“It takes so long to get people trained, which is why Ivy Tech is so valuable. You can have somebody walk in off the street, already trained, and you just saved a ton of time and money.”

– Matt Hicks, Quality Assurance Senior Specialist, Cook Pharmica
Ivy Tech students advance quickly within Cook because of their preparedness and experience

With local companies struggling to hire production employees, Ivy Tech Community College’s biotechnology program has helped to adequately supply a pipeline of talent and training to companies in the Bloomington area—a biotechnology hub in the state of Indiana. As part of the Community College Consortium for Bioscience Credentials (c3bc), Ivy Tech developed its biotechnology program, which allows students to earn certificates in biopharmaceutical manufacturing, regulatory affairs, or an associates degree. The program has an applied, hands-on approach to teaching students, largely benefitting local companies, especially Cook Group, a privately held company based in Bloomington, Indiana, primarily involved in manufacturing of medical devices.

“I was shocked at the number of biotechnology students this semester, so I think the new arrangement between Cook and Ivy Tech will encourage and take away a barrier that was there prior to when it was implemented,” said Dean Miller, Associate Professor, Regulatory Affairs, Ivy Tech Community College.

Cook uses Ivy Tech program as hiring source

Cook Pharmica and Cook Medical, subsidiaries of Cook Group, have employees that contribute to the development of curriculum and are instructors within Ivy Tech’s biotechnology program. As workers in the field, Cook instructors are able to provide Ivy Tech students with real-life scenarios and experience.

An instructor of several courses, Russ Clinton, Manager at Cook Medical said, “I would use this opportunity to identify students who I would want to potentially hire.” Cook Medical and Pharmica see the program as a recruitment opportunity for open entry-level positions within their company.

The biotechnology program ends with an internship, in which the school works with Cook to place students. Every year, Cook Pharmica requests Ivy Tech interns and has hired almost all of them – around 35 interns since 2006. They recognize that these students bring the skill sets they need, reducing training time.

Ivy Tech and Cook have an extremely robust relationship. Not only has Cook contributed to the development of the biotech program by providing curriculum and professors, Cook has also donated equipment to the program. Ivy Tech brings their students to the Cook facility for field trips as well.

“The regulatory affairs department sees Ivy Tech as a feeder for more employees. This new program will reduce on-the-job training.”

– Chris Kilander, Global Product Manager, Cook Medical
“I don’t see training changing with My Cook Pathway. A lot of the training is very scripted and on-the-job. What does change is the persistency to learn at a faster pace.”

- Kelly Callahan, Manager, Human Resources, Cook Pharmica

Looking to meet the needs of local companies, Ivy Tech has Cook sit on their advisory board to give input on needs, requirements, and improvements. “We created a certificate that was 100 percent developed based on what [Cook] has said,” said Sarah Cotes, Professor of Biotechnology, Ivy Tech Community College. Students have the ability to come out of the Ivy Tech program earning industry-recognized certifications, like the American Society for Quality.

Over the course of years, the relationship between Ivy Tech and Cook has been able to adjust. Students coming out of the Ivy Tech program have the knowledge they need to begin a successful career at Cook Medical and Pharmica.

My Cook Pathway

Ivy Tech partnered with Cook Medical and Cook Pharmica to create “My Cook Pathway,” an education program allowing participants to earn a certificate or two-year degree in Ivy Tech’s biotechnology program at no cost to the employee. Cook Medical and Cook Pharmica send their employees to receive the Regulatory Affairs certificate or the Biopharmaceutical Manufacturing certificate. Students must achieve a ‘C’ or better in their courses in order for Cook to fully fund their program tuition.

There has been a large increase in the number of Cook employees that are taking advantage of the Ivy Tech biotechnology program with the announcement of My Cook Pathway. The knowledge students take away from the program is applicable almost anywhere. The Regulatory Affairs concentration is especially diverse, where students can specialize in a number of different areas. “If you do RA well, you can get your product to the market quicker and have an advantage over your competitors. Being able to position your technology first is key,” Chris Kilander, Global Product Manager, Cook Medical said of the importance of this program. Due to the convenience of the program, Cook has had the ability to hire fewer people from outside of the area and more local candidates.

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EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHTS

COOK MEDICAL

Pictured left to right: Maribel and Naomi

“I took about five courses and paid not a dime. I can make a huge difference in regulatory affairs here all the way out to the other aspects of the industry. I thought the program was a great way to be able to see where this path could lead me.”

- Naomi Funkhouser, Regulatory Affairs Specialist

COOK PHARMAICA

Tony Roberts has worked in the manufacturing industry for 25+ years. He was the third graduate from the Ivy Tech biotech program, and found a job at Cook Pharmica with the help of two of his professors that worked there. Tony started as a lab technician in 2007 and worked his way up to an associate scientist by 2013. “I could not have taken this job without what I learned at Ivy Tech. As for hands-on skills, there’s no four year university that’s trained people as well as Ivy Tech has.”

Alex Schwab came to Bloomington to attend Indiana University for Chemistry. After deciding this wasn’t the direction she wanted to go in, she heard through a friend about the biotech program at Ivy Tech. Alex began interning at Cook Pharmica in May 2016 for two months before being hired full time. “I think I was very prepared. There was another gentleman who started before me, and I came in already knowing all the expectations. The difference between the two of us was very dramatic even from day one.”

Matt Hicks moved to Bloomington in 2010 looking for a job. He had CGMP experience and qualified for an entry level manufacturing position. With the determination to advance, Matt was steered towards Ivy Tech and completed the biotech program. Originally wanting to go into regulatory affairs, and after holding four different jobs within Cook, Matt is now focused on quality assurance. “Everything I was learning directly applied to what I was doing. I can’t say that of any other educational experience I’ve had before.”

About the C³BC:
The Community College Consortium for Bioscience Credentials (c³bc) is a multistate consortium of 12 community colleges engaged in an educational and training initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Labor under grant TC-23761-12-60-A-37. Under the c³bc, 12 Community Colleges nationwide coordinate to support the following strategies to assist grant participants to obtain employment in high-wage, high-skill occupations, such as biotechnology, biomanufacturing, and medical devices:

1. Harmonize a set of core skills across the biosciences and embed stackable and latticed, industry-recognized credentials into training for biosciences jobs that will create career pathways for TAA-eligible and other displaced workers.
2. Improve and expand recruitment, testing and aptitude assessment for trade-impacted workers in tandem with the public workforce system. This will help industry demand for biosciences workers.
3. Expand and improve the delivery of education and career training programs at the Community College level. Accelerate completion time in certificate/credentialing programs through improved assessment of prior learning, focused support services, the removal of institutional barriers and development of technology.
4. Build community college capacity for biosciences education and training that meets local, state and national employer needs across subsectors of laboratory skills, biomanufacturing and medical devices.

This product was funded by a grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration. The product was created by the grantee and does not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of Labor. The Department of Labor makes no guarantees, warranties, or assurances of any kind, expressed or implied, with respect to such information, including any information on linked sites and including, but not limited to, accuracy of the information or its completeness, timeliness, usefulness, adequacy, continued availability, or ownership.

Community College Consortium for Bioscience Credentials (C³BC):