing Indonesia, with the remaining 5% hired by Toyota supplier companies. Employers report that AKTI alumni bring valuable expertise to the shop floor, often drive improvements in equipment capabilities, and are well-prepared for future leadership roles.

While the AKTI model and circumstances are unique, its launch and first few years of operation offer lessons learned that can be applied in a variety of contexts. For community colleges and similar institutions around the world seeking to effectively prepare graduates for IR 4.0, key recommendations include:

- Cultivate an "ecosystem" of government and industry partners to ensure compliance, relevance, and support.

- Continually incorporate new and emerging technologies into the curriculum so that students develop the ability to quickly familiarize themselves and become comfortable with innovations.

- Establish partnerships with international counterpart institutions to expose students to global good practices.

- Maintain communication and relationships with alumni to help monitor industry needs and inform curriculum development.

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About the authors

Edy Susilo Darmawan has served Director of the Toyota Indonesia Academy (AKTI) since 2022. In this role, he leads industry-aligned vocational education initiatives, develops curricula, and fosters partnerships between vocational institutions and the automotive industry. He joined Toyota Indonesia in 1996 as a junior engineer in the Welding Shop, and has held various leadership roles at Toyota Indonesia, as well as at Toyota Motor Corporation in Japan and Toyota Motor Asia Pacific Engineering and Manufacturing in Thailand.

Praditya Alambara currently serves as AKTI's Deputy Director. He began his career at Toyota Indonesia in 2006, as a staff member in the Toyota Learning Center. Since then he has held various leadership roles both on the shop floor and in management. He continues to mentor students, and collaborates closely with industry partners to ensure that AKTI's curriculum provides the skills students need for success.

Cintya joined AKTI in 2022. Currently, she serves as a Lecturer and contributes to staff professional development and institutional accreditation initiatives.

Maula S. Sarah joined AKTI in 2022 as an intern in the Academic Administration Division. In 2024, she transitioned to the Quality Assurance Division, where she focuses on maintaining and improving internal quality standards and systems to comply with government regulations.

Enhancing Global Workforce Development through International Distance Learning: A Case Example from Japan

Xixi Zhang
The University of Osaka, Japan

As is the case in many countries around the world, workforce development is a key national priority in Japan, and an important driver of higher education policy. Amid intensifying global economic competition, Japan established the Council on Promotion of Human Resource for Globalization Development in 2011. The Council articulated a national goal to cultivate "global human resources" — individuals equipped with the skills needed to thrive in diverse cultural contexts and a rapidly changing global economy. It defined the core skills and attributes needed by such individuals as: (1) Linguistic and communication skills; (2) Self-direction and positivity, a spirit for challenge, cooperativeness and flexibility, and a sense of responsibility and mission; and (3) Understanding of other cultures and a sense of identity as Japanese. Building on this initiative, subsequent policies — such as the Top Global University Project launched in 2014 — have reflected a shift toward broader inclusion by encouraging higher education institutions to internationalize and create supportive environments for diverse student populations.

Traditionally in Japan, higher education institutions have focused their internationalization efforts on student mobility (study abroad, recruiting international students) and educational partnerships — often primarily with an eye toward improving global rankings (Ota, 2018). While mobility has long been recognized as an effective means for students to gain global skills, several challenges hinder the growth of student mobility (in Japan and many other countries), including cost factors (particularly for students from economically challenged backgrounds), concerns about job prospects after returning, and a general inward-looking mindset among students. Though short-term student mobility (particularly experiences of a month or less) has grown following the introduction of the Council and related government programs and initiatives, long-term study abroad rates among Japanese students have declined steadily over the last 15 years.

Beginning in 2020, the pandemic further disrupted Japan's internationalization activities, with many institutions turning to distance learning as a means to maintain and expand their global engagement. The rapid transition to online learning for all students not only mitigated the overall effects of the pandemic, but also built capacity and systems that many institutions are now continuing to leverage as student learning and workforce development have come to the fore as primary goals for global activity. By lowering barriers to participation, distance learning offers a flexible platform that enables students to gain critical skills required in today's globalized workforce, including communication, collaboration, and multilingual proficiency.

A case example: The University of Osaka's distance learning programs

Data on the scope of global distance learning initiatives for specific sectors of Japanese higher education is not readily available, so it is unclear to what extent such initiatives are currently being implemented in the career and technical education sector. However, lessons learned from the implementation of such programs in other higher education sectors (e.g. universities) can inform their development in career and technical education colleges and other types of institutions — in Japan and around the world — seeking to broaden access to global learning and develop "global human resources" across a variety of academic and applied fields.

The University of Osaka, one of Japan's national institutions of higher education, serves as an example. Online education has been a growing part of the institution's internationalization and workforce development efforts in recent years; in particular, virtual courses offered through the university's North American Center for Academic Initiatives have provided students with opportunities to engage with experts and peers from around the world.

This case study takes an in-depth look at two such courses offered by the university: "Current World Affairs" and "Global Studies in English." When originally launched, these courses were offered in-person at the university; in 2020, due to the impact of the pandemic, these courses transitioned to a fully online format utilizing Zoom meetings and the Collaborative Learning Environment (CLE) (a university-wide digital platform for managing and supporting classes) and have remained fully online since then. This shift has enabled better integration of synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous (pre- and post-class) online learning, allowing for more flexible participation, as well as increased enrollment capacity.

Through an examination of course structure, student participation, and learning outcomes, and drawing on data from program documents, student reports, facilitator reflections, and pre- and post-course surveys, the analysis and results of this case study provide insights into effective course design and methodology that can inform the development of such courses in different geographic and institutional contexts around the world, including those that are just beginning to undertake global learning as part of workforce development initiatives.

"Current World Affairs" (Spring & Summer Semester)

The "Current World Affairs" course is open to undergraduate students (both "regular", i.e. degree-seeking, and "non-regular," such as exchange students). Since it is conducted in Japanese, however, the majority of attendees are "regular" students — primarily first-year undergraduates. The course features online lectures from professionals in various fields, including CEOs, researchers, and civil society leaders. Many of these lecturers have international experience, offering students exposure to global success stories and diverse perspectives. The course encourages students to reflect on their personal and professional goals and challenges them to think critically about current world issues.

Over the years, participation in the course has fluctuated, but recent years have seen an increase in enrollment. For example, the 2023 course saw 178 students enroll, and this number rose to 187 in 2024.

"Global Studies in English" (Fall & Winter Semester)

"Global Studies in English," conducted in English, targets all students, including both "regular" and "non-regular" students, and both Japanese and international students. The course aims to enhance critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills. It also provides exposure to international academic practices through lectures by international faculty, including from the University of California and other institutions abroad.

Despite its focus on global engagement, enrollment in this course has been lower than in "Current World Affairs." Only 23 students participated in 2021, with slight dips in 2022 and 2023 before a minor recovery to 23 students in 2024. The lower enrollment in "Global Studies in English" compared to "Current World Affairs" may be attributed to a variety of factors, including the course's specific focus on improving English proficiency and the more academic nature of its content.

Students' goals and learning outcomes

Surveys conducted before and after the courses reveal several key insights. In terms of students' goals, in the "Current World Affairs" course, students were primarily motivated by the opportunity to learn from experts with diverse backgrounds and to gain career insights. Post-course surveys have indicated that most students felt they had achieved the course's objectives, with 88% reporting that the course had helped them develop essential skills such as writing, creative thinking, and logical thinking. Three-quarters (75%) of respondents, for example, felt their writing skills had improved, and 70% reported better creative thinking abilities.

Although few students initially expressed interest in improving global communication skills as their motivation for participating, 45% of respondents reported that the course had helped them improve their interactive communication skills — one of the skills identified in national policy statements as critical for "global human resources".

Similarly, students who completed the "Global Studies in English" course identified having the opportunity to learn from lecturers at overseas universities as a primary motivation for enrolling. They diverged from counterparts in the "Current World Affairs" course, however, in that improving English language proficiency was also among their top motivations, while learning about international career opportunities — a major goal for "Current World Affairs" students — was not. Post-course data (from learning assessments as well as student surveys) indicate that like the "Current World Affairs" course, the "Global Studies in English" course had a positive impact on students' academic and communication skills, again demonstrating alignment with national policy goals for global workforce development.

Lessons learned

The distance learning programs at the University of Osaka have provided valuable opportunities for students to engage with global perspectives, regardless of their location, and data on course outcomes suggest the programs are indeed contributing to national policy goals around creating a globally competent workforce.

The differing motivations and participation rates between the two courses profiled in this article suggest, however, that tailored approaches to course content and delivery may be necessary to meet the diverse needs of students. For instance, the "Current World Affairs" course, with its focus on career development, appeals to students at the beginning of their academic journeys. Its interactive format, particularly the opportunities for direct engagement with lecturers during Q&A sessions, allows students to gain valuable career insights.

In contrast, "Global Studies in English" focuses more on small group discussions (4~5 students per group) to enhance students' English communication skills. However, due to low enrollment, this course, which targets a more specific demographic, may need to reconsider its structure and content to attract a broader range of students. A key lesson is that addressing barriers to English-taught courses — such as language anxiety or perceived difficulty — may be crucial to attracting more students.

For both courses, the opportunity to engage interactively with experts from around the world was a major draw, suggesting the inclusion of a wide range of online presenters and lecturers as a best practice in planning course content. On-going assessments of these programs — and comparative data from other institutions in a variety of higher education sectors that are implementing global distance education — will provide valuable insights into how they can be refined to better meet the needs of students and further enhance their global engagement and skill development.

Conclusion

Distance learning is an essential and complementary tool alongside physical exchange for enhancing global workforce development, especially as the demand for global talent continues to grow. By fostering inclusive and flexible educational opportunities, distance learning programs contribute to the development of globally competent graduates who are equipped to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

 To effectively implement and further improve these programs, institutions can leverage alumni networks and international partnerships to involve diverse lecturers, enriching the learning experience with varied perspectives and real-world insights. Incorporating current trends such as information technology, well-being and healthcare, sustainable development, and personalized career exploration can further engage students and meet evolving global needs. Together, these approaches ensure that distance learning remains a dynamic and impactful pathway for cultivating the global workforce of tomorrow.

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About the author

Dr. Xixi Zhang is Specially Appointed Assistant Professor at Cross-Boundary Innovation Program Office, Institute for Transdisciplinary Graduate Degree Programs, The University of Osaka, Japan. Her major academic fields include Japanese linguistics, ICL (Intercultural Collaborative Learning), Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), Global Citizenship Education and Interdisciplinary Education. Email: sissizhang.itgp@osaka-u.ac.jp.

Community-First as a Bridge: Structuring Experiences Abroad for Civic and Career Connections

Shane Snipes

Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY, USA

In an increasingly interconnected world, campus and study abroad programs offer students more than cultural immersion—they provide opportunities for transformative learning and career development. The challenge lies in ensuring these programs move beyond surface-level experiences to foster meaningful connections with local communities while equipping students with career-ready skills. The Citizen Entrepreneur Explorers Program (CEEP) bridges academic inquiry and community engagement. Importantly, CEEP aligns with the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Competencies, ensuring students develop the critical thinking, communication, and teamwork skills necessary for success in a global workforce.

Launched in 2019, CEEP has grown into a proven framework for experiential learning, emphasizing local community engagement and entrepreneurial problem-solving. Initially implemented at the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC), the program has since expanded to 11 institutions across the U.S. CEEP integrates classroom learning with community-based projects, enabling students to develop critical career skills while fostering civic responsibility (Eyler & Giles, 1999). In 2025, CEEP will expand internationally through partnerships with the Institute for Sustainable Development Studies International (ISDSI) in Thailand and the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) in London. These collaborations will embed the CEEP framework into study abroad programs, providing a structured approach to community engagement that enhances students' academic and professional growth.

CEEP is supported through philanthropic grants, institutional partnerships, and public funding. Notably, the Kauffman Foundation provided initial funding via a multi-year Knowledge Challenge Grant to scale the model nationally, while the Blackstone LaunchPad initiative supported integration with entrepreneurship programs at participating colleges. Additional support comes from campus-based promotion, departmental resources, and local partners seeking experiential learning frameworks—ensuring the program remains accessible to students from all backgrounds.

The CEEP framework: An innovative approach to experiential learning

CEEP operates at the intersection of academic learning and community engagement, using a problem-based approach to help students identify, analyze, and address local challenges. By engaging directly with community stakeholders, students learn to navigate complex social dynamics, build empathy, and apply their knowledge to real-world problems. This alignment with competency-based education ensures students develop skills applicable across disciplines and industries (Garrison & Anderson, 2003).

In Thailand, for example, students partnering with ISDSI will engage in sustainability projects, such as collaborating with local farmers to develop innovative agricultural practices. This immersive approach requires students to conduct field research, propose actionable solutions, and present findings to stakeholders. Similarly, in London, students will tackle urban challenges like housing equity and environmental sustainability, working with local organizations to craft community-centered solutions. Research demonstrates that such hands-on experiences are critical for fostering deep learning and retention (Jackson, 2016).

CEEP's design prioritizes cultural humility and mutual respect. Students are encouraged to approach their host communities as active participants rather than passive observers, fostering relationships built on trust and reciprocity. This emphasis on community-driven engagement equips students with the cultural fluency and interpersonal skills needed to navigate diverse professional environments (Deardorff, 2016). Employers increasingly value these attributes, recognizing their role in building inclusive and innovative workplaces (Schattle, 2008).

NACE Competencies in action: Preparing students for career success

One of CEEP's key strengths is its alignment with the NACE Competencies, which outline the skills most valued by employers. By embedding these competencies into its framework, CEEP ensures students are both culturally enriched and professionally prepared. Below are ways CEEP study abroad programs address specific NACE Competencies:

Critical thinking and problem-solving. CEEP emphasizes analytical skills by requiring students to evaluate complex challenges and develop evidence-based solutions. For example, a project in Thailand might involve assessing water usage practices and proposing strategies for sustainable irrigation. These activities foster critical thinking, a skill consistently ranked among the most important by employers (Hurst, 2019).

Communication. Communication is integral to the CEEP model, as students present findings to local stakeholders, draft project reports, and engage in cross-cultural dialogues. These experiences strengthen both verbal and written communication skills, preparing students to convey complex ideas clearly and persuasively (Glover & Law, 2020).

Teamwork and collaboration. Working in multidisciplinary teams, students learn to navigate cultural differences, resolve conflicts, and leverage diverse perspectives. These collaborative experiences mirror the dynamics of today's global workplace, where teamwork is essential for innovation and productivity (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002).

Global and intercultural fluency. By immersing students in diverse cultural contexts, CEEP fosters intercultural competence. Students gain a nuanced understanding of global issues, equipping them to adapt and thrive in a multicultural world (Deardorff, 2016).

Leadership. CEEP empowers students to lead their projects, fostering decision-making, initiative, and accountability. These leadership experiences prepare students for roles requiring independent thinking and strategic planning (Schattle, 2008).

Faculty development: Building sustainable bridges

Faculty play a pivotal role in the success of experiential learning frameworks like CEEP, acting as mentors who guide students through the program's processes. To ensure consistency and sustainability, CEEP provides monthly professional development opportunities, including peer connections and workshops on community-based research and interdisciplinary collaboration. Faculty are trained to identify local project opportunities, facilitate student engagement, and lead reflection sessions that deepen learning.

This investment in faculty development has long-term benefits, fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration across disciplines. For instance, environmental science professors might work alongside business faculty to design projects that integrate sustainability and entrepreneurship, creating richer learning experiences (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). By empowering faculty, CEEP ensures the sustainability and scalability of its framework across institutions and countries.

Impact and outcomes: A vision for global change

In the coming years, CEEP aims to impact 5,000 students globally, with 30% originating from BMCC and other CUNY colleges and 70% from partner institutions across the U.S., U.K., and Thailand. In Kansas City—a key focus area supported by the Kauffman Foundation—CEEP proposes collaborating with local community colleges to address challenges faced by Native American and underserved populations. These partnerships will model how to integrate entrepreneurial and community engagement practices into education.

CEEP's outcomes will be tracked through surveys, student reflections, and longitudinal studies assessing improvements in NACE competencies. Key metrics include increased career readiness, stronger community connections, and expanded cultural fluency. For example, students who participate in CEEP report higher confidence in their ability to lead projects, collaborate across disciplines, and communicate effectively—skills that directly enhance employability (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Shaping future leaders: An invitation

What sets CEEP apart is its holistic approach to education, combining academic inquiry, community engagement, and career development. Unlike traditional study abroad programs, which often emphasize cultural exposure, CEEP focuses on building reciprocal relationships with host communities. By aligning its curricular framework with NACE Competencies, CEEP prepares students to navigate and thrive in a globalized workforce. Its focus on critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and cultural fluency equips students with the skills needed to address complex challenges and contribute meaningfully to their communities. This approach enriches students' educational experiences and contributes to local development, creating a model of global citizenship in action (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002).

CEEP is designed as an open framework that allows institutions of all types to adapt it to their local or global contexts. The program's emphasis on faculty development ensures its principles are consistently applied across this wide range of contexts. Institutions interested in joining the network are encouraged to identify faculty or staff champions committed to experiential, community-based learning. From there, they can connect with others at Citizenpreneurs.com. The program offers onboarding sessions, templates, and co-development support. Key advice for building similar programs includes starting with the CEEP framework, securing initial seed funding, engaging community partners early, and building in regular reflection and evaluation points to ensure both academic rigor and community benefit.

As CEEP expands to new regions and institutions, it has the potential to shape the next generation of leaders. By fostering connections between students and communities, CEEP creates a bridge to a better future—one that prioritizes empathy, collaboration, and innovation.

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About the author

Dr. Shane Snipes is Assistant Professor, Deputy Chair, and Degree Coordinator in the Business Management Department, at Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY. His research focuses on integrating generative AI, experiential learning, and community-centered education to enhance critical thinking, collaboration, empathy and entrepreneurial self-efficacy. He created and distributed freely the Citizen Entrepreneur Explorers Program (CEEP), advancing innovative teaching practices and technology-driven pedagogies across disciplines. Dr. Snipes regularly presents at national and international conferences on sustainability and AI's transformative potential in higher education and entrepreneurship.

Giving Apples to Newtons: Nurturing Innovation Via Industry-Academia Collaboration

Aswathy Venugopal
Cognizant, India

As industries navigate rapid technological transformation, there is an urgent need for a workforce equipped with technical expertise and the ability to thrive in a constantly evolving landscape. According to the World Economic Forum's Skills Outlook report (2025), the next five years will demand a sharp rise in technological competencies—particularly in AI, Big data, Cybersecurity, and digital literacy. In parallel, organizations increasingly seek individuals who can think critically, solve complex problems creatively, and adapt swiftly to change. Socio-emotional attributes such as resilience, flexibility, curiosity, and commitment to lifelong learning are becoming just as essential as coding or data analysis.

The Cognizant Academia Research Ecosystem (CARE) is a strategic initiative designed to address the evolving demands of the modern workforce by bridging the gap between academic preparation and industry needs. CARE cultivates a balanced skill set by promoting deep expertise in high-growth areas such as artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and cybersecurity, while also advancing educational approaches that nurture resilience, curiosity, and lifelong learning.

Aligned with Cognizant's broader Synapse initiative, CARE drives innovation through collaborative research, skill enhancement, and real-world problem solving. Synapse aims to empower one million individuals by 2026 with future-ready skills, including generative AI, through partnerships with governments, academic institutions, and industry leaders. Together, CARE and Synapse create new pathways for students and professionals to thrive in a rapidly transforming global economy.

This article explores how the CARE program prepares students for the global workforce, with a focus on student learning outcomes and future readiness.

Program overview

Launched in 2022, the CARE program is an extension of Cognizant's "Ecosystem of Innovation," encompassing employees and academic partners. The program involves various stakeholders, including Cognizant's senior delivery leadership, the R&D team in our innovation studio, and the GenC Human Resources team, as well as administrators, faculty, professors, research scholars, and students from participating academic institutions. Initially starting with one engineering college, the program expanded to four more colleges in 2023, reflecting its scalability and adaptability.

The CARE program is meticulously designed to ensure that academic capabilities align with real-world business problems through a collaborative approach. Currently, the CARE program is operational in India and Cognizant is working with universities with foundational research and development capabilities. The program begins with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Cognizant and academic leadership, outlining engagement objectives, goals, and legal modalities, including Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs).

Core teams comprising subject matter experts (SMEs), faculty, and students are identified at Cognizant and the academic institutions. These teams participate in design workshops to identify business problems for innovation, and potential research assets that can be utilized for solution development. Additionally, these workshops help identify the training programs necessary for student skill development across various technologies, processes, and methodologies.

Educational activities and approach

The program emphasizes comprehensive student skilling in both digital technologies and processes. Students develop expertise in digital skills such as Augmented Reality/Virtual Reality (AR/VR), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the Internet of Things (IoT). They also gain proficiency in processes and methodologies, including User Interface (UI) design principles, use cases, and business processes. Furthermore, students are exposed to futuristic technologies like brain-computer interfaces, robotics, and advanced tech gadgets such as Microsoft HoloLens, Vuzix smart glasses, collaborative robots (cobots), and Automated Guided Vehicles (AGVs). Components of the program include:

- The innovation journey involves students and faculty working alongside Cognizant teams in an Innovation Studio, following a Product-Oriented Development (POD)-based model. A POD-based development model combines students and Cognizant SMEs in smaller groups that can work on an idea autonomously. This model encompasses stages such as problem definition and detailing, solution whiteboarding, POD team setup (comprising students and Cognizant SMEs), development, and solution incubation and business validation. This hands-on approach ensures that students gain practical insights into industry processes and methodologies, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

- Faculty members are also enabled through exposure to industrial methodologies and nuances. They learn and apply these insights to help their own teams, getting involved in industrial projects and enabling more students under their guidance.

- Students present their developed solutions to Cognizant business leaders for validation and demos. They also have the opportunity to showcase their solutions to customers' C-suite executives and industry entities such NASSCOM (a trade association for the Indian IT industry). This exposure helps students understand industry expectations, receive valuable feedback, and build professional networks, preparing them for successful careers in a globalized industry landscape.

- The program concludes with Cognizant certificates, felicitations, and honors, celebrating the achievements of students, faculty, and the Cognizant SMEs.

Outcomes and impact

The CARE program has trained over 100 students in industrial innovation and digital skills, significantly enhancing their employability. Many students have secured positions in leading technology firms and startups. Alumni of the CARE program have demonstrated impressive career trajectories, leveraging the skills and experiences gained through the program to advance in their careers.

Graduates have reported increased confidence and competence in their professional abilities, attributing their success to the comprehensive training provided by the CARE program. The cascading impact includes students helping their peers understand industry practices. Exposure to multiple use cases has helped students understand prototype development and presentation/articulation of the prototypes. Additionally, the program has provided an understanding of industry-specific technologies relevant to non-tech industries such as manufacturing, energy, and retail, which are undergoing digital transformation.

> *"Through the CARE program, I gained a range of skills and knowledge that will shape my career. I developed a deep understanding of advanced AI/ML models, such as GAN and LLMs, enhancing my technical expertise. I also learned about data preprocessing, visualization techniques, and cloud computing, which are essential in today's tech landscape. The program taught me to integrate technical solutions with business perspectives, improving my strategic thinking." — Student 1*

> *"CARE has provided a comprehensive understanding of the entire lifecycle of solution and prototype building. From the initial ideation phase to the final deployment, I learned how to navigate the software creation process effectively." — Student 2*

The CARE program also emphasizes the development of critical soft skills. Students enhance their problem-solving abilities, learning to identify, analyze, and solve complex problems. They develop strong collaboration and teamwork skills, working effectively in diverse teams to achieve common goals. The program also fosters adaptability, enabling students to quickly learn and adapt to new technologies and methodologies.

> *"I have gained project management skills, including planning, executing, and managing projects, as well as time management and resource allocation. Working in multidisciplinary teams has fostered my collaboration and communication skills." — Student 3*

This comprehensive approach ensures that students are well-prepared to work in diverse, international environments, making them highly attractive to employers and ready to tackle the challenges of the modern workforce.

> *"...I acquired skills in gathering requirements, understanding key performance indicators (KPIs), and thoroughly comprehending the problem at hand." — Student 4*

> *"Interactions with international clientele have refined my prowess in presentation and cross-cultural communication, ensuring my preparedness to lead projects and deliver impactful solutions in my forthcoming professional trajectory." — Student 5*

Insights and future pathways

The CARE program stays relevant by continuously adapting to changing industry demands. Detailed MoUs and NDAs address student enablement, ensuring clear guidelines and effective collaboration. This adaptability is crucial for maintaining the program's effectiveness in a rapidly evolving technological landscape.

The program ensures a well-rounded education by balancing academic learning with practical experience. Regular communication and coordination between industry and academia are maintained through meetings, progress reviews, and feedback sessions.

Facilitating student access to Cognizant facilities required meticulous planning and coordination. This included ensuring necessary security clearances, providing logistical support, and offering amenities such as cafeteria services. These logistical challenges were addressed through detailed planning and collaboration between Cognizant and academic institutions. Timelines, reviews, and governance structures were established to create flexibility for students and colleges, balancing both academic and research program requirements.

The CARE program exemplifies the power of industry-academia collaboration in nurturing innovation and preparing a global workforce. By providing students with hands-on experience and exposure to cutting-edge technologies, the program enhances their skills and drives industrial innovation. This case study underscores the importance of such collaborations in fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation.

Such collaborations are a result of a strong industry-academia ecosystem that Cognizant has built over the years by contributing to colleges in multiple ways, e.g. participating in academic planning meetings, providing input for curricula, interacting with students through in-person and virtual forums, and running campus engagement programs for students and faculty. Programs of this type allow companies to evaluate an academic institution's interest and appetite for co-developing innovative solutions to enable students for future workforce success.

The success of the CARE program highlights the potential for similar initiatives to transform education and industry. By bridging the gap between academia and industry, these programs create a pipeline of skilled professionals ready to tackle future challenges.

In essence, the CARE program is like giving apples to Newtons, providing eager students with the resources and opportunities they need to research, learn, and innovate. As the global workforce evolves, the importance of such collaborations will only grow, making industry-initiated programs like CARE essential for sustainable development and economic growth.

Reference

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About the author

Aswathy Venugopal is Head of Campus Recruitment and Relations, India, for Cognizant. In her 20+ years at Cognizant, she has visited over 100 campuses and spearheaded more than 3,000 programs, including student internships, faculty development, higher education initiatives, and hackathons. Her roles have spanned technology, delivery, and corporate functions for Cognizant in India and the US. Email: aswathy.venugopal@cognizant.com.