

BIBB/AACC International Symposium of Experts
New Approaches for Lifelong Learning in Vocational Education and Training
Certified IT Qualifications and Blended Learning
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Opening Remarks

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Thank you, Dr. Pütz, District Administrator, Kühn, Dr. Franz, and colleagues, good afternoon and welcome to our joint conference on lifelong learning as it relates to careers that utilize information technology. I especially want to thank Dr. Pütz and his staff at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training for being our hosts.

I am pleased that the American Association of Community Colleges, representing more than 1,200 member colleges in the United States and internationally is the co-sponsor of this conference. Our association is located in Washington, D.C., and we represent more than 95% of community and technical colleges in the U.S. Our member colleges are located in every US state, and they comprise the largest and fastest growing sector of higher education in our country. They currently enroll more than 11 million undergraduate students each year.

We appreciate the friendship and hospitality of the Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, our host and co-sponsor for today's summit. Over the past several years, we have forged a strong and mutually beneficial alliance with our German colleagues because we share so many of the same challenges. Both in your country and in our own, our colleges play a pivotal role in work force preparation. We are at a critical crossroads in how and how well we do that. We must find new and flexible ways to train IT workers – not just initially and not just in IT companies, but over a lifetime in industries that have neither national nor international borders and are constantly changing. In our country, we would call that a pretty “tall order!”

From our own research and that of others, we know that Information Technology – IT – continues to be one of the top industries as an individual sector. But we also know that IT is fundamental to most industries today, and it is ever evolving. In the auto industry, for example, cars are designed, produced, and serviced using computers. In a country that gave us the Mercedes and the Volkswagen, the Germans certainly understand how important that is! The same is true in health care . . . in communications . . . and in emerging fields such as cyber-security and bio-technology. In fact, it is true of virtually every major industry that affects our daily lives.

The US Department of Labor projects a growing skills gap in the United States. Jobs of the future are going to require higher levels of education and training. Our institutions, working in partnership with business and industry, are the solution for closing the skills gap. Education and training are ever more important if the Western World is going to maintain its competitive edge and the standard of living of its people.

The quality of representatives participating today is a reason for optimism. We have not only some of the top educators on work force issues, but we also have individuals from companies that are leaders in IT internationally. Our association and our colleges have worked closely with the U.S. companies represented, and we are excited by the enormous potential and synergy our two countries can create together. Specifically, we believe that working together we can create a standard IT curriculum that serves the entire IT industry. There are other potential areas of collaboration, and we will explore many of them at this summit.

Again, to our German hosts, I thank you for your courtesy and for the opportunity to enjoy your beautiful city. To the attendees, I thank you for making this conference a priority. Now, we look forward to rolling up our sleeves for some highly productive discussion.