

**Testimony of Amy Hickman, Campus President of ECPI  
Greenville, South Carolina Campus**

**Before the  
United States House of Representatives, Committee on Education and the Workforce,  
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training**

**Field Hearing, Greenville, South Carolina  
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**"Reviving our Economy: The Role of Higher Education in Job Growth and Development"**

Chairwoman Foxx, Representative Gowdy, and other distinguished Subcommittee Members, my name is Amy Hickman and I am the Campus Director for ECPI University's Greenville, South Carolina Campus. Thank you for holding this field hearing and for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you on the topic of "Reviving our Economy: The Role of Higher Education in Job Growth and Development." America and South Carolina are facing tough economic times. The national unemployment level is 9.1 percent and South Carolina's unemployment rate is over 10 percent. Creating jobs is imperative for the United States to maintain its standing in the world. I commend you on holding this hearing and exploring the essential role of higher education in a national job creation agenda.

The region we call the South Carolina "Upstate," home to ECPI's Greenville campus, has a long history of providing education tailored to the needs of local industry. That once meant textiles, now it more often means high-tech automotive manufacturing and the diverse technology-focused support industries driven by the population growth we have been fortunate to see over the last two decades. The Greenville area has become a popular relocation destination for retirees, but also for working families looking for a strong job market and a relatively low cost of living. ECPI University is a strong part of the Upstate higher education community of public and

private institutions that train students who become part of the local workforce. ECPI's 13-campus system offers programs that focus on skills-based, employer-driven education and includes three South Carolina campuses: Greenville, Columbia, and Charleston. Currently, ECPI employs 160 South Carolinians, all whom are dedicated to ensuring our students succeed. As a tax-paying corporation, ECPI generated over \$15 million in taxable revenue in 2010 to both the federal government and the State of South Carolina. This is a public-private partnership that yields positive results: workforce training, jobs filled, employer demands met, and revenue for the local government.

Established in 2000, the Greenville campus has an annual enrollment of over 500. Many of these students came to us after having attended other colleges but found that they fit at ECPI because of its career-readiness focus and condensed, flexible programs. We offer a variety of programs at our Greenville campus. Our School of Technology offers an associate's program in Electronics Engineering Technology and bachelor's programs in Network Security, Web Development, and Database Programming. We also offer Business Administration programs with a unique technology focus. At our School of Health Sciences on campus, we offer programs in Medical Assisting, Medical Administration, Practical Nursing and Healthcare Administration and we plan to increase the programs we offer in the health fields on our campus.

A real advantage for ECPI students is that our associate's degree can be completed in 18 months and a bachelor's degree in 30 months. Adult students know that completing a program quickly with a convenient schedule has value in their lives as they can get into the job market with new skills faster. The typical student at ECPI is "non-traditional" – adult, independent, working, and often a parent and/or first-generation college student. At ECPI Greenville, we have an overall

cohort graduation rate of 61%, which is well above the graduation rate at other colleges serving a similar student population. ECPI's selective admissions process, smaller class sizes, and work-like environment allow our students to succeed at high rates. We attribute our students' graduation success not only to our academic advising and tutoring, but also to our mandatory attendance policy and proactive approach to student success, which allows many to excel when they had struggled before. ECPI also has successful employment rates: our 2010 graduates range from over 70% placement to nearly 100% in some programs, with an overall average of 80% placement.

The programs ECPI offers are purposely focused on the technology and health care fields where there is consistent and growing demand for skilled workers in the Upstate region. As the Upstate job market has changed, the quality of jobs and incomes have risen. For example, companies like Concentrix provide high-level technical customer service. They are able to operate a major hub in Greenville because they can recruit students such as those from our Network Security Management program. Over the last eight years in Greenville, we have graduated 775 students with degrees in computer science, as part of a University system that is second in the nation in the number of computer science associates degrees awarded last year, according to *Community College Week*. The fact that our students apply the knowledge they learn, both in the classroom and on externship, means they enter the workforce highly prepared. As an example of that, an Electronics Engineering Technology graduate from ECPI recently hired by Kemet, a global high-tech company based in Greenville, South Carolina, was told by Kemet that they typically keep employees on contract for over a year before making a permanent hire. Our graduate, however, spent only two months as a contractor before being permanently hired. Her success has been truly life-changing: she attended school under the GI bill and persisted despite mounting medical

bills from a child's sickness and a divorce. Her success story demonstrates ECPI's ability to offer quality, flexible education that prepares workers and meets employers' needs for qualified workers in the region.

Colleges like ECPI also play an important role in retraining workers displaced by the recent recession and in need of career re-direction and re-training. As an example, one student came to us after having been laid off from Timken and believed attending ECPI was his best option for obtaining higher education. He is now about to graduate with a degree in Electronics Engineering Technology and has been re-hired by Timken and promoted into their engineering department.

Our graduates also play a vital role in meeting the changing healthcare needs of Greenville's population. One of our graduates entered our medical assisting program after having moved from job to job for years with little stability. Shortly after graduation, she began working in a doctor's office. Once she became certified as an RMA, she was hired, like many of our graduates, by the Greenville Hospital System and now has a stable career. It is important to note that as other schools that are dependent on public funds have limited or closed their practical nursing programs, ECPI has doubled our nursing program in the last two years to nearly a hundred current students. Most often, our graduates staff the increasing number of assisted living facilities in the area that will meet the needs of a growing population of retirees. With over 23% of our population age 55 or older, these graduates will be crucial to providing the care needed for our aging population, particularly as Greenville continues as a popular retirement destination.

It has not been by accident that we provide the skills our employers most need. Twice a year, our employers examine our programs to evaluate whether they address the changing trends in their industries. We revise and refocus our curriculum based on the recommendations of those in the industry for which our students are preparing. We look to design programs the Upstate will need as we move into a future that requires more technical and health-focused skills from its workforce. For example, to meet demand we recently applied for and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools recently approved our request to offer a master's degree in computer science, which we hope to offer in the near future. Our attendance at events sponsored by organizations such as InnoVenture and the Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson Technology Council helps us remain in tune with trends and developments in the business community. For every program that we launch, we survey employers to determine their needs and seek externship sites. Employers are eager for our students to serve as externs, both as a way to complete projects and as a testing ground for future employees. Based on employer recommendations, in the last year we have launched new programs in database programming and healthcare administration. We are currently planning programs that will address the needs of an increasingly mechanized manufacturing industry and a quickly digitizing healthcare system. We hear again and again from employers who relocate to the Upstate that a skilled workforce is a key factor in their decision. Even so, I have yet to hear from any of them that they have a surplus of highly qualified applicants. The vision for Greenville's future will make us a model of environmentally sound community planning and technological breakthroughs, requiring an increasingly skilled pool of labor. To satisfy that need, it is vital that students have a wide range of educational choices available, and ECPI offers a strong alternative choice.

Finally, our training is not limited to technical skills our graduates need for a career field. Our focus on attendance and a required professional dress day are an additional important part of how we provide students with the soft skills employers increasingly seek. Our general education courses focus on communication skills and critical thinking, areas employers generally find lacking in many other college graduates. No matter the program, our students are well prepared for a paperless workplace, having been instructed in a virtually paperless classroom. We train students on resume-building and interview skills. And we don't stop assessing how well our students are prepared when they graduate: when our students are hired, we survey our employers for additional feedback as to their performance.

Our customer service surveys consistently reflect the good job we are doing, with 95% of our students indicating they would recommend the school to a friend and 21% of enrollments referred to ECPI by students and graduates. Historically, our graduates progress quickly in their careers and frequently become employers of future graduates. Our career services department routinely works directly with employers to match our graduates to their particular needs, which is why companies like Draexlmaier and Windstream return to us again and again to fill their openings in information technology. Even graduates who relocate maintain their ties with us and generate referrals, for instance, an alumnus working as a systems architect consultant for the FBI who has directed recruiters our way. Our strong reputation and quality of education are equipping graduates with the skills they need to succeed in the workforce at a time when these skills are most needed to help companies grow. I hope the Subcommittee has learned new information from us about the vital connection between higher education and filling jobs. I look forward to your questions on how higher education plays a critical role in getting America back to work.