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Students will continue to train using the program's stationary, indoor ambulance simulator, but a working ambulance has been added as well. PHOTO COURTESY OF LLCC

LLCC expands, upgrades training facility for emergency services

CC JOBS | Lynn Whalen

The Springfield community needs more paramedics and emergency medical technicians, and Lincoln Land Community College is ready to train them.

Three years ago, LLCC received a federal grant to address the “urgent community need” for emergency services workers. The funds were intended to pay for the renovation of Logan Hall on the LLCC campus to expand training space for EMTs, advanced EMTs and paramedics and also purchase a working ambulance and state-of-the-art equipment with the new school year starting, more students will be better equipped to learn to save lives in emergency situations.

“When there is a shortage of emer-

gency services personnel, people have to wait longer for a paramedic or EMT to arrive at their homes,” said Cynthia Maskey, dean of health professions at LLCC. “Several years ago, we started meeting with the EMS systems based at Memorial Health and HSHS to discuss how we could address this shortage. From those discussions, we’ve made curriculum changes, and we have the physicians who are the EMS directors in each system teaching here regularly. Now we have this amazing new facility, and we’re hoping ‘If you build it, they will come.’”

And the students are coming. Emergency management technician classes are “bursting,” said Maskey, and para-

medic classes are also filling up quickly. “Enrollments for all health professions are really good, and the hope is we’ll be getting more as people tour and learn about our new facilities,” she said.

The new spaces include a simulated apartment where students will practice their skills. “When there’s a 911 call and EMTs and paramedics go into a home, the most common place they find people is in the bathroom,” said Maskey. “So our ‘apartment’ has a full bathroom, as well as a kitchen, living area and bedroom. Students can work through many different scenarios in a realistic environment.”

Down the hall are new simulation labs, including a “trauma room” that

will be shared with the college's radiography program. "EMS students can practice the cycle of care that might start with arriving at the home, initial assessment, treatment and transport to the hospital where the patient would be transferred for additional diagnostics, such as X-rays and further medical attention," she said.

Instructors and students will continue to train using the program's stationary, indoor ambulance simulator, but the addition of a working ambulance is a big step forward.

"We now have the classrooms, simulation labs, apartment and a real ambulance our students will be able to drive and train in and even VR (virtual reality) simulators for mass casualty scenarios," said Kyla Kruse, LLCC chief communications officer. "The renovations in Logan Hall, which also houses occupational therapy assistant, radiography and sonography programs, are just going to make for a great experience and connection between the different health professions programs."

Maskey said hospitals, ambulance companies and others who employ EMTs are very supportive in helping students with tuition costs. "They want EMTs to become advanced EMTs and paramedics. EMT is the starting point for those and other programs in health professions. EMT provides a great background to go into



Cynthia Maskey, dean of health professions at Lincoln Land Community College, outside the new EMS lab. Students will continue to train using the program's stationary, indoor ambulance simulator, but a working ambulance has been added as well. PHOTO BY ZACH ADAMS

nursing, for example, and with multiple degrees and certificates, you can write your own ticket in the field."

There is also a remote attendance option in the paramedic program, if EMTs are working and unable to attend class. "We work with students to keep them on the job in service to the community while also allowing them to advance," said Kruse.

Overall job placement for LLCC paramedic graduates is 97.5%. Nick Ferreira, program director of the LLCC emergency services program, said of aver-

age salaries in this area, "Depending on agency type and if a provider works full time, an EMT could make \$50,000 per year, AEMT could be around \$60,000 and a paramedic around \$70,000. Many like the work schedule of three days on and four days off."

There are programs that can assist qualified students with EMS program costs including Pipeline for the Advancement of the

Healthcare Workforce, or PATH.

Maskey says students who pursue a career in emergency services generally like excitement and don't see themselves sitting behind a desk, doing the same thing every day. "In emergency services, every day is a new adventure. You'll always be learning because it's going to be different every day. You are always going to be helping."

"When someone calls 911, it generally is their lowest point," she added. "They need help. Sometimes they just need to hear, 'It's OK, take some deep breaths.'"

Whether it's getting them to the hospital right away, or stopping bleeding, or just helping them calm down, there is instant gratification if you're that helper. You may also hear, 'You're my hero,'" Maskey said.

Lynn Whalen has a background in broadcast journalism and higher education public relations, most recently as chief communications officer at Lincoln Land.



The new training spaces feature a simulated apartment for students to practice their EMS skills, including a bathroom, one of the most common places EMTs find people when responding to 911 calls. PHOTO BY ZACH ADAMS



‘Tell me about yourself’

– How to answer this important question

CC JOBS | Kelly Gust

If you’re heading to a job interview or attending a career fair, chances are you’ll hear this classic opening line: “So, tell me about yourself.”

It may sound simple, but it’s one of the most important questions you’ll answer. In just 30–60 seconds, you have the chance to make a memorable first impression and connect your background to the role or industry.

Here’s how to craft a strong response,

with examples you can adapt for your field of interest.

1. Use a simple framework: Present, past, future

This structure helps keep your answer focused and relevant:

Present: Who you are and what you’re doing now, whether it’s a job, school, a volunteer role or a hobby

Past: A quick highlight of past work experience or education

Future: What you’re looking for in an employer and why you’re interested in the opportunity you’re interviewing for

2. Keep it short and targeted

Your answer should be one or two minutes long, max. You don’t need to tell your life story. Focus on what matters to the person in

front of you: your skills, goals and alignment with their company or industry.

3. Show enthusiasm and confidence

You don't need to memorize a script, but practicing out loud definitely helps. Aim for conversational, not robotic. Employers want to hear your energy and positivity.

4. Examples by industry

Business or marketing: "I'm a senior marketing major with an interest in brand strategy and digital campaigns. Last summer, during my internship at a consumer goods company, I helped run a social media campaign that grew engagement by 40%. I'm now looking for a full-time role where I can combine creativity with data to drive results."

Health care: "I'm a recent biology graduate with hands-on experience in a research lab and a strong foundation in patient care. I'm passionate about improving patient outcomes and exploring roles in healthcare administration or medical research."

Engineering or tech: "I'm finishing my engineering degree, where I've worked on several design projects. I'm looking for an opportunity to apply those skills in manufacturing or product design."

Education or nonprofit: "I'm currently student teaching at a local elementary school and working toward my certification. I'm committed to student-centered learning and would love to work with a school or nonprofit."

Creative arts or communications: "I'm a recent grad with a degree in communications and a passion for storytelling and visual design. I've led multiple student media projects during my internship. I'm now looking for a creative role where I can contribute to a compelling brand."

5. Customize

At a career fair, you will likely speak to many different types of employers. Before each conversation:

- Glance at their job postings or company values
- Adjust your answer slightly to show you've done your homework
- End with a question to engage them such

as: "Does that sound like a fit for what your team is looking for?"

6. Final tips

- Smile and make eye contact
- Have a printed resume ready to hand over
- Practice with a friend or record yourself for feedback
- You've got this!

Bottom line: Your answer to "Tell me about yourself" should feel confident and purposeful. With a little preparation, you'll

walk into your next interview or career fair conversation ready to connect, impress and move one step closer to your next opportunity.

Kelly Gust is the CEO of HR Full Circle, a Springfield-based consulting firm that provides talent management and human resources consulting to organizations of all sizes and stages.

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Best practices for requesting professional references

JOBS | Jessica Burns

A professional reference can make or break a job opportunity. When employers request references, they're asking for an endorsement of your skills and experience from a qualified source. When a reference provides a great referral, it confirms your

strengths and abilities. But if a reference provides a less than stellar review, it can be detrimental to your job opportunity.

Be prepared to provide trustworthy references who can vouch for your work to potential employers with these best prac-

tices for professional references.

Who to list as a reference

A reference should be someone who has witnessed your best work and who would do a great job speaking to your strengths,

talents and characteristics. A mentor, coworker or former boss who you have maintained a good relationship with may serve as wonderful professional references.

Family and friends generally shouldn't serve as references, unless a personal reference is requested. In that scenario, choose your reference very carefully and make sure you ask someone who is willing and able to speak positively of you in support of your career goals.

When might a reference be needed?

References are commonly requested on job applications and may require providing your reference's name and contact information. This is the most common method of providing references, but you may also choose to list references as available upon request on your resume.

A timeless letter of recommendation can also serve as a testament to your skills. A letter of recommendation may be requested from someone such as a company executive you've worked closely with who may not be available to take reference calls, or from a professor if you've pursued higher education.

Best practices to request references

Ask permission to list a contact as a reference. Some references may allow you to list them on any application at any time, while others may prefer to know the specifics of jobs you're applying to so they can customize their message.

Communicate what you'd like your references to share if they're contacted. Would you like your reference to highlight your soft skills, examples of collaboration or your project management capabilities?

Stay in touch. Maintain a relationship with your references and share your wins and coachable moments with them. If you have the type of relationship that you trust them enough to list them as a reference, it's likely a relationship worth continually investing in.

The best way to ensure you have great references for future job opportunities is to invest in building relationships. Cultivating positive relationships while proving your

skills, characteristics and work ethic can prepare you to succeed. If you're unable to identify connections who can provide professional references, consider providing a character or personal reference.

It's never too late to improve your professional network, so take advantage of networking events, professional development and learning opportunities. Interacting with like-minded individuals may open the door to cultivating relationships with

others who want to see you succeed and who may be willing to serve as a reference once they get to know you.

Jessica Burns is a content marketing specialist at Express Employment International creating content for employers, leaders and about the workplace of today. She is an accomplished former social media professional and award-winning writer.

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Your career catalyst

How connections drive job search success

JOBS | Asia Johnson

Landing the career opportunity you want often stems from the relationships you build. Prioritizing and nurturing your network isn't just about the immediate job hunt; it's about crafting a resilient and rewarding career path. Leveraging your professional network offers a significant edge in today's competitive landscape. Here's how it can revolutionize your job search:

1. Access hidden jobs: Many jobs are filled through internal referrals and never advertised. Your network can connect you to these opportunities, giving you an advantage.

2. Secure warm referrals: A referral from a trusted employee can dramatically boost your interview chances. It's a powerful endorsement that elevates your application above the competition, essentially letting you skip the line.

3. Gain insider knowledge: Conversations with industry professionals provide insights into company culture, team dynamics and project details you won't find in a job description. This insider view helps you tailor applications and ace interviews.

4. Build credibility: When someone in your network recommends you, you instantly gain credibility. They're vouching for your

skills and character, which is invaluable, especially if you're changing careers or have resume gaps.

5. Expand skills and knowledge: Networking is continuous learning. Engaging with diverse professionals exposes you to new ideas and trends, helping you develop new skills and become a more attractive candidate.

6. Boost confidence: The job search can be tough. Connecting with others provides encouragement and fresh perspectives, reminding you that you're not alone.

Building and maintaining your network is an ongoing process, even when you're actively job searching. Here's how to make it work for you:

- Start with your inner circle: Friends, family, former colleagues, professors and alumni are great starting points.
- Leverage online networks: Connect on LinkedIn with other professionals in your industry, engage with content and join relevant groups.
- Attend industry events: Conferences and meetups are prime opportunities to meet new people.
- Offer volunteer help: Networking is a two-way street. Genuinely helping others through volunteering could lead to reciprocal opportunities.
- Follow up: Send personalized messages after connecting and periodically check in to keep invested in relationships.

Looking for a job is a full-time job. Connect with others by maximizing your existing relationships, leverage your professional network and engage in activities that build relevant connections. Investing in yourself and your career will always pay off.

Asia is an award-winning content marketing specialist for Express Employment International, covering a variety of career topics for job seekers.



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LLCC offering Essential Workplace Skills series

CC JOBS | SBJ staff

Lincoln Land Community College is offering its popular Essential Workplace Skills training series this fall at its LLCC-Medical District location at 130 W. Mason St. The series is designed for individuals seeking to upskill or boost their marketability – including job seekers, current employees and anyone wanting to sharpen critical soft skills.

For a limited time, participants can receive a 50% discount on the \$129 registration fee by using UPSKILL at checkout. This special pricing is made possible through support from a Noncredit Strategies at Work Grant through the Illinois Community College Board.

“These trainings are built to be engaging and immediately applicable back on the job. LLCC’s facilitators bring real-world expertise and practical strategies designed to improve performance and morale,” said Diana Heeb Bivona, director of continuing education and business solutions at LLCC. “We’re proud to support both employers looking to invest in their teams and individuals who want to stay competitive in today’s evolving job market.”

The following three-hour EWS workshops will be offered at LLCC-Medical District, Room 202.

Practicing Professionalism at Work, Aug. 29, 9 a.m.-noon

Elevate the standard for workplace behavior. This session addresses common professionalism pitfalls, how to accept feedback and what it means to contribute positively to your workplace culture.

Navigating Challenges & Stressors, Sept. 8, 8:30-11:30 a.m.

Support your team’s resilience and emotional intelligence. This course helps participants manage stress proactively, build wellness habits, set boundaries and respond thoughtfully in tough situations.

Thinking Critically at Work, Sept. 22, 8:30-11:30 a.m.

Equip your employees to solve problems, think independently and make sound decisions. This training emphasizes data-informed thinking, avoiding cognitive traps and effectively communicating recommendations.

Understanding Customer Service Essentials, Oct. 6, 8:30-11:30 a.m.

Ideal for both internal and external-facing teams, this course strengthens customer-centricity, communication skills and service recovery strategies, with practical tools to build trust and loyalty.

Building Stronger Teams Through Inclusive Practices, Oct. 20, 8:30-11:30 a.m.

Discover practical strategies to strengthen team collaboration and communication. Participants will explore ways to recognize unconscious bias,

improve interpersonal understanding and work effectively across a range of backgrounds and perspectives.

For more information and to register, visit www.llcc.edu/ews. Businesses can also partner with LLCC to bring a trainer onsite to their location for one or more sessions. For more information about scheduling customized sessions, visit www.llcc.edu/business-solutions or contact LLCC Continuing, Corporate and Professional Education at 217-786-4959.

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