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JULY 2015

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RAISING TALENT

Built by flight trainers,
Airpark remains a hub
for continuing education

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RAISING TALENT

By Jimmy Magahern
Photos by Tim Sealy

A photograph of three people standing in front of a modern building with horizontal wooden slats. On the left is a woman with short blonde hair, wearing a grey blazer and pants. In the center is a man with grey hair, wearing a dark blue suit and tie. On the right is a woman with long blonde hair, wearing a bright pink dress and a black blazer. They are all smiling at the camera.

Maricopa Corporate College administrators Susie Pulido, left, vice president of business development; Dr. Eugene Giovannini, president, and Brianna Bendotti, vice president of workforce solutions, lead efforts at the school to create training and courses for workers to upgrade and strengthen their skills and assist companies in fulfilling their needs.



Pulido, Bendotti and Giovannini promote Maricopa Corporate College's ability to give employees in the workforce quick access to training.

Built by flight trainers, Airpark remains a hub for continuing education

The lobby of Maricopa Corporate College looks nothing like a traditional university admissions office. Compact as a struggling chiropractor's waiting room, it faces a front desk papered not with curriculum booklets but with a small pile of fliers listing some of the college's more than 300 "instructor-led online courses," each offered 24 hours a day, with new sessions

beginning each month.

"These are all six-week classes, for \$125 each," says Chris Menapace, the school's director of professional education, penciling in the amount on a list of business-oriented classes ranging from training in general computer programs to HTML5 Web design and SQL database coding. "What do you want to learn?" she asks.

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It's a different opening question than what's usually asked at traditional higher education institutions, where course selection is dictated by the type of degree the student is seeking and learning is measured by years of study. In the new model of competency-based learning offered at Maricopa Corporate College branded as MCOR to differentiate it from that other MCC, its parent, (Maricopa Community Colleges), courses are designed around what the student wants to gain proficiency in, with certifications rewarded based on tangible evidence of learning, not on how many credit hours are spent sitting in classrooms.

"What our professional personal education classes are designed to do is give those in the workforce some quick access to training opportunities that augment what we offer on the campuses of the community colleges," says Susie Pulido, MCOR's vice president of business development. "We don't have semesters. We meet with an individual or company and, whatever their needs are, we put

a training in place and implement and deliver."

Daniel Corr, vice president of academic services at Scottsdale Community College, says the fast-tracking skill-seeker is the new type of student community colleges are wooing.

"We have a number of different course offerings for folks who want to get in, tally up the credits they've accumulated over the years and get going on a quick program of study that will result in a credential and therefore a job," he says. "They don't want a bunch of different options. They want that fast track. And that's increasingly what we're here for."

In constantly updating fields like IT or medical technology, where what you've learned in the past 12 weeks is all that really matters on the job, a fast-paced immersive "boot camp," where students cram a lot of learning into a short period, can sometimes put an applicant in better standing than someone with a 10-year-old degree in computer science. In a recent story in the Silicon Valley Business Journal, Andrew



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Daniel Corr, vice president of academic services at Scottsdale Community College, said community colleges are wooing fast-tracking skill seekers.



Ng, former Stanford computer science professor turned founder of Coursera, the nation's leading supplier of massive open online courses (MOOCs), put it this way: "The model where you go to school for four years then coast for the next 40 years on what you learned in college doesn't make sense anymore."

University of Phoenix, which offers continuing education certificate programs and individual professional development courses through its School of Business, is seeing its share of knowledge crammers, too. "Today professionals are staying in the workforce longer and technology is changing the dynamics in many fields," says Ruth Veloria, the school's executive dean. But Veloria cautions high school graduates not to assume a fast certificate program can serve as a replacement for a bachelor's or master's degree.

"Developer boot camps can be a great way to get an entry level coder job faster or to grow or obtain specific skills, but the leaders of the future in IT are still likely to have a bachelor's or master's degree," she says. "Today's employment environment demands professionals keep their skills current and competitive, but full degree programs continue to lay strong foundations and set the stage for long-term career growth."

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School zone

The Scottsdale Airpark has always had a little classroom chalk in its bedrock. The airport was built as a basic training facility for World War II Army Air Corps pilots and acquired after the war by Arizona State Teachers College (before it became ASU) for its own aviation school. From 1953 to 1966, the area around the airfield became Thunderbird Academy, a training school for Seventh-day Adventist missionary pilots that also offered vocational education in mechanics, welding and woodworking.

More recently, the Airpark was home to the Eller College of Management's Scottsdale campus, where the school launched its Executive MBA program in 2006. Last year it moved out of its location near the Loop 101 and Bell Road to join the rest of the University of Arizona Eller College of Management in downtown Phoenix. And the Airpark is still the nest of the 60-year-old WorldatWork, formerly the American Compensation Association, which has been offering training and certification specifically

in the human resources profession out of its current buildings overlooking Northsight Park since 1988.

For nine years prior to MCOR moving into its home just a block north from WorldatWork, on 87th Street south of Raintree Drive, that same set of classrooms, offices and workrooms housed the Scottsdale Community College Business Institute. Corr says that when SCC (which is also one of the Maricopa Community Colleges) started there it was mainly a resource charged with running its then-nascent online service.

"Its purpose was to provide a venue for online instruction opportunities for working adults—which at the time was rather innovative," he says. "But now online instruction is something most colleges offer across the curriculum, integrated into everything they do. It's no longer new, different or even innovative; it's just part of how we all operate."

SCC wound up consolidating the systems it developed at its Business Institute into its main campus on Chaparral Road near Loop 101, and MCOR took its place

in the Airpark last year. Now MCOR is utilizing the classrooms more, still providing individual instruction primarily online but offering businesses workforce training at the facility or as a hybrid arrangement—part online, part in-person. In some cases, instruction happens onsite at the client's own facility: A recently launched program for Amazon brings MCOR's instructors to its PHX6 fulfillment center in southwest Phoenix. MCOR also conducts courses at downtown Phoenix's Center for Entrepreneurial Innovation (CEI), an incubator for startups in the biotechnology, medical device, renewable energy and software development industries.

All of MCOR's workforce training programs are customized to meet the particular needs of the company and readied quickly, to keep pace with rapidly changing industry advancements.

"We service the corporate community, so we operate at the speed of business," says Pulido, who worked in corporate sales at Kellogg's before moving over to higher education. "We meet with the

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companies, listen to what their needs are, assess them and come back within a very short period of time with some proposals and then begin execution and delivery. And we can turn these around in a couple of weeks, sometimes.”

Business-driven

MCOR’s IT Web Developer Boot Camp is not one of its \$125 all-online courses. The on-campus class, held from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday for 12 intense weeks, costs \$3,975. But it comes with a guaranteed job inter-

view, and a stamp of approval from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), a rewrite of the 17-year-old Workforce Investment Act (WIA) that just went into effect this July 1 and provides new pathways to credentials needed for employment.

Simply put, the boot camp is an intense 360-hour training for jobs that already exist: It’s a course put together by the school for employers looking for people with the precise skill sets taught in the class. Because those people are hard to find, it makes sense for

companies to partner with a continuing education provider who can, in effect, make new ones. In a recent story on tech boot camps, NPR described this trending educational model as “12 Weeks to a Six-Figure Job.”

“The real customer now is the employer,” explains MCOR president Dr. Eugene “Gene” Giovannini. “The dynamics of how an education provider works have been skewed. The way the old model worked is a potential student walked through the door and said what they wanted to become. ‘I want to become a pharmacy technician.’ ‘OK, here’s the courses you need to take for that degree.’ The dynamics of it now is, the employer is dictating where the training is going to go. The real customer is no longer the student, it’s the employer. You’ve got to have the employer and the job up front. And then whoever is walking through the door, that’s who you counsel and provide guidance to in regard to getting that job.”

MCOR’s innovative focus on tailoring education to fit open positions at real world companies has attracted an impressive list of first-year clients, including Marriott, Coca-Cola, Walgreens and Amazon, and landed it on the White House’s short list of education providers honored at April’s White House Upskilling Summit, led by Vice President Joe Biden.

“There were about 120 folks there but there were only 10 education providers invited,” says Giovannini. “Most in attendance were from business and labor.”

During his speech, Biden chided corporations who aren’t partnering with continuing education providers to create courses that help entry-level and mid-career employees gain the skills they need to move up the ladder.

“You guys understand this,” he said to the honorees. “(But) I’m a little surprised why more businesses haven’t caught on to what you guys are doing. I really mean it, just from a bottom line perspective.” Biden added, “As you know, training increases worker’s productivity. It leads to less turnover, which means employers don’t have to spend more money down the road to hire new workers. And it increases innovation and profitability by unleashing the talent of your own employees.”

Freedom to learn in new ways

At the summit, Biden also reinforced President Barack Obama’s Upskill

Corr said students want to get going on a quick program, receive credentials and land a job.



Initiative, launched during his State of the Union address last January. The initiative calls on businesses to “help workers of all ages earn a shot at better, high-paying jobs, even if they don’t have higher education,” by empowering working adults with the education and training they need to “upskill,” or develop the additional skills needed to upgrade their career and earn higher wages.

Brianna Bendotti, vice president of workforce solutions at Maricopa Corporate College, also serves on the board for JAG, or Jobs for America’s Graduates, a state-based national non-profit organization which has helped nearly three-quarters of a million young people who are most at risk for dropping out stay in school and secure entry-level jobs. She says this population, in particular, finds the model offered at continuing education schools preferable to traditional college.

“Competency-based learning is appealing to learners of all ages, but holds special appeal with young people as CBL is project-based, interactive, engaging and collaborative—in other words, it’s diametrically opposed to a boring, one-dimensional ‘park and bark’ lecture,” she says. “We know that learning is not one size-fits all. CBL is an open-minded approach that emphasizes the learning and evidence of acquired skills, providing diverse opportunities for an individual to acquire the knowledge—self-paced, experiential, videos, gaming, etcetera. For many young learners, this represents freedom to learn in unique ways and the success can breed confidence.”

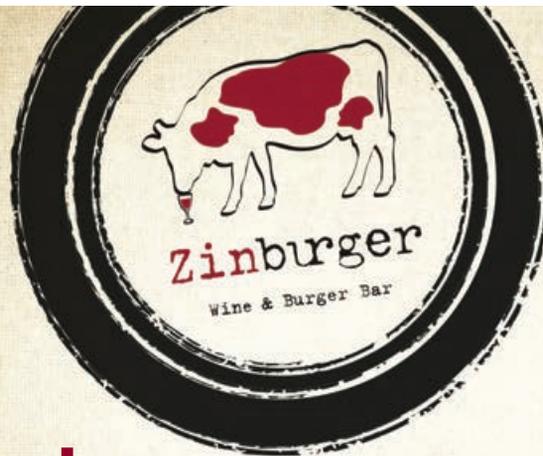
Bendotti says MCOR has corporate partners all over the Valley, but considers the Airpark a terrific location for connecting with diverse businesses and “shortening the feedback loop” with employers to ensure MCOR’s industry-driven, skill-based courses are meeting their “pre-hire needs.”

“Progressive higher education institutions recognize the need to adapt and respond to employer demand,” says Bendotti. “The overwhelming reason people pursue post-secondary education is to achieve professional goals. More colleges are realizing that we owe it to our students to create programs that position them as relevant contributors in whichever field they pursue.” ■



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