

Known for his innovative approach to education, Dr. Michael Torrence of [Motlow State Community College](#) in Tennessee is a champion of emerging technologies, workforce development, and community engagement. He's passionate about creating scalable opportunities for students, fostering relationships with industries, and preparing the next generation for the future. From transforming homeless students into successful professionals, to pioneering digital credentialing systems, Dr. Torrence shares his dynamic FRED Talk from the [ACT Workforce Summit](#) stage.

## Voices of Excellence on Episode 50



**Dr. Michael Torrence, President**  
[Motlow State Community College](#)

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## Links and Resources

- [Episode 50 of the Podcast](#)
- [ACT Work Ready Communities](#)
- [ACT Workforce Solutions](#)
- [2024 ACT Workforce Summit](#)
- [Tear the Paper Ceiling Campaign](#)
- [Inquire on WRC Storytelling and Poster Exhibition](#)

## Transcript of Episode 50

[Opening Jingle and Music]

Michael: I often ask business, can you move at the speed of Motlow now, because we've shown that we have not just use cases, but scalable use cases that allow credentialing. So instead of talking about it, we became about it. and the next phase for us is to try to think through this as an enterprise solution.

Jasen: Dr. Michael Torrence of Motlow State Community College joins us from the FRED Talks stage with a vision of next-level workforce impact, here on episode 50.

[Podcast Open] Ready for Work is a podcast from A-C-T! spotlighting excellence and innovation, throughout the workforce ecosystem! Jasen Jones hosts this journey, with trends and ideas to help your region's workforce reach its highest potential.

[Jingle] Now, let's get Ready for Work!

Jasen: We're thrilled to bring you another installment of the FRED Talks from the most recent ACT Workforce Summit. We'll hear from Dr. Michael Torrence, the dynamic president of Motlow State Community College. Known for his innovative approach to education, Dr. Torrence is a champion of emerging technologies, workforce development, and community engagement. He's passionate about creating scalable opportunities for students, fostering relationships with industries, and preparing the next generation for the future. From transforming homeless students into successful professionals to pioneering digital credentialing systems, Dr. Torrence's work is truly inspiring.

Fred McConel: Our next Fred Talker I'd like to welcome the stage is Doctor Michael Torrence, president of Motlow State Community College. Please help me welcome Doctor Torrance.

Michael: Good morning, everyone. There we go. Now we are ready to rock and roll. My name is Michael Torrance. I serve as the seventh seeded president of Motlow State Community College, located in southern-middle Tennessee. Our service area is roughly 11 counties, 4500mi<sup>2</sup> of beautiful landscape.

We have one micro-metro area in the Rutherford County location. And then the rest of it is small town, rural. We have the great distinction of being associated with the Whiskey Trail. So, I hope that those of you who are not from the state of Tennessee understand what that is. If you don't keep listening and you will, and we hope that you take something home with you.

So today I'm here to tell you a little bit about what we do, and here's a list of the company that we keep. We're going to spend a conversation this morning in the next, eight minutes that is around automation and robotics. a little bit about STEM and most importantly about the people that we serve, because at the end of the day, that is the secret sauce.

When folks ask me, how are you guys doing what you're doing, it is through connection. It is through relationship. And most importantly, it's about trust. We spent the last five years cultivating relationships with the industries that you see on the slide. As a former professor, I don't read my slides to my class, so I'm definitely not going to read the slides to you. You can look at them and check them out for yourself, but you can see some very, very interesting partnerships that have been formed. and the people that we support, and in turn, support us. Yes. That's not rhetorical. That's for call and response. Yes, yes, yes. All right, there we go. Hold on. One more time. Yes. [ambient audience laughter] Yes, yes. Okay, there we go.

### Workforce: Robotics and Mechatronics



**THE COMPANY WE KEEP!**

Robotics is a dynamic career in manufacturing and robotics for those who are interested in the latest technology, automation and robotics. We are currently seeking qualified individuals for the following positions. If you are interested in learning more about our programs and opportunities, please contact us at [roboticstraining@mscc.edu](mailto:roboticstraining@mscc.edu). To learn more about our training call 833-464-2782.

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CERTIFICATIONS FOR  
INCUMBENT WORKERS  
ARE OUR SPECIALTY

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MECHATRONICS

MOTLOW STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
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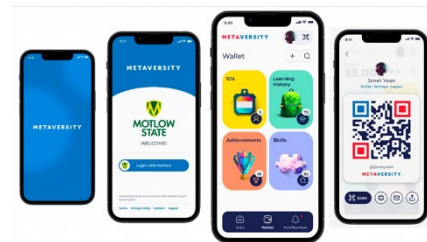
Here's an example of instruction taking place. I think it's important that when you get a chance to be the face of the organization, which is simply what I am, I'm a cog in the wheel. It is not about me. It is about us. Melissa Pass is one of our stalwart instructors, professors in the mechatronics robotics program. And you can see her here. helping students get alignment, understanding, preparation, to be, quote unquote, work ready.

What does work ready mean to you? I hope that immediately you have an answer in your head when you start thinking about work ready today. Work ready is different than what it was when I graduated. Work ready doesn't just mean a set or amalgamation of skills.

It means the ability to logically and cogently think on your feet. Troubleshoot with latent technologies while trying to wrap your arms around emerging technology. Would you agree? Yes. Okay, now we're on the same page.

The Metaversity. There are some things that you do in the course of your career or your life, and you're trying to leave a legacy or canon behind that. Hey, I actually contributed to something. I woke up about 3 or 4 years ago at about 3:17 in the morning, which is normal. And I thought about this. Is there a way to integrate the skills that, tie to metacognition, that tie to micro credentialing, short term credentialing as well as degree pathways that could be portable and taken with our students anywhere, anytime, on demand.

## Metaversity



And this is what we came up with. If you want to see how it works, you can borrow me for about 30 seconds in the hallway and I'll let you put your fingers on my phone. But I ask that you make sure you clean your hands, because we don't want to pass any germs. We're still in that phase, right? And I'd love to show you how it works. Or you can reach out to me, and I can send you the video of me, myself actually going through with, not seeing my fingers, but watching how the application works. It is verifiable in on the blockchain. it is authenticated. It is a trust mechanism.

We actually started a use case. And as my colleague before, talked about five months or six months, we built this between July of last year and December of last year, had a use case by December, and scaled it to 100 students across one program by May of the following year. So, we, that's why we we're here talking about it, because the conversations around higher education in business and industry is about can you move at the speed of business?

I often ask business, can you move at the speed of Motlow now, because we've shown that we have not just use cases, but scalable use cases that allow credentialing, and quote unquote, this is a digital wallet that is in effect, it works! So instead of talking about it, we became about it. and the next phase for us is to try to think through this as an enterprise solution.

What would it be like to utilize a tool like this in your HR hiring process as an onboarding? What would it be like to use a process like this, or a platform like this to engage with employers on a regular basis, as they are looking to upskill and or further train the employees that they hire from our institution? I think it would be pretty cool, don't you? We're still on the same page. I like it.



Here is an example of what we do and the humanness about being at a brick and mortar location, and providing education and training across such a large space. This is an example of a student, who was homeless. and what ends up happening with this young man over the course of the last year, the college wrapped their arms around him.

He was drinking from a water hose and cleaning himself and getting prepared for class in the backyard of one of his friend's homes while he slept in his car. Larry Sweat wrapped his arms around him. Obviously, Larry is the person who has a haircut, almost like mine. And we made sure that this young man ate. We made sure that we covered the cost of tuition and books and whatever this young man needed. So, he went from being homeless to a \$75,000 job after graduation. That is the purpose. [ambient audience applause] Thank you.

That is the purpose of what we do. It is about making sure that we create scalable opportunities for the people that we touch in the communities that we serve. Moving forward, another area of interest and expertise for us as an institution has to do with anything that has to touch, emerging technology. Specifically, aviation, Google I.T., Coursera.

So, training the next generation of coders, training the next generation of cybersecurity personnel. And as you think about cybersecurity, I hope you're not just thinking about Homeland Security and the Department of Defense. I hope you're thinking about the mom and pops that need to make sure that their spaces aren't broken into, hacked, etc. Higher education in particular, has, over the last 5 to 7 years seen itself chopped into and hacked on various occasions and in the state of Tennessee.

**Workforce:  
Aviation, Google IT, Coursera**

<p><b>robotics</b></p> <p>240 Students (up from 75) 54 Employer Partners (up from 30) 6,507 THEC Hours (up from 3076)</p> <p>Larry Matt lsmatt@mtcc.edu</p>	<p><b>Google IT Support Professional Certificate</b></p> <p>300+ Enrollers (up from 300+) \$13 per hour training for eligible students ages 18-24</p> <p>Walter McCard wmccard@mtcc.edu</p>	<p><b>trained</b></p> <p>50 Students 4 Employer Partners (up from 4) 21,876 THEC Hours</p> <p>Heather Austin haustin@mtcc.edu</p>
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We've seen this become a real threat. So, preparing our own and growing our own, literally and figuratively, to protect our information or P.I.I., not just the student's information, but our own information. And definitely, the banking systems or tech, is really important as we move people through these processes.

The simulation aviation program that we just launched last year in Bedford County is literally adjacent to the airport, in Shelbyville or Shelbyville, if you're from the area. The important part about this is that pilots who are looking to get up to 50 to 60 hours of continued rating. They can actually do it in our simulated FAA-rated, simulated trainers. So, we've taken them out of the sky, putting them in simulated training, and advanced their mission in addition to the simulated training we offer in aviation.



We've done the same thing in our health care programs and EMT and nursing. I'll ask you this question. I hope that you never need a nurse. But in the case that you do, would you prefer to have a nurse that not only has field work experience, but also has between 500 and 1000 hours of simulated training with models such as SIM men and SIM women, and SIM babies and SIM toddlers and SIM adolescents, as well as inside of VR, AR, XR. So, what we've done is create an experiential opportunity for our students to learn in real time on demand and any place that they are, so that the learning gets quote unquote, extended.

I really don't know why they put this picture in here, but I'll tell you, that's me. And obviously I already talked about this simulated training laboratory. You can see I was teasing or very, very happy about the fact that we actually were able to accomplish that. Doctor Tony Milliken is in the audience, who's our executive vice president of workforce development and community development who led part of that effort.



And this is something that's important to me. I'm a girl, dad. And I think it's really important that when you're a girl, dad, you show up. And whenever I get an opportunity to be around the young humans, because I try not to give them a gender designation, because that denotes connotation and denotation. So, this young human is actually a student whose mom is an adjunct for us in our program. And she came up to me afterwards and said, can we take a picture? And I won't give her name because I don't have clearance to give her name. But, I can say that when you look at the picture, I hope that you see this as a representative sample of the power of creating opportunities like this in small town rural communities.



This young person may be the next person that flies me around, as I think Southwest is moving about a thousand jobs to Nashville BNA. Perhaps she becomes a pilot and I'll see her with her wings, and she'll talk to me about, you know, this picture. There aren't very many pictures in my office, but this one has made the cut.

Here are some of our students, two of them. As you can see, the labels on their shirts of Skills USA. We have award winning students. We went from not having a Skills USA chapter of Motlow State to having the largest chapter in the state of Tennessee with over 800 students. And they all wear these bright red jackets. So, it's very daunting to see all of these folks in these red jackets. It's like this whole gang of people coming at you when they move around right?













Examples of excellence here in our student body, Miriam Tanis, who's either on your right or left, and then Dane Norman, who's on either on your right or left, Dane has transferred over to MTSU, or Middle Tennessee State University. Miriam is still with us. They've won medals not just on the state level, but also the national level and Skills USA competitions.

Workforce and EMT. Here's a list of the company that we keep. Again. Again, this didn't happen overnight. This is the culmination of five years and six months of work getting up early, connecting with people over coffee, over lunch, over chicken breast and rice pilaf, over and over and over and over again. Yay!

**Workforce:  
Nursing and EMT**

 Coffee County Schools LEARNING TODAY FOR BRIGHTER TOMORROWS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vanderbilt Harton Regional Medical Center</li> <li>• Vanderbilt Heritage Medical Center</li> <li>• St. Thomas Riverpark</li> <li>• Southern Tennessee Regional Health System</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TN State Health Department</li> <li>• TN State Health Department</li> <li>• TN State Health Department</li> <li>• TN State Health Department</li> <li>• TN State Health Department</li> <li>• Rutherford County Schools</li> <li>• Coffee County Schools</li> <li>• Vanderbilt</li> <li>• Trustpoint</li> <li>• Southern Hills</li> </ul>
		
		
		

The company that we keep is very, very important because it qualifies quality. It qualifies excellence. It qualifies our vision as an institution.

In our last graduating class, 39 nurses that will go out into the world, they keep us all safe, can't be more proud of them. EMT, examples of people who come pick you up on busses to make sure you keep breathing in between your home and the place that they're trying to get you to save your lives. Great program that is taught to our dual enrollment program.



We've seen ourselves do a couple of things with enrollment because when presidents talk, this is what presidents ask each other. What's your enrollment? That's not the end all be all. It should be what your impact is. So, I will give you the enrollment numbers. We've gone from 6991 students 4 or 5 years ago to now being back to 6060 students this past fall. And that's a 7.5, an increase in enrollment. We've also seen

ourselves grow 5.4% FTE. Point-five percent equals roughly a half, 1 million, to 1 million bucks. And so, you can do the math calculations for yourselves. Over a three-year period from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. We'll see that rolling average increase and will allow us to earn more funds and resources to support the people that we need to support.

Dean Amy Holder in the blue, who leads a lot of our nursing efforts.



And thank you for your time. I appreciate it. [ambient audience applause]

[background music transitions]

Jasen: That is a great example of the innovation and success we love showcasing at the ACT Workforce Summit. Thanks again to Dr. Michael Torrence from Motlow State Community College for this inspiration on episode 50 of Ready for Work.

Registration is open and we just posted the full lineup of workshops, plenary sessions, and networking events to help make your decision easy to register for the 2024 Summit in mid-town Atlanta, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup>.

As you noticed during Dr. Torrence's FRED Talk, storytelling of success in workforce programs is a very powerful medium. We invite you to share success stories and testimonials from your working learner STARS and champions throughout your workforce ecosystem. These stories will be celebrated at the Summit in Atlanta and beyond, in collaboration with Opportunity at Work. We'll also feature a Poster Exhibition highlighting successful Work Ready Communities. To learn more, please reach out to us via email to [w-r-c at act-dot-org](mailto:w-r-c@act-dot-org).

[Podcast Closing and Jingle] Thanks for listening to Ready for Work, from A C T, your partner in Workforce Solutions and Work Ready Communities. Subscribe in your favorite app, or learn more at [A C T dot org, slash, ready for work podcast](https://act-dot-org/slash/ready-for-work-podcast).