



**NARRATIVE 4:**

**SOFT SKILLS PROGRAM**

## **NARRATIVE 4—Soft Skills Program**

### Postsecondary Soft Skills

#### Employer Engagement

Elizabethtown Community and Technical College (ECTC) has over 25 years experience engaging with our local employers to meet their soft skill and technical skill training needs. Over the past three years we have had KY WINS projects with 11 Hardin County firms/organizations to deliver over \$500,000 in training to over 350 incumbent workers. Training included Conflict Resolution, Managing Generations at Work, Mid-Manager Training, Customer Service and many other topics. A complete list of companies trained along with a list of Soft Skills classes delivered can be found in the Appendices Section Items # 1 and 2.

In addition to the KYWINS Projects previously mentioned, ECTC has done training and assisted the following major companies in Hardin County—Fischbach, Altec, First Federal Savings Bank, Gates, Profit Stars-iPay Technologies, Mouser Cabinetry, Summit Polymers, Cardinal Health and Standard Register.

Over 190 other business and industries are served annually by ECTC through Workforce Solutions. In addition, other companies send their students to credit certificate, diploma, and associate degree programs to upgrade their skills and further their careers in local business and industries. Each College occupational-technical program has an advisory committee that meets at least two times a year. Annually, over 250 local business and industry representatives attend these meetings to review curricula and often urge faculty to include work ethic, diversity, and other soft skills content to their courses and programs.

ECTC serves as staff, at no cost, to the Elizabethtown Industrial Foundation Training Consortium (EIFTC), which has been in existence for over 25 years. Representatives of member companies meet monthly to ascertain training needs for their members. The consortium also supports four separate committees: Maintenance, Regulatory, Robotics, and Soft Skills. The Soft Skills Committee exists to recommend specific soft skills training to be offered to their members. Each committee meets quarterly to discuss current needs. The Soft Skills Committee is composed of business and industry representatives of major employers in Hardin County. A list of EIFTC members can be found in the Appendices Section Item # 3.

In addition, ECTC has created a four-contact hour, non-credit course entitled, “Work Ethic Tools” which has been validated by local industry and piloted in Hardin County. Course content can be found in the Appendices Section Item # 4.

ECTC offers “Options” workshops for dislocated workers as part of a joint effort with Lincoln Trail Area Development District and the closing firm to provide free training to these workers. Topics offered include: Computers for Beginners, Find a Job via the Internet, How to Attach Documents and Complete Online Applications, Interviewing Skills, How to Market Yourself, Dress for Success and others as the situation warrants.

ECTC works with the two economic development entities in Hardin County to ensure that any new or potential companies locating or considering locating in Hardin County has information and assistance to

apply for TrainKY funds to assist in reducing initial training costs. Through TrainKY, new or expanding firms may apply for assistance of their initial training costs through ECTC.

ECTC is part of the Lincoln Trail Area Development District Business Service Team to coordinate efforts across agencies with business and industry so that Hardin County firms can remain globally competitive. Part of that training is soft skills to further enhance employee relations and improve communication and other soft skills necessary to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Attendance/punctuality, teamwork, critical thinking, and other soft skills are integral to preparing students through the ECTC Ready to Work program, which has been at the College for over eight years. Students also receive interviewing skills, resume writing assistance, and often gain work experience while at ECTC.

All Associate in Applied Science degree graduates have completed approximately 25 percent of their coursework in soft skills/general education. In addition, the occupational-technical faculty members weave work ethics into their individual courses and daily interactions with students. Through Skills USA and Phi Beta Lambda, for which ECTC is known statewide and nationally, soft skills competitions are held along with technical competitions. Student organizations at community and technical colleges are another significant source of acquiring soft skills and work ethics tools that will help them in their careers through their chapter activities and competitions.

ECTC offers cultural studies courses. Cultural Studies Courses are defined as a course in which the major thrust is the study of one or more non-traditional and/or underrepresented cultural and are traditionally excluded from or marginalized in mainstream American curriculum. Cultural studies courses demonstrate a cultural emphasis in their course descriptions. For the completion of AA/AS degree, students must complete at least one cultural studies course. The College offers over 45 courses that fulfill this requirement.

ECTC requires completion of a college orientation session. In addition, students may opt to enroll in one of two credit-bearing orientation courses. These are:

#### GEN 100—Introduction to College

This one-credit course introduces new students to college and college life, support services provided by the college, techniques for academic success and career exploration.

#### GEN 102—Foundations of Learning

This three-credit course presents strategies which promote academic and personal success in college, including utilizing campus resources, learning and memory, self-management, critical reading, critical thinking, classroom skills, and career exploration.

The ECTC Career and Counseling and Job Placement Office assists prospective and current students with the career planning and job search strategies necessary to achieving their future goals. The office provides information, advice, training, and resources designed to help students select pathways leading to satisfying careers. Services include: a career library, a computerized career-exploration program, individual career/life assessments, small group workshops featuring selected topics in career planning/job search skills, annual job fairs, and community jobs postings. The office is a central repository and location for all employers from throughout our service area to post available career opportunities. These openings are shared with faculty members and students to ensure that employers

have a highly qualified pool of applicants from which to consider. The office coordinates services with Workforce Solutions and through them area chambers of commerce and over 500 business and industries.

ECTC regularly partners with universities, other community and technical colleges and secondary schools to meet the needs of students and citizens.

### **Secondary Programs and Programs sponsored by Chamber of Commerce**

Hardin Co. Schools (HCS) and the Hardin County Chamber of Commerce have partnered to offer the students of HCS the opportunity to earn Work Ethic Certification. Many businesses have offered to help teach classes in the schools and be guest speakers. The Elizabethtown Society of Human Resource Managers (ESHRM) group has helped to organize and participate in student interviews to assess the Work Ethic Skills attainment. Students that earn Work Ethic Certification will receive a special seal on their diploma, wear special cords and be recognized at graduation, be eligible for a Work Ethic Scholarship and will be granted an interview with businesses in the community that display the Work Ethic Certification Seal. Students must meet the minimum requirements for the position to be granted the interview. (See Appendices Section Item # 5). A copy of the Work Ethics Certification Participation Application from business to participate has been included in the Appendices Section Item # 6.

This program was implemented during the 2013-2014 school year in the Hardin County School System. There were 250 students enrolled in the program with 65 graduating with the distinction of having earned the Work Ethic Certification.

Internship opportunities with Hardin Memorial Health and Hardin County Schools are already underway and other internship opportunities are under negotiation.

Jon Ballard, Superintendent of Elizabethtown Independent Schools expressed that EIS would consider pursuing this program as well. Hardin County Schools would assist EIS in launching the program.

### **Kentucky Career Center**

The Kentucky Career Center instructs a class for jobseekers entitled *Do You Have the Skills*. It teaches participants about the soft skills that are essential to job seeking and retention. Each employer looks for a mix of skills and experience in hiring a new applicant. We try to instruct those seeking jobs on which soft skills are important. Employers value soft skills because they are just as essential as an applicant or jobseeker having experience, or technical skills. Soft skills are so often undervalued, and there is far less training provided for them than hard skills. This is the reason why the Kentucky Career Center strives to teach our job seekers the importance. Employers expect job seekers to know how to behave on the job. They tend to assume that everyone knows and understands the importance of being on time, taking initiative, being friendly, and producing high quality work. The assumption that soft skills are universal leads to much frustration. That is why it is so important to focus as much on soft skills training and development as you do on traditional hard skills. See Appendices Section Item # 7.

The Kentucky Career Center located in the Lincoln Trail Area has instituted a program entitled "EMPLOYMENT READY, SET, GO SEMINAR". The Ready, Set, Go pilot program, a weeklong program co-sponsored by the Lincoln Trail Area Development District/Kentucky Career Centers and Elizabethtown Community and Technical College. The objectives are to immerse unemployed and underemployed individuals into activities that teach work ethics, information about drug and alcohol abuse, careers services available through the Kentucky Career Centers, and jobs available in the area, training opportunities. A second proposed pilot is at Flex Films where the students will learn about the culture of the employer, tour the facility, and be exposed to many of the objectives in the first pilot. Each pilot is limited to 16 students. Currently the pilot programs are offered free through post sponsoring organizations. See Appendices Section Item # 8.