

Applied Scientific
Instrumentation



Small, High-Tech Company Finds Talent Source at Community College

Applied Scientific Instrumentation

Offering relevant work experiences to students within a community college cooperative education program provides a small technology firm the opportunity to “hand pick” a successful team and decrease recruitment costs.

At Applied Scientific Instrumentation (ASI) the operating motto is “We Create Solutions.” The small, high-tech firm of 22 full-time employees, and annual sales of \$8-10 million, specializes in creating both the imaging hardware and the electronic, automated systems required for complex biological experiments. Because much of their product line serves the neuroscience research community, ASI maintains high standards for the caliber of employee it seeks to join its staff of engineers and technicians.

According to John Zemek, Founder and Executive Director of ASI, the nature of the work within the company requires employees with multiple skills including the abilities to analyze and solve problems and to work independently. It also requires the specialized technical competencies needed in mechatronics, which includes mechanical and electronic engineering in addition to software, systems design, and control engineering. Through a strong cooperative education partnership with Lane Community College (LCC) in Eugene, Oregon, where ASI is located, the company has secured a reliable source of talent to meet its skilled workforce needs.

Co-op Internships Provide Value

When Zemek established ASI in 1990, he was thoroughly knowledgeable of the LCC cooperative (co-op) education program, having completed an associate degree at LCC and returned as an instructor in the Electronic Technology Division after earning a B.S. in both management and finance from the University of Oregon. Knowing the rigor and relevance of the LCC co-op program,

Zemek naturally tapped the LCC interns as new incoming talent to grow his high-tech company. In the ensuing years, ASI has provided internships to 55 students and, in 2007, received the LCC Cooperative Education Employer of the Year Award.

The co-op program at LCC, in existence since 1970, is the largest program west of the

PERSONAL STORY

When the plywood mill where he had worked since high school closed, Cliff Turpin decided to go back to school in 1998 at age 48. Although he had never been unemployed, Cliff had no computer skills and the thought of getting through the writing classes was daunting. Taking advantage of a U.S. Department of Labor retraining opportunity for trade agreement impacted sectors following NAFTA, Cliff enrolled in the Electronic Engineering program at Lane Community College (LCC). With the supports offered through LCC and by ASI, he graduated two and a half years later with a 3.89 grade point average, an Associate Degree in Electronic Engineering and an offer of full-time employment from ASI, at which he had completed his co-op assignments.

Employed since June 2000 with ASI, Cliff has worked his way around the growing firm and currently purchases parts and supervises assembly as well as the LCC co-op intern program. According to Cliff, “Wages are good and the company provides benefits and bonuses.”

Business Outcomes

- 70 percent of full-time employees recruited
- High-performance talent sourced
- Decreased recruitment costs
- High quality customer support and satisfaction

Student Impact

- College credit earned
- Relevant work experience gained
- 65 percent of LCC co-op interns employed full time

Lane Community College Cooperative Education Program

- Work experience earning college credit
- 92,584 students served
- Over 7,500 regional businesses served
- Cover worker's compensation expenses when necessary

Mississippi with over 2,000 co-op students integrating on-the-job, work experience with academic studies. Students earn college credits while working full- or part-time in positions related to their career and academic goals, gaining relevant work experience and opportunities to apply classroom instruction. LCC provides a direct faculty coordinator with industry knowledge to each employer in order to assure that appropriate student matches are made, to develop measurable learning objectives for the placement period, to assess work progress, and to determine grade assignment based on employer evaluation. The LCC co-op program serves over 800 local employers per year and has engaged over 7,500 employers since its inception. With over sixty-five percent of all LCC co-op students retained by employers as permanent employees after graduation, the program funnels qualified employees to regional businesses.

Hand-picking Talent Benefits Small Business

For a small business with the need for a highly-skilled, technical workforce that operates in teams, Zemek sees the advantage of being able to evaluate an individual over the three month period that constitutes the college semester. He observes not only skills and technical abilities but also the way in which the student interacts with other employees and fits into the team and culture of ASI. The process has enabled the company to “hand pick a winning team.” ASI maintains that this successful partnership with LCC’s co-op program accounts for the fact that 70 percent of its 22 full-time employees are graduates, or have been students at LCC. Although ASI invests a great deal of time to develop meaningful work experiences and to provide oversight and mentoring for its student interns, much of those costs are recouped in decreased staff recruiting expenses.

According to Zemek, supporting the cooperative education program has been both a socially responsible thing for ASI and a very sound business decision. The growth of the

business and the high quality of customer support and satisfaction are all linked directly to ASI’s employees. Understanding this business imperative for skilled and educated employees further upholds the company’s commitment to continuing education. In addition to offering average salaries of more than \$50,000, profit sharing and other benefits, ASI provides tuition assistance to full- and part-time employees in order to encourage higher education achievement.

“The co-operative education program at LCC is a two-way street. Not only do the students get real world work experience, but the employer also gets a chance to evaluate a potential employee.”
 - John Zemek
 Founder and Executive Director
 Applied Scientific Instrumentation

Co-op Education Programs Exemplify Learn and Earn

In some cases, cooperative education work placements are paid by employers, generating income that is often critically needed by community college students. However, the current economic climate creates challenges to this practice, particularly for small businesses.

According to Andrea Newton, Executive Dean, Career and Technical Education, LCC, ninety percent of Oregon employers are small businesses. Currently, the college finds it difficult to have employers pay student interns when they have recently laid-off employees. When students are not paid, LCC covers worker’s compensation expenses for their time on the work site, thereby alleviating that burden for employers. Although there is no promise of a job, with over sixty-five percent of LCC co-op students employed through a co-op placement, the program provides a substantial Learn and Earn pathway.

For more information about ASI, please visit www.asiimaging.com.
For more information about LCC, please visit www.lanecc.edu/cooped/.
ANNUAL SALES: \$8 to \$10 million
SIZE: 22 full-time employees
LOCATION: Oregon

About Corporate Voices

Corporate Voices is the leading national business membership organization shaping conversations and collaborations on public and corporate policy issues involving working families. A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, we are a unique voice, and provide leading and best-practice employers a forum to improve the lives of working families, while strengthening our nation’s economy and enhancing the vitality of our communities.

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Find Out More

Corporate Voices is committed to identifying and spotlighting businesses supporting postsecondary completion while making significant contributions to internal company goals. “Best practice” talent development models that increase access to career opportunities through education and training are being examined for characteristics that are transferable and replicable to other employers. This research is being conducted with the guidance of the Corporate Voices Learn and Earn Business Leadership Team consisting of business executives leading promising models and those interested in peer-to-peer learning. If you are interested in joining, contact Peggy Walton at pwalton@corporatevoices.org. Team members include:

- Verizon Wireless
- UPS
- PG&E
- Walmart
- CVS Caremark
- AOL