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## Tailor-made college apprenticeships program for companies to be talent hub

Written by [Marcus Lim](#) on July 10, 2018

A new college apprenticeship program launched in May by Miami Dade College in collaboration with the US Department of Labor, Florida Department of Education and major partners in targeted industries aims to be a talent hub, creating and retaining local talent to bolster the workforce.

The program, tentatively to begin in early August, will be tailor-made to a company's need. Every course will be customized. Miami Dade College will supply theory lessons that cover the industry and then on-the-job training will be at the company's location.

John Wensveen, vice provost of academic schools, told Miami Today the current US administration had plans on apprenticeships but Miami Dade College has been working on this program for almost a year, hoping to be an apprentice hub of South Florida. When the Department of Labor heard about the program, it wanted to collaborate and bring in a more "national vision."

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“We see apprenticeship as a major opportunity. Our school’s president has a tagline, ‘talent is universal, opportunity is not.’ What we see here is a lot of talent in the community and that talent isn’t necessarily connected to opportunity. We are the bridge to connect them,” Mr. Wensveen said. “We want to create workforce opportunities and focus on targeted industries in the county. Skilled talent may not be available now, which impacts a company.”

The program launched in a ceremony at the Wolfson Campus downtown, with attendance by the program’s first and currently only company partner, Commercial Jet, which specializes in restoring and repurposing commercial jets for private, public and cargo usage. The company saw the appeal of imbuing its culture and training and retaining young talent from the start, as another alternative to outsourcing talent for specialized skills.

Evros Psiloyenis, office of the president and spearheading the program for Commercial Jet, told Miami Today that specific skills within the aviation industry are being depleted and few people are willing to pick up the trade. The program would help solve that.

“What’s been happening within the education sector many years now is a drive for everybody to obtain a degree. That has been the message always, degrees for

everybody. With that, some industries have suffered, such as the aviation and manufacturing sector,” Mr. Psilovenis said. “People are getting older and retiring, resulting in a shortage of our industry. With the program, we are looking to develop within the industry the skill set that we need, the talent that is necessary in taking care of maintenance on aircraft.”

The first program with Commercial Jet will be 24 months and aims to have a maximum of 15 students for the first cohort. The apprentices will simultaneously undergo technical instruction lessons and on-the-job training at Commercial Jet’s site. For other companies, classes could be held at Miami Dade College campuses or even online. The instructors will be provided by the college. The on-the-job training requires the apprentice to shadow an expert of the company.

At its current stage, the program is primarily for the role of structural technician, but Mr. Psilovenis said that after the program the apprentices could embark on the mechanical side or ultimately apply for areas of management.

“The idea is to create a career avenue within our company. If we are training these people, we want to retain them and give them the opportunity to have a fruitful career with us,” Mr. Psilovenis said. “We would want them to have a culture of belonging to Commercial Jet and one day maintain a position of leadership within the industry.”

The course is free to apprentices, who will not pay tuition. Instead, they are paid for their time. Throughout the course, once they hit a “gateway,” a term used by Mr. Wensveen to denote a certain level of progression by the apprentice, their pay level rises. Once they graduate, they get a “journeyman” certificate.

Recruitment has begun and will wrap up by the end of July. Each company will have different recruitment guidelines. Commercial Jet is still shaping the applicant

process and curriculum. Miami Dade College will help in recruitment by marketing the program.

Numerous companies are in talks to partner with the college, mainly from the technological, transportation and logistics sector, though some financial companies are also talking, Mr. Wensveen said.

“This will be a national example for talent training,” he said. “We want to be a talent hub and want the nation to use us as a model.”

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