Workforce Learning Summit Innovation/Best Practice

Wake Technical Community College

START: Hospitality

In summary, the best practice for the START Hospitality Program is the continuous involvement with the hotel and restaurant industry before and during program development. Input from industry leaders included current software usage for desired employee skill sets. An advisory committee composed of local industry leaders was most effective in the development and continuation of the START program. These leaders voiced their needs and we addressed them accordingly. National industry-recognized certifications that are mandated by employers were also factored into the program. These certifications enhanced student marketability while simultaneously aiding industry employers by reducing work time and revenue. Additionally, connecting students with various employers via field trips, class speakers and job fairs has proven effective.

DETAILS

The START (Skills, Tasks and Results Training) Hospitality Certification Program is an intensive, 10-week course at Wake Tech during which students have the opportunity to gain all of the following certifications and skills:

- **START Certification**: Created by the American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute.
- **Line Level Certification**: Obtained after 90 days of employment in the industry.
- **ServSafe Certification**: Training in food safety standards that provides you with essential knowledge and skills.
- **Career Readiness Certification**: Essential employability skills – reading, math, location finding – needed in the workplace and recognized by employers.
- **“Soft” Skills**: Resume writing, interviewing, job applications, customer service, conflict management, public speaking.
- **TIPS (Training for Intervention ProcedureS)**: A dynamic, skills-based program designed to prevent intoxication, drunk driving, and underage drinking by training servers, sellers, and consumers of alcohol.
- **Opera Property Management System**: Used in most major hotel front offices.
- **Delphi Training**: Introduction to the World’s Leading Sales and Catering System

START addresses the large number of hotel/hospitality job opportunities in Wake County and surrounding counties, and it evolved out of Wake Tech’s earlier work with the hospitality industry. In 2010, Wake Tech had started a Human Resources Development course for hospitality. At that time, there was the HRD short-term introduction to the hospitality industry and a two-year associate’s degree. However, students wanted training that was somewhere in between, and hotel/hospitality employers sought employees with industry certifications.

During the development of the START Hospitality Program, we had to look at our internal and external resources. For example, we collaborated with our college’s Human Resources Development (HRD) department to teach job skills, interview techniques, and resume writing, as
well as testing for the Career Readiness Certification. The START program structured the course not just based on theory but on what the industry requirements were, be it software or hands on. We teamed up over the years with different companies whose software was being used by hotels and restaurants. Research was conducted by visiting different markets within the industry to see what the hiring trends were. Wage study and market growth were provided by the local Convention and Visitors Bureau. A committed advisory committee has proven essential and prudent to guide use through the development of the program. The members of the committee have varying expertise and are in different hospitality markets. The current START Advisory Committee members are:

- Michael Martino (G.M., Sheraton Imperial)
- Mark Latu (G.M., Hyatt House)
- Jackie Saxton (H.R., Sheraton Imperial)
- Hillary Rapp (Sales Representative)
- Greg Havenstein (Group Travel Booking)
- Loren Gold (GRCVB)

Recently our industry partners identified a high need for maintenance technicians and housekeepers. We addressed this need by developing a course. In order provide experience, a general manager allowed the class to use a room for the lab practicum.

In an effort to stay industry connected, we are active members of Triangle Area Human Resources Association (TAHRA) as well as Triangle Area Hotel & Motel Association (TAHMA). We continue to improve the program by listening to our industry partners.

Implementation of the START Hospitality Certification Program began in January 2011.

**Partner Type(s):**
- Business/Industry (direct involvement)
- Other: National Restaurant Association, American Hotel & Lodging Association

**Impact/Outcomes**
114 students have been served by the program so far, with at least 70% of our students obtaining jobs in hotels or customer service following the program. Graduates of our program have found employment in area hotels, such as the Sheraton Imperial, Holiday Inns, Marriott Crabtree, Hyatt House, Umstead Hotel & Spa, SpringHill Suites, and others. Positions have included Front Office Representative, Night Auditor, Valet Service, Room Service (Food & Beverage), and Assistant General Manager.

We create a job fair for the students and two weeks prior to the class, we invite hospitality companies to interview and potentially hire our students.

Within a year or two of going to work in hotels/hospitality, many former students move up the ranks to supervisory and managerial positions with the help of the training the received in class.

**Funding Source(s)**
Included in the $180 tuition cost were books, scantrons & test materials, totaling $305.00. We have also had some scholarship funds from State Employees’ Credit Union (SECU) as well as Project Skill-Up. Funding of this program is from Occupational Education Instructional funds.
**REFLECTIONS**

**Innovation or Best Practice**
Giving employers a good product by listening to their needs, by involving the end user i.e the hospitality industry and by adjusting to changes has been the reason for the success of this program.

An employer served by the program attributes the success of the program to Wake Tech’s upfront establishment of an employer advisory committee to find out what businesses want, and to the college’s listening rather than selling employers a predetermined service.

**Lessons Learned**
We did not start our class with a full package but slowly and steadily built the course adding more industry-recognized components to our program. We also marketed our class to area hotels to let them know that we have a program that will not only give them quality students but will save them money since all the students would have achieved the certifications and a good level of understanding of the business.

A hands on approach was adopted for this class. We were not focusing just on books but also the real life scenarios as well.

**Scalability**
Our strategy is easily expanded and upgraded upon communication and/or demand. Our success depends on students successfully completing the course as well as getting careers in the industry. We have current data on our students’ progress.

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**RESOURCES**

**Workforce Learning Summit Presenters**
Sameer Pawa, Instructor/Coordinator, Wake Technical Community College  
Anthony Caison, Vice President, Continuing Education, Wake Technical Community College  
Mike Martino, General Manager, Sheraton Imperial Durham, START Advisory Committee Member  
Karen Braxton, former student, current employee at Sheraton Imperial

**Links**
[www.StartHospitality.waketech.edu](http://www.StartHospitality.waketech.edu)

**For Further Information**
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