

A word with Bert Glandon of College of Western Idaho

By: *Arne Wallace Allen* March 9, 2015



Bert Glandon is the president of the College of Western Idaho, the Nampa-based community college that started admitting students in 2009.

Before CWI, the Treasure Valley was the largest metropolitan area in the country without a community college, so its supporters expected demand to be high. But enrollment surpassed most predictions. The college opened in January 2009 with 1,208 students. Enrollment has doubled and even tripled

for many semesters since then, and now CWI has more than 10,000 for-credit students. Idaho has two other community colleges: North Idaho College in Coeur d'Alene and the College of Southern Idaho in Twin Falls.

Glandon, who started as president of CWI in June 2009, has spent his career in education, and has a doctorate in educational administration from Brigham Young University. He served as president at Arapahoe Community College in Littleton, Colo., from 2002 to 2009, and at the Ontario, Ore.-based Treasure Valley Community College from 1981 to 2002.

Idaho Business Review spent some time with Glandon learning how CWI has handled its growth, and about what is next for the state's newest community college. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

College of Western Idaho is focused on helping students attain the skills they need to join the local workforce. How does CWI do that?

We've been working with the Boise Valley Economic Partnership, and with employers in Meridian and Caldwell and Nampa, and we meet with them and ask them what their specific needs are.

We can work with companies to customize training. For example, with the applesauce company (Materne, a French company that opened a factory in Nampa last year) they started with a crew of 20 to 30 but they needed 70. We worked with them to do training on-site. The company pays us to train the people they find. They want to recruit the people they want, but they need this kind of training for this period of time.

I just met with the mayor of Eagle and had a specific conversation about manufacturing and design. He's agreed to meet with several cohort businesses in fabrication, and we're going to have a group meeting to say, "What are the basic skills we need?" and "Do they fit within our machine tool program?" I'll bring the dean of the area in, and we'll say, "What are the basic skills you need of students who are coming out of CWI? Do you want a customized course?"

When you started at CWI, did you anticipate the kind of growth it has seen?

I don't think the community anticipated that growth at all. I had heard about it when it opened up, and when I was interviewing. I heard they opened with 1,208 students, which to me said, "Wow, there's an unfulfilled need here." Most community colleges start with 500 students and within five years would get to 2,000. We were at 3,600 students in six months.

So I knew it was going to be a huge growth, but I didn't expect it to double or triple every semester like it did the first two or three years. I don't even think the American Association of Community Colleges expected it.

Do you expect it to keep growing?

The area has the capacity to keep sending students. The dynamics we're dealing with now are with dual credit, where (high school) juniors and seniors have the opportunity to go to school here. And there are scholarship bills in the Legislature to incentivize students to go on. And as long as there's a hue and cry for skilled labor, the adult population, the 40-year-old, will return to find skills. I think we're going to find greater numbers of students.

Employers often mention that their workers need better soft skills, such as professionalism, showing up on time, and the ability to work in teams. Is that something CWI addresses?

Our instructors talk from Day 1 about what the employer expectations are going to be, how the industry functions, and the challenges in today's world. For example, why is there a problem with so many applicants not passing the drug test?

Education can only go so far in the training process. There's also work ethic. To me, a lot of that is taught in the home before they ever show up here. When they get here, we try to make sure it's very clear what the expectations are if you want to keep your employment. You won't keep the employment if you don't meet the industry standard.

We screen them at the very beginning and say, "If you flunk a drug test there is no way you'll get a job in the automotive industry."

You can educate all day long, but if somebody wants to smoke dope when they go home at night, what can you do?

Where are the good jobs?

There are very good family wage-earning jobs in plumbing, electricity, electronics, and HVAC. They cannot find enough HVAC people. Of course, construction tech depends on the economy; you go through peaks and valleys.

We're talking to junior high kids about opportunities in various industries. Parents have to understand there are good jobs out there both in academic and in the professional career fields.

When is CWI going to have a strong presence in downtown Boise?

We have an Overland and Maple Grove training site with four buildings right now, and we are obviously looking at trying to develop a campus in Ada County. Downtown property is off the table for us because of the cost per square foot. We're not funded to build buildings, so if we don't have partnerships or collaborative efforts, it's cost-prohibitive to go downtown.

Our board is committed to coming up with a plan to own an urban campus, a highrise-type operation in Ada County, though not necessarily in downtown Boise. We've had people working on that for three years.

What's next?

The mission of the community college probably isn't going to change much. How we deliver it might. We're at about 37 percent online and could increase that. There are all kinds of ways to deliver education. We're constantly in a self-improvement process, with self-analysis, because quite frankly the community college of the future is going to be so different from the college of 50 years ago.

Ideally, high school students would have to opt out of community college, not opt in. You would have to opt out not to go.

ABOUT ANNE WALLACE ALLEN



Anne Wallace Allen is the managing editor of the Idaho Business Review.