



SUCCESS STORY

C I S C O A C K N O W L E D G E S S U C C E S S A N D A C C O M P L I S H M E N T S

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Building Internet Skills in Rural Colorado

In 1995, there was little or no Internet infrastructure in most parts of Southeastern Colorado. But Otero Junior College helped change all that. Situated among cattle ranching and row crop irrigated farming in the Arkansas River Valley, Otero took the initiative to help build an Internet infrastructure to connect the surrounding rural communities. The college also adopted a new mission – to build a local workforce of highly-skilled IT professionals.

The college adopted the Cisco Networking Academy Program in 1998, and became the first Academy in the state. Otero has since grown into a Regional Academy that supports fifteen Local Academies and almost 800 Networking Academy students.

According to Dr. Tom Armstrong, Otero's VP of Instructional Services, "We're committed to preparing our students with the IT skills and experience employers need."

No Wasted Possibilities or Talents

In the past four years, 65 students of the college's 1300 plus student body have completed the Networking Academy program. Otero Junior College is a classified Minority Serving Institution with a very diverse student population. Academy graduates hail from three surrounding counties in the Central Plains, and range in age from 18 to 55. They are single moms and dads, migrant workers, new high school graduates, and professionals who take classes full-time or part-time in the evenings or on weekends. "The Cisco Networking Academy Program attracts a diverse range of students because it's leading-edge, exciting, flexible and extremely rewarding," says Bill Abel, Otero's Cisco Programs Manager and only dedicated full-time instructor.

Bill, who is CCNA-certified, has been with the program since the start, and together with a part-time colleague, has played a key role in the students' success. This is quite an accomplishment given that over fifty percent of them have little or no previous computer experience.

One Academy student, Michelle Trujillo, didn't know how to turn a computer on before enrolling. Now, she is within arms reach of becoming a Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA™). "The Cisco Networking Academy has opened new doors for me," says Michelle, a single mother of three children. "Now, I have the skills and experience to become a networking professional, and I'm confident I will have a successful IT career."

Not Just a Job; It's a Vocation

Each student has the potential to attain his or her Cisco certification and a high-paying job and career, according to Bill, who is candid about his large ambitions for his students. He believes Otero's 'job-ready' Cisco Networking Academy students and graduates are already an integral and vital part of the state's economic infrastructure. The college is currently partnering with local businesses that range from county



Academy student, Michelle Trujillo working on the computer





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agencies to the local courthouse, libraries, hospitals, and correctional facilities to provide Internet connectivity, on-the-job training, and experience. Students participate in cable installation, network assessment and troubleshooting, and PC hardware/software repair and upgrades.

Graduates are in demand by employers across the state and typically earn \$18 to 25 per hour – approximately twice the \$17,000-20,000 average annual income of a resident in this region of roughly 30,000. “The Cisco Networking Academy Program is making a difference to people in this community,” says Bill. Students are excited about pursuing a career in network engineering - it’s not just another job for them; they’ve found their vocation.

For more information on Minority Serving Institutions, please visit:

http://65.104.127.212:82/public/digital_divide/bridge/MinorityBackground.shtml



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