

The March 27, 2007 Logistics and Distribution Banner Center Focus Group was made possible by the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission 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:

- Having enough workers to fill available jobs
- People lack basic skills out of high school
- Vo-tech not a mainstream track in high school
- Constantly evolving technology and ways of communicating
- Rules and regulations continually changing
- Due to lower manufacturing, significantly more freight in than freight out of Florida prevents companies from coming to Florida
- Lack of awareness and understanding about 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 III consisted of one participant with more than 30 years of industry experience, including trucking, transportation, and sales for a major multi-modal corporation.

A variety of jobs in the logistics and distribution industry were discussed in the context of education and training, both for new hires and experienced employees. The participant shared that many companies consider hiring only those truck drivers with a minimum of two to three years driving experience. Workers under 30 years of age, who gain computer experience during K-12 education, are expected to be computer literate; older workers may participate in 3 to 4 day computer trainings.

Currently, new employees may receive 10 days of initial on-the-job training, including 2 to 3 days to observe and one day to learn company rules and regulations. Truck drivers are provided 6 to 12 weeks of driver training and apprentice mechanics programs where available.

As an average, existing employees may get 4 to 5 days a year training. Truck driver training covers safety, hazmat, heavy haul, port laws, and state and federal rules. Virtual and on-site training along with short burst sessions via conference calls, one hour trainers and newsletters—particularly with safety as an on-going topic. The typical training lag averages 6 months to 1 year in the field and many companies have in-house training centers.

Technical schools and colleges provide 2 and 4 year degree programs, but the participant touted the need to really understand what the job is about, best gained by actually "walking in the shoes" of those who perform the job.

People learn about jobs and careers through being in the business, networking, job and company web-sites, and trucking and industry trade shows and conventions.

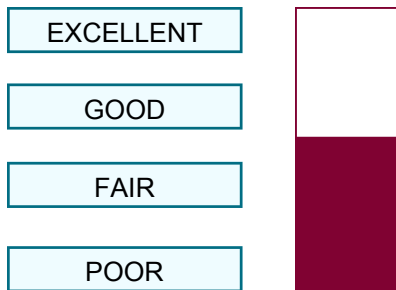
The participant emphasized emerging opportunities and knowledge needs in growth jobs which included computer programmers, sales (pricing and industry knowledge), billing (scanning technology), telemarketing to acquire business, and load board experts (matching freight/loads with carriers).

## The Ratings

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

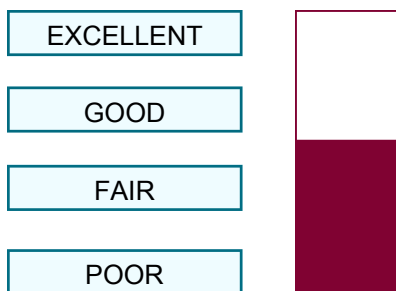
### Technical Skills

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



### Soft Skills

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



## Situation Assessment—Access to Talent

The participant discussed a number of jobs and careers for which talent is needed: truck drivers, mechanics, sales agents, dispatchers, and customer service representatives. The job of a truck driver in particular has become complex with a myriad of changing responsibilities, and evolving technology, rules, and regulations. When asked whether the occupation should be renamed, “Freight Manager” and “Logistics Engineer” were chosen.

### Technical Skills

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

- Changing trucks: computerized engines, automatic transmissions
- Changing rules and regulations: weight limits, hours per day driving limits, how to load, in-motion weighing, security, hazmat
- Computer hardware and Microsoft Office
- In-house systems, scanners and billing
- Office and communications equipment
- Safety and traffic rules
- Metric systems and tools (1/3 today)

### Soft Skills

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

- Communication with customers and people on the phone and in-person
- Respect for people, authority and equipment
- Conflict management and resolution
- Ability to be on time
- How to ask questions
- Problem-solving
- Supervisory

*“Changing technology and the resulting impact on communications affect every job in this industry”*

## Concluding Consensus

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

### Condition 1

The Banner Center provides cutting edge information, education and training for the industry and companies.

### Condition 2

The Banner Center promotes what information, education and training is available—particularly by job and career categories.

### Condition 3

The Banner Center views and presents logistics and distribution as a growing industry with a global reach.

## The Role of an Emerging Banner Center

The participant stressed the need to create awareness and understanding of the logistics and distribution, and supply chain management industries; and that whether defined as “whatever it takes to move something from Point A to Point B” or the “resource—manufacturing—package chain,” people need to know the role this industry plays in the economy and the impact these jobs have on businesses and consumers.

The participant cited the negative image of jobs and careers in the logistics and distribution industry based on the incidence of truck accidents as well as a perception of these being lower class jobs not requiring education and yielding low pay. When asked to do so, the participant was able to reposition the image as positive: the importance of bringing goods and products to market, a highly service-oriented and increasingly multi-modal industry, run by state-of-the-art technology, using just-in-time communications, with better pay and benefits than many jobs/careers, and education and training requirements for entry and continued employment.

The need for education and training exists for all employees in all jobs/careers on an ongoing basis: the participant proposed one training occurrence a month as the ideal benchmark.

To populate the pipeline with new employees, the Banner Center should support vo-tech as mainstream for K-12 education, with a logistics and distribution track in high school. The Banner Center could sponsor Career Days at which job profiles, salaries, and company hierarchies are discussed with students, parents, and guidance counselors.

The participant also stated that the Banner Center curriculum should include, in their basic program for all students, the latest fast-changing technology and the impact on communications, in applied and realistic settings. Increase in multi-modal, changing rules and regulations and conflict resolution were other important content for education and training courses.

The place was less important than the need to provide continuing education for employees to refresh and relearn, and the ability of a college to offer more courses and programs. The subject content could be provided through short courses, day seminars, year-long technical and communication and management skills courses, and programs resulting in certifications, two year degrees, and leading to four year degrees.

The participant cited the importance of weaving communication and role playing into all training and courses, to build the capability of interacting successfully with customers, bosses and co-workers in a variety of situations. The Logistics and Distribution Banner Center curriculum should layer content to provide what the participant labeled a “teaching chain” of both skills specific to the job—*technology*, and the soft skills—*communications*.

Our thanks to the guest leader who invested his time and perspectives in this Focus Group:

Don Wood—3SM Inc.