“We’re excited that our partnership with BHCC has allowed students the opportunity to gain professional work experience in financial services while still in school. This relationship has provided us with the added benefit of access to a great pipeline of talented employees. We look forward to this relationship with BHCC students both before and after their graduation.”

- Robert Kaplan, Executive Vice President and Head of Global Operations, State Street Corporation

Going Places

The Learn and Earn internship takes students to prestigious Greater Boston corporations for hands-on experience that transforms their career expectations—and their lives.

When Nelson Franjul walked across the lobby at State Street Corporation in downtown Boston, he had just landed a job at one of the world’s top investment companies. For him, this would be the start of a new life. A first-generation immigrant from the Dominican Republic, Franjul had been working in commercial refrigeration just a year earlier. He was financially secure, well able to support his family, but he was dissatisfied with the direction of his life.

Thirty years old and wanting more, Franjul turned to Bunker Hill Community College. While community college is often the solution for older students who want to change careers, BHCC offered Franjul an unexpected bonus: the Learn and Earn internship program, which provides an entrée into major New England corporations for meaningful, hands-on experience. Through the program, Franjul would secure two successive internships at State Street Bank, working at the company five days a week while attending school.

“I was amazed,” he recalled. “It was the best thing I could have done.” The internship fueled a long-held dream of a career in finance. At State Street, Franjul made the extra effort to come in early and stay late. “I was learning so much, and State Street gave me the opportunity to learn.”

In June, the former commercial refrigeration worker accepted and began a full-time job as a project manager in State Street’s global mutual funds operation.

Learn and Earn is an exemplar among BHCC’s successful corporate partnerships. In 2011, with the support of Governor Deval Patrick, members of the Massachusetts Competitive Partnership (MACP), a non-profit public policy coalition of 16
Learn and Earn intern Nelson Franjul in the lobby of State Street Corporate Headquarters.
Like all of the Learn and Earn interns we’ve had, Jennifer exceeded all expectations. She showed up each day engaged and ready to learn and it was amazing to see such growth in just a few months."

- Marina MacVicar, Senior Manager, Community Relations, Fidelity Investments

influential Massachusetts CEOs headed by Daniel O’Connell, approached Bunker Hill Community College. Their plan was to create a pilot program, replicable everywhere, that would prepare Massachusetts community college students for the workplace by giving them the chance to work in a corporate setting at a major company.

The BHCC response was immediate and enthusiastic. By the spring semester of 2012, the College established an interdisciplinary internship course, interviewed and prepped students, and placed 20 interns at five major companies: Raytheon, State Street, Suffolk Construction, BJ’s Wholesale Club and EMC, where they worked one or two days a week.

The program has grown exponentially. Two years after its launch, the 20 students per semester have become 77, and their hours have expanded from one or two days a week to 16-to-30 hours a week. In all, more than 220 students have now taken part in the program.

“Raytheon has been a proud supporter of the Learn and Earn program for three years now, and we’ve seen the value of this important partnership,” says Karen Balcom, University Programs Leader for Raytheon. “It is rewarding to have a part in helping BHCC students navigate a path to future careers, and in the process, help them build a professional network.” The number of corporate partners has now grown to include Fidelity Investments, Vertex, Bank of America, The Boston Foundation, Dovetail Health, Staples, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and, most recently, UBS.

Total immersion is key to the success of Learn and Earn: students jump into actual, demanding projects in the corporate workplace, where, with attentive mentoring, they are expected to make important, real-world contributions. And they have.

At Fidelity Investments, Learn and Earn intern Jennifer Sheehan found herself thriving as part of the team that put together community outreach programs. Sheehan organized events and supported Fidelity’s Writing Coach program with Citizen Schools, helping middle school children write high school applications.

“They were definitely there to teach me,” said Sheehan of her intern
supervisors at Fidelity. Frank Perrone, Group Creative Director of Fidelity Communications and Advertising, stressed the importance of providing guidance for interns, as for any new employee. “When I first started my career, there was someone I could call my mentor, someone who would take me under their wing. I never forgot how much that meant. As much as our interns expect to learn from their experience with us, we are learning just as much from them. It’s a terrific program and a testament to the hard-working students who carve out the time from their school work and other jobs.”

Sheehan, a liberal arts major in her early 40s, is the single mother of a 20-year-old daughter and seven-year-old twin boys. Living in public housing and working in the office of a printing company, Sheehan decided to return to school because, like Nelson Franjul, she was dissatisfied. She wanted to do something more for herself and “to set an example” for her children.

For Sheehan, the Fidelity Investments internship was an opportunity to learn on the job from her supervisors and to make a real contribution to company projects. “They were willing for me to take on responsibilities and trust me with them,” she said. For the final project of her Learn and Earn internship, she was charged with helping to coordinate Fidelity Cares Day, an employee volunteer event for more than 700 associates.

The intensive work requirements of extensive support from the beginning to the end of the internship—starting before the student gets into the program. When, for example, BHCC student LaDonna Hawkins failed to get an internship in the summer of 2013, Learn and Earn Coordinator Cora Miller advised her to try again. “Students applying to the Learn and Earn Program learn persistence and build academic stamina,” says Miller. “It is a competitive program that encourages students to up their game.”

Hawkins came to BHCC from Orlando, Florida, looking for a new start. She had a stable job running pyrotechnic shows at Sea World Adventure Park. It paid well enough. As she cared for her father, who was ill and on dialysis, Hawkins thought more about her long-held dream to be a biomedical engineer, hoping some day to help create artificial organs to ease the suffering of people like her father. After her father passed away in 2010, she found herself newly determined at age 40 to start again.

Boston was clearly a center for medical research, and when Hawkins researched biomedical engineering programs, BHCC kept popping up; she enrolled at the College in 2011. But her life in Boston wasn’t without obstacles. She shared an apartment with six roommates and tried to make ends meet. She struggled financially, academically and with her own health issues.

“IThought I was going back to Orlando,” said Hawkins. That is, until the BHCC team reached out to support her. Hawkins was amazed at how closely the team stayed in touch with her—people like Program Coordinator Cora Miller and Hawkins’s academic advisor, Professor JoDe Levine, of the science and engineering department. With their encouragement, she attended the interview workshops and seminars that were offered to prepare students for the program. In the fall, she applied for three internship positions and received all three offers.

Choosing Raytheon, Hawkins worked at the company’s Missile Defense Center in Woburn, a position that required security clearance as she designed trajectory test calculations. Landing a second internship this spring at Vertex, she was similarly included as a credentialed member of the workforce. “I never felt like an intern. I was working on projects that employees were working on, treated like any other person in the company,” she said. Vertex introduced her to the high-end laboratories of a major pharmaceutical company, and her work with quality control testing of medications for cystic fibrosis fueled her dream of a career in biotechnology. LaDonna is currently competing for her third internship, and now has plans to pursue a master’s degree.

While the program has served returning students determined to pursue new careers, it also works for younger students just finding their way. Gabriella Valenzuela, 20, came to Bunker Hill Community College directly after graduating from Somerville High School. She was an enthusiastic student but unsure of how to present herself in interviews, and uncertain about what her future professional life would hold.

When she heard about Learn and Earn, she knew she wanted in. She was encouraged by Professor Anthony Fontes, Chair of BHCC’s Business Administration Department, who created the credited internship course with Sharon Schaff, Director of Career Planning and Internship Programs, and by Academic Internship Coordinator Marcea Taylor.

Taylor looked at Valenzuela’s background as a star high school athlete in soccer and volleyball, and also at the
determined work ethic she had developed in an immigrant family where both parents worked full-time jobs. For Taylor, Valenzuela was “a star in the making.” With encouragement, Valenzuela worked hard to meet the GPA requirements of the program. “The math lab was my second home,” she said.

Her efforts paid off, and once accepted to Learn and Earn, she secured an internship in the Human Resources department at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. There she met with a pleasant surprise.

Valenzuela had little knowledge of how an HR department functions and how her skills might fit in. She was excited to find that the marketing skills she was developing as a business major were immediately useful. She was especially encouraged by the company’s workforce development program, which included free college courses, and by the opportunities the department offered for people to grow within the company. And though she was herself a fluent English speaker, she was, as the child of immigrants, cheered to see language courses included as part of the program.

“Gabby quickly embedded herself as a valued contributor to our team,” said Kristina Hillier, of BIDMC’s HR staffing department. “She has been instrumental in various projects and process improvements, including front desk operations, file auditing, and compliance tracking with education verification.”

Her business professor, Fontes, remembered Valenzuela as a quiet student during her first semesters at the College. “She barely said a word,” he says, “and a year later she’s really come into her own. It has been a total transformation.

“The reality of it is that these are real jobs,” Fontes adds. “Students are going to Raytheon and working on missile defense systems. At Suffolk Construction, they are going out on job sites and helping in project management for building projects. And their work receives a stream of plaudits from the corporate partners.” That includes founding partners such as Raytheon as well as new partners such as The Boston Foundation.

“Through Raytheon’s partnership with Bunker Hill Community College, I have witnessed firsthand the advancement of the Learn and Earn program,” says Keith J. Peden, Senior Vice President of Human Resources and Global Security at Raytheon. “More than 40 interns who have participated in the Raytheon program have developed skills that are needed in the workforce, and are a testament to the continued growth and success of Learn and Earn, and to Bunker Hill Community
College fulfilling its vision and mission.”

The Boston Foundation’s Julie Smith Bartoloni, Senior Director of Donor Relations, echoes the enthusiasm in describing the contribution of its first Learn and Earn intern. “Deanna Colella arrived at The Boston Foundation highly motivated and with a ‘can do’ attitude. These traits, combined with her events expertise, made having her assistance like adding a staff member to our team.”

The Learn and Earn program has grown dramatically, not only in terms of student placements with participating corporate partners—State Street alone now has 60 positions for Learn and Earn students, for example—but in terms of the range of work opportunities available. The program is now placing students from more than 20 majors, including accounting, graphic design, event planning and IT disciplines (the last due in part to new positions created by EMC). Partner participation, meanwhile, has opened to corporations outside of the original Massachusetts Competitive Partnership.

“Learn and Earn,” says Schaff, “represents a collaboration between the College and its corporate partners that has affected the employers’ view of community college students, and the expansion of the program raises the competitive brand of BHCC in the community.

“It is a high-investment partnership that succeeds through continuous integration of learning and value for all parties,” Schaff continues. “We would not be where we are without bringing together our diverse employer partners to discuss program enhancements and to leverage best practices.” As a result, BHCC has added peer mentor support from Learn and Earn alumni. Bank of America and State Street have each stepped up to host impressive, all-company winter networking events that have received overwhelmingly positive responses.

As a model of change, the program has succeeded in changing students, employers and the College itself. BHCC has created a new course model and has modified academic program requirements for several majors. The College has also incorporated

Nelson Franjul at State Street Corporation.
the flexibility required to meet ongoing requests from employers, such as innovating off-cycle and mid-semester starts.

From the perspective of BHCC President Pam Y. Eddinger, Learn and Earn is about developing and sustaining long-term relations with major local corporations that represent opportunities that lead to real jobs and broader vistas for students. But the program is more than that. “It is also an opportunity to enhance the College’s planning and assessment capacity,” she says. After the initial development of the program, Raytheon, one of the founding partners, provided a member of the Raytheon team, Michael Hoeffler, who interviewed faculty, staff, students and corporate partners, and led a Six Sigma process that increased the College’s ability to carry out this large, complex program with a small staff.

“The student piece is exciting,” Eddinger says, “and it is exciting for us to build greater capacity for more students. But equally important is that our College is becoming a learning college, an institution that is self-reflective, and can learn from its successes as well as its mistakes. We are strengthening our institutional culture.” In addition, the Six Sigma process helped the College’s effort to scale up the program. “We are now at the point of creating a template, the goal of any new program. We are building a model,” the President said.

The redesigned Learn and Earn 2.0 will launch in the fall of 2014. Students will spend more time on the job, and the internship will extend beyond the regular academic semester to five- and seven-month stints, thus increasing the return-on-investment to the College, the corporate partners and the students by optimizing the value of the immersion experience.

The response from Learn and Earn’s corporate partners has been enthusiastic. “I associate passion, creativity and desire to learn with the Bunker Hill Community College students I know,” says Jeff Stolz, who has supervised half a dozen student interns as Raytheon’s CCA Operational Excellence Manager. Each intern has completed Six Sigma training and identified a qualifying project to save the company $100,000, and now they will have more time to see those projects through. “Blending their insights with our experience has launched innovative projects, including use of educational software in training programs and enhanced safety methodologies.”

For Nelson Franjul, LaDonna Hawkins, Jennifer Sheehan and Gabby Valenzuela, the transformation continues. Franjul, in addition to securing a full-time job at State Street, also completed a bachelor’s degree in management with a finance concentration at Curry College in May. After working at both Raytheon and Vertex, Hawkins is confident in her pursuit of a biomedical engineering degree and hopes to enter the bachelor’s program at the University of Massachusetts Lowell in 2015. Gabriella Valenzuela, having discovered new applications for her marketing skills, looks forward to getting a four-year degree. Jennifer Sheehan has found her immersion in the Learn and Earn program a catalyst not only for a career path but for personal growth. “This was a way for me to re-test my skills and my ability to get up in the morning and face the day and face new challenges in the outside world,” she said.

“What we see in this program,” says Schaff, “are learning experiences that are truly transformative. The access and exposure to these corporate opportunities become a game-changer. Students emerge with not only clarified career goals and accomplishments, but renewed purpose, identity and the hope of new possibilities. Even more invested in their education and with the support of professional mentors, they feel empowered to reach for their dreams and fulfill their potential.”

“Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center decided to participate in BHCC’s Learn and Earn Program because it not only introduces Bunker Hill Community College students to the many careers that exist in healthcare, it also introduces BIDMC to great local talent.”

- Joanne Pokaski, Director of Workforce Development, Division of Human Resources, BIDMC