



Microsoft® Office Specialist

SAIT Polytechnic Prepares Graduates to Improve Workplace Productivity with Microsoft Office Specialist Certification

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Success Story



SAIT POLYTECHNIC

Administrative Information Management Diploma

Location:

Calgary, Canada

Program enrollment:

96 students per year

Success Metrics:

- Preparation for the workforce
- Advanced technology training
- Employer-valued credential



CANADIAN POLYTECHNIC FOCUSES ON EXPERIENCE-ORIENTED TRAINING AND VALIDATES STUDENT SKILLS WITH MOS

CHALLENGE

As one of Canada's leading polytechnics, SAIT Polytechnic provides relevant, skill-oriented education to more than 70,000 registrants each year. From apprenticeships to baccalaureate degrees, SAIT Polytechnic offers a range of credentials in diverse program areas.

The Administrative Information Management (AIM) two-year diploma is a specialized program

in the School of Business. The program is a mix of business theory courses, practical information management and hands-on computer applications training.

"We work with industry to provide students who are trained to hit the ground running," said Patricia Rokosh, SAIT Polytechnic, former School of Business Academic Chair. "We teach them critical thinking. By the end of the program, they are completely familiar with computers; the Microsoft Office suite is incredibly important. Although the program is designed to prepare students for further study, many graduates go into industry and their employers don't want to let them go back to school once they realize their value to the organization."

Over the past 10 years, faculty and administrators at SAIT have worked to bring the AIM program to the forefront as office and administrative professionals fill an increasingly important role in the workforce.

"With the evolution of our program, one of the next steps that we saw as essential was to ensure that our students were carrying the industry credentials that would give them recognition for their skill level," said Janine Violini, an AIM instructor at SAIT. "One of our goals is to make sure our students have the skills to make their offices more efficient and productive. Office professionals today have actually taken on the day-to-day tasks of middle to upper management, and we want to make sure our program continues to teach the skills our students need to be competitive in the workplace."

Approximately 60 students graduate from the AIM program each year. Administrators began to look for more credentials and assessments to help students master technology skills and prove those skills to potential employers. "Some potential employers don't know what a diploma in Administrative Information Management includes, so we wanted to help students earn industry-recognized certificates to overcome that hurdle," said Violini.

SOLUTION

The AIM program did extensive research on technical certifications and in particular, the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification program. With buy-in from Catherine Koch, Dean

Microsoft® Office Specialist

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– **Patricia Rokosh,**
SAIT Polytechnic,
former School of Business
Academic Chair

of the School of Business, they quickly decided MOS was the right direction to take and started with a pilot program to see how their students would perform on MOS exams.

Since AIM program students already took three semesters of Microsoft Word due to its importance in the industry, they started with the MOS Word exam. SAIT worked with Certiport's Canadian partner, CCI Learning Solutions, to become a Certiport Authorized Testing Center and implement the MOS program on campus.

"We started out by bringing our practice tests online and setting up our labs for exams," said Violini. "We relied on CCI Learning so much during those initial months and we were up and running for students to take certification exams that very same academic year."

All of the SAIT students who took the Microsoft Word exam in the first year passed, and some received very high scores. In fact, one of the very first students to take the exam, Emily Daubert, earned a perfect score and became the Canadian Microsoft Word Champion. She then won the gold medal at the Certiport Worldwide Competition on Microsoft Office in 2010.

"Our students quickly got excited about certification and the competition, and implementation was pretty simple for us here at SAIT, since we were already teaching the right skills and programs," said Rokosh. "Faculty did not have to change their curriculum and our students were well-prepared for the exams."

RESULTS

To date, approximately 125 MOS certifications have been earned by SAIT students. Faculty and administrators encourage all students to earn certification, and they have received feedback that employers are recognizing the value of MOS certification.

"As an administrator, adding and offering the MOS certifications have really bumped up our level of excellence," said Rokosh. "MOS has raised the bar and the level of what our students do in their classes has gone up an entire notch. Now when our students are going out, they can go anywhere in the world and work – they have a skill set that is transportable everywhere."

AIM students are striving to get certified before they graduate, and recent graduates report excellent employment opportunities based on their certifications.

"I think the certification really adds a lot to the graduation," said Brian Paulhus, AIM student, SAIT Polytechnic. "So instead of just getting a diploma to put on your resume, you are also certified in Excel, certified in Word. It can put you above all the other graduates of other business courses around Calgary."

SAIT graduate Emily Daubert discovered the true value of MOS certification after she competed and won the gold medal in the Worldwide Competition. "I received many job offers, and they were mainly based on the fact that I was a Microsoft Office Specialist in Word and Excel," said Emily Daubert. "Certification is what made me stand out from the stack of resumes. When you go into a job interview and 10 other people are being interviewed, certification gives actual proof that you can do what you say you're going to do."

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