

Obtaining Academic Credit for Transit Training

A Report from the Career Pathways and Career Ladders Project

Overview

Throughout the course of the Career Pathways and Career Ladders (CPCL) FTA funded project, the Transportation Learning Center (the Center) has worked on local and national level community college credit opportunities, while exploring additional options for workers in the industry to obtain academic credit for training and apprenticeship work. On the local level,

- Existing community college relationships have been strengthened where they already existed in Utah,
- New relationships have been created in Philadelphia, Cleveland and Utah and
- A new transit-specific program has been established in West Virginia.

On the national level, the Center has used the FTA project's meetings, webinars and conferences to inform CPCL partners and others about the U.S. Department of Labor's Registered Apprenticeship-College Consortium (RACC) and the value of establishing Registered Apprenticeships in transit agencies to more effectively facilitate workers' ability to obtain college credit for their training and work experience. In addition, the Center has opened discussions with two national college credit assessment organizations—the American Council on Education (ACE) and the National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS.)

Community College Relationships at the Local Level

Cleveland: After discussions about college credit options for training during the Center webinar at the nine-month mark of the CPCL project, Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA) and Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 268 expressed interest in hearing about college credit assessment and transcription options for their railcar apprenticeship program. Using West Virginia project contacts and after consultation with Laura Ginsburg at U.S. DOL's Office of Apprenticeship about appropriate contact people involved in the Registered Apprenticeship Community College program, the Center coordinated and participated in two conference calls with GCRTA and ATU Local 268. In the first call, agency and union participants talked with Dr. Michael Snider of the Ohio Community Colleges, who explained how credit assessment worked through the Ohio community college system and then specifically at Cuyahoga Community College. He suggested proper contacts and next steps.

The same labor and management representatives from GCRTA then participated in a call with Dr. Kristy Wood from Mountwest Community and Technical College (MCTC) in West

Virginia. In advance of the call, Dr. Wood provided the group with a write-up done collaboratively by the Center and MCTC explaining how credit assessment works in the context of their fully online Associates Degree in Transportation Technology, with a specialization in Transit. She detailed the specific steps for any GCRTA employee interested in that degree or any other of the transportation-related specializations.

GCRTA and ATU local 268 have expressed interest in exploring both options. They have been in touch with Dr. Wood and obtained more information on MCTC programs, and they have initiated discussions with the appropriate contact person at Cuyahoga Community College. At this time, no decision has yet been made on which institution they might work with as an academic partner.

Philadelphia: In collaboration with Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority (SEPTA) and Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 234, the Center's local partner, the Keystone Development Partnership (KDP), facilitated meetings between transit stakeholders and community college officials in four of the five counties served by SEPTA. KDP collaborated with the Collegiate Consortium for Workforce & Economic Development, which is a non-profit organization. The Consortium is a partnership of Drexel University and five area community colleges: Community College of Philadelphia, Delaware County Community College, Bucks County Community College, Camden County College, and Montgomery County College.

The SEPTA manager of training presented the SEPTA-TWU Apprenticeship and potential for college credit to this Collegiate Consortium for discussion. The SEPTA apprenticeships are generic with appendices for each of the individual programs such as Bus Mechanic, Elevator/Escalator Specialist, and Rail Car Maintainer. SEPTA is not looking for trainers, but the process to align courses with college credit. The Collegiate Consortium, the Community College of Philadelphia and the Bucks County Community have similar programs with existing apprenticeships in the region. The group discussed the difference between continuing education certification and college credit. Some colleges may offer credit, some continuing education courses may apply towards a degree, but not all.

In September 2014, KDP met with the Collegiate Consortium, Community of Philadelphia, and Delaware Community College to review the SEPTA TWU Bus Apprenticeship curriculum. The Delaware Community College Dean of Workforce Development and Community Education offered to provide a summary for a project plan to present to SEPTA and TWU. The colleges will need the course content (curriculum outline), learning outcomes, time in class, and time on the job linked to the apprenticeship education program. Some colleges will require a description of instructor qualifications. On the job experience is evaluated case by case. For veterans in the transit workforce, some colleges accept credit for training that has been assessed by the military. The Community College of Philadelphia Curriculum Coordinator evaluates programs such as apprenticeships. Once information becomes available, KDP will schedule a meeting.

In addition, KDP has detailed information about Mountwest Community and Technical College's transit degree and credit assessment process, the program discussed below under West Virginia. They are using that information as needed to inform the Philadelphia-area colleges about what type and amount of credit has been assessed for particular forms of training and apprenticeship in transit.

SEPTA, TWU and KDP are planning to continue to move this work forward past the duration of the CPCL project. Next steps for them are to

- Construct a matrix of existing programs that would support the SEPTA-TWU apprenticeship at each of the community colleges,
- Construct a matrix of existing apprenticeship courses and training linked with the SEPTA-TWU apprenticeship and
- Identify grants to support the evaluation process.

Utah: Utah Transit Authority (UTA) and ATU Local 382 continue to work with Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) as a partner used by their mechanics as part of their apprenticeship program. In the course of the formal outreach process developed under the CPCL project, UTA and ATU staff and leaders connected current employees with SLCC and went to SLCC to recruit potential new employees. In addition, the union asked to see the Mountwest Community and Technical College write-up used for Philadelphia and Cleveland, and is considering whether the Mountwest program may also be a potential option for its members who want to pursue a degree.

West Virginia: In the Center's initial onsite meeting with our project partners from the West Virginia Department of Education Career and Technical Education Division and the Rahall Institute, Center staff was introduced to Dr. Kristy Wood, Director of various specializations under the Associates Degree in Transportation Technology at Mountwest Community and Technical College (MCTC.) MCTC had just explored adding a Transit specialization to their degree. Under the course of the CPCL project, that transit specialization was established. In the course of ongoing discussions and collaboration with the Center, MCTC:

- Obtained final approval for its Transit specialization
- Identified and assessed a series of training modules directly related to frontline transit occupations
- Developed a description for transit agencies and unions—which were sent to Cleveland, Philadelphia and Utah—describing in detail how academic credit assessment of training and apprenticeship would work and how that is connected to a path to a degree at MCTC. The description also included information about options for further academic work, if desired, that would lead to a four-year degree with MCTC partners. (Appendix A)
- Presented the MCTC program to a range of transit and transportation agencies, unions, academic programs, non-profits and regional and national government agencies at the Center's September 17 "Making Connections Roundtable Conference" as well as at the October 7 conference convened by the U.S. Departments of Transportation, Education and Labor.

Exploration of Registered Credit Assessments at the National Level

While our local partner agencies and unions will continue to develop and explore their local community college relationships and credit assessments for specific programs, the Center has initiated discussions about the possibility of pursuing national-level credit assessments for frontline worker Registered Apprenticeships in Transit. National assessments are

feasible because of the national standards underlying the apprenticeships as well as curricula that has been or is being developed that can be used as a basis for assessment.

As part of our CPCL project work, Center staff organized and participated in a series of calls and email communications with the staff from the American Council on Education (ACE) and the National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS.) Both organizations expressed interest in assessing curricula based on national standards in Transit Registered Apprenticeships and provided detailed guidance and materials related to appropriate next steps and costs related to such a process.

NCCRS then pursued more in-depth discussions with the Center and our partners, through participation (at their request) in our September 17 conference. They made a presentation to attendees on how credit assessment could be carried out and discussed various options for the funding of an initial assessment. Presentations and materials emphasized that their assessments are ultimately made part of an Excelsior College transcript which, through the RACC and other college transfer credit procedures, can be used and applied to a variety of academic programs across the country.

The Center will continue to explore the credit assessment option with NCCRS (and perhaps also with ACE) and discuss with interested partners and other entities ways in which such an assessment might be funded. The Center will also continue discussions with Mountwest Community and Technical College, which can serve a national student body, as well as with Laura Ginsburg of U.S. DOL's Office of Apprenticeship related to the continuing work of the Registered Apprenticeship-College Consortium.

Appendix A: Mountwest Community and Technical College Transit Specialization Overview

Mountwest Community and Technical College

A.A.S. Degree Program in Transportation Technology, Specialization in Transit

Overview

The purpose of this program is to provide a pathway to an accredited degree for incumbent and incoming workers in transit. The Mountwest Community and Technical College (MCTC) A.A.S degree has several key elements that make it accessible to full-time working people in transit.

- The program is online and self-paced, based on an individual student's schedule each semester.
- The program has an established mechanism for assessment of academic credit for training and workplace experience. Once assessed, this credit can be used to fulfill almost one-half of the program's 60 credits required for a degree. Credit can also be awarded for a CDL and transcribed learning through military service training.
- Students can take their required general education classes through MCTC online, but the program will award transfer credit for appropriate general education courses (Communication/English, Math, Science, Computers) taken at other colleges.
- The program is affordable: \$420 for every three credit-hours. (Tuition can change at the start of each academic year, but no increases are currently scheduled.)

How The Program Would Get Started and Work: Steps and Segments

1. The potential agency and union partners, in consultation with MCTC and the Transportation Learning Center, would identify one or more job categories at the transit agency that have training and on-the-job experience that could be appropriately evaluated for academic credit.
 - a. MCTC and the Center would work with the partners to ensure that the appropriate documentation of training curriculum and field work is provided to MCTC for a credit evaluation.
 - b. Up to 15 credits can be awarded for workforce training, with the possibility of additional credit for workers with a CDL and/or documented learning through military service.
 - c. The maximum cumulative credit that can be awarded for all prior documented and assessed learning is 21.
 - d. In addition, up to 12 credits can be awarded for actual work in the industry.
2. After outreach to interested workers, students can begin the program in the Fall of 2014.
3. Once admitted, each student can begin to take his/her general education courses online, or submit an official transcript from another academic institution to receive

credit for comparable general education courses at another appropriate college-level institution.

4. The final set of requirements for the A.A.S. is the 18 credits of transportation-specific courses: Introduction to Transportation Systems, Transportation Law and Policy, Transportation Economics, Transportation Security, Transportation Geography and Transportation Information Systems.

[How the Workers Get Academic Credit for Workplace Training and Field Work](#)

MCTC has a history of working with the transportation industry to assess and then award academic credit for workers in specifically identified job classifications and/or to workers who have gone through training related to those classification and have had experience that has required them to learn and use those same skills. Ideally the specific classification is related to a job and training that is tied to a state or national registered apprenticeship program. The most promising classifications to start with might be Bus Mechanic and Railcar Mechanic or related job categories tied to registered apprenticeships. However, MCTC is also willing to look at other large categories of workers who go through specific standards-based training, such as bus operators.

To assess the training and work of workers in these areas, MCTC would review the training curriculum as well as the competencies developed by workers who are in these jobs and have gone through the required training. The Center would work with the partners to gather and package the materials in a manner that helps MCTC to do this assessment of prior learning for academic credit.

Once the amount of credit to be awarded is established, all workers who have gone through the assessed training and have worked or currently work in the identified set of job classifications will be entitled to receive that credit from MCTC. The credit will appear on their transcript and will be applied toward the A.A.S. degree at MCTC; it is these credits that create the specialization in Transit. The remainder of their credits would come from the required general education courses and Transportation Technology courses discussed earlier.