



Microsoft® Office Specialist

Validates Students' Skills to Land Jobs Despite Tight Labor Market

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Case Study



Richland College
School of Engineering,
Business & Technology

Location:
Dallas, TX

Total College Enrollment:
18,000+ (credit) / 5,000+ (non-credit)

Business Office Systems & Support Program (BOSS):
3,000

Success Metrics:

- Establish and grow quality program
- Provide students with recognized workforce credentials
- Garner upper-level administrative support
- Jumpstart competitive edge



STUDENTS FROM RICHLAND COLLEGE FIND A PROVEN WAY TO STAND OUT AS JOB CANDIDATES WITH MICROSOFT® OFFICE CERTIFICATION.

CHALLENGE

Since 1972, Richland College has focused on providing students relevant business training using the latest technologies. Historical trends show that enrollment in software classes, where individuals can develop and refresh required job skills, tends to increase during times of economic hardship. As the school's student body prepares

to enter the competitive job market, Richland College recognized a greater need for these students—who often don't have the experience of other job seekers—and sought ways to help them validate their skills and improve their employment options.

SOLUTION

Continuing personal development is always a smart choice, since employers look for the most qualified candidates to contribute to their organization. Incorporating the Microsoft Office certification program allowed Richland College to set themselves apart from other programs and companies offering training, but also provided students an opportunity to earn a recognized certification in Microsoft—tangible proof they possess the skills that make them ideal hires.

"Many applicants go into a job interview and embellish their skills," Becky Jones, Associate Dean said. "Often times a candidate tells an employer they are proficient using a particular software application and then they hire that candidate and later discover the employee doesn't know as much as they said they did."

Starting in 1999, the BOSS program began exploring the possibility of becoming a Microsoft testing center, relying on relevant data, attending Course Technology conferences and gathering background information on the benefits of certification. Jones mentioned a physical lab location and adequate testing computers were already in place. "When the college could see that we were not only trying to grow our program, but also to help students in their job search by providing them with an industry-recognized certification, they were onboard."

After becoming a Certiport Authorized Testing Center in 2001, the Business Office Systems & Support program required all students enrolled in a semester-long Microsoft Word, Excel®, Access® or PowerPoint® course to take the Microsoft certification exam as part of their coursework. Students also have the option to earn an additional credit certificate from Richland College if they complete five major Microsoft Office Suite software classes.

Microsoft® Office Specialist

"In our specific program area, many students start out with the short-term goals needed to become employable. However, as they work through Microsoft Office software courses and obtain at least one Microsoft certification, our students feel more empowered for professional success."

– **Becky Jones**
Associate Dean of the School of Engineering, Business & Technology, Richland College

As the Microsoft certification began to impact more and more students, Richland College realized the benefits of additional training and certification for students both at school and in their future careers. They have learned that certification is a way for students to stand out in a very difficult economy, and the college is committed to ensuring that students have a financially feasible option to obtain certification. "We feel it is so important to have affordable access to certification and no one should be denied this opportunity," Jones added. Students have the option to purchase a textbook with a discounted test voucher, and Richland also provides free access to Certiprep®, the premier practice test solution for Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) exams, a big advantage to effective training and preparation.

"This program requirement really encourages our students and provides them with an attainable, short-term goal," Jones said. "The Microsoft software is the industry standard and is most widely used by potential employers. We know that if our students diligently study the Microsoft Office suite, it will open many doors for them both now and in the future."

Program course availability and flexibility have been another key component to successfully building a quality certification program. Richland College has been able to attract a diverse student body demographically and empower students with critical job skills by offering daytime, evening, flex-term and online courses that fit a lifestyle of going to school, along with family, work and other obligations.

RESULTS

Since 2001, Richland College has administered over 2,965 certification exams to both students and the community served by Richland College.

"When our students obtain a certification, they can go into any industry and apply for an administrative support position," Jones said. "The Microsoft credentials have opened many doors for them throughout the community."

Richland College student Steve Hensley has used his PowerPoint® certification for trial preparation and litigation support in his work as a paralegal. Knowing how to proficiently use all of the advanced features of the newest software version has allowed Hensley to create presentations which communicate more effectively with juries.

"I do a lot of contract work, work with different firms, and my certification is like having a degree," said Hensley. "It becomes something else that I put on my résumé that says: 'This is a guy who knows how to use this stuff. If you hire me, I will be able to sit right down and I will be up to speed on the software. You won't have to wait for me to figure things out, I already know.'"

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