



Rassoul Dastmozd, president, Saint Paul College

Saint Paul College president: under-served populations key to state's jobs future

A Civic Caucus Focus on Human Capital Interview

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Present

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Summary

If Minnesota is to maintain its high-quality workforce in coming years, the state has no choice but to give major emphasis to education and training of its under-served populations, who will make up 70 percent of the state's future population growth, according to Rassoul Dastmozd, president, Saint Paul College.

Business as usual won't be enough, given less than adequate results to date in E-12 education, high numbers of college dropouts and high unemployment rates for people of color. Places such as Saint Paul College, already successful in attracting students of color and low-income students, are well-positioned to provide education and skills training for this growing segment of our population.

Low-income students and students of color often face other challenges, such as housing, health care, transportation, and income, that make it extremely difficult for them to devote first priority to education and training. Consequently, for Minnesota to maintain its high-quality workforce, the state must take a broad-based approach to address these areas of need, in addition to education and training.

Biography

Rassoul Dastmozd has been President/CEO of Saint Paul College, a community and technical college, since July 2011. From August 2006 to July 2011 he was vice president of academic affairs, Clark College, Vancouver, WA. From April 1999 to July 2006 he was academic dean at Eastern Iowa

Community College District. From 1985-1999 he was a faculty and department chair, Indian Hills Community College, Ottumwa, Iowa, a community & technical college,

A native of Iran, Dastmozd has a bachelor of engineering technology, Southwest Minnesota State University; a M.S. in educational administration, Drake University, and a PhD in education, human resources and community college leadership from Colorado State University.

Background

Saint Paul College, established in 1910, is a comprehensive community and technical college, and a vibrant part of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system. The campus is located at 235 Marshall Avenue, St. Paul, near the St. Paul Cathedral and the State Capitol.

In the 2014 academic year, 9,690 students were enrolled in credit programs, and 1,476 students in non-credit programs. The average age of students is 29; enrollment is 60 percent minority, including immigrants from 38 countries; 55 percent female. In February 2014, the school was ranked by Community College Week as 12th in the nation in enrollment growth among colleges with 5,000 to 9,000 students. Saint Paul College was recognized as the No. 1 community college in the nation in 2010 and again in 2013 by Washington Monthly Magazine, based on active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, first-year retention rate, three-year graduation/transfer rate, and credentials awarded per 100 full-time equivalent students

Saint Paul College offers 43 associate's degree programs and 79 career, certificate and diploma programs. In the 2014 academic year, it awarded 599 associate's degrees and 956 certificates and diplomas. Dastmozd illustrated the breadth of the College's offerings by describing a typical day and interactions with individuals who attended the College. For example, his day might begin with breakfast in a restaurant, prepared by a culinary arts graduate; a visit to the physician's office and a blood test drawn by a graduate of a phlebotomy program and tested by the medical laboratory technician, a graduate of Saint Paul College; going to work in a building constructed by graduates of carpentry, pipefitting, sheet metal, plumbing, cabinet making, and electrical technology programs; an automotive repair or a warranty check performed by a graduate of the automotive technology program and a trip to the massage therapist, another graduate of Saint Paul College. These are a few examples of the way Saint Paul College graduates interact with our community every day.

As part of its interviews on preserving Minnesota's quality work force in coming years, the Civic Caucus invited Rassoul Dastmozd to discuss Saint Paul College.

Discussion

Challenges for Minnesota's work force:

While Minnesota has a lower-than-average unemployment rate, it faces several challenges, Dastmozd said, including the following: an aging workforce, employer concerns about a shortage of skilled employees, emphasis on the importance of a four-year degree, migration out of Minnesota, students needing remedial education, tuition expense, and student debt. He added that a lack of

access to affordable housing and accessible transportation for communities traditionally under-served by higher education make the supply and demand equation very challenging to balance in terms of addressing the workforce challenges for Minnesota's workforce.

The importance of Saint Paul College:

Dastmozd stated that Saint Paul College is very representative of Minnesota's future workforce, with 60 percent of its enrollment consisting of students of color, more than 32 percent first generation students, 61 percent low income, and 67 percent receiving financial aid.

Demographics are changing and 70 percent of Minnesota's growth will come from under-served populations, he said. MnSCU's community and technical colleges serve more first-generation students, more students of color and American Indian students, more low-income students, and more veterans than all other Minnesota higher education options combined, Dastmozd said.

Anticipating changes in jobs, and, necessarily, training for jobs in the future:

Many jobs didn't exist 20 years ago, such as cyber security and health informatics, Dastmozd explained. To stay close to industry changes, every career/technical program at Saint Paul College has a volunteer technical program advisory committee. The advisory committees consist of employers and industry experts from the Twin Cities to advise faculty and administrators on current trends and their needs for skilled employees.

Dastmozd used manufacturing as an example of how Saint Paul College has changed as employers' needs change. A generation ago, the machine technology program was taught primarily on manual equipment. However, today's employees need high-level expertise in computer programming to operate contemporary high tech equipment. Manufacturers need graduates who are versatile, nimble, flexible, and those who possess essential soft skills beyond the skill set required of a specific manufacturing process. He mentioned the college has adjusted to the ever-changing construction sector occupations, and engaged with Minnesota's Centers for Excellence to keep up with changes in health, manufacturing, transportation and information technology careers.

The College also works closely with community-based organizations such as Neighborhood House, Goodwill Easter Seals, YWCA of St. Paul, and International Institute of Minnesota to expand accessibility and promote affordability for potential students who want to pursue workforce training or higher education experience. These organizations can refer students to the College, while providing social services that the College does not have available, leveraging essential community resources, support systems, and avoiding duplication.

Additionally, Saint Paul College is engaged with foundations such as McKnight, Minnesota Philanthropy Partners, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), MSPWIN and other organizations to keep abreast of employment trends and needs.

Through analysis of information provided by DEED and Itasca Institute, the College identifies areas where there are gaps in post-secondary education leading to employment opportunities. Establishing and implementing new programs does take time, Dastmozd commented. For example, when the College identifies the value of a new program, such as the nurse anesthetists technician program, they consult with local employers, establish a technical advisory committee, design a curriculum, review necessary space, and recruit outstanding qualified instructors. It can take two years to a get

program running. Additionally, approval must be obtained from MnSCU, which ensures the market isn't overwhelmed.

Dastmozd highlighted that a new Health and Science Alliance Center will be constructed at Saint Paul College, to strengthen programs in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Currently the college's STEM classrooms are full, with utilization rates of 98 percent to 130 percent. The new center will provide 45,000 square feet of new and renovated space, an \$18.82 Million state-of-the art training complex. Programs using the new space will include STEM programs such as chemistry, biology and pre-engineering and health programs such as respiratory therapist, practical nursing, associate degree in nursing, nurse anesthetist technician, and phlebotomy technician.

The college attaches great significance to so-called "soft skills," that are needed irrespective of the type of occupation, including written and oral communication, trouble-shooting, quantitative skills, critical thinking, computer literacy, citizenry, and a well-rounded general education.

People need to purge themselves of long-held prejudices about "negative" jobs:

Informing the public about changes in the nature of manufacturing, any other type(s) of career and technical education training programs (CTE), and programs such as transportation and construction is essential, Dastmozd said. He said it is important to dispel the stigma that manufacturing jobs are dirty and dead end jobs. Saint Paul College is training a workforce who will help advance and expand economic prosperity for all Minnesotans.

Many high school graduates require remedial education in college:

About 55 percent of high school graduates enrolling at Saint Paul College need to improve essential skills, such as math, reading and writing, and must take remedial courses, as well as, regular community college/technical college courses. This percentage represents the number of first-year students who fail to test as college-ready on the Accuplacer™ placement test. Persons who pass may enroll directly into college English and math classes. All seats in developmental reading, writing and math classes at Saint Paul College fill every semester.

High job placement rates for Saint Paul College graduates

Of those students completing an associate degree or receiving a job-qualification certificate from Saint Paul College, job placement rates are very high. In 2013, for example, the most recent year that data is available, the college's placement rate was 78.3 percent. The placement rate in selected programs was higher, for example, for transportation 91 percent; manufacturing 87 percent, and construction and building trades 88 percent. Overall, this year's unofficial employment rate is at 85 percent.

Unfortunately, large numbers of students aren't graduating, a national problem:

Among students at Saint Paul College, about 47 percent of them complete their two-year associate degrees or certification for a job within a three-year period. That figure is above a national average of 38 percent, but Dastmozd said the College needs to do better.

He again reminded the group of the fact that 55 percent of high school graduates coming to Saint Paul College aren't yet equipped for college-level courses. These individuals may have been passed through social promotion throughout their K-12 education. With an average student age of 29, the College also enrolls students who have not been in school for many years and skills need to be sharpened.

Further, he said, society cannot rely only on our post-secondary schools to address the gap between job-seekers' skills and employer needs. Students coming to Saint Paul College often face a multitude of other challenges that make it extremely difficult for them to devote first priority to education and job training. These students are confronting problems such as affordable housing, transportation, low-income, and lack of family support systems. Often they are the first one to set foot in a college setting and pursue a higher education option. The nation can't solve the education problem when these other issues are paramount.

What stands in the way of reaching goals effectively?

A questioner commented that Saint Paul College is part of the large state MnSCU system of community and technical colleges and state universities. The questioner wondered what, if anything, stands in the way of Saint Paul College achieving its goals more successfully. Dastmozd said that everything they do is based on student success, as Saint Paul College is a student-centric institution. The College's strategic plan aligns and supports the MnSCU System's strategic direction. The way the current system is operating, comprised of two-year colleges and four-year universities, it provides flexibility for each institution to stay focused with its mission and deliver to their constituents.

A concerning point on higher education in Minnesota, is that at one time in the past, tuition to the state's technical college was free; then it was 50-50, tuition and state aid. Today the division is 65-68 percent tuition, and 35-32 percent state aid.

What work is needed to create a "seamless" transition from high school to college?

In terms of a "seamless" system, the questioner commented that we seem to have a big problem linking the high schools to the post-secondary institutions. High school graduation rates are embarrassingly low for many minority groups. Remedial courses are widely needed at the post-secondary level even for the students who do graduate from high school.

Dastmozd cited several examples of Saint Paul College's connections with the K-12 system, as well as, partnerships with Community Based Organizations that promote access to students, including:

- **Great Lakes Community Investment**, which provided funding for college readiness, parent engagement, and non-cognitive skill development for students at four Saint Paul public schools and two local charter schools.
- **Youth Career Connect**, a four-year (2014-2018) program funded by the U.S. Department of Education to engage more than 1,200 Saint Paul high school students in career-focused high school academies of finance and information technology.
- **A Gateway to College, a credit recovery** initiative on the Saint Paul College campus, currently serving 64 students with a goal of 200 students that allows Saint Paul high school students to complete high school requirements and potentially to earn college credit.
- **Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO)**— The College increased PSEO enrollment from 250 in 2014 to 315 in 2015.
- **Summer Credit Recovery** is a program where Saint Paul College hosts summer Credit Recovery programs for SPPS, serving 200+ students.

- **Early College Models** will continue in 2015-2016. The College will continue to offer College courses in Roseville High School as well as Johnson high school and will explore the Early College Model with SPPS in an expanded manner.
- **The Career Pathways Model** will offer Career Pathways course for SPPS beginning in 2016-2017 Academic Year.
- **Bridge Coursework** will include Summer Math Bridge coursework for Power of You students, which will allow advanced placement in remedial Math courses for up to 90 students.

Keeping in mind that the College also enrolls non-traditional students, the College has worked diligently to establish intentional partnerships with community based organizations to better serve its community. Some examples are as follows:

- **C3 Fellows** is a college and healthcare partnership between Saint Paul College, MCTC, and the Central Corridor Anchor Partners. To date, 112 students are working or volunteering in a related field.
- **Education to Employment Pathways Partnership** is a program funded by the Saint Paul Foundation and F.R. Bigelow Foundation in 2013. The partnership between the College, YWCA Saint Paul, and International Institute of Minnesota creates pathways for clients of the community based organizations on to completion of a College credential leading to gainful employment. Served by a navigator on campus, the program has served 135 students of which 64 are employed or continuing to the next stage of their education.
- **Trading Up** is a MJSP initiative funded by the DEED in collaboration with the Saint Paul Builders, 16 employers, MnDOLI, and a number of non-profit community based organizations. The College developed and documented pathway(s) for pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship union trades training program(s) potentially serving 140 students from traditionally under-served communities and with an expected placement of 105 students.
- **ABE Intrusive Advising** is a partnership between the College and a non-profit community based organization (Hubbs Center) that developed intensive tutoring sessions for students without burdening them with tuition costs for these services. Intrusive advising served nearly 450 students last year.
- **The College Readiness Institute Academy (the Academy)** is an educational partnership between Saint Paul College and three local adult basic education providers: the International Institute of Minnesota, Ronald Hubbs Center, and Neighborhood House. The Academy provides high quality instruction that prepares students for the rigors of college, many of whom are new Americans. Comprehensive advising, mental health, counseling, and academic planning services are provided to students by two navigators, addressing their social, personal, and academic barriers. To date the Academy has served 50 students showing preliminary success in moving students directly into college credit-bearing classes. This pilot project will serve 180 participants over eighteen months, ending in June 2016.

A questioner commented that it is important for all high school students to begin exploring career opportunities early, well before they graduate. Dastmozd said that he and his team have been working diligently with their partnering high schools, as well as community based organizations, to share information and expectations in more of an intentional manner to meet the needs of students.

Importance of the liberal arts:

Dastmozd dispelled any suspicion that Saint Paul College stands only for job-related education. Liberal arts provide an excellent well-rounded education, if coupled with a skill, he said.

Building loyalty by the employer to the employee and loyalty by the employee to the employer

A questioner noted how years ago employees thought of themselves as having a career with one employer. Moreover, in those days, the questioner said, the employer seemed to have a greater commitment to retaining employees for the long term. Dastmozd replied that it's not possible for Saint Paul College to change the culture of employers. The College treats each student as being very important, with the intent of building a strong work ethic. Society is evolving... much of the workplace culture is specific to a particular workplace. Employers must value the human capital they have and invest in their employees. It is a commitment that creates good will where employees feel valued, rather than being viewed as a disposable commodity.

Helping a community college relate mainly to the local community even though part of a state system :

A questioner noted that years ago community colleges were part of local school districts. Later they were placed into the state system of MnSCU. Thus, the questioner wondered, might it be more difficult today to build a strong relationship between local employers and the community college. Dastmozd said he doesn't see any evidence of things not working well within the present system in terms of relationships with employers. Saint Paul College relates to some 500 local employers. It's a matter of having adequate financial resources.

On another organizational matter, a questioner asked whether the state system for community colleges is hindered in any way by the fact that MnSCU has both community colleges and state universities within its purview. Dastmozd said Saint Paul College maintains a favorable relationship with other two-year colleges, as well as four-year state universities. MnSCU educates 435,000 students each year in 47 communities across the state (includes 31 colleges or universities and 54 campus locations). ( <http://www.mnscu.edu/media/publications/pdf>

 [2014_MnSCU_Viewbook_FINAL.pdf](#))

No concern about competition with massive open online courses (MOOCs) :

A questioner noted popularity nationwide and even worldwide with the new development of free online college courses being offered by well-known professors at noted universities. Dastmozd said the impact of MOOC development is largely prevalent in the four-year university scene. Saint Paul College has online courses, but they serve the local community, within a 10-15 miles radius. Also, he said, the completion rate of MOOCs is very low, less than 3-5 percent. He noted that they are special resources that can enhance one's knowledge base.