



SAIT POLYTECHNIC

LOCATION:

Calgary, Alberta, Canada

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT:

- 2,300 students

PROGRAM ENROLLMENT:

- 115 students

SUCCESS METRICS:

- Guide for curriculum re-design
- Highly regarded by industry
- Valuable resources for students, instructors
- Return on software-upgrade investments



Alberta-based technical college makes certification core to the curriculum with the backing of industry and local employers

CHALLENGE

Gerald Flim, program specialist for New Media Production and Design at SAIT Polytechnic, says the two-year school has always strived to help students develop skills demanded by industry. So when the Adobe® Certified Association program launched in 2007, the department was quick to adopt it.

“As soon as we heard the Certified Associate program was available, we were on board with it because we immediately realized the value it could bring to our program,” Flim said.

Perhaps the true value of the certification program wasn’t fully realized until last year when stakeholders of SAIT’s New Media Production and Design department put the curriculum under the microscope. Flim said he was gathering information for potential changes to the curriculum when a survey to his industry advisory board helped him realize just how important the credential was to the future of the New Media Production and Design program.

“Overwhelmingly there was support for having [Adobe Certified Associate] as part of our curriculum,” he said. “For industry, this certification tells them that the student has an entry-level skill set in these areas. Employers would definitely want to see something like that for anyone they were considering.”

SOLUTION

Flim said industry enthusiasm for the certification prompted him and other department decision makers to make it a central component of the curriculum re-design. Using the certification objectives as a guide, Flim and others have begun developing and modifying curriculum that are reflective of the skills needed for certification.

“We are here to train students to get positions out in industry,” he said. “The more resources that are at our disposal to set up our curriculum, the more relevant and meaningful it will be for the student and also for the employer.”



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- Gerald Flim
Program Specialist for New
Media Production and Design
SAIT Polytechnic

Though Flim says the department is still in early stages of complete curriculum overhaul and roll out that will likely last two years, he noted some of the basic structure of some of the courses will correspond directly to certification exams. A series of three Certified Associate courses—Web Communication, Rich Media Communication and Visual Communication—will have skills development and certification in Adobe Flash®, Dreamweaver® and Photoshop® as their primary objective.

“We just liked the fact that students would be able to take the certification exams, [and] we liked the resources that Adobe was putting out to support exam preparation,” said Flim. “The students have really bought into it because they can see the value of having Adobe certification. And they’re really excited and supportive of these [courses] we’ve set up.”

Flim uses the free outlines, modules, examples and assignment suggestions from Adobe to develop lesson plans that focus on and help prepare students for certification. Because he repeatedly tells students the material they cover in class may actually appear on the exams, he finds students are more eager than ever to tackle challenging class and homework activities.

“It was pretty much my standard line in all my classes,” he said laughing. “They were keen to do it. And they were well prepared for [the exams] because they knew what was coming up. It made it a little bit easier from my standpoint.”

RESULTS:

Integrating Adobe Certified Associate into the curriculum has received board support, especially from industry. One local employer from a Calgary-based design studio said he was immediately impressed when he learned a SAIT graduate from New Media Production and Design had obtained the Adobe credential during interviews for an open position with his firm.

“I thought implementing the Adobe Certified Associate into the curriculum was a fantastic idea,” said Dan Stephenson, a Web developer with Mosaic Studios. “Employers spend a lot of company time and money to ensure their staff is up-to-date with the newest software packages and best practices. Having students entering the industry who are Adobe Certified Associates gives employers the peace of mind these students will have the technical skills needed to succeed in the industry.”

Flim says students who achieve Adobe certification get an instant measure of credibility. “Now if they get that certification, they can have the ACA logo on their business card. They can put the ACA logo on their Web site. And that’s really going to stand out for them as they go out into industry because a lot of companies will recognize that logo.”

The Adobe credentials and logo usage have been valuable resources for SAIT graduate Manuel Tomasir who has started his own graphic design business. “Anybody can say they know what they are doing, but having a certification to back it up is all the more valuable,” he said. “It gives me much more credibility with potential clients and employers.”

SAIT graduate Rick Cruz achieved all three Adobe certifications for Adobe Creative Suite 4 (CS4) offered through the school’s program. He says the credentials add credibility to his portfolio when applying for employment. “[Certifying] has given me an additional document to attach to my SAIT diploma [and] to validate my Adobe skills on an official level,” Cruz said.

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