

**Trade Adjustment Assistance and Community College and Career Training
Transforming Education for Advanced Manufacturing in South Dakota (TEAM SD)
Lake Area Technical Institute
Leadership and Instructor Interview Highlights**

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Background

The TAACCCT third party evaluators conducted a series of participant interviews in January of 2018. The purpose of these interviews was to collect implementation data around grant goals, objectives, and evaluation research questions.

Interview Process

The TAACCCT third party evaluation team developed and finalized the evaluation questions and the evaluation process with the Project Manager. The list of interviewees was adjusted to include leadership and instructors identified by the Project Manager as crucial to the successful implementation of the grant goals. All interviews were approximately one hour in length and all interviewees were provided a copy of evaluator interview notes and given an opportunity to make corrections and/or to add additional comments. A complete list of interview participants is identified in Table 1 below. Questions were tailored for the specific participants and were edited with the input of the Project Manager.

Table 1: Interviewees

Interviewee	Position
Terri Cordrey	Project Manager
Gina Grant	Assessment Coordinator
Brad Heesch	Curriculum Administrator
Jodi Messerlie	Registrar's Assistant
Michelle Schrempp	Online Student Success Coach
Eric Schultz	Director of Enrollment
LuAnn Strait	Director of Student Services
Shane Swenson	Business Partner Specialist
Darrel Grohs	Precision Machining Department Head/Instructor
Brooks Jacobsen	Electronics/Robotics Department Head/Instructor
Jamison Jalbert	Welding Technology Department Head/Instructor
Scott Leitheiser	Energy Operations/Energy Technology Department Head/Instructor
Mark Ramsey	Precision Machining Online Instructor
Steven Schwinger	Precision Machining Online Instructor
Troy Stuwe	High Performance Engine Machining Department
Mathew Weinzirl	Electronics/Robotics Online Instructor

Interview Themes

Three themes surfaced as a result of the interviews conducted by the evaluation team in January of 2018: **Growth, Continuous Improvement**, and a **Culture of Quality**. Growth is one theme that emerged as a result of the Advanced Manufacturing leadership and instructor interviews. "Learn Where You Earn" is a partnership between a business and LATI in which a current business employee can up-skill by enrolling in an online hybrid degree program. In this model, the theory is taught online by LATI faculty and the lab work is overseen at the place of employment using an onsite supervisor acting as a mentor and onsite machines to accomplish the lab portion of the program. During the 2016-2017 school year, one employee at Graco, located in Sioux Falls, SD, piloted this program and will complete his degree in May of 2018. This year, Falcon Plastics and 3M, both located in Brookings, SD, have employees currently enrolled in the

“Learn Where You Earn” program and Graco has four additional employees interested in pursuing an online hybrid degree beginning in the fall of 2018.

In addition to the “Learn Where You Earn” program growth, leadership positions initiated as a result of the TAACCCT Round 4 work are also growing. A Business Partner Specialist position, implemented during year one of the TAACCCT Round 1 work, has been instrumental in strengthening LATI’s business partner relationships. Since the fall of 2015, business participation in LATI’s Career Expo has grown from 72 attendees to 110 attendees and 32 of those attending are new participants. In the last year, the Business Partner Specialist has made an impact on the number of businesses that sponsor Stretch the Million student scholarships from 34 businesses to 30 signed contracts with 10 awaiting signatures to date in 2018. Half of these 40 businesses are requesting to sponsor more than one student. The Business Partner Specialist has become such an asset to the work that this year a second Business Partner Specialist position was staffed.

The Advanced Manufacturing (AM) programs are also **growing**. Student registration at the time of the interviews (January 2018) indicated enrollment has increased in four of the five AM programs. With the addition of more equipment and additional students, several instructors indicated space is quickly becoming an issue. Space is being addressed in several ways. One program was moved to a new building and two other programs accommodate more students by splitting lab instruction into two shifts. Online programs will also help alleviate the space issues and this year the online offerings **grew** to include three online electronics courses.

Enrollment in online programs has increased 42% since the fall of 2016 when, recognizing that online students need different support than on campus students, LATI hired an Online Student Coach who supports the twelve online programs with an enrollment of 300 students.

Continuous Improvement is also a prevalent theme in the TAACCCT Round 4 work. TAACCCT dollars and business partner contributions helped fund industry standard equipment contributing to LATI’s AM programs having “state of the art” labs offering students a variety of learning experiences. These rich learning environments are continuously evaluated and updated.

AM curriculum is always changing and improving in response to industry needs. Each program meets twice a year with an advisory board consisting of business and industry partners. A large part of the focus of the advisory board meetings is determining curriculum revisions and updates. Advisory board member curriculum input was the most valued contribution according to AM instructors.

The focus on improvement is evident in recognizing and responding to student needs. As mentioned above, during the implementation of TAACCCT Round One, leadership recognized that the needs of online students are different than those of on campus students. Consequently, during the implementation of the Round Four TAACCCT work, LATI hired an Online Student Success Coach and has improved the IT services to accommodate the varied schedules of online learners. Also, when one Karen student enrolled in Advanced Manufacturing welding program last year, the Director of Student Services put in motion a series of activities to help the student feel welcome on campus. The counselor provided English tutoring for this non-English speaking student. These efforts have proven successful as this year there are four Karen students enrolled in the welding program. The attention to student needs has resulted in an 87% retention rate in AM programs.

The third theme emerging from the interviews is a **culture of quality**: quality instructors, quality programs, quality facilities, quality relationships, and quality graduates. The evaluation team interviewed eight Advanced Manufacturing instructors, the five program department heads and three online instructors. All of the instructors have experience working in the industry in which they teach.

One instructor returns to work in industry every summer and one, until last year, owned his own industry shop. This “on-the-job” experience gives the LATI instructors a keen perspective of the skills graduates need to be successful in the work force. Additionally, quality relationships with businesses and industries guarantee the timely development of curriculum responsive to industry needs and, along with grant monies, provide instructors with the financial resources to make available to students state of the art learning environments equipped with a variety of industry quality equipment. All of the instructors are heavily involved in a variety of recruiting activities to ensure the sustainability of their programs. One stated goal of every instructor interviewed was to help students grow in skills so that they graduate from LATI workforce ready. The result of this **culture of quality** is that the Advanced Manufacturing graduates from a LATI AM program are in high demand not only in Watertown and the surrounding areas, but also nationwide.

Three themes emerged as a result of the leadership and instructor interviews: **growth, continuous improvement**, and a **culture of quality**. Growth can be seen in expanding programs and facilities, increasing enrollment and faculty, and enhanced and increasing business partner relationships. Continuous improvement is demonstrated in curriculum and lab facilities that are constantly reviewed and updated to respond to industry needs and leadership responsiveness to student needs which results in 87% retention rate for AM students. A culture of quality is made evident in quality instructors, quality programs, quality facilities, quality relationships, and quality graduates.



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