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EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

A faster path to a lucrative career

Ivy Tech Community College President Sue Ellspermann and Eleven Fifty Academy Founder Scott Jones discuss how their institutions are rebuilding the road to high-paying jobs.

Q: What are viable alternative paths to high-income jobs other than a college degree?

SUE ELLSPERMANN: In short, students have more options than ever before when it comes to preparing themselves for a high-wage career. In today's environment, there's tremendous flexibility when it comes to earning a credential that leads to a high-income job. Associate degrees, short-term certificates, and industry certifications are viable alternatives to the traditional four-year degree, and many allow

students to be career ready in just months. Because of the high demand for skilled workers, some of these credentials can be earned at no cost to the student, thanks to the state's Next Level Jobs program.

SCOTT JONES: Tech is a trade, and those who don't know the "tech" language will be partially illiterate in future decades. The Academy's modus operandi is built on an immersive educational experience, similar to studying a foreign language "in country," except we are teaching

the "language of the future." Our unique methodology works really well for those who have grit. We have streamlined our rigorous, intensive curriculum into typically 12- or 24-week courses. The Academy can allow those from "all walks" to skill up literally 16x faster than, and at a 99% cost discount to, a typical four-year public college degree. We designed our curriculum to break through career barriers without loading students with debt.

Q: What are the implications of skills becoming more important than college degrees in terms of employability?

SCOTT JONES: It was at once visionary and pragmatic for the United States to declare just a few months ago that "abilities" were vastly more important than "degrees" when hiring for the 2 million jobs within our federal government. Skills-based hiring breaks down barriers for many, especially in the area of technology. The barrier that is removed is the two- or four-year degree requirement, which kept many capable individuals, especially those in the lower socioeconomic layers, from fully realizing their potential.

As for the private sector, it is ironic that many of the top tech founders were college dropouts and yet their companies require degrees for open positions. Recent announcements by Google and Salesforce eliminating that requirement provides incredible opportunity for all individuals, especially those of color and other underserved populations. At Eleven Fifty Academy, our student population is 25% students of color, and we are working hard to increase this number.

SUE ELLSPERMANN: The bottom line is that employers want to hire people with the skills employers need to remain globally competitive. As a result, certificates and certifications can be just as valuable as a college degree. Many of the credentials earned today are developed with input from industry, almost guaranteeing that what is learned is current and relevant. Over time the certificate holder is able to stack additional credentials on top of the original certificate to continue to excel in their profession.

In today's job market, there are many different paths to a great career, and the four-year degree is just one. That's

why I'm so excited to be at Ivy Tech Community College right now. We provide students with the best value in higher education in Indiana along with the options they need to succeed, whether through a two-year degree, a short-term certificate or a certification.

Q: How have educational institutions shown themselves to be nimble and innovative in preparing students for careers?

SUE ELLSPERMANN: We believe that no institution has been better than Ivy Tech at quickly developing quality academic programs that ensure students receive a relevant education and are workforce ready as soon as possible. As COVID-19 began affecting our communities, we worked with employers to ensure our classes continued to run and that we were adapting to rapidly changing workforce needs. We have implemented the new Learn Anywhere model, which allows students to be in-person, virtual or online based on their own needs week-by-week. We quickly partnered with the state of Indiana to help those affected by COVID-19 quickly enroll into tuition-free programs to help them prepare for their next career. This has been Ivy Tech's legacy for more than 50 years, and our close partnerships with industry require us to be agile and responsive.

SCOTT JONES: Many students in K-12 have little to no idea what happens inside the office buildings and factories that are quite literally in their backyards. While there are existing efforts to bridge these relationships, considerably more needs to be done. There are successful experimental pilot programs in our state, including Lion Manufacturing in Loogootee High School. Our goal with Eleven Fifty Academy is to build a local tech workforce, keeping our brilliant Hoosiers in our state, and attracting other businesses to relocate here. Thanks to a planning grant from the Wabash Heartland Innovation Network, we are exploring how to engage foundational coding skills in high schools in the WHIN region and hopefully beyond. Companies need to open their doors to local students and open their pocketbooks for worthy non-profit partners, such as Eleven Fifty Academy, in order to invest in the workforce of the future.



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Q: Affordability is often a barrier to people pursuing higher education. How can that barrier be overcome here in Indiana?

SCOTT JONES: Thanks to Eleven Fifty's access to scholarships and grants, our students are able to accelerate into a career in tech. It's all about speed. Individuals are able to "skill up" into a career in technology via software development or cybersecurity literally 16x faster than via a four-year public university degree yet have very similar placement and compensation outcomes. Faster outcomes transform lives, positively impacting the individual, their employer, and their community. Speed also allows these students to benefit from the approximately \$250,000 of income that they can earn during the four years they might have gone "the traditional route." Eleven Fifty Academy is one of the very best places to experience this relatively new form of rapid education and rocket ramp into the tech job market.

SUE ELLSPERMANN: Ivy Tech is Indiana's best value in higher education. Our mission includes being an institution of access, meaning we serve very diverse students, including those who otherwise would be unable to afford college. This includes those seeking to earn a high-demand credential and those who seek to get an affordable start at Ivy Tech before transferring their credits to a four-year institution. It's important to know that "value" does not just mean "affordable," however. Our programs are robust and consistent with the quality offered by other institutions, which is one of the reasons these colleges and universities accept our transfer students. Hoosiers should take a close look at college costs. We believe when they do, institutions like Ivy Tech will be seen as a smart choice.

Q: What other improvements should be made to the educational ecosystem in Indiana to improve accessibility to available jobs?

SUE ELLSPERMANN: As the old saying goes, "knowledge is power." Ivy Tech is committed to providing Hoosiers with information about different types of postsecondary credentials,

what jobs are in demand, and the different salaries provided. Employers are beginning to elevate this message through hiring practices that no longer require bachelor's degrees, but allow specialized credentials, like those offered at Ivy Tech.

SCOTT JONES: As we have learned in our expansion across Indiana, each community and educational system is unique. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution. The first step is to convene community leaders and others with "boots on the ground" to discuss the challenges they face and collaboratively propose solutions. Educational institutions and employers must both be represented in this conversation at the local level. Bridging corporate relationships to all educational institutions with the knowledge of the job market, both present and future, should influence what is being taught and show students what is possible.

Q: How can employers better partner with educators and training providers?

SCOTT JONES: Employers tell us the skills needed for high-value jobs. At Eleven Fifty Academy, we have a large advisory board of small and large employers that actively hire our graduates. These members drive our constantly tuned curriculum, help with mock interviews that prepare our students for real-world interviews, teach in our classrooms, host field trips, and mentor our students. When companies share their employment requirements, communities can connect the dots from early education to workforce.

SUE ELLSPERMANN: Employers are critical to our success in designing curriculum, evaluating program and course relevance, finding qualified faculty, funding capital needs, and—of course—providing work and learn opportunities for students and careers for graduates. We are fortunate to have partnerships across the state that reflect this sense of urgency and we welcome any new relationships that allow us to do more to serve the needs of students, employers, our communities, and the state as a whole. The more committed an employer is to partnering with us and other education and training providers, the more they can shape the future workforce in their industry.

Q: Should not-for-profits play a role in bridging gaps between formal education and workforce needs?

SUE ELLSPERMANN: At Ivy Tech, we are strong believers in the valuable role non-profits play as a partner to education providers. Each of our campuses have strong ties to their local community-based and faith-based organizations and we are committed to doing even more to collaborate with them to bridge gaps our students face, including childcare, transportation, food insecurity and emergency aid. Some of the richest results occur when there is alignment between education, government, employers/business, non-profit entities, and philanthropy. Indiana is fortunate to have strength in each of these five areas and when they come together.

SCOTT JONES: Yes, successful, proven non-profits, such as the Academy, are actively playing a critical role in bridging education and workforce needs in technology sectors and beyond. I cannot imagine a path without this necessary collaboration. By design, non-profits were created for specific initiatives. We at Eleven Fifty have partnered with several to meet the unique needs of our students and set them on a successful path for a sustainable career in tech. This non-profit is rapidly making a giant contribution to the state of Indiana and to Hoosiers.

Q: How should institutions supported by taxpayer funds be held accountable for outcomes?

SCOTT JONES: Data always tells the story. When funding is tied to reliably measured outcomes, it forces all institutions that seek taxpayer funds to fix what is broken. This would incentivize rapid accountability for the many holes in our various educational systems that exist today. Strict accountability for outcomes—such as placement rate and salaries—is required, NOT enrollment numbers and graduation rates, which are far less relevant to tangible results for Hoosiers. Unlike most institutions, Eleven Fifty Academy is fully transparent about its outcomes.

SUE ELLSPERMANN: Ivy Tech Community College is committed to transparency to legislators on behalf of taxpayers, to our employers, and to communities we serve. We measure the wages our graduates make upon graduation and report that annually. We also measure graduation rates and completions aligned to the jobs in Indiana's economy. Our goal—and how we believe we should be measured—remains the same: we must offer programs and credentials that lead to employment in the fields where workers are needed most and in the industries that allow Indiana to remain globally competitive. ●



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Eleven Fifty Academy

Eleven Fifty Academy is a nonprofit dedicated to impacting the lives of individuals seeking to rocket launch their careers in tech. Bootcamp courses offered in Software Development, Web Development, Cybersecurity, and UX/UI Design.



Sue Ellspermann, Ph.D., became president of Ivy Tech Community College in 2016. An industrial engineer, she previously served as Indiana's 50th Lieutenant Governor from 2013 until March of 2016 and before that served in the Indiana General Assembly as state representative for District 74.



Scott Jones is the president and founder of Eleven Fifty Academy, one of the world's top-ranked software development and cybersecurity full-immersion training bootcamps. Jones has raised over \$200 million for his various companies, resulting in over \$5 billion of investor returns, and co-founded the world's largest voicemail provider.



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