

North Carolina Advanced Manufacturing Training Program Using Tooling U-SME Addresses Skills Gap

With a vision of being the #1 state in the U.S. for manufacturing, North Carolina has initiated an innovative program called the North Carolina Advanced Manufacturing Alliance (NCAMA). Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, it is educating and training displaced and dislocated workers to fill the needs of North Carolina employers.

Using state-of-the-art equipment for hands-on training and a new approach to learning, students can earn certificates, degrees and diplomas, and be placed as interns with local advanced manufacturing companies where they can obtain the necessary workplace experience for full-time employment. Among the new approaches to learning being adopted by the Alliance is the use of Tooling U-SME online training.

“With the \$18.8 million grant, we are able to train and place dislocated workers with employers across the state which have a shortfall of advanced manufacturing workers,” said DeRay Cole, project manager of the statewide consortium. Based at Robeson Community College, the lead institution for the 10-community-college initiative, Cole said, “This creates jobs for North Carolina and brings needed industry back to the state.”

Tooling U-SME fits in with this mission, he said, as NCAMA uses learning models that take advantage of a digitally-connected world.

“Tooling U-SME online training supports our curriculum and maps to the industry-recognized credentials and certifications, endorsed by the National Association of Manufacturers, that employers are seeking,” he said.



Harvey Strong, the Technology Department Chair, explains a piece of specialized equipment to NC Commerce Secretary Sharon Decker.



Robeson Community College's advanced manufacturing training lab.

An important element is that the Tooling U-SME online training can be implemented consortium-wide at all the Manufacturing Technology and Advanced Manufacturing programs. This helps ensure consistent content. Instructors use it as a sole curriculum in some cases and as a resource in others, supporting the 13 advanced manufacturing programs among consortium member colleges.

The consortium is already seeing positive results from the program, which began being implemented in October 2013. By March 2014, more than 300 students throughout the state had completed over 4,600 classes. Exam scores indicate a 21% increase in knowledge gained among all students who did the coursework.

“While there were some initial concerns with making a change, once the instructors learned more about the Tooling U-SME curriculum and how it could boost the content program, they embraced it. Now they feel it’s a big plus,” said Cole, who selected the program after vetting its reputation for industry training.

Robeson Community College acquired an additional 90 “seats” for students, perhaps in part due to the successful use of the Tooling U-SME program, Cole said.

“Each student has access to the courses, and registration and enrollment have been seamless due to the software’s accessibility and Tooling U-SME’s follow up,” said Cole. “We feel good having them as a partner, using their tech platform to teach students for today and tomorrow.”

Many students have non-traditional backgrounds, including veterans, those who have been laid off as jobs moved overseas, and others interested in accelerated courses to get back into the workforce quickly. The program also provides career pathways for high school students.

Fulfilling the Alliance's goal to ensure students are digitally connected, students are equipped with iPads, allowing them the flexibility to complete coursework on demand, at home or wherever there is a WiFi connection. This provides more time for hands on application in the lab and accommodates students' busy schedules.

"The Tooling U-SME product is tech-friendly and fits in with our existing programmatic capabilities," said Cole. "We take enrollees through a technical training class on how to use the online training courses and their iPads and they come up to speed quickly."

Instructors are also able to generate reports to measure performance through Tooling U-SME. Its Learning Management System administers, delivers, tracks and reports the training activity of learners. The Tooling U-SME team worked closely with the consortium to build customized hierarchy and structure to fit the Advanced Manufacturing Alliance's needs.

"The North Carolina Advanced Manufacturing Alliance program is a model for other states focused on addressing the skills gap," said Toni Neary, Government and Education, Tooling U-SME. "They are providing accelerated education and training, creating a high performance workforce for careers in advanced manufacturing."

The NCAMA program results are striking. Since the program launched in 2012:

- 1,600 students have enrolled
- Retention rate is 87%.
- 700 iPads have been issued
- More than 900 industry-recognized certifications have been awarded
- 100 students have been placed in internships
- There are 90 direct job placements

These results are partly due to the way Alliance's colleges across the state are staffed. In addition to instructors, a Success Manager works closely with students, providing support. Additionally, a Project Coordinator works with the community to educate it about careers in advanced manufacturing and to recruit students. The Coordinator also partners closely with industry to place qualified graduates and interns. NCAMA also has strong partnerships with Workforce Investment Boards, local employment agencies, local education authorities, local community agencies and non-profit organizations.

Schools receiving funding through the program are Robeson Community College, Beaufort Community College; Craven Community College; Nash Community College; Edgecombe Community College; Davidson County Community College; Surry Community College; Haywood Community College; Fayetteville Technical Community College; and Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College.

For more information on NCAMA, please visit:

<http://advancedmanufacturingalliance.org>

<https://twitter.com/ncmanufacturing>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCManufacturing>

<https://plus.google.com/+AdvancedmanufacturingallianceOrg/posts>

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