Transcript
Pima Community College Perspectives
“Economic Development”
Guests: Rachelle Howell, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Marketing and Public Information
Nancy Russell, Vice President for Instruction, Community Campus

(male speaker) Welcome to Pima Community College Perspectives, a look on how education enriches our community. And now, here’s your host, Nina Trasoff.

(Nina Trasoff) Hello, and welcome to Pima Community College Perspectives. I am Nina Trasoff, and it’s my pleasure to be here today talking with Rachelle Howell who is Assistant Vice Chancellor for Pima Community College, and Nancy Russell, who is the Vice President of Instruction for the Community Campus. And our topic today is why a skilled workforce is so important and how Pima prepares us and prepares our workforce. And I think, as contentious as the world can be, nowadays, one of the few things I think everybody can agree on is that a well-educated workforce is the foundation of a prosperous community. So let’s just launch in and look at what is Pima’s role in that? Because I know you do education for—I mean, along the whole spectrum of very technical and very general. Rachelle, give me some background on that.

(Rachelle Howell) Sure, sure thing. Well, you know, for a community college, for Pima in particular, developing a well-educated workforce is really where our mission starts and stops. And we take a two-pronged approach. There’s-- one aspect is serving our local businesses, the employers, and the other approach is serving individuals in the community. With the businesses that we work with, our goal is to provide short-term training for their employees, because skilled workforce for a business means that business has the opportunity to be competitive. And that’s really important in today’s environment, in particular. And our goal there is to respond really quickly, uh, be as responsive as we can to the employers that we work with.

On the flip side, uh, right now, there are a lot of people in the county, and well, in the region and the state, in the world, that are struggling. But locally, people need us more than ever. There’re a lot of people that have been laid off, or—or unemployed, underemployed, because they—they can’t find work in their original, uh, their original industry. And our goal, really, is to help them restart their careers and look for ways to move forward. And many of them are choosing occupational training. And these are not traditional transfer courses or transfer programs. These are individuals who need quick training, they need to move onto their next career, and they need to get their, their lives, their families back on track.

(Trasoff) I think that’s a really important point, Rachelle, because in this day and age when people have lost their job or their profession because of the circumstances, they may not have the luxury of going to school for two years in order to be able to gain the skills they need to move into their next field. And so what you do is really come in... And Nancy, if you could talk a little bit more about that. Um, what is Pima’s approach? Uh, Rachelle talked about both for the individual and the business. How do you combine that and target that?
(Nancy Russell) The approach is, is two-fold, as it should be, to—to reach both entities, certainly, with the employers. We have a team of, uh, individuals that go out and meet with employers, help determine what their employees need for additional training so that they can continue to, uh, produce in that environment. That they can gain additional skills, hopefully be promoted, move up, and make that entity, whether it’s an organization or whether it’s a, a business here, help make it more prosperous and, and, um, impactful in our local, uh, economy.

The other approach is with the unemployed individual. With the unemployed individual, we work hand-in-hand with Pima County One Stop offices. There are two here in, in Tucson, and actually, the College and the County share two employees at those centers to help ease an unemployed worker into the system of higher education. It can be a mind-boggling event for—many times it’s their first introduction to higher education. What we look to do there is we really help to guide that individual, what does he or she need? What level are they at currently? If they have, uh, if they have bachelor’s degrees, we actually have a Post-Baccalaureate program if they are interested in becoming a teacher.

Or if they are in a particular trade or in a particular industry, and they need retooling. Say that industry is no longer prosperous in Arizona. Then we’re going to help them retool and offer them a variety of short certificates in a variety of occupation programs ranging from Pharmacy Tech to EMT, Paramedicine or EMT Basic, uh, Aviation Technology, Building Construction, Hotel/Restaurant Management. Our website has them all. I’m not going to list them here.

Or say the person doesn’t even have a GED yet. A lot of times, a GED is the road, that initial step to really being able to move ahead in—in, in any type of occupation. Pima College is the one that does Adult Education, so we can help that person earn their GED. So it is a two-fold approach based upon whether it’s an industry we’re looking at, and a company, or it’s an individual.

(Trasoff) And I think the point about Pima County One Stop— a lot of people may not really be aware of what that is, but it is what its name implies. I think it’s so important, and it’s something that’s done so smart in this community, to have one place that people can turn to for all of the needs that they’re going to need, all of the specifics that they’re going to need to have addressed.

(Russell) It’s critical, uh, for the dislocated or the underemployed worker; it’s a critical role that the county serves, um, in addressing those needs. They do have a case management approach where they are really trying to address the en—the whole individual and the variety of difficulties the individual may be facing, especially in these current economic times as we’ve talked about.

(Trasoff) And education is one key element but not the only thing they get when they go down there.

(Russell) Exactly.

(Trasoff) Now I was talking about, I just was talking about One Stop being wonderful, because it’s one place you can go and have all your answers. One of the other beauties, I think, about Pima is that you are all over this community— east side, west side, north, south. You have programs and campuses there, as well as available online. You really make it easy.
(Russell) We, we do, indeed. Um, I think one of the little-known facts regarding the College is that not only do we have our six campuses and then a variety of sites, with our Public Safety Institute, or our Northeast Learning Center, or our Davis-Monthan Air Force Base site, because those are, those are wonderful places to serve all of the students throughout, throughout the county. But the other little-known fact is that we offer an enormous amount of customized training on-site at local businesses and organizations. So we’re able to deliver, throughout the region, a variety of customized training for those employers, when employees are seeking to upgrade their skills.

(Trasoff) And when you are talking about that kind of approach, can those classes that are created for that moment, that need, can they evolve into a course, a formal course at Pima? And how does that happen?

(Russell) They, they actually can, Nina, and thank you for asking that. Uh, the best example that I, um, am able to give of a recent transition is our Supply Chain and Logistics Program that we just initiated. Two years ago, Pima Community College worked with the Pima, with Pima County, Arizona Western, and Cochise College to apply for a community-based job training grant through the Department of Labor. We were awarded that $2 million dollar grant to develop a Supply Chain and Logistics program. So what the College did, in collaboration with the County and, and the other community colleges in the region, we met with-- here in Pima County, there are approximately 27 employers that we met with. But we met with employers also in, in Yuma and in Douglas and in Sierra Vista and Nogales to make sure that we were going to, that the curriculum that we were going to develop would touch the needs of all of the supply chain and logistics employers in this region along the Cana-Mex corridor and the I-10 corridor.

By doing that, we then also reached out; we had been a member of a, of a community college consortium, a national consortium, that shares curriculum. And so we reached out to that consortium, gathered up their curriculum, customized it, and through a contract, we, in essence, beta-tested it. We wanted to make sure it was going to meet the needs of the employers, so several employers sent employees to these classes initially. So we were able to test it out.

But before we offer any type of program at the College in open-enrollment, those classes have to be thoroughly vetted. So we make sure they go through our College Curriculum Council, which has a number of administrators, and, but a definitely overwhelming number of faculty members, that take a look at the curriculum, make sure that our student learning outcomes and that the curriculum is college, is worthy of college credit, that it’s appropriate, has appropriate outcomes, and has a path for success, where they’re able to learn and then apply, and prove that they have the—the knowledge and the skills to go forth into whatever field it is.

So we took, we took these customized courses and beta-tested them with the companies, under contract, but then it evolved. We took that entire program, evolved it, worked it through our Curriculum Council, and it’s now being offered at our East Campus, um, with very, very successful enrollments.
(Trasoff) That’s fabulous, and, and in an upcoming program, we’re going to be talking about accreditation, and I think that kind of approach and the seriousness with which you take the creation of any new curriculum, um, has to play well on that. But that’s a topic for another day. Uh, what I do want to go to, just briefly though, is, um, the collaborative approach. It is just astounding how very much you do work with everybody else, and that makes just perfect sense nowadays.

(Russell) It really does. I—and I think it’s really important to note that we are trying to work with, particularly, with the other colleges, but here in our own region, we are working with all of the employers to make sure that we are giving them the workforce that they need to make us competitive in the 21st century. As you said at the start of the show, Nina, education does equal prosperity, and, and we all know that.

So whether we’re serving the individual or whether we’re working, whether it be with, um-- we currently are working with Geico, serving, uh, their employees with accounting and marketing classes, or the Tucson Fire Department; we’re training their firefighters to become paramedics. Uh, we worked at Raytheon and with the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, a lot of different community partners. Whether, again, whether they’re associations or, or whether they’re corporate America, we’re there to help serve, make sure that their employees get trained, the training that they need. And it’s important to note, as those employees get trained and move up, that creates entry-level jobs for others to start to fill.

(Trasoff) Your enthusiasm is infectious. Uh, as we wrap up this segment, I just want to touch very briefly on two of the new programs, because they speak to that future that you were talking about in terms of energy sector and healthcare.

(Russell) We are very excited. The College has been very fortunate to secure, uh, two particular grants to help us develop some new programs. One of them is the State Energy Sector Partnership, which will establish a Green Energy Curriculum Center. Our Downtown Campus, um, is part of the statewide effort to develop programs in environmentally friendly technologies, such as energy-efficient construction, solar technology, and the like.

The second program is to help health industry employees learn how to elect, uh, convert patient records into the electronic format. As we all know, the—all the secure requirements now that we all have to sign off on every time we go to the doctor; everything has to be secure, electronic, and easily transportable. And so we are part of a—again, a consortium of several community colleges. The Downtown Campus along with Desert Vista and Community Campus are all working on that, uh, and that’s about a three-quarter of a million dollar grant to help train employees in our region.

(Trasoff) Just terrific. Well, you are out there helping to build our skill—our workforce and offer options to people who have lost one form of employment to move into the next. Those transitions are so critical. Nancy Russell, thank you so much for being with us. I do appreciate it. We’ll take a quick break, and when we come back, uh, Rachelle and I will be talking with Joe Snell, who’s the President and CEO of Tucson Regional, uh—um, Economic Opportunities, TREO.

[music]
(male speaker) For more than 40 years, Pima Community College has helped prepare the citizens of Tucson and Pima County for good jobs and better lives for themselves and their families. We don’t do it alone. We appreciate your ongoing investment in education, especially during these extraordinarily tough times. Your tax dollars, combined with student tuition, make it possible for thousands of Southern Arizonans to get a jump-start before transferring to a university, to get the training they need to stay competitive at work, and to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow. Many of our students are seeking to restart their careers after losing their jobs, and some, their homes, during the recession. All of our students know, as you do, that the more you learn, the more you earn.

We know that today’s students are often juggling work and family, as well as school. That’s why Pima offers classes at night and on weekends at six campuses, more than 180 other locations, and over the Internet. Our programs deliver education how you want it, and give you the opportunity to achieve your goals at your pace. Today’s Pima Community College students will be tomorrow’s firefighters, nurses, police, teachers, and small business owners, the backbone of a safe, healthy, prosperous Tucson and Pima County. Thank you for your support as we continue to help you and your family build a better tomorrow. For more information, contact us at 206-4500 or visit us on the Web at pima.edu. Pima Community College, developing our community through learning.

(Trasoff) Welcome back, I’m Nina Trasoff with Rachelle Howell from Pima Community College. We’ve been talking about how Pima prepares a skilled workforce, and joining us now for this segment is Joe Snell, who is President and CEO of Tucson Regional Economic Opportunities, TREO, which is doing such a good job of bringing new business to our region. Have to congratulate you, Joe.

(Joe Snell) Thank you, Nina, thank you, Rachelle, and thanks for having me.

(Trasoff) My pleasure. Um, talk a little bit, please, about your new approach and how TREO is trying to address our needs in Pima County.

(Snell) Yeah, you know, to bring you back, TREO was created, uh, in 2005 to facilitate the creation of high-wage, primary jobs in the region. We primarily do that through the recruitment or expansion of primary companies. And the real kick for us is providing, if you will, the connectivity, uh, with one voice for this community to—to represent the key assets we’re selling, and that’s, you know, government and the infrastructure, healthcare, for example, higher education. And we’ve went through and we’ve had some success in that since 2005, uh, with the expansion and re—recruitment of nearly 30—of 37 companies worth about $1.4 billion of new wealth generated for this region.

(Trasoff) Wow. That’s impressive.

(Snell) Yeah. It—it is. Uh, now no doubt, the economy has cooled things off for us and everyone else, but I think we’re in a pretty good position, uh, Tucson is, compared to some of our competitor cities, of—of mitigating these losses and probably coming out of it stronger down the road. Um, we went through a recent restructure, Nina, um, in primarily, you know, the role that if we’re looking at connectivity, it’s important that, that we have the key stakeholders and the key drivers of this economy
sitting at the table, because that—that’s who’s selling. Um, and there’s no difference selling to an outside company or to a company looking to expand; same value proposition needs to exist.

And we looked at it, and—and to be frank, we needed more voices. We needed more diversity. And we went out and expanded the TREO Board of Directors and—and created a little different infrastructure, which has expanded our board from about 17 members to a 54-member board, but it’s much more diverse. And—and the other outcome of that is that it shifted our funding. Uh, in 2005, we were about 80% funded by the, uh, the City of Tucson and Pima County, and that has shifted overnight, uh, uh, to where we don’t have that majority of funding in the public sector. Thus, we’re not quite so victim to the political whims that go up and down and much more stable. So, um, a lot of changes here, but I think in the, in the right direction.

(Trasoff) What is the role of education and an educated workforce for you when you’re going out to sell Tucson? How important is that element?

(Snell) Paramount. Um, you know, there—there, people ask me all the time, “Joe,” you know, “are incentives important?” Uh, for—for example, in—in, in creating jobs. And yes, they are; they become more important when a, uh, recession happens, you know, a supply and demand curve. But what hasn’t changed—whether it’s a strong economy, a weak economy, uh, recession, you know, high growth— is that labor drives all market decisions. Companies, employers, are still picking locations, expanding in locations, consolidating, with the primary need to fill talent and fill a talent gap.

So if—if that’s the premise of what needs to happen, it is absolutely critical that we have higher education, um, really, education at all levels, K-12, all the way up through, you know, uh, advanced degrees, at, uh, you know, that are, we have capable organizations that are, that are business-friendly, and, uh, that are connected to the employers’ needs. And I think we have that asset here in Southern Arizona like other regions might not have.

(Trasoff) Uh—that’s just what we were discussing, um, earlier in this program, and Rachelle, how does Pima keep up? Because Joe is out there constantly with these groups, bringing in new possibilities, and there’s different kinds of training, and you have to gear up pretty quickly.

(Howell) We do. We, part of, part of what we do is maintaining an open dialogue with, with entities like TREO and Mr. Snell and, in fact, participating on their Board. Our Chancellor, Roy Flores, is a member of the TREO Board. So, just having a—a, a constant presence in the community and with the industry, with businesses, and listening to needs, and what the next new trend is, and what, what the new demand is going to be for—for workers, and in what industries, is really important to us. And there are a lot of ways that we can go about that. We, we—we do a lot of research at the College, watching trends in, uh, the economy and in industry and in business, both regionally, statewide, and—and nationally. You know, it’s—it’s really a global marketplace anymore; we’ve got to be cognizant of that. So just watching trends.

And we actually have a department at the College that that’s one of their main, one of their main efforts is to—is to watch trends and track trends and recommend industries that—that we need to be looking
at to—to provide, uh, start providing programs for, so we can help develop trained and skilled employees. But—but just keeping a finger, literally, on the pulse, and it sounds cliché, but it’s really important for us to stay in communication with our local businesses through these organizations, through the Chambers of Com—Commerce, um, listen to what’s going on in our community and find out where—where the needs are. Without that, we—we wouldn’t be able to serve our community, and we do pride ourselves on being responsive and producing programs quickly. And that’s one of the strengths of community colleges, as compared to universities, being able to develop and turn out new programs as quickly as possible to meet the needs of the new labor force demands.

(Trasoff) One of the threads that I keep hearing, I—I hear both of you using the word constantly, “partnership,” “collaboration.” And that working together is so important, ‘cause you can’t just shotgun it. You can’t just go out and train for everything. Um, Joe, what are some of the industries that you’re really focusing on now?

(Snell) We did a pretty significant amount in 2006, involved nearly 6,000 people in this community, and—and we studied, uh, uh, went through an exercise to determine which industries could shape our future. And we narrowed that down, uh, uh, really, for a best fit for Tucson. Uh, because again, you know, you said it, we don’t believe in a “shotgun” approach; uh, we believe in a very “targeted” approach, and I think it served us well as our close rates went up. That’s part of why we’ve got 37 wins on the board.

For us, those four industries that are, that are high priority are aerospace and defense. Why? We’re a top five region in critical mass. Not very many places in the country, or even around the world have this many assets in aerospace and defense. Uh, biotechnology, specifically in the diagnostics field, uh, very critical for our futures; solar, um, uh, technologies, solar manufacturing, real critical, we have a lot of assets there; and then logistics and transportation. Uh, frankly, our proximity to the Western, you know, California markets and—and Mexico, we can touch a lot of people in a—in a, in a very short distance. So those are the industries we focus on, uh, at this point.

(Trasoff) And Nancy Russell was talking about that earlier, about how, uh, the transportation and logistics coursework started as a target just for a particular need and is now expanding to one of—one of the regular parts of the Pima curriculum. So you’re going to have ongoing, uh, trained workers in that field.

(Snell) Yes, and I know we worked with the, uh, College. You know, you talk about partnerships. We have had a long-standing partnership with Chancellor Flores and, and really, all the leadership, uh, at the Community College; I can’t tell you, um, you know, Um, in—in every case, but I could, if we had more time, I would list off, uh, you know, case after case that, you know, where we’ve sat down and—and went to the Community College and have, for example, a defense project that we worked on about a year ago. We came back and—and, and, the company official sat down and said, “Listen, we need, uh, a certain skill set that—that we don’t see in this community. We see general aerospace training, but we need a real tight skill set.” Community College was able to, to—to develop a curriculum and a training program virtually overnight, and the company came back and said, “We’re satisfied. This is, uh, exactly
what we need.” This is an asset that—that’s, uh, you know, I hope we never lose, because it makes my job a lot easier.

(Trasoff) That has to be something that gives you a lot of confidence when you go to recruit, and you know that there’s a specific, targeted skill set you need, to know that you have a partner in Pima that you can just call and say, “Okay, here’s what we need,” and they’re going to be able to respond.

(Snell) A lot of comfort. In this case, it was an expansion project, but again, you know, a lot of people don’t understand that—that companies that are here locally, uh, you know, they—they, they might be, uh, a little isolated. They might not be plugged into the system, and, uh, uh, you know, so it works both ways, not just recruiting companies. But yeah, it gives me a lot of uh, uh, very sound, sound nights sleeping.

(Trasoff) Yeah, we do forget that—that the majority of our jobs, I believe, if I remember correctly, come from existing businesses expanding, as opposed to new coming in.

(Snell) That’s right; always do, in every community.

(Trasoff) So what occupations, where do you see the trend going, Joe? What—what, where’s the next step? If a young person’s listening, or a middle-aged person’s listening and—and, and wants to retool, what are the directions?

(Snell) Well, you know, without getting specific skill sets or jobs, because that does change, and you know, this is a, the private sector’s very demand-driven. And I think where communities sometimes fail—and we do not; the Community College does very well with it— is we tend to sometimes, communities tend to look at the supply and then try to drive that and—and fit the demand that’s out there. And, you know, it’s a very difficult to say; we know which industries are going to shape the future, but the specific jobs can, we can sit here today and say they’re going to be, um, left-handed healthcare workers, and in 12 months, it might be right-handed healthcare workers.

(Trasoff) [chuckles] Flexibility, then.

(Snell) Yes, flexibility. And I think that’s something that Pima Community College does very well is, is adjusting to that. So, I think, focusing on those four industries, uh, I would throw healthcare in that, very important, very, very critical, um, you know, are the types of industries that, if I was young, and I have a 23-year old daughter, I would, you know, say, that, that you probably should look for some type of, um, uh, skill set that supports those industries.

(Trasoff) Any other parting thoughts for us, Joe, as we’re looking at this partnership and—and the foundational role that education plays in economic development?

(Snell) Well, no, and just reemphasize it again. Um, you know, people have heard me around town, and I’ve said it for five years now, education. And I know, so I’ll put a plug in for education all-levels. They’re all part of the pipeline, uh, that helps fill that talent, uh, uh, gap, if you will, that—that does exist. And you need them all. You need, uh, you know, University of Arizona’s an excellent, uh—uh, organization.
You need a strong K-12 system, a nimble community college; I think we have it. I think it’s a real important that we, uh, don’t lose focus, though, that we need to keep competitive with those institutions so, um, I’m a big supporter of—of, of these organizations and, uh, I want to make sure that we continue to, uh, fund them adequately. Uh, and I think it—it benefits us, uh, in the pocketbook, uh, down the road.

(Trasoff) Thank you, Joe, thank you so much for joining us. This was Joe Snell, President and CEO of TREO, and Rachelle Howell, who is Assistant Vice Chancellor of Pima Community College. Thank you all for joining us, and next week we’ll be talking about accreditation and how important it is.

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(male speaker) K-J-L-L, South Tucson.