

Connecticut's largest city, community college partner to add Construction Management certificate program

Shortly after Bill Finch took office as Mayor of Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 2008, he started the Small and Minority Business Resource Center (SMBRC). Its goal is to help small business owners thrive by providing training and assistance they can use to earn construction, architectural, and/or engineering contracts. One of the center's first projects was to co-develop a Construction Management program with Housatonic Community College. But before the center and HCC went forward with the program, they wanted to find out whether or not there was a pressing need for such training in the area.

Bridgeport seeks to educate minority contractors

In early 2008, the construction sector in Bridgeport, the largest city in Connecticut, was flourishing. Yet when it came to the city awarding construction contracts, Finch noticed a trend: "Qualified women- and minority-owned businesses were frequently overlooked when the city sought private companies to manage construction projects or supply needed services," he wrote in a recent op-ed piece in *The Connecticut Post*.¹ According to Finch, the root of the problem wasn't discrimination; instead, it was a lack of education. "They were qualified," he wrote, "but many of the small and minority-owned companies simply didn't have the knowledge they needed to identify projects or go through the Request for Proposal process."

As a result, Finch and the SMBRC sought to provide training to help the business owners. Deborah Caviness, the center's director, contacted Dr. Robert (Rab) Thornton, Dean of Outreach Services at HCC, about developing a Construction Management certificate program. While Thornton saw the potential, he was adamant that the program should not be developed based on what they *think* is happening in the local construction sector.

Need for data-driven research

After the center approached him, Thornton used EMSI's local labor market information to look at job, occupational, and demographic trends, including the current and projected regional demand for construction managers. The results of his research were conclusive. "Instead of someone saying, 'I think there's a need,' the data HCC provided showed there was a need," Thornton said.

Program proves successful in first year

As a result, Housatonic and the center announced their partnership to offer the new Construction Management programs in English and Spanish. Right away, the reception from the community was very positive. The initial program served 77 students, while 18 students took part in the customized Spanish offering. Certificates were handed out in October, 2008, and already Finch is proposing that the state replicate Bridgeport's model for helping minority-owned businesses with short-term programs.

Both Thornton and Finch agree the partnership and training wouldn't have taken off without a thorough, data-driven assessment of the labor market. In a recent letter, the mayor comments, "During the research phase of our partnership, it was important to confirm with data the City's belief that there was a need for this program. Housatonic's EMSI and OneSource research reports for construction management more than met this need. The College's job, occupational, demographic, and economic trend analyses for this industry unequivocally showed that, yes, there was a need for a Construction Management program for Bridgeport's businesses."

¹ [Minority business initiative worth replicating](#)," *The Connecticut Post*, January 16, 2009.



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