



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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FLORIDA CONSTRUCTION INSTITUTE: PUTTING STUDENTS ON THE FAST TRACK FOR HOME BUILDING JOBS

Overview

Florida Community College at Jacksonville (FCCJ) and the Florida home building industry have forged an innovative partnership to fast track the training of construction workers. Closely allied with leaders and contractors in the home building industry, the Florida Construction Institute at FCCJ has developed a community college-based training program preparing students for jobs in carpentry, electricity, plumbing technology and heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) in 12 to 18 months, less than half the time required by many traditional apprenticeship programs.

The institute integrates classroom, lab, and work experience to maximize learning. Courses are competency based, and students currently graduate with certificates. In the future, pending redesign of the residential trades curricula, they will earn college credit for their coursework, opening the way to associate of applied science degrees, among others.

Three Florida community colleges have replicated the institute's program, and others are moving toward implementation. Florida Community College at Jacksonville and the Virginia Community College System have taken a national lead in a move toward community college-based training programs for residential construction. Under a proposed Department of Labor grant, the Florida Construction Institute would serve as a model for training academies nationwide.

Industry Initiative and Funding

Shortages in skilled employees for the home construction industry provided the impetus for the Florida Construction Institute. The former president of the Florida Home Builders Association (now president of the institute's state advisory board) worked with the executive vice president of Florida Community College

at Jacksonville and the president of the downtown campus to develop a concept for the industry / community college partnership. In 1999, the Florida Legislature approved appropriation of \$500,000 from Workforce Investment Act state-level funds to support the pilot.

In December 1999, the Florida Workforce Development Board and the Florida Department of Labor and Employment Security awarded a two-year contract for \$500,000 to FCCJ to develop the demonstration project. The state added another \$250,000 for a third and fourth year.

The pilot concept called for a state advisory board, that included representatives of the building industry, to ensure that training met the needs of workers in the field. Local contractors were recruited to serve on advisory councils to design skill-based courses for different trades.

WorkSource, Inc., the local workforce board entity that allocates federal funding from the U.S. Department of Labor, provides \$215,000 a year for tuition and books. Stipends are granted to students who meet income guidelines. Paid internships are a vital part of the training concept. Twenty-five contractors have agreed to pay students for their work through the college's cooperative employment program. Through a special state financial aid program, FCCJ has been able to reimburse employers for up to 70 percent of student wages in qualified training programs. This year, a state Department of Education grant and WorkSource, Inc., will provide stipend and tuition funds to allow students to earn their hands-on experience working with HabiJax, a local nonprofit agency building low-income homes.

Student Recruitment

The institute's first class was admitted in September 2000. Some students entered fresh out of high school, but recruitment proved most successful among young men, ages 19-24, who had not completed high school and realized they needed marketable skills.

To combat attrition that occurred early in the program, entry assessments to evaluate student abilities and motivation were improved. Basic academic skills



are a critical part of the curriculum, and about one-half of the students pursue a GED or high school diploma program while enrolled at FCCJ. New students must qualify by scores on the Test of Adult Basic Education. Students who have mastered construction skills can "test out" of specific classes. All students are required to attend an OSHA (Occupation Safety and Health Administration) safety orientation class.

Today, approximately 225 students take classes in the construction trades; 112 are part of the institute program. The construction trades faculty includes five full-time and seven part-time instructors.

A Workable Formula

From the outset, the institute's major challenge was to find a workable formula for combining work and training. Traditional apprenticeships usually require students to work full days and take classes at night for about four years. The institute wanted to explore options that would enable students to attend classes during the day.

Based on discussions with contractors in the various individual trades, the institute initially pursued two patterns for combining work and training:

1. HVAC students went to school full-time for a term and then to work, spending two days in classes and three on the job.
2. Other students attended classes two days a week and worked the remainder of the week. Sometimes, two students filled a single job, alternating days. In other situations, students attended classes one-half day and worked the other.

Students continue to follow a variety of schedules. However, contractors prefer that students work full-time. Proposals to move to a seasonal calendar and a four-week alternating-work-and-class-time schedule are under review.

Institute Curriculum

The Florida Construction Institute offers state-approved vocational curriculum in carpentry, electricity, plumbing technology, and HVAC. A masonry program was cancelled due to low enrollment. The curriculum requires a student to have 960 to 1,350 contact hours of classroom or shop training to graduate with a certificate. A portion of the contact hours may be completed through internships.

The institute draws upon curriculum guidelines developed by the National Center for Construction Education and Research (affiliated with the University of Florida in Gainesville) for all fields, except HVAC.

New curriculum—based on new residential crafts' skill standards, developed by the Home Builders

Institute (HBI), the workforce development arm of the National Association of Home Builders, will be adopted as the standards, related texts, and training materials become available. HBI plans to develop a national registry of individuals who complete training certificates based on the new standards, a benefit to workers and employers in a highly mobile industry.

The Florida Construction Institute and the Virginia Community College System are pursuing the development of recognized associate in applied science degrees based on national skill standards. The opportunity for a career ladder is viewed as an important recruitment tool to attract more high school graduates into the home construction field.

DOL Grant to Improve Training

Nationally, the home building industry anticipates a continuing annual need for 200,000 new workers. Educational leaders in this arena believe that a national coalition, responsive to industrywide training needs among community colleges, may offer the most effective and financially sound approach to training students for fast-growing, stable occupations.

Institute's First Graduates

In January 2003, the first 65 students, including one female, completed training at the Florida Construction Institute and received certificates in carpentry, electricity, plumbing technology or heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC).

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