

Summary of Employer Roundtable, Session #2
December 3rd, 2012
8:00 AM to 10:00 AM
President's Conference Room
East Tennessee State University

ETSU Attendees

Brian Noland, President
Bert Bach, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Wilsie Bishop, Vice President for Health Affairs and University Chief Operating Officer
Jeremy Ross, Associate Vice President for University Advancement
Bill Kirkwood, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education
Cheri Clavier, Director of Assessment and Teaching
Reedena Newlon, Executive Aide, Assessment and Teaching
Curtis Montgomery, Assistant to the President

Guest Employers

Fred Adams, Director, Northeast Regional Health Office of Tennessee Department of Health
Joe Carr, Executive Vice President and City Executive, Bank of Tennessee
Charlie Glass, Executive Director, Greater Kingsport Family YMCA
Richard Hurley, Major, Field Operations Bureau of Tennessee Highway Patrol
David Kirschke, Medical Director, Northeast Regional Health Office of Tennessee Department of Health
Logan McCabe, Vice President, Marketing and Sales Division of Bristol Motor Speedway
Roger Mowen, Chief Volunteer Officer, Greater Kingsport Family YMCA

Welcome, Opening Remarks

Dr. Kirkwood expressed how “how delighted we are that you took time out of your morning to be on campus with us and to share your thoughts with us.” He introduced ETSU President Brian Noland.

Dr. Noland thanked the guest employers “for taking the time away to be with us in a conversation about the future of ETSU, about the presence of ETSU, and about the role and ability of ETSU to meet your needs from an employment perspective.” He explained that “this conversation is part of two streams. The first stream is a process of the Committee for 125, a group that has been meeting throughout the fall to help frame a vision for the institution as we move towards our 125th anniversary. We have just come out of the centennial and as we move from the centennial and begin to look forward one of the things that we are engaging in as an institution—across all facets of the institution—is a long range planning process. Of where are we, where have we been, and how are we meeting the needs of the region? And part of this effort is the conversation today—really getting a sense from the employer’s perspective. From the folks who drive the economy of the region in partnership with us. What can we do to deepen that partnership? What are the things that you are seeing from ETSU that you really enjoy? What are the skill-sets that you need in terms of new employees? And what can we do to partner with you to ensure that we are producing graduates who are able to continue to drive the economy? And then the other side of it is part of a process with the state in which we are required to reach out to employers and get a sense of their perspectives. So two different streams here—one visioning and one state accountability. But the two all come together to frame what we do on a daily basis which is how do we prepare students to transition into the workforce and to help to continue to make this a growing, dynamic, and thriving region?”

Dr. Noland prompted introductions in the room and he and Dr. Kirkwood introduced the organizer and facilitator of the Employer Roundtable, Ms. Clavier.

Employer Needs

Other than the skill set based on the positions being filled, Ms. Clavier prompted discussion of other skills, abilities, or attitudes that are important of the new employees hired. Participants mentioned the following attributes:

- most new hires come in at entry level
- ability to function within different computer operating systems
- positive interpersonal skills such as relating well with co-workers and customers
- oral and writing intensive skills
- conversationalist
- well-rounded academic career
- multi-task ability
- multiple Spanish skills; companies may check for certification
- team collaboration
- critical thinking skills
- conflict resolution ability
- character and personality
- wellness attitude
- no entitlement issues, but motivation in the desire to want to excel and work hard
- long term rather than short term mindset
- knowledgeable in the field
- disciplined and common sense driven
- awareness of competitive environment and ability to differentiate oneself

Attributes That Differentiate Students

To build upon a comment made about differentiating students, Ms. Clavier asked participants to point out attributes that are sought in resumes during the very first step of employment.

- ability to write a grammatically correct resume
- communicate one's skills
- demonstrate ability to work in group environment within school, work, extracurricular activities, etc.
- communicate some level of accountability
- campus and/or community involvement
- adaptability; students/employees need to reach comfort level quicker
- self starter
- positive work ethic
- ability to show what is wanted in life
- ability to articulate

Online or Traditional College Experience

To build upon comments made about changing technology and keeping up with computing skills, Ms. Clavier sought opinions on what kind of difference it makes in graduates who have an online versus traditional college experience.

- detail the lifestyle that prompted the necessity of taking online classes versus traditional classes
- a mix of online versus traditional classes could be more acceptable; it depends on types of classes and how much they are weighted on resume
- in some instances online is acceptable as in cases of professional development for those already on the job; this allows employees to utilize time well and keep up-to-date on training

- there is worry of students/employees communicating primarily through technology; the social skills of those kinds of profiles are sometimes very inadequate for the work environment today
- we do have a tuition assistance program and it certainly is not limited to anything local; it could be online; it really is good to see an employee go back and get a degree if they did not do that—whether it is undergraduate or graduate
- somehow that demonstrates their life-long learning attitude; I want to learn this because that is a requirement now for my job; that says a lot about their thinking—about what would differentiate

ETSU Reputation

Ms. Clavier asked about ETSU's reputation. Specifically, "when you see on a resume that a potential employee is an ETSU graduate what does that mean to you?"

- we have extreme success with ETSU graduates; and the quality of not only the training they have, but the person they are and the character they have, and all the other intangibles you cannot teach but you just develop
- let's say you are a health care system so you are looking for a physician, or a nurse, or an administrator...I think ETSU competes very well; because you get somebody that has grown up in the region and understands what it is like to live here and prefers to live here and they have that technical skill you are looking for
- if you think about some general degrees like Business Administration or Marketing; those degrees are not as strong at ETSU as they might be at some other universities
- we are talking about personality traits and skills and you do not really get a degree in, but they are required for the job
- we have hired some great people from ETSU and this region that really did not have some of the good basic English background; there is an issue and it is something to look at and think about
- when they get into a global environment they are just not prepared; they just think very locally
- what have you done extracurricular; travel could be part of that too
- I think one of our challenges is getting people that want to be in this region; and in that way regional schools are a plus

ETSU Strengths and Weaknesses

Ms. Clavier continued with ETSU's reputation. She asked employers to compare ETSU graduates to non ETSU graduates and point out the strong or weak areas. Responses were:

- with ETSU being local we have a better working relationship with the faculty versus other areas
- ETSU is reaching more out into the community than they have in the past
- what you have done as far as accepting classes from community colleges; I think that would be a selling point to recruit them to ETSU
- I think as far as our workers, ETSU's students and employees are right up there with the others—UT and Memphis, and all over the country
- the ones coming from ETSU do not have as much of a broad mindset perhaps as some of the others; the ones that we hire—the reasons we hired them was because of their part-time work experience prior to graduation
- in some ways the ideal ETSU student is the one that went to school here because they wanted to stay here
- we found that some of the best employees and the best rounded, no matter where they go to school is if they take the opportunity to spend four or five years in some other area, whether it be in a larger city, a different region, and then they come back to the area
- but you will talk with recruiters—whether it be in the health field or any other area is that getting them here is the biggest issue; once you can get them here and introduce them to the area they are pretty happy; but you do have the stereotype of East Tennessee and coming here

Collaboration

The panel then discussed collaboration opportunities between ETSU and employers. Ideas discussed included:

- training from the departments
- continuation of career day
- encourage part-time employment for experience; we hire thirty to forty part-time employees after school and for summer day camp

Real World Experience

The comment regarding part-time employment prompted Ms. Clavier to ask the employers, “do you see opportunities within your companies for real world experiences for ETSU students and is there a way we could perhaps strengthen that?”

- yes; those are real world experiences and that experience would be valuable whether they are looking to stay in this area or looking for careers;
- as well as internships and I think there is opportunity for that too
- the value proposition has to be really strong from the university's side; effectively you can use this student and it will not cost you anything in efficiency or financial terms
- and thinking about how you educate college undergraduates and graduates in service business and what is specific courses and what that means to a curriculum
- then more affectively asking that employer to come to that campus and help teach and make aware to those students that skill requirement early in their degree
- so more investment in the student and those basic skills, regardless of the department

Discussion – Degree Completion

Degree completion is a continuing challenge. Ms. Clavier asked for any thoughts on working with us to help more students complete degrees, which would result in a more educated workforce.

- if a student wishes to go back and do something we also supply funds for that; we do try to work within the schedule of a student
- have roundtables like this one; I think that would be great for each department that you have to have those heads of those companies come
- students have to be mobile nowadays to go where the positions are at and then come back
- it is the specially skilled positions that we are looking for

Filling Vacancies

Dr. Noland explained that “part of the state's focus on degree completion is driven by economic forecasts. One long term forecast is that there are going to be extreme shortages of individuals across the state to fill vacancies as folks retire and the workforce transitions. This may not be a fair question; it may be a better question for HR. As you all look downstream, are you concerned about your ability five, ten, twenty years down the road to replace individuals with folks coming in with similar talents and skills?”

- we will have a mass exodus of retirees; fortunately, we do have bright young people coming up; I would say eight of ten of those jobs will be available to retirement
- those jobs generally will not be for the entry level positions
- the jobs I am speaking of are top level, management, director type positions
- we are going to lose a huge percentage of CEOs around the country and there are not adequate supply of people to fill those positions coming up the pipeline

- in many cases those people are not necessarily in place with the critical thinking, the communication kinds of skills that we have talked about
- I would say within the next five to ten years there is a huge opportunity for individuals to make a mark in the business world
- you can find them—you are just trying to build a ratio of experience versus new employees that the transition happens
- we've got to stage them in as the demographic changes so five years from now I can say I did not lose my critical interface
- I see ETSU playing a really good role in what is the quality of life through partnerships and you guys are very good community citizens; I think that has got to continue to happen and help facilitate through other businesses in our community in helping facilitate the quality of life that is here
- the prejudice here will not only be about whether they are well educated, but whether they are healthy
- people are not likely to get hired from school to the higher level jobs; it is important that they get in at the level they can and show initiative and work hard and think within the next few years there will be a lot of opportunities to rise up in a lot of different organizations
- based upon these individuals' career and the job and their training I will tell you that they are more advanced than what we were at that point; I think it is in good hands; they just have to have the exposure

Questions from the ETSU Panel

Gaps in ETSU Curriculum

Ms. Clavier prompted questions from ETSU attendees. The theme of the questions was ETSU curriculum. Drs. Bach and Bishop asked the employers to point out what we should be offering in our curriculum.

- conduct curriculum evaluations; I think it is something that the university could look into more on a regular basis
- issue of not having an Engineering program; some companies hire from all surrounding engineering schools; their basic skill requirements are around Engineering
- one problem is lacking is the students that want to start their own business—how to proceed about going to the bank and setting up a loan, and how to make the contacts, get a license, and things like that
- from a tourism standpoint we talk about other places being ranked in the thirties and forties as far as tourism visitors; we are in the teens; that is pretty amazing for a state our size and our resources and quite frankly I think there is room for growth
- I figure there is more opportunity there to grow; students would stay here and start new businesses; lack of some technical degrees kind of hurts the area versus if you went to Boston and MIT where they have a huge entrepreneur environment

Keeping Students Here to Live and Work

Ms. Clavier prompted questions from ETSU attendees. Mr. Ross prompted discussion regarding keeping students here to live and work.

- and I found, even those that will leave you will leave you better off for being there and you have got to create an environment that you have an investment in them; that you want to keep them on board and engaged
- keeping that person there for a long time is not as big a deal; we certainly deal with it; it is recruiting and getting them here in the first place
- a lot of the times the reason for people leaving or not leaving is the spouse; it may have nothing to do with you or the employee if they come here or whether they stay here
- I think a lot of that has to do with what their major is; Criminal justice—a bachelor's degree—maybe you are looking for getting federal jobs or state jobs; but Nursing—they may very well stay around

Questions from the Guest Employers

Dr. Noland allowed the guest employers to ask questions.

Q: "I was interested in the oral intensive course—what is that?"

A: "Part of the curriculum is for the students to get up and talk; we have several different topics for them to discuss." "In every major at the university the intensive courses which you refer to, a student is required to take an information technology, writing, and an oral communication course that is related to a discipline in what that student's major is going to be."

Q: "Is there some basic skill set that you aim for all the students to leave here with like knowing how to do a resume, or how to anticipate questions for an interview when interviewing for a job? Or how do students get those skills?"

A: "We want every student that comes here to be able to write. . . We want them to be able to speak. We want them to have the kinds of math skills they are going to need in whatever work environment they find themselves in. And be able to work with numbers and be able to work with data. . . We want them to use technology to seek information and process information. We want them to be able to think critically. . . Those are the big five. . . We do have an office of career services that helps in terms of resume preparation; that provides a great deal of help with that. I think that varies from major to major. I think some majors devote some attention in class to those kinds of skills."

Q: "You know I am a physician and we never had any courses in like managing people. They never taught you how to manage people, communication."

A: "We require every medical student to take a health communications course. It is interdisciplinary."

Q: "So you have a process in place to try to meet those competencies and somehow you are doing group cause failure analysis. However, you want to judge the methodology to determine how effective you are at that. However, we are hearing from people at the table that there is still an opportunity for improvement here. Do the people assessing your progress have life experience in a work environment that they are a good judge of that capability? Or no, do you need somebody out of the academic environment to judge, well I get twenty percent of the students passing the mark and the others do not? Well, why don't they? Tell me effectively why you are not reaching more students? If I get two out of ten, that is not a very good success rate. You're costing me a lot of money trying to figure out the two I want to hire and the eight that I do not want."

A: "Higher education is increasingly moving from a data accountability perspective in a direction that the hospital industry was seven, ten, fifteen years ago. You are seeing us more benchmark oriented, customer service oriented, feedback oriented. Dr. Kirkwood mentioned accreditation. We are going through that accreditation process now and many of the things we are looking at; not only do we have assessment, but how are we using it and how are we closing the feedback loop? So part of our conversation today is a function of that process of trying to wrap our arms around how we do a better job in these areas. Dr. Bishop did not have a full opportunity to discuss the professional health program. I think you would enjoy learning a little bit more about it. It literally brings together the diversity of groups that you are suggesting from physicians, to pharmacists, to nurses. And hands on setting in the classroom so they as a team assess a pace, and as a team assess what a course of action may be, and as a team on the back end debrief. We are one of the few, if one of the only institutions in the country that has as a broad interprofessional health program. When folks from Harvard took a look at the things we were doing they said we need to be doing this up in Boston."

Wrap Up, Closing Remarks

Dr. Noland said, "I want to thank everyone for your time. I want to stay true to the schedule because I know your time is valuable. Thank you for your investment of time and for your candor. It is quite often a difficult thing to do to sit in a room full of individuals and be critical in some respects of an organization that we all love. But through that open and candid conversation we are going to be able to better position ETSU to serve your needs and to serve the needs of folks across the state. I think the region may be a little limiting at times. How can we serve the needs of the state and the needs of the south? This conversation helps us to move along that way. I thank you all very, very much. . ."