

Adobe® Certified Associate

Aligns Educational System with Professional Creative Media Requirements



NEW RIVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE

LOCATION:

Dublin, Virginia

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT:

- 5,000 students
- 1,000 dual-enrollment high school students

SUCCESS METRICS:

- Professionally recognized credential
- Value in articulation with state department of education
- Validation of curricular relevance
- Return on software-upgrade investments



Virginia community college uses the certification program to prepare college and dual-enrolled high school students with real-world skills and credentials

CHALLENGE

When the Adobe® Certified Associate program first launched in 2007, Carlotta Eaton gathered enough information on the new program to present it to her industry advisory committee. After costly examination fees and frustration with another creative media certification program, the director of game technology at New River Community College was ready for a change.

“The big problem was employers didn’t know what the previous certification was—they had never heard of it,” Eaton recalled.

The advisory committee, made up of graphic design professionals from the surrounding area, quickly embraced idea of embedding the Adobe Certified Associate program into the curriculum as a means to help students acquire and validate the skills of some of the tools industry professionals use most: Adobe Dreamweaver®, Flash® and Photoshop®.

SOLUTION

By implementing Adobe Certified Associate, Eaton eliminated some funding issues and provided justification for needed software purchases. With the other certification program, Eaton said students were often dinged twice if they had to retake a failed exam. She learned the Adobe program is available through a classroom license that provides unlimited certification exams and use of test-preparation software. Perhaps more importantly, by combining her certification purchase with her software upgrades, she has been able to convince school administrators that she can earn a return on investment with the latest release of the Adobe Creative Suite.

“If you actually have a certification that goes along with [the software], it’s easier to get through the budget process of why we need this particular software,” she said.

New River Community College (NRCC) has offered associate’s degrees and certificates to residents of the surrounding area since 1969. In a growing information and technology program of nearly 200 students a year, about 45 students annually earn Adobe Certified Associate certifications in Eaton’s semester-long information technology design courses that include Dreamweaver, Flash and Photoshop. Certification is a core component and requirement in each class.

“It helps the students because on their resumé they have the coursework, the degree, the portfolio and the certification. So it gives them a stronger resumé,” Eaton said.

Students spend the first half of the semester building their competency in the applications to take the certification exam as part of the required mid-term. Later, Eaton has students put their newly acquired



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- Gordon Creasy
Specialist for Industry
Certification,
Virginia Department of Education

skills to task by completing projects that emphasize their creativity and time management. So far, she has found course work to be a good predictor as to which students will pass the certification exams and also excel in the overall course.

"Usually students that pass the certification have As and Bs in the class," she said. "If they have a lower grade they usually can't pass the certification."

And Eaton's instructional methods typically garner high pass rates. For example, she said all of the students in a recent Web Design II class passed the Dreamweaver certification on the first attempt.

RESULTS:

Eaton says students are motivated to earn industry certification. Despite circumstances such as work outside of a full class load, many students in her class go to great lengths to prepare for and achieve certification. "It gives them another edge," she said. "They've got something to show for [their skills] besides just the class completion."

One information technology design student sees her three Adobe Certified Associate certifications as a foundation for her career aspirations. "Achieving certification says I'm serious about what I want to do," said Heather Walters. "I am working towards my goal to be a graphic or web designer, and here is proof that I am achieving that goal."

Other than NRCC students, the information technology design courses also feature a mix of dual enrolled high school and university students, high school teachers and professionals. One such professional, the art director for Virginia Tech Magazine, discovered that Adobe Certified Associate has helped boost his capacity and credibility to support Web design projects at Virginia Tech, as well as through freelancing opportunities.

"I feel like I'm moving my career forward," said Glen Duncan. "It's something I can put on my resumé. I can tell clients I have an Adobe certification. It's something that can build a lot of trust for clients."

As part of the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), an educational system that values articulation with the state's secondary schools, NRCC also has ties to local high schools through which the Adobe Certified Associate program plays a significant role. It builds value in the community college's relationship with the state Department of Education whether students who earn the certifications opt to enroll in a VCCS college or move on to seek employment with an industry-recognized credential in-hand.

"We feel the job market better relates with—and values—skill-set verification as opposed to course exams for career and technical education," said Gordon Creasy, specialist for industry certification at the Virginia Department of Education.

Judith Sams, a program specialist in business and information technology at the Virginia Department of Education, says high school teachers are energized and enthusiastic to develop their students' multi-media skills when they go through Eaton's teacher training courses.

"This extension of the New River Community College Adobe Certified Associate program has been a very positive experience," Sams said. "And the name and reputation of both Carlotta Eaton and NRCC are known throughout technology training circles."



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