

Minnesota West Community & Technical College
Renewable Energy Advisory Committee
Meeting Notes
Monday, November 24, 2008

Present: Duane Carrow, Rose Patzer, Mike Bauman (shift supervisor/GFE and consultant for the Renewable Energy program at the college), David Lukkarinen (Plant Manager, ADM/Marshall), Lee Gunderson (Plant Manager, AGP/Dawson), Jeff Knutson (CIE/Marian, Indiana), Doug Erickson (Southern MN Beet Sugar Coop/Renville), John Konstant (Northstar Ethanol/Lake Crystal)

Introductions were made. Jeff Knutson participated via phone. Rose informed us that Dennis Hampel of Minnesota West has requested that minutes of the meeting be posted online, once participants have reviewed.

- 1) **DOL Grants:** Duane informed the group of the DOL grant that has been awarded to MnSCU, involving 6 community colleges. Minnesota West is the lead college. The award is \$1 million, plus \$1 million in leveraged funds from all 6 colleges for a total of approximately \$2 million. Duane outlined the 3 initiatives set forth:
 - a) Develop renewable energy curriculum for K-12. (Another college is heading up this initiative).
 - b) Energy Technician degree AAS (60 cr.) – identify core skills that crossover between all disciplines of ag. processing. Multiple colleges would be able to offer this degree program. (Alexandria Tech is working on this.)
 - c) Minnesota West's focus will be to create 4 specialized certificate programs: *Ethanol Production; Biodiesel production; Solar Installation; Wind Energy*. We have already completed some of these. All will be offered on-line.

One of the stipulations of this grant is to create an Advisory Committee (state-wide). This would be a 2 year commitment, travel expenses would be reimbursed. Is there any interest from members of this group to participate?

As part of the “leveraged funds” for this grant, we need to establish a monetary value for the time members of this Advisory Committee dedicate to our meetings, prep, travel, etc. After discussion among the group, it was determined that the $\frac{1}{2}$ day charge would be \$750 per person.

We have committed to train 200 people. There is a potential for scholarship – employer paying for tuition. This would also be considered for leveraged funding. For grant purposes, it must be documented. Discussion on how companies offer tuition payment programs: consensus is that payment should be tied to grade or performance in the course. Student should pay for tuition up-front and company reimburses following successful completion and retention in job. Concern from faculty standpoint – faculty cannot give grade information to employer without employee authorization. Colleges are restricted as to what information we can give to employers unless students signed a waiver. Duane: “*Should we put together a set of forms for employers with waiver included – to aid in tuition refund process?*”

Rose: "*We are looking at additional training outreach - would 'block schedule' format be of interest to plants?* Block schedule = focus on 1 course for 3-4 weeks. Typical on-line courses are 16 weeks and students are enrolled in multiple classes. Is it better for employees working full time to focus on 1 course? Comments: *Block training would work well.*

Attractive to employer. Hard to get plant people on rotating shifts to attend. Challenge for the instructor – harder to schedule time. Requires more time from the employee.

- 2) **WIRED Grant** – Another DOL grant – this one available to 36 counties in SW Minnesota. The grant amount is \$5 million in the areas of renewable energy and supporting talent development. Anyone in the 36 county area can write a proposal. Must be industry-led.

Duane discussed two proposals he will be writing (deadline is Jan. 6, 2009)

- a) Outreach – informing the public (students, high school instructors, counselors, parents) about careers in RE.
- b) Simulator – Grant would be two-fold: help recoup costs to date for simulator and to write a manual for training on the simulator.

There are 3 components required to write a grant proposal:

- Workforce Development
- Industry
- Education

There was discussion on Mike's work with the simulator and NovaTech. Mike worked on de-bugging the simulator and worked with NovaTech to redesign it to work manually (interactive) – more realistic for plant use and training. Companies appreciate the nature of simulator training – typically employees must "react" to issues in a plant. Simulator training allows students to get hands-on experience without the risk.

Duane informed the group that as part of the grant process, letters of support from industry are needed. Duane will send a proposed letter to members of the Advisory Committee, members should re-write as they wish, print on their letterhead, sign and return to Duane to be included as supporting documentation.

- Duane would like to see members of the biodiesel industry included as well. All comments from group were in agreement. This should be a collaborative effort.
- Several plants will be experiencing loss of mid-management employees through retirement. Where will replacements come from? Who will step up?
- Now seems like the time to promote RE education through heavy advertising campaigns (in light of job lay-offs and slowing economy). Duane mentioned that within the next 3 years 6,000 new jobs will be created in wind energy. Issues with lower wage scales in rural areas are a stumbling block.
- If members of the committee have other ideas for proposals for the WIRED grant, please feel free to make suggestions. Minnesota West would be happy to help.

- 3) **Curriculum Change Proposal** – MnSCU directive: reduce the AAS programs (2 yr.) from 68 credits to 60 credits (to save students money). Our certificate program would increase from 11 credits to 16 credits.

Rose reviewed the changes in the proposed curriculum.

Lee explained the changes in rules for licensing boiler operators. Could our Water Treatment course be documented for boiler license?

At this time, students taking the on-line certificate program are not required to take the Accuplacer Assessment.

The new curriculum drops the Survey of Chemistry (4 cr.) course. Process Chemistry (2 cr.) is required in spring semester, second year.

Duane asked if it is better to create a pool of employees with broad knowledge of all areas of renewable energy or to focus on one area. The consensus was to not to focus on one area, education should be general in scope and include all disciplines of RE.

Overall, the group approved of the curriculum changes.

Duane mentioned 2 possible additional technical electives for the future: Biomass gasification and sugar beet process fundamentals

Committee members should **respond by Dec. 5** with any suggestions for changes or comments regarding the proposed curriculum.

4) **Program Update**

Enrollment is down. MN West needs to attract and retain students.

Plants don't know we're here! We need to get the word out by marketing directly to the plants – introduce them to our new curriculum.

A problem MN West has encountered is students dropping out following internship or before completion of second year – jobs are offered and they leave.

There is some leeway with ADM to offer more \$\$ to employee with a 2yr. degree. Degree is beneficial. ADM would be interested in interns – would hire for 3 months with the agreement that they wouldn't hire fulltime until they graduate. They would be open to sharing students' performance reviews with school advisors as part of internship documentation.

There is competition from other colleges – concern for pirating of program materials. It's already happened.

Ethanol career pathway – initiate at high school level.

Prize wheel – used to attract potential students at job fairs and school open houses. Prizes are given for correctly answering questions on RE. If committee members have any (logo) marketing tools that could be used as prizes, we would welcome them. Please send to Rose's attention.

Rose invited committee members to come and speak to RE classes regarding the industry. Always welcome! John commented that it was interesting and beneficial to be exposed to different facets of the industry while he was a student.

The next meeting will be held in March (Annual Meeting).