

JOAN DOLAMORE, DEAN OF LIFELONG LEARNING, WENTWORTH INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Collaborate with local industries to create degree programs

Developing a new degree program without getting feedback from people in the industry involved is like planning a wedding without ever consulting the bride — it's not a good idea.



JOAN DOLAMORE

Over her 23 years in adult education, Joan Dolamore learned the importance of engaging business leaders when creating degree programs. Dolamore is dean of lifelong learning at Wentworth Institute of Technology in Massachusetts.

"Industry has a clear need for qualified employees, but often lacks resources for developing critical competencies," she said. "Continuing education, which is organized to be responsive to industry trends, has the resources and talent to build comprehensive degree programs and training seminars that target those needed competencies and skills sought by corporations, unions, the military and state and local governments."

That was the case when her institution recently partnered with the New England Regional Council of Carpenters. Executives from the organization first contacted WIT's admissions office about developing a program, and the inquiry was passed along to Dolamore's unit.

Next, leaders from both the institute and NERCC met to discuss collaborating. The result? An associate's degree program in building construction management designed specifically for carpenters who are members of NERCC.

"NERCC had a defined need — to offer an educational opportunity to its members and graduates of its apprenticeship training program," Dolamore said. "They came to Wentworth because of our reputation in construction management, and specifically to our division because of our reputation for being responsive, creative and flexible."

It took about a year to finalize all the details of the program. During its development, Dolamore's unit evaluated the Carpenter's Union Apprentice Training Program and decided to award credit toward the degree to any NERCC member who had completed it.

Carpenters who haven't completed the training

program but who are union members are given the opportunity to develop a life experience portfolio to earn those credits, she said.

The greatest challenge that Dolamore faced was ensuring that the carpenters had taken required math courses. Many of the incoming students hadn't had the necessary prerequisites in algebra and trigonometry to be successful in the program, she said.

The solution was for Wentworth's math professors to deliver those courses as workshops to the students in the program at no charge to them. NERCC agreed to pay the faculty salaries, she said.

NERCC carpenters who enroll in the program receive a discount on tuition. NERCC also provides scholarships and loans against members' pensions to encourage them to enroll.

Executives from NERCC publicize the partnership and provide opportunities for WIT representatives to share the details of the program with students in their apprenticeship training.

However, when it comes to creating partnerships with area industries, professional organizations aren't always the ones to contact Dolamore's unit as NERCC did.

"In other cases, we have proactively conducted outreach to key officials within unions that are closely aligned to our academic programs," Dolamore said. "We also have sought, and continue to seek, opportunities to present at local conferences and meetings and have information tables at various venues that cater to unions and other trade associations."

Contact Dolamore at dolamorej@wit.edu. ■

Avoid these 5 mistakes

Joan Dolamore, dean of lifelong learning at Wentworth Institute of Technology, said the five biggest mistakes that leaders make when forging partnerships with business leaders are:

- Not listening to partners in the industry that you are creating a program for.
- Being inflexible in terms of when courses are delivered.
- Being unwilling to explore tuition discounts that are serious enough to increase enrollment.
- Not immediately involving all academic departments that will be involved in the program's curriculum.
- Not involving the registrar's, financial aid and bursar's office as soon as you can, especially if you are delivering a program in a new model. ■