A Better Workforce Through Interactive Learning Programs: Q&A with Tracie Bryant

When higher education and private sector organizations team up, learning through video becomes much more than streamed lectures or recorded expert presentations and interviews. It becomes an interactive and dynamic experience with videoconferencing and 3D environments.

Corporate and education alliances create opportunities to inspire students in ways textbooks or static content can't. For example, a medical student can walk into a lab, assess and treat a traumatic head injury on a simulated patient, and then be evaluated by a physician at a remote location. In addition to simulations, students may collaborate with experts, visualize their work in 3D, and more. Tracie Bryant, AVI-SPL VP of Sales for State/Local Government & Education, explains why these programs result in improved career opportunities and a more skilled workforce.

Q: What are career pathway programs?

TB: Career pathway programs are government-sponsored workforce development programs that train high school and college students, as well as displaced workers, so they can move immediately into their chosen fields and contribute to their communities. Schools partner with businesses to give students the skills to join the workforce and to retrain displaced workers for better opportunities. While private companies do provide funding for these programs, the Department of Labor and the Department of Education offer grants to augment them. Programs usually include internships and mentoring so once participants graduate, they can work directly in their fields and often with the sponsoring employer.

Q: What are the technologies used in these programs that connect classrooms with businesses?

TB: Video conferencing facilitates these collaborations, but depending on the needs of the organization, you can also integrate visualization or other kinds of technologies. You may consider adding huddle rooms, virtual outreach, and more. There are so many possibilities that can be customized to the program. For example, in healthcare training, students have to be hands on and become familiar with the technology they use in the workforce. So those institutions need medical simulation laboratories and advanced visualization labs with 3D imaging.

Q: What fields of study use these programs?

TB: Any field that can train using simulation of the actual environment will benefit from a career pathways program. Those fields include IT, healthcare, engineering, energy, business, manufacturing, the sciences, and any technical or industrial specialties. You want students to be connected to professionals for lecturing, mentoring, internships, as well as working with the actual technology in the field you're studying. It really is about hands-on education.

A lot of institutions have existing relationships with companies, but they just haven't thought about how to link everyone together. It's just a matter of getting them to work together in ways they haven't thought of before.

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Q: What are the benefits of implementing these programs?

TB: These programs work. There are benefits for both the workers and the community. Displaced workers can learn new skills and get help in switching careers. Students can gain skills in highly specialized areas and get an early start focusing on areas where they excel. You can identify what jobs are in demand and slot students into them so they can immediately contribute to their communities. Also, we want to keep the industry and engineering jobs that companies were

outsourcing. We want to keep those here. And when you have highly skilled jobs, you also have less competition and higher pay—sometimes even with six-figure salaries.

Institutions benefit because quality career pathway programs attract the best and brightest students in the world. These schools stand out among the competition as specialized world-class institutions.

The right technology makes distance learning an interactive and dynamic experience.

Q: What kinds of grants are available for creating work-based learning programs?

TB: Grants are always available but the specifics are always changing. AVI-SPL can help you figure out what opportunities exist based on the focus and interests of your institution, as well as which specific grants are a fit with investments your institution is already making. AVI-SPL is a great starting place because we've been successful in developing so many of these career pathways programs. We help locate federal funding opportunities and contact our partners that can provide grant writing free of charge. Because awards can be in the tens of millions of dollars, applications can be complex and even hundreds of pages long.

Q: What career pathway solutions does AVI-SPL offer?

TB: First, we meet with you and figure out exactly what you want to do. We learn what programs and accreditation your school offers, then recommend solutions that will enhance the curriculum and improve the way knowledge is shared. The technology may enable lecture capture or support recording and archiving content from experts. The solution may include creating simulations and providing hands-on training. AVI-SPL can deploy and support those technologies as well as design spaces like huddle rooms to facilitate student collaboration. The solutions are highly customized to the institution.

We like to get involved from the beginning, assessing your needs and goals to make sure your project is the most advanced solution possible. We even contact the appropriate manufacturers to help prepare the grant application. Then we stage, build, and deploy the technology, working hand-in-hand with the architects on new projects. After the completion of your solution, we can support the day-to-day maintenance of the technology to make sure it works as expected.

Q: What do you see for the future of these classroom-to-career programs?

TB: I think we're going to continue to focus efforts on highly specialized areas. The ways communities approach and support education are going to change. And the government is going to have to continue to fund these career pathway programs in order for them to be successful. A lot of these industry employers are buying into these programs and donating to them in the form of scholarship funds. There are organizations like the Gates Foundation that are heavy donors to programs like these. More community partners are standing up to support what they see as the future of the nation.

Organizations should be aware that this is the future, so they need career pathway programs not only to stand out but also so they don't get left behind. Technologies are evolving at a faster pace, meaning a lot of industries will crumble and a lot of new ones will pop up. The people who take advantage of these educational programs are those who will come out on top.

AVI-SPL®

AVI-SPL engineers, technicians and professional development staff know how important it is to understand the challenges currently facing educators. In classrooms, common areas and across school locations, AVI-SPL implements collaborative and interactive environments that work within the school's mission. A site assessment ensures that solutions simplify the process of teaching students and communicating announcements while meeting the school's goals.

AVI-SPL has a strong history of technological innovation in the higher education sector and works closely with its customers to identify the best solutions for the challenges its customers face. AVI-SPL then partners with component, software and system vendors to create its solutions. As a technology agnostic partner, it is able to integrate its designs with any devices and systems.