



Microsoft® Office Specialist

Gives New Jersey Job Corps Students a Marketable Edge in the Workforce

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Case Study



Edison Job Corps Center

Location:
Edison, NJ

Total Enrollment:
530

Success Metrics:

- Competitive edge in the workforce
- Measuring stick for classroom progress
- Third-party proof of skills
- Catalyst to realizing career goals



EDISON JOB CORPS STUDENTS FIND THEIR CAREER DREAMS ACHIEVABLE IN THEIR PURSUIT TO EARN EIGHT CERTIFICATIONS BEFORE GRADUATION

CHALLENGE

Edison Job Corps, like many other Job Corps centers in the United States, runs hundreds of young adults through their educational and technical training programs each year with one goal in mind: meaningful employment. As computing skills have grown to become an integral component of nearly every job

in today's economy, Edison instructors and administrators realized it wasn't enough to say graduating students had the skills. They also needed proof.

"We brought [the certification program] in eight years ago because we realized that students needed an edge," said Ty Bailey, Office & Administration instructor for Edison. "Even though it wasn't a requirement then, we thought it [would] give people more marketable skills."

SOLUTION

A lot has changed since those early efforts in pioneering the certification program at Edison, which has not only grown but also become a fixture of the Office & Administration track. In April 2007, the skill standards behind Microsoft Office certification and Certiport® Internet and Computing Core Certification (IC3®) were officially added to the Job Corps curriculum.

With the update, Edison administrators made another bold move: They decided to push Office & Administration students to achieve eight certifications before leaving Job Corps.

"We lay it out from the beginning: 'We really expect you to earn all eight certifications that are available,'" said Marianne Arkush, deputy director of Edison. "Now, a student can complete less than that, but since we raised the bar and our expectations, they tend to meet them."

Students who enter the program choose a Microsoft Office application to master right away. They work—under the guidance of instructors—to become familiar with, then proficient in, their application of choice. Assessments and practice tests ensure students are learning the skills needed to certify. A student sits for the exam only after he or she consistently scores well on the practice material.

"Once a student will come in and you give them attainable goals and acknowledge those goals, the students will achieve," said Bailey. "Once they pass their first certification, the next are very quick. The first one may take a student six or eight weeks. But the second one will take three weeks."

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– Ty Bailey
Lead Office & Administration
Instructor
Edison Job Corps

"My first certification felt great," recalled Christina Hernandez, who earned Word and Outlook® certification. "I was so happy, and I came into the classroom so excited. I couldn't wait to take my second one."

Tangible goals such as certification provide a measuring stick everyone can follow, says Arkush. "In the classroom, everyone understands they're working on certification. And it's a way of understanding how far they've progressed in the system and how they're progressing compared to their fellow classmates."

RESULTS

Over the last few years, Edison students have achieved 50 to 60 Microsoft Office certifications per month on average. Many have also successfully integrated into the workforce when employment prospects previously seemed elusive.

"At times I felt like I was going to be an ordinary person in the hood... basically wasting time, wasting life," said Rita LaRoche, who earned Outlook® and Word certifications. "But coming here and getting my certifications told me I could do it. And if I could do it, [anyone] could do it."

Hernandez, who already has already mapped out plans for the immediate future, will use her newly obtained skills as a stepping stone for achieving her goals. "I want to be an IT technician when I leave Job Corps because I want to go to college. I want to be able to pay for college and live on my own and take care of everything, so that I don't have to depend on anyone."

Added LaRoche: "I'm trying to get three more certifications. I'm looking into college.... I'm thinking about a lot of options."

Edison's focus on Microsoft Office certification has led to accolades for their students as well. Last year's U.S. representative in the Championship Round of the 2009 Worldwide Competition on Microsoft Office, Alex Eisenhower, was a product of Edison's blossoming program. As U.S. champ, he sees doors opening ahead: "It certainly seems that my goals are more reachable now that I have more certifications under my belt."

Arkush says employers are the ones who really win as a result of Edison's robust certification program. "Having these certifications, because it is third party, tells the employer from the minute [Edison graduates] walk in the door that they've got certain skills; they don't have to train them."

Bailey agrees. "The best selling pitch that we have here at this Job Corps are certification and our students. And it's [word of] mouth. Employers will go to the next employer and say, 'Well, you know what: If you go over to the Job Corps center, you need someone who's certified in IC³®, certified in Excel®, Access®... call on them.'"

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