

Preparing for the future

How higher education is addressing the workforce needs of regional industries

Following the spotlight of the NBA championship and the Republican National Convention, Northeast Ohio must show that it is able to sustain the revitalization and economic growth that drew the praise of the nation. In fact, behind the scenes, businesses and industry leaders are working closely with educational institutions, from the K-12 to postsecondary levels, seeking to ensure that students are adequately prepared for future job opportunities.

“Our students should be able to take on rigorous academic study, hone their technical skills and enter the workforce prepared to actively engage in the civic, cultural and community life of Northeast Ohio,” says Dr. Alex Johnson, president of Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C).

Smart Business spoke with Johnson about how this alignment is leading to the creation of new student experiences.

Why is the need so great?

Since the 1980s, research has shown that the U.S. has failed to keep up with the growing demand for postsecondary-educated workers, and as a result, is losing its competitive edge. By 2020, 65 percent of all jobs in the economy will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school. By that point, the U.S. could fall 5 million workers short of the total needed with postsecondary credentials.

The fastest-growing occupations — STEM, health care professional and community services — also have the highest demand for postsecondary education and training. Furthermore, the need for manufacturing skills is still strong. In the next decade, the Northeast Ohio region will have nearly 50,000 job openings in manufacturing, many requiring additional

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 **WEBSITE:** To learn more about Cuyahoga Community College's Centers of Excellence, visit www.tri-c.edu/coe.

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technological expertise. A skilled workforce is critical to the economic development and competitive vitality of Northeast Ohio.

Why is the Northeast Ohio region ready for this integrated approach?

Cleveland is a diverse and vibrant city, supported by a region built on manufacturing. The region has transitioned to a high-technology, high-value manufacturing hub with renowned health care facilities and iconic cultural jewels. The recent national attention also showcased the expansion in hospitality and culinary arts. We have world-class hotels and a burgeoning food scene anchored by nationally recognized chefs.

We know this region is a great place to build a career, but we also recognize that many individuals have not yet had the opportunity to take advantage of the region's ongoing economic growth.

How can higher education meet this need?

Tri-C and our colleagues at other community colleges and four-year universities have spent a lot of time discussing industry needs with our key partners in healthcare, manufacturing, culture and the arts, information technology, public safety, hospitality and other fields. These connections ensure that we are creating the right programs to

help students gain the right skills for job opportunities in those industries.

We are working together not only to align our programming within each institution but also to create seamless pathways from one college or university to another. This will allow students to get on the right track, gain skills and credentials, then earn a good wage from a job in their field as they continue to advance their education and their careers.

What will the Centers of Excellence mean for students?

The Tri-C Centers of Excellence are designed to meet the educational, cultural and economic needs of our communities by aligning our programs with industry needs, growth and opportunity in the region. At these centers, each of which supports a major industry sector, Tri-C students have access to extraordinary faculty, innovative teaching methods and experiential learning.

We offer high-quality, industry-relevant courses to provide the comprehensive, hands-on training students need to gain a competitive edge in today's job market. And we stack those courses so students can come to us where they are and advance through short-term certificates to more advanced credentials, associate degrees and on to our university partners for bachelor's degrees and beyond. ●