

The March 16, 2007 Logistics and Distribution Banner Center Focus Group was made possible by the University of North Florida, and the Employ Florida Banner Center for Logistics and Distribution.

Lake City Community College has been selected as Florida's Banner Center for Logistics and Distribution, a part of a Workforce Florida commitment to encourage and launch centers of excellence to meet Florida's economic and workforce needs of the future. Phase One of the effort requires formation of an implementation plan, a strategic plan to serve the Florida market, and near-term program implementation to demonstrate the customer commitment and operational capabilities of Banner sites.

## Challenges for the Industry and Companies

Top of mind and generally shared challenges for industry and companies included:

- Poor positioning and reputation of careers in logistics
- Weak to modest position in wage competitiveness
- Intra-industry talent churn
- Limited employee and recruit understanding of down-stream customer relationships and impacts
- Dilution of the term "logistics" with preference for "supply chain"
- Limited adaptability to industry-specific information technology tools
- Employee and recruit capability to use data to make decisions and perform on time and just-in-time tasks
- Limited understanding and utilization of critical industry terminology
- Limited understanding of basic compliance standards and tools (documents)

Other participant-specific concerns included finding bilingual (Spanish) talent, and recruiting and retaining truck drivers.

## Summary

In Phase One of their Banner Center program, Lake City Community College conducts focus groups to inform both the strategic planning process and opportunities for near-term curricula development. The Banner Center team forms and conducts focus group conversations based on the following key assumptions:

- A wide range of sector leaders and experts must be included
- Participants should be provided access to focus group documentation and other results, and encouraged to supplement missing or emerging data
- Participants should be provided with avenues to discuss both long-term and near-term issues
- Sessions should be fast-paced and sensitive to the time and travel investments of the participants

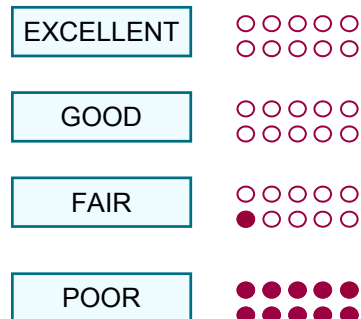
Focus Group I included participants with experience and expertise in inventory management, trucking, recruiting and human resources, port services and cargo, supply chain management and consulting, and engineering and transportation. Participants were especially interested in the "crossroads economy" of Florida and the role logistics and distribution intensive firms have in regional success. They raised serious concerns about the lack of understanding among current employees and recruits relative to fundamental principles of supply chain, limited technical skills in information management and standard business terminology, and the lack of resources to cultivate lasting careers in the profession. Despite multiple prompts regarding specific training and skills requirements for job classes or positions, participants preferred to focus on an overarching need for talent that understands the unique downstream customer relationships and has applied technical training in industry-specific settings. Individual employees and students may have access to technical or academic components for logistics and distribution careers but the generic, classroom approach to compliance, terminology, project management tools, and management does not meet the needs of this industry.

## The Ratings

The Focus Group provided a rating of regional access to talent for both technical and “soft” skills, as defined by the participants.

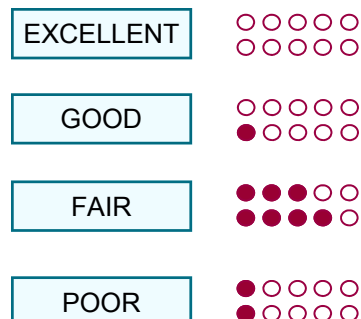
### Technical Skills

Considering their ability to access talent with the technical skills needed to support a competitive Florida enterprise as poor, fair, good or excellent, the consensus was poor.



### Soft Skills

Considering their ability to access talent with the “soft” skills needed to support a competitive Florida enterprise as poor, fair, good or excellent, the consensus was fair.



## Situation Assessment—Access to Talent

Participants clearly distinguished supply logistics and distribution industry requirements from generic or all-industry skills programs. Global supply chains and the distance employee actions have from ultimate customer impacts and values require dedicated programs and applied techniques.

### Technical Skills

Focus Group participants outlined a number of priorities for technical skills for employees and recruits.

- Basic computer/software skills cultivated in applied settings
- Basic compliance and regulatory standards and terminology taught in applied settings
- Working knowledge of tools and equipment used in the industry
- Experience in using data to make decisions about service, delivery, and other customer affecting behaviors
- Tangible, on-site exposure to systems-in-action such as warehouse and inventory management, multi-modal handoffs of goods and products, and on-board information technology diagnostics

### Soft Skills

Focus Group participants outlined a number of priorities for “soft” skills for employees and recruits.

- Understanding of the downstream impact and values employee behaviors have on customers
- A working foundation of terminology relative to tools and infrastructure
- A working foundation of terminology relative to regulation and compliance
- A basic foundation of supply chain concepts
- An evolving appreciation of career pathways

*“The generic, classroom approach to compliance, terminology, project management tools, and management does not meet the needs of this industry.”*

## Concluding Consensus

The 2½ hour conversation ended with a rating of participants' potential to engage in developmental conversations for the Banner Center in the future. There was a consensus that the potential was good, and would be excellent on the following conditions:

### Condition 1

Identify and hire the best talent for this new center of excellence. The talent and leadership base must reflect Florida's commitment to the field.

### Condition 2

Deliver curricula services that are aligned with company requirements.

### Condition 3

Deliver programs in proximity of the customer companies AND establish a regional or local reputation for excellence in each and every market.

## The Role of an Emerging Banner Center

Participants believe their enterprises would be more competitive if their "soft" and technical skill requirements were met for employees and recruits. Over time, school districts will probably step-up to the challenge, but the need is immediate and the "crossroads" economy of Florida is in-play. This means a Community College dedicated to the right curricula is likely to provide students of all ages with their first glimpse, first theories, and first applied programs for supply chain-driven careers. If the Banner Center for Logistics and Distribution leveraged its assets and partner resources to design and deliver these curricula, would there be a realistic market for sustainable services? Focus Group participants answered "yes" but with some very important conditions:

- Some believed program delivery needed to start in partnership with companies for existing employees, while others felt entry-level and recruit-driving coursework had to go hand-in-hand with employee programs
- Any program for employees must be market/location accessible (In the words of one participant, "Are you here?")

One participant also counseled the Banner team to seek out existing local or regional strategies, and noted a regional initiative designed to train and recruit from the service sector (providing incremental improvements in both benefits and salaries for individuals and families).

### Our thanks to the guest leaders who invested their time and perspectives in this Focus Group:

**Bob Wood**—University of North Florida  
**Bobby Steele**—Wal-Mart  
**Carlos Morales**—Sea Star Line  
**Jimmy Davis**—Davis Express, Inc.  
**Kathleen Wentworth**—ICS Logistics

**Ken Mixon**—Sea Star Line  
**Michael O'Leary**—Grimes Companies  
**Paul Dupre**—Grimes Companies  
**Ricky Bowen**—Terry Dicks Trucking, Inc.  
**Robin O'Leary**—CEVA Logistics

**Ron Ratliff**—RS & H  
**Shawna Hunt**—Sea Star Line  
**Stacy Jarvis**—University of North Florida  
**Terry Dicks**—Terry Dicks Trucking, Inc.  
**Tom Ming**—Landstar Global Logistics