

The March 22, 2007 Logistics and Distribution Banner Center Focus Group was made possible by the Okaloosa Applied Technology Center 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:

- Homeland security inspection requirements affect employment eligibility
- International trade opportunities evolving
- Increasing education needs require funding
- Jobs are looking for people
- People lack basic skills out of high school
- Partnership with business and education is necessary for applied teaching and learning
- Measures are changing on how employees are evaluated
- Constantly evolving technology and ways of communicating
- General lack of awareness and negative image about jobs and careers in logistics and distribution

### 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 II included participants across the business, economic, development, education and workforce sectors. Participants possessed experience and expertise in management, security, terminal services, warehousing and inventory management, recruiting and human resources, port services and cargo, supply chain management and consulting, engineering and transportation, economic development, workforce development and education.

Today's training needs merge technology and communications in an increasingly changing environment in this industry. Jobs are begging to be filled yet many applicants lack the basic skills expected from high school graduates. Highly skilled blue collar and white collar employees are harder to find with companies often courting employees from each other.

Talent is found through a range of sources, from off-the-street to campus recruitment. Job and company web-sites are increasingly used to put jobs and applicants together. However, a general lack of knowledge about jobs and careers in Logistics and Distribution seems to exist. The participants indicated that the industry has a somewhat negative image, pointing to the need to re-image the industry and advertise/promote career opportunities. Awareness of the industry and careers in middle and high school was also proposed, noting that only business majors in colleges "hear about" logistics and distribution in their sophomore or junior year.

Once employed, employees are mostly trained in-house for the technical aspects of the job. Training for supervisory, management and leadership skills is often out-sourced. The importance of education institutions and businesses connecting to educate and train together was emphasized, beginning with curriculum development to students learning and applying knowledge in 'real world' settings.

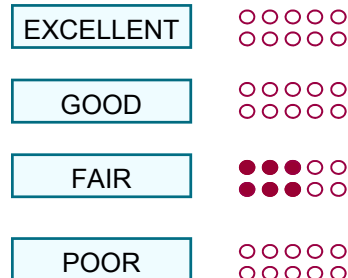
Tomorrow's ideal employees in logistics and distribution were profiled as life-long learners who possess a work ethic and the ability to see how their jobs fit into the big picture.

## The Ratings

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

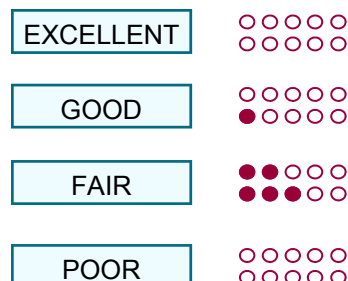
### Technical Skills

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 fair.



### 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 noted a group of technical and “soft” skills as “most needed” but emphasized that the “soft” skills be integrated with the technical skills in any and all types of education and training. Employees need to have the basic skills as an entry point for jobs but many don’t possess, so a baseline of basic skills need to be taught, *and learned*. Participants said that finding talent with technical skills can be difficult. Some businesses want employees to learn and apply skills in the context of logistics and warehousing. They also noted that logistics and distribution businesses shift and change with competition, trade, and technology, so the relevant skills change quickly.

### Technical Skills

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

- Computers, systems and software cultivated in applied settings, including:
  - ▶ Wireless technology
  - ▶ Computer diagnostics
  - ▶ Electronic, camera and scanner systems
  - ▶ Warehousing and inventory management systems
- Understanding how their industry works and how their and other jobs are connected (often need to perform jobs outside job description)
- Industry and company terminology
- Companies’ way of doing business and their ‘way of working’

### Soft Skills

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

- Possession of a good work ethic and accountability
- Ability to be prompt and to meet deadlines
- Ability to problem solve and make decisions
- Ability to lead and motivate people
- Respect for other people
- Capability for multi-tasking
- Open to learning and applying new techniques

*“Jobs are looking for people.”*

## 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

More and continuing engagement and input from the business community—including major logistics and distribution companies.

### Condition 2

The Banner Center education and training would be convenient from a place 'located in my city' and, for some, virtual access is acceptable.

### Condition 3

The Banner Center provides a continual refreshment of most needed programs and phase out of programs no longer relevant to businesses, with instructors under-going continuous training to keep up-dated.

The Banner Center partnership with businesses and education institutions can help move logistics and distribution courses and careers to the mainstream of high school and college course work. Jobs and careers in this industry are available for high school graduates through college graduates. The Banner Center can help redefine the track to these jobs and careers in its role, up and down-stream, with middle and high schools, community colleges and four-year universities, along with businesses, workforce development and economic development.

The Logistics and Distribution Banner Center's courses must blend technology and hard skills with the soft skills in a real world setting with real consequences. A mix of programs—short training sessions or classes, certifications, A.A. or A.S. degrees, extended learning, train the trainer and outreach courses to enterprises were identified as most desirable. Participants stressed that the Banner Center should let the private sector know how to access and engage with them. The Banner Center must promote their resources and courses directly to businesses. Ideally, the Banner Center can fulfill the cutting edge education, training and information needed by industry.

The Banner Center can play a major role in creating general awareness about the logistics and distribution industry and its jobs and careers. Participants proposed utilizing in-school programs and media advertising to create a contemporary technology-driven image, strengthen the connection to marketing, and promote entry-level to management job and career opportunities.

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

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