

President's Perspective

Thoughts, ideas and perspectives from Larry L. Bingaman, President and CEO

Building a School-to-Utility Work Pipeline

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Nearly 40 percent of the approximately 550,600 utility employees in the United States are eligible for retirement within the next five years, including 5,000 utility employees in Connecticut. At the Regional Water Authority (RWA), that number is closer to 50 percent. There is an immediate need for us to grow the applicant pool for the RWA and other utilities so that we can continue to operate at the high level our customers expect of us.

It was this challenge that three years ago began a conversation between the administrators at Gateway Community College (GCC), Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) and me. That conversation grew into the Public Utility Management Degree Programs offered at both schools that today are training the next generation of utility employees.

Last month I had the pleasure of joining the presidents of both colleges and hosting Connecticut Representative Rosa DeLauro and New York Representative Paul Tonko to talk about these programs. Both legislators have expressed their commitment to supporting the physical infrastructure of our country's utilities. They were very excited to hear how these groundbreaking degree programs are supporting the equally important human infrastructure that keeps utilities running.

The potential for a shortage of job applicants is a serious challenge for utilities, but it is also a unique opportunity for students and other job-seekers. With 40% of utility workers nearing retirement, there will be a significant number of job openings and advancement opportunities for people interested in entering the industry. Utilities have also been recognized for being excellent places to work. A recent study from the Brookings Institute examined utility employment and highlighted the potential this sector offers for entry-level employees to discover long-term careers. Utilities offer above-average wages, good benefits and low barriers to entry.

Interested students can begin pursuing a degree in Public Utility Management at GCC, where they can attain an associate degree in two years. Following that, students can choose to transfer to SCSU to complete their Bachelor of Science degree in Public Utility Management with tracks in water, gas or electric operations. Both degrees offer a mix of courses designed to prepare students for work with a utility, including environmental sustainability, financial accounting, asset and infrastructure management and other subjects related to work in public utilities. Students graduating from these programs will be equipped to fill managerial and technical job openings at the RWA and other utilities. The RWA and other utilities are also offering internships to students in these programs.

If you are interested in pursuing a degree in public utility management, I encourage you to reach out to academic counselors at GCC and SCSU to learn how you can get a jump start on your career through the Public Utility Management Degree Programs.