

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & SKILLS TRAINING

Skills Training

University couples trades training with academics

BRIAN MARTIN
CORRESPONDENT

In the world of construction industry professional development there is a facility in the Fraser Valley that is definitely marching to its own drummer.

The University of the Fraser Valley's Faculty of Trades and Technology has developed a program it feels is unique in North America.

The difference is that the university is busy mixing trades training with academic learning.

Construction trades training being offered includes architectural drafting, carpentry and joinery, electrical electronics and welding.

"Our objective is to have educated trades people," said Harv McCullough, dean of the Faculty of Trades and Technology at the university.

"We look at the value of education versus the value of training and study how the two can mix."

At any time there are between 350 and 400 students at the school and that is expected to grow to as many as 600 within a year.

Given the nature of trades training and apprenticeships, it is not the same 400 or 600 at the end of the year as it was at the beginning.

It is a constantly revolving student body.

McCullough pointed out that even before the provincial government made several university colleges full-scale universities the Fraser Valley College had been moving in that direction.

It has faculties of this and that rather than schools.

In the case of the University of the Fraser Valley there are four faculties: Arts; Sciences; Professional Studies and the Faculty of Trades and Technology.

There are a couple of ways in which it manages to mix trades and academics together.

The first involves an entry level program, which is basically a pre-employment



UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY

Students at the University of the Fraser Valley (top and right) hone their construction skills at the school, but will still need to find time for academic study.

program.

It sees trade students enrolled for between seven and 10 months.

When they finish they are capable of moving into a second year apprenticeship.

It also means, however, they are at the university long enough to take advantage of some of the academic courses.

One example is communications.

"These students come out with communications skills as well as with their trade skills," said McCullough.

"We want our people to be university educated, not just trained."

The most impressive mixing of trades training and academic learning, though, involves the university's Bachelor of Business Administration (trades management).

The program is aimed directly at men and women who have successfully completed their apprenticeship training and have their trade qualifications.

They may want to continue further in the construc-

tion industry either by moving into senior management in a large firm or by starting and running their own company.

The degree is offered through the University of the Fraser Valley's Faculty of Professional Studies.

It is possible to complete it in 14 months.

A more common scenario, however, is a student, who is already working full time, taking several years to finish the course on a part-time basis.

"We think that being able to provide education as well as trades training is a huge advantage," said McCullough.

Rolf Arnold is the director of trades and technology.

He is more than pleased to display the impressive equipment students have to work with.

There is, for example, 40 separate welding stations as well as a state-of-the-art welding robot. There is also a top of the line routing machine and a molding machine.

The facility even has an unfinished mini-condo com-

plex where electrical students practice their trade.

Although it is not actually considered construction, the auto mechanics area was impressive. It has just received a gift of seven new trucks and cars from General Motors.

Between the two of them, Dean McCullough and Rolf Arnold have more than 50 years of experience both as tradesmen and as instructors.

Their pride in their new Chilliwack facility is very obvious.

The university (until recently it was called the University College of the Fraser Valley) serves 10,000 students.

Its main campus is in Abbotsford, in the central Fraser Valley but it also has satellite campuses in nearby Mission as well as in Chilliwack in the eastern end of the valley.

The Chilliwack campus is sparkling new having been opened for less than a year.

Virtually all the university's trades training is now centred in Chilliwack.



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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & SKILLS TRAINING

The Ironworker Trade

Concerns voiced over training fragmentation



UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY

The ironworking trade has become more specialized with training in B.C. being divided into three different certifications.

RICHARD GILBERT
STAFF WRITER

The British Columbia Industry Training Authority (BCITA) is in the process of updating the ironworkers trade certification by making the designation more specialized, but some people in the industry believe the changes will harm the trade.

An ironworker has traditionally been trained as a generalist that can perform a range of tasks.

According to the British Columbia Industry Training Authority (BCITA), ironworkers in the construction industry produce and install structural ironwork, concrete reinforcing materials and work with precast concrete to construct buildings or bridges.

Ironworkers are often involved in reinforcing concrete by cutting and shaping rebar so that concrete can be placed around it.

"Ottawa decided that the trade would be split up. So it

is up to individual provinces to decide what the training will look like," said Ron Rollins, chief instructor at the British Columbia Institute of Technology.

"This leaves the door open for provincial governments to do as they please."

Rollins explained that the ironworker generalist, which was a Red Seal program, required 23 weeks in school before the apprentice went to work, as well as two five-week upgrades and 4,500 hours of practical experience.

The Construction Industry Training Organization (CITO) is mandated by the BCITA to be the industry training authority for the industrial, commercial and institutional construction sector.

CITO is changing the traditional training program for ironworkers in B.C. by implementing a training system similar to the one in Alberta, where these workers have become more specialized.

"There will be a reinforcing steel program, which is known as rebar, as well as structural steel and a bridging mechanism that would allow someone to be trained as a generalist," said George Douglas, CEO of CITO.

"Someone who becomes certified in both rebar and structural ironwork can take a third program that will allow them to be certified as a generalist ironworker."

One of the main concerns that Rollins has with the new training is the affect it will have on young apprentices.

"I think the government will have great statistics as the number of apprentices goes up, but the industry as a whole will have lower quality young apprentices," said Rollins.

"Condensed training for people entering a trade is detrimental to the trade and to them. I can accept this for people who are already in the trade and are looking for certification, but this doesn't help younger workers, who are entering a trade."

Ironworkers Local 97 is concerned about the changes to the ironworker designation, because it may result in a deskilling of workers.

"The short term advantage to this approach is that the BCITA can increase the number of apprentices going through the system, by increasing the number of registered apprentices," said Mike Mckoryk, spokesperson for the Ironworkers Local 97.

"The fear from us is that we are streamlining a workforce in a way that will make the workers less valuable in the long term as a skilled reliable workforce. Whenever you dissect a trade you don't get the overall competency levels you have with a generalist."

The union believes there is an advantage to sticking with the old designation because it will be easier to maintain work.

"The new designation will hinder someone's ability to travel and take their craft elsewhere," he said.

According to Douglas, the training program for the structural ironworker should be completed by August.

Once this is done they will start working on the program for the reinforcing ironworker.

"At a practical level, we work with subject matter experts to spell out the skills, tasks and competencies that are required for the structural trade. These experts are people working on the job or foremen," said Douglas.

Once this process is complete a report goes back to the governance committee, which then goes to the CITO board.

The organization has put together an industry steering committee that is guiding the process of splitting the ironworker training into three streams.

Rollins has more than 30 years experience as an ironworker and was involved with this committee as a subject matter expert.

"We tried to decide what could be taught in the upgraded structural steel program, but this task was more than difficult," said Rollins.

"We were asked to trim back hours, but the companies in the industry are telling me that the training they want for an ironworker takes much longer. It is frustrating to see a program which is Canada's best, and the oldest in North America, go through this process."

According to Douglas, the whole process should be complete by year's end.

A few additional months will also be needed to develop exams for the program.

An implementation strategy will need to be developed to get the program running in the college system. No date has been set for the launch of the program.

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & SKILLS TRAINING

Inner City Initiative

Construction employment awaits graduates

BRADLEY FEHR
EDITOR

A program based out of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside is getting people ready for a career in construction.

Tradeworks Training Society offers a number of construction-related training programs, but one in particular aims to get disadvantaged inner city residents onto the Vancouver Olympic Athletes Village worksite in about eight weeks.

The potential construction workers can kick start their career with the Tradeworks pre-employment program.

It is called CORE (Construction Orientation To Retain Employment) Stage 1, and they are taught life skills and labour market information as well as having the chance to brush up their math skills to help them cope when they enter the workforce.

"It's to get them ready for construction training," explained Rod Paynter, with Tradeworks.

"They can prove to themselves that they have what it takes."

After the two week program, the students enter the Vancouver Regional Construction Association's (VRCA) CORE basic construction training program, where they are taught the nuts and bolts of working in construction.

They learn basic first aid, how to frame and use other tools of the trade in a part of the fabrication shop for the upcoming Olympic Games.

They graduate with five different certificates and are ready to enter, or re-enter, the workforce.

So far, 28 individuals have completed the CORE program and 27 of those started work.

From that group, 13 are still employed.

Another group of eight are currently taking the training.

The grads are then found employment at the Millennium Water condominium development in Southeast False Creek, which is doubling as the Vancouver Athletes Village during the Olympics.

The developer, Millennium Southeast False Creek Properties Ltd. signed a community benefits agreement to provide a minimum of 100 construction jobs at the site for inner city residents through either of the main contractors, MetroCan Construction Ltd. or ITC, or any of the subtrades.

So far, 55 people have started work and 33 of those people are still at it.

Millennium also provided \$750,000 for a legacy fund for inner city training programs and support, and committed to buying \$15 million in goods and services from inner city businesses.

However, not all inner city residents go through the employment program as some directly enter the CORE basic training program and others are placed directly into jobs.

Another 28 individuals immediately found work and 20 of those are still there or were successful at the job.

Building Opportunities with Business (BOB) is coordinating the effort and has been interviewing people for each of the training programs and the direct job placements.

"There are lots of different positions," said Lani Johnson, with BOB.

She listed plumbing, formwork and rebar work as just a few of the available jobs.

Johnson said that they have even placed some workers directly into apprenticeships.

She said the CORE program is great because it touches on so many facets of construction.

"It gives them a feel of what they want to do when they get out of it," she said.

"For some of them, a little

boost is all they need."

Those who complete the pre-employment program have a better success rate for completing the rest of the CORE program and landing, and more importantly, keeping a construction job, Paynter said.

The second pre-employment class is about to kick off and it will end shortly before the fourth edition of the CORE Stage 1 program starts.

In addition to running the CORE program, the VRCA is also providing a job coach to help individuals land their job and to provide support when they realize their employment.

"It's an exciting initiative," said Keith Sashaw, VRCA president. "We're happy to be providing a benefit to the community."

Tradeworks Training Society also runs other employment-related programs. It runs a youth carpentry program and a women's woodworking and joinery program.



BRADLEY FEHR

Rod Paynter with the Tradeworks Training Society poses with a saw in the CORE training facility, which is located inside the Rona Vancouver 2010 Fabrication Shop.

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & SKILLS TRAINING



Two welders use manual welding equipment to perform a task at the 14th Canadian Skills Competition at Calgary Stampede Park.

CANADIAN SKILLS COMPETITION

Trades Skills Competition

Youth strut their stuff

RICHARD GILBERT
STAFF WRITER

Canadian students and apprentices competed in Canada's largest national trade competition in Calgary for a chance to qualify for the 2009 WorldSkills Competition.

The 14th Canadian Skills Competition was held at Calgary Stampede Park.

It is Canada's largest national multi-trade and technology competition for Canadian students and apprentices. Every year, the Olympic-style event brings together young people from

all regions of Canada, along with their parents and advisors, to compete in more than 40 trade and technology areas.

"The Canadian Skills Competition shows the kids that a skilled trade is a good opportunity for them, instead of going to university," said Cynthia Faubert, communications and marketing officer at Skills/Compétences Canada (S/CC).

"Working with your hands is good and you don't have to go to university to make good money. This year we had more than 500 competitors and there were more than 150 in the construction events,"

The construction competitors were involved in 12 events, including plumbing, welding, electrical wiring, brick masonry, cabinet making, carpentry and architectural CADD. There were competitions for students in both secondary and post-secondary school.

This year's competition was particularly significant because it is the main step in qualifying for Team Canada at the 2009 WorldSkills Competition.

"Since the next WorldSkills Competition will take place in Calgary as well, it was a practice year to see how all the installations work," said Faubert.

"The kids who competed will have the same tools at the world event as they did at the national event."

Once on team Canada, students and apprentices are assigned a trainer, who is usu-

ally their current teacher, but could be a technical committee member.

"The quality of work by the contestants should be much better at the world event, because they will have about a year and a half to practice," she said.

"Some of the contestants who have finished their apprenticeship will train for this event to make sure they are up for the challenge."

WorldSkills competitors, aged 17 to 22, are drawn from national skills competitions that are held in 49 member countries/regions.

The next WorldSkills Competition is Sept. 1 to Sept. 6, 2009 in Calgary.

"We're proud to host an event of this caliber in Alberta," said Premier Ed Stelmach.

"It provides an international stage for profiling Alberta's best - our skilled and talented citizens, high quality education system, our top-notch trades and technology industry."

The provincial government announced that it would provide \$24 million to support the event, which is expected to attract more than 1,000 international competitors, 5,000 international experts, delegates and judges, and about 150,000 students and public spectators from across Canada and other participating countries and regions.

S/CC is a national not-for-profit organization that helps in encouraging Canadian youth to choose careers in skilled trades and technology.



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