



Microsoft® Office Specialist

Raises Visibility of and Prospective Student Interest in Community College Courses



**Anne Arundel
Community College**

Location:
Arnold, Maryland

Students:
Nearly 55,000

Success Metrics:

- Recruiting tool for prospective students
- Widely recognized industry credential
- Professional development requirement for advancement



**MARYLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE
DISCOVERS MICROSOFT OFFICE
CERTIFICATION STABILIZES
ENROLLMENT IN APPLICATION
COURSES AND FILLS REQUESTS
FOR CREDENTIALS THAT VALIDATE
IN-DEMAND WORKFORCE SKILLS.**

CHALLENGE

People in the community used to call Kelly K. Sell, asking if Anne Arundel Community College offered computer technology courses that included certification exams. As coordinator of application programs, the AACC associate

professor of computer technologies knew that both potential students and employers were looking for a way to demonstrate computer competency in specific credentials.

"I thought it would be great if we could get this incorporated into the curriculum, but I didn't know how," Sell said.

At a conference, she met with Certiport representatives, who explained how implementation at an institutional level could work. Sell became sold on the idea after discussing it with colleagues who were running similar programs. She acquired grant funding, conducted specific training on the certifications for AACC faculty and launched the program in January 2009. Having gone through a Microsoft® Office certification course herself, Sell was familiar with the training courseware and skills required to achieve the credentials.

SOLUTION

The pilot Microsoft Certified Application Specialist certification courses showed what Sell had suspected: the community wanted application programs that included certification exams. A feature of the pilot program included the cost of the exam in the course costs. The response from the community was almost immediate. Between spring 2008 and spring 2009 enrollment increased by 19.7 percent and 21.5 percent during the same period the following year. All told, enrollment in the program has jumped an overall 45.5 percent since spring 2008. With the increased enrollment, Sell opened up to four training and certification sections each in Microsoft Word, Excel®, Access®, Outlook® and PowerPoint®.

Connie Hammond, computer technologies professor and Excel instructor, sees the implementation of the certification program as a resource that AACC can use to entice prospective students to enroll in the application courses.

"It's valuable for the college to offer MCAS certification because it's a means for students to not only gain the applications skills but also improve chances for advancement in their current jobs or employment if re-entering the workforce," she said.



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– **Kelly K. Sell**
**Application Coordinator/
Associate Professor
Computer Technologies Dept.
Anne Arundel Community College**

A large part of the pilot success came with the support of the AACC administration, which saw certification as a major professional development tool for the school's faculty and staff. Policy set by the administration encouraged achievement of certification to qualify for merit increases, a fact that appealed to Kelli McBride, an instructional coordinator for the School of Arts and Sciences at AACC.

McBride earned her Word 2007, Outlook 2007 and PowerPoint 2007 certifications and plans to tackle the other two soon. Positioning herself for advancement has been important, but McBride also has noticed her productivity increase.

"Now that I feel like I have a good base in the applications, I don't just do the basics anymore," she said. "Definitely, I try several different ways to do things. [And] I can do [them] a lot faster."

Frances Kushner, a budget analyst from a neighboring liberal arts college, decided to take the Excel 2007 course in fall 2009 when she saw certification was included. Though a frequent user of the application, Kushner found the certification process expanded her knowledge of the application, including knowledge of keystrokes to improve her efficiency.

"It's helped me realize there are different ways to enhance what I do here," she said. "It's one thing to say you use Excel and are comfortable with Excel, but it's another thing to get certified, which says you have the expertise."

Kushner plans to enroll in the Access 2007 course next.

RESULTS

Instructors and students worked with several software and publisher products to find the ones that best prepared the students for the certification exams, said Sell. She found that students who used the Certiprep™ for 2007 Microsoft Office Certifications software generally performed well on the exams because it allowed them to improve on their speed and accuracy. An average of more than 80 percent of the students passed the certifications last semester, with some individual programs posting nearly perfect pass rates.

After the pilot program ended, students began paying the costs of the Certiprep software and the certification exam plus retake bundle. Enrollment in the application courses dipped temporarily, but now numbers are holding steady as word of the certification option spreads. Because passage of the certification exams is way of proving computer competency in specific areas, Sell expects enrollment to climb. She also is optimistic that making the certification program permanent at AACC will prove to be a good long-term solution for the residents and employers in the community.

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