Certiport IC³

Helps Members of California Community Update Skills for New Careers

IC³

Merced College Career Advancement Academy

Location:
Merced, California

Total Enrollment:
Up to 240 people per year
(15-20 new enrollees each month)

Success Metrics:

- Competitive edge in securing employment
- Confidence builder for re-skilling workers
- Employer-valued credential

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Career Advancement Academy Program administrator says IC³ has given participants a 'competitive edge' among job candidates for almost 10 years

CHALLENGE

At a trade conference in 2000, Jackie Mayhue discovered a way she could distinguish her academy's graduates in a crowded and competitive 21st Century workforce. The program coordinator for the Merced College Career Advancement Academy (CAA) had just sat for a certification exam provided by Certiport and was wowed by the performance-based testing technology and the concept of validating key employment skills.

"I took the test, believed in its contents, then came back to our school and said, 'We have to do this,'" she recalled.

Certiport helped Mayhue set up an on-site testing center at the CAA. She administered only 20 exams that year but recognized that the program could become so much more—both to the community and its employers.

SOLUTION

The CAA has served the Merced community as an employer-focused training center since 1989. Its program offers non-credit classes in medical assisting, legal office and advanced computer applications. The CAA has an open-entry/open-exit policy and allows enrollees to spend a minimum of 30 hours per week and up to 32 weeks on average to achieve a certificate of completion. Before tackling the more advanced training, however, program participants must train for and take the IC³ Key Applications exam as part of a Computing Intro course.

Initially, Mayhue acted as promoter as well as administrator to sell the value of Certiport IC³ to local employers. She gave IC³ brochures to leaders in the business community and found internships for students who had performed well on the exams. She preached the value of verifiable skills in advisory committee meetings with local employers. Mayhue even spread the word through the Merced Chamber of Commerce.

"In the beginning it took a long time for us to get the community aware," Mayhue said. "But as the years have progressed and as the community has become aware, now they are asking for [IC³], and job descriptions are containing that in their advertisements."

As the stature of the program increased locally, the program also began to increase in popularity with enrollees.

"It's come to be something the students strive to obtain … to get that certification they can show an employer," said Mayhue. "They do have a certificate of completion from us, but they also have the IC³ certification, which is like gold to them."

Melissa Taylor had worked in waitressing before deciding she wanted to receive formal training in medical assisting. She achieved her IC³ certification and completed the program in 2004. In a subsequent job interview with a local medical office where she was later hired, Taylor said the interviewer was "very impressed" with her new credentials. Now, as a training assistant for CAA, she impresses upon program participants the value of developing and validating skills through IC³.

"I let them know how much these programs are used in an office. Even in a medical office you have to know how to use an e-mail or word processing program," Taylor said. "Knowing the programs and earning the certification really helps in gaining employment."

The vast majority of the enrollees are able to validate their new skills. Mayhue estimates 95% of program participants pass the Key Applications exam. She attributes the high pass rate to "immersion"—a steady diet of hands-on exercises—and the practice test that comes with the IC³ Site License.

"That is a very good indication of whether they will pass," she said. "If they can pass [the IC³ Practice Test], then they are ready to test."

RESULT

Today, evidence of the CAA's certification program success abounds. Mayhue says not only are graduates getting jobs, but they're often hired at a higher wage because of their validated skills. She even has employers who send their own employees to Merced's IC³ training program.

"Our employers want that literacy," she added.

The CAA maintains a steady enrollment between 100 to 120 participants, all of whom tackle IC³ Key Applications before achieving the rest of the certification or moving on to other tracks. Mayhue said many program participants overcome challenging personal circumstances such as lack of prior education or job loss to gain new-found confidence upon successfully completing the program.

"One big thing it gives them is self-esteem," she said. "I've been with the program since it started, and I really believe in what we're doing because I've seen so many people achieve success."

Another program graduate echoes the same sentiment.

"It has given me the self-esteem to try for things I wouldn't have before," said Laurie Morton, a student who passed her Key Applications exam in 2008 before becoming a part-time aide in the program. "It says right there: 'You can do it; you did it.'"

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– Jackie Mayhue
Professor & Program Instructor /
Coordinator
Merced College Career
Advancement Academy

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