TITLE:

Tracking Biotechnology Graduates of Forsyth Technical Community College

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ABSTRACT:

This project explores the characteristics demonstrated by prominent graduates of Forsyth Tech's Biotech Program. Graduates of this institution represent the Piedmont Triad region of North Carolina which is designated as an emerging cluster in biotechnology and the life sciences. The NCBW team worked with graduates who are achieving high levels of success in their careers or subsequent educational endeavors. Our purpose was to discover the characteristics or skills that they share that could be encouraged or enhanced in other students to raise the level of success obtained by other Biotechnology graduates. Commonality among these successful graduates indicates some distinct qualities that enhance the efficacy of their passage from student to career-oriented employee. An intrinsic interest in the scientific field is needed because the success of a graduate seems proportional to his/her diligence in "going the extra mile" to fulfill their potential. However, these graduates also indicate that "soft" skills and communication skills may be the most significant factors that determine their success.

PURPOSE:

The North Carolina Community College's BioNetwork trains Biotechnology workers for the state. For the most part, the people who take NC Community College biotech courses are either new to the biotechnology arena and are pursuing entry-level job training, or they are incumbent workers taking training upgrades, or they are pursuing an academic degree, such as an Associates. Forsyth Technical Community College, in the Piedmont Triad area, has strong ties to BioNetwork and is a leader in NC Biotechnology training. It is home to the National Center for the Biotechnology Workforce and it currently offers an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Biotechnology. The data from the Forsyth Tech Biotech program points to an average age of 35 with two-thirds of the students being female. It had been assumed that Biotechnology students and graduates go into the biotechnology workforce after graduation, but data from our previous studies suggest that (at least for Forsyth Tech) employment into biotechnology positions is not always immediate. Determining success characteristics of prominent graduates who have entered the workforce or have continued their studies was our study aim.

METHOD:

Four prominent graduates of Forsyth Technical Community College's Biotechnology Program agreed to be interviewed. They were videotaped and asked through a series of scripted questions, to self assess the attributes that have made them successful through the Forsyth Tech Associates Degree and onto the next level of education or employment. The videotaped responses were then transcribed into a spreadsheet for comparison. The answers were grouped and analyzed for similarities. For the purpose of this abstract the two major findings were revealed. The full study will be released at www.biotechworkforce soon.

FINDINGS:

These graduates exhibited: **1) an assertive and positive attitude toward their education; 2) all "love" science**. Several questions evoked similar responses. Graduates explained the need for students to be aware of their program and its limitations as well as their own limitations and the requirements for success. One of those requirements was "soft" skills as it applies to their ability to interact with others in team environments or in interviewing type situations. They expressed their own ability to "sell themselves". These participants described the discipline to own their own education which was demonstrated through the internal drive to know more, to seek out answers, and to explore various aspects on their own. **They all exhibited the willingness to "go the extra mile"**. This trait appears to reflect in their total success.

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