A New Vision of Community:
Lone Star College System Sees "Community" Globally

Introduction

The light is breaking through the windows of Lone Star Community College's Corporate College, headquartered at the Lone Star College System–University Park campus in northwest Houston. Shah Ardalan watches business leaders arrive for a meeting at the college's Conference Center. In his role as CEO for the newest campus in the Lone Star College System, Ardalan is focused on both the educational and economic impact of Lone Star on surrounding and global communities. "Houston is home to many international corporations. Through our Corporate College we provide customized training and host meetings with people from all over the world," said Ardalan, referring to Lone Star's role in workforce and economic development for a wide range of companies, from small businesses in the Houston area to global Fortune 100 companies.

Lone Star College System sits at the critical nexus of the employer finding the employee, offering certificates and degrees students need to acquire specific skills as defined by the hiring company. This is a long-standing service to the local community whose taxes support the community college but gone are the days when "community" meant local. As Linda Head Associate Vice Chancellor over Workforce Development and Lone Star's Corporate College explains "We are trying to help Houston-headquartered companies meet their workforce needs. Many of the companies need a workforce pool to not only work here in the Houston area but to move to other states in the United States and sometime to other countries." Lone Star sees community globally and uses innovation and technology to expand and enhance its workforce and economic development initiatives.

The National Need

Recognizing the importance of community college and industry partnerships as a means to economic recovery, the Obama administration hosted the first White House Summit on Community Colleges in October 2010. At the same time, the President's Economic Recovery Advisory Board announced a new industry-led initiative entitled 'Skills for America's Future' that aims to improve these partnerships and maximize workforce development strategies, job training programs and job placement. "We want to put community colleges and employers together to create programs that match curricula in the classroom with the needs of the boardroom," President Barack Obama.

The initial goals of the Skills for America's Future initiative are to:

- Partner community colleges with industry to have an additional 5M students earning college degrees or certificates by 2020.
- Have an impactful industry/community college partnership in every state.

Unfortunately state and federal government funding continues to decline and community colleges face difficult decisions to cut services, increase tuition or, in some cases, turn away eligible students due to insufficient funding and limited physical capacity. Couple this with the recognized need in certain industries for trained, qualified workers and the opportunity exists for innovative community college and industry partnership solutions.

Using Technology to Expand the View

Lone Star College System (LSC) is the largest institution of higher education in the Houston area and the fastest-growing community college system in Texas with more than 75,000 students in credit classes for spring 2011 and total enrollments of more than 100,000. It comprises six campuses, two university centers and six satellite centers. *Community College Week* magazine recently named Lone Star a top associate degree producer, ranking it eighth in community colleges nationwide and one of the top in Texas. And for the third consecutive year *The Chronicle of Higher Education* named Lone Star one of its "Great Colleges to Work For."

> *"With the help of technology like telepresence, we are redefining this community to be the world..."*
>
> – Shah Ardalan
>   CEO, LSC-University Park

Lone Star's newest campus, University Park, doesn't look or act as a traditional community college. The new 1.2 million square foot, 70-acre campus nestled in northwest Houston includes a comprehensive college, 1,000-seat restaurant, 25,000 square foot full service conference center, commercial lease space, and an innovative university center. It is also home to Lone Star Corporate College, a leader in workforce and economic development in the Houston area, which partners with global corporations to develop long-term strategies and human capital solutions for their workforce needs.

Shah Ardalan, named CEO of LSC-University Park in February 2011 and also serving as Chief Information Officer over the Lone Star College System, is helping Lone Star redefine what "community" means and changing the perception of community colleges. His vision includes using technology in innovative ways that enhance the student experience, reach beyond local borders and expand Lone Star's impact on the economy. One example is Lone Star's deployment of Cisco Telepresence®. University Park's state-of-the-art conference rooms offer this collaboration tool, an exceptionally high quality video conferencing service that includes large high-definition screens, enhanced camera and audio systems, and a near life-like experience for users. "With the help of technology like telepresence, we are redefining this community to be the world and have used these tools to do interviews, training, and meetings with companies across the world like Argentina, Vietnam and Ghana." Positioning the conference center as a strategic differentiator, Ardalan and his team have found success in marketing the availability of these rooms to corporations. Ardalan believes technology will have a major role in enhancing Lone Star's reputation as an innovative community college. "We are using telepresence as one of our differentiators so our corporate clients don't have to build their own; they can use ours," said Ardalan. Linda Head, Associate Vice Chancellor of Corporate Development agrees. "Being part of the telepresence network will add to the services we can provide to our clients and elevate our corporate image." Head also has additional plans for telepresence at Lone Star. Many of its local clients have facilities in other parts of the country and one way of better serving those corporations could be to partner with other community colleges near those facilities. "Our capacity can only grow with partnerships. If other community colleges across the country were utilizing this innovative communication and meeting tool, we could better serve the needs of our larger clients," she said.

Lone Star also plans to use telepresence to assist in the recruitment of students. One issue that affects the Houston community is the shortage of blue collar technicians for the oil and gas industry. There are many baby boomers on the verge of retirement without a pool of skilled replacement workers. Lone Star is working to fill this gap but there continues to be a stigma of what the hourly jobs in this industry involve. "If a young person knew they could make $80,000 a year working on an oil rig or that manufacturers have clean centers, younger students might be interested in these occupations. These technologies will help us with recruiting students and connect them to the employers in these industries," said Head.

The Importance of Working Together

Even before the current economic downturn, Lone Star valued corporate partnerships in part as an important source of funding and these types of relationships are now considered critically important to helping the country remain competitive. Ardalan and his team select their corporate suppliers very carefully, looking for first rate companies who are not only leaders in their specific areas but also have a vision that is similar to Lone Star's such as AT&T, HP, and Cisco. "If you want to be a leader, you have to align with leaders. No one can do it alone," Ardalan said. "At the same time, higher education needs to bring value to the partnership."

From Head's perspective building relationships and creating workforce development programs with corporations serves a dual purpose: it's a service the college provides to its business community by developing a highly trained workforce pool and it's an additional revenue source. Career and Technology programs at community colleges are very expensive and corporate dollars help alleviate the increase in classroom expenses. Healthcare, energy, manufacturing, and transportation programs require expensive lab equipment and simulators with the latest in computer technology and design software. Corporations such as Tenaris™, FMC Technologies™ and Stevens Transport work with Lone Star Corporate College to develop new programs and courses. These contracts in turn help fund high tech labs and equipment to train students who go to work for them.

Embedded in the college's mission is providing high quality education, along with accessibility and affordability and Ardalan views technology as the enabler to accomplish these priorities. Collaborations with companies such as Cisco and AT&T align with Lone Star's commitment to advanced technology and providing its corporate partners with high quality, low cost educational services.

How AT&T Can Help

AT&T Telepresence Solution® is a high-definition videoconferencing service that enables a virtual, life-like meeting experience. This advanced form of videoconferencing simplifies the meeting management process, allowing you to schedule a session and start a meeting at the touch of a button. Unlike conventional video systems, you don't have to worry about transmission quality or interrupting meetings with invasive technology for aiming cameras or moving microphones. AT&T Telepresence Solution includes several choices of high definition screens showing life-like size and visual quality, spatial audio tracking, and realistic eye contact. The specially designed rooms create the feeling that you are across the table from another person at the other endpoint, enabling you to easily perceive subtle facial expressions and body language. This leads to a higher level of engagement and interaction which can lead to more productive meetings. More than 120 major organizations are currently using AT&T's Telepresence Solution with over 2,400 endpoints on the AT&T Business Exchange network.

With an array of products, brands and deployment models bombarding the market, it can be difficult for schools to choose a provider when considering telepresence as a way to transform the way they collaborate. While Lone Star chose to deploy Cisco TelePresence® in partnership with Cisco, many customers look to AT&T for flexibility, expertise and a proven track record for telepresence deployments. **AT&T Telepresence Solution has several advantages** including:

A Growing Network of Endpoints:

- **Many Customers.** More than 2,400 endpoints from over 120 major organizations are connected to the AT&T Business Exchange.
- **Access to Marriott rooms.** Customers have access to public rooms in twelve Marriott locations worldwide with plans for additional locations.

A Customized Experience:

- **Flexible Connectivity.** Can enable smaller, remote offices to connect with their larger offices. Customers can also connect via the internet.
- **System Management Options.** Customers can choose a fully-managed solution, they can provide their own equipment and have AT&T proactively manage it, or they can provide their own equipment and manage it themselves.
- **Equipment Options.** Customers can choose from equipment ranging from immersive rooms for 6 – 18 people to a small conference room for 1-2 people.

The Bottom Line: A Better Bottom Line

- **Better Ways to Pay.** Customers can avoid significant upfront cost because they pay a monthly fee with a usage based pricing model which is great for colleges, enabling them to collaborate with their corporate partners.

Have a Meeting on Us

Would you like to personally experience the AT&T Telepresence Solution?

Take advantage of AT&T's "Have a Meeting on Us" program. This program offers key personnel from interested community colleges a live and in-person experience with telepresence using one of the 1,200 existing AT&T or Cisco rooms.

Contact your AT&T representative for more information or go to http://www.corp.att.com/forms/telepresence to request a 'meeting on us'.

Certain limitations apply. Check with your AT&T representative for terms applicable to the "Have a Meeting on Us" program.