

Pace University/NACTEL Graduates Report Increased Productivity in Their Jobs

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NACTEL began in 1997 when a group of industry leaders, both employers and unions, met to develop an online learning solution to address critical employment needs in the industry. Today the NACTEL coalition includes the Communications Workers of America (CWA), Frontier/Citizens Communications, The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), Qwest Communications, SBC and Verizon, in a partnership representing nearly 2 million employees and members in the industry. CAEL was instrumental in convening this coalition in 1997 and continues to serve as NACTEL's manager and fiscal agent. NACTEL received early developmental funding from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

Pace University has been NACTEL's university partner since 1998. Currently the University offers:

- Accelerated Bachelor's of Science in Professional Technology Studies, Telecommunications Concentration
- Advanced Certificate in Emerging Technology
- Associate of Science in Applied Information Technology, Telecommunications
- Introduction to Telecommunications Certificate
- Telecommunications Essentials Certificate

The curriculum for this program is developed collaboratively with university faculty working closely with representatives from the industry and targets specific technician job titles in the industry. The curriculum is continually updated to reflect the most current telecommunications technology.

Since 1999, an average of 520 students generates approximately 2000 enrollments each year.

In May 2004, 54 of these students graduated from Pace University's NACTEL program and received an Associate's Degree in Telecommunications. The graduation ceremonies were held in New York City's Radio City Music Hall, and a reception honoring these students was hosted by Pace University and NACTEL following the ceremony.

The Student Perspective

Both Pace University and NACTEL collect detailed feedback from students enrolled in this program, and two major themes were evident in the interviews with this year's graduates. First, the flexibility of online learning enables students

to complete coursework while meeting the other adult responsibilities of work and family. And, secondly, their NACTEL degree has made these graduates more productive, better prepared for their jobs, and able to give outstanding service to their customers. Five of the nine graduates interviewed were so pleased with their NACTEL program experience that they have enrolled in Pace's new online Accelerated Bachelor of Science Degree in Professional Technology Studies with a concentration in Telecommunications this fall.

Bruce Jones, Engineering Assistant at Verizon, CWA Local 2105, enrolled in the NACTEL program in the fall of 2000 to enhance his previous work experience in engineering. In December 2003, he petitioned for a new position as Engineering Assistant, which required that he first qualify by taking an exam. However, he felt fully prepared for the exam and new position because of his Pace NACTEL courses. The program had introduced him to the latest technology concepts and ideas. He was confident that the education and training he received could be used toward his advancement in telecommunications engineering.

“At Verizon, we are at the leading edge of technology,” Jones says. “We are going beyond the next generation and my Pace NACTEL courses have prepared me for that. The courses were a big part of my preparation for my new position. Now I am designing outside equipment, using fiber optics, multiplexers, and everything else that makes up modern telecommunications.”

In the summer of 2000, Gregory Grady, Customer Service Specialist at SBC, CWA 4013, began the NACTEL program. Grady found that online learning was not only good for him because of his work environment and schedule, but also was a good learning style for him personally. He believes the courses have given him a broader perspective enabling him to do better work for the company.

“What I like most is that the program has expanded my background and helped me to understand why things work the way they do,” Grady says. “I have become a mentor for new people and a few managers, who just did not have the background when they joined us. It has helped me to do a better job, both for the company and my customers.”

“I’m a business consultant for Verizon so everything I’ve learned is useful,” says Wailan Jow, Verizon Business Consultant, CWA Local 1023. “I use my knowledge to explain technology to my customers.”

For Jow, born and raised in Hong Kong, going to school and getting a higher education is a “privilege.” But working full time and taking care of her husband and two children has been a top priority that forced her to put education on the back burner — up until three years ago. Wailan enrolled in NACTEL in January of 2001 and did her coursework from home or during lunch breaks. The convenience of the online format was key.

“I wanted to learn and knew that I must work hard and must keep learning to have a better future for myself and also set an example for my children,” Wailan says. “I could arrange my personal schedule, go online anytime I wanted for any assignments, and be home at the same time so I could take care of my children and housework.”

Wailan is now graduating with her A.S. degree and offers this advice to anyone starting in the program: “Set a reachable goal, for example, start with one class and target for a certificate first. Then go for the second certificate. Before you know it, you will have enough credits to graduate with an associate’s degree.”

Wailan plans to continue her successful approach and enroll in Pace’s accelerated B.S. program in the fall.

Frank Rable, Business Consultant, Verizon, CWA 13500, has had a similar experience with customers and the company after completing his degree requirements. After a career in the packing industry, he began working in telecommunications. He entered the NACTEL program to help reach a level of expertise on par with his fellow employees. He also wanted to learn to communicate more effectively with customers.

“I began the program to learn telephone technology from the past 30 years. Instead, I learned the new stuff – VoIP, data transmission, and DSL,” Rable says. “Instead of learning about the technology of the past, I am learning what the telecommunications industry has become and is becoming. Therefore, when I am talking to customers and they ask ‘why can’t I do this?’ now I can explain it.”

Another graduate, Carlos Martin, Testing Technician, SBC, CWA 9412, had a different experience because he had acquired more than 17 years of experience in telecommunications and then decided he wanted a degree in his line of work. He experienced some personal trials after beginning the program in the spring of 2001, but was able to graduate this past May. After completing the program and earning his associate’s degree, he believes he is not only knowledgeable regarding the next generation of technology but is also better equipped to communicate with customers and fellow co-workers.

“The area that helped me most is based around Internet protocols (TCP/IP),” Martin says. “One of my many duties is helping field technicians and customers over the phone with DSL issues. I now have a better understanding of how information is routed as well as line issues.”

What the NACTEL Partners Say

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the \$675 billion telecommunications industry employs 1.2 million individuals in the United States in fields such as the

traditional areas of local and long-distance telephone services, as well as in advanced technology-based services such as wireless communications, the Internet, fiber optics, and satellites. The NACTEL member companies represent more than 75 percent of the employees in this industry.

Despite the boom in telecommunications technologies, companies have faced both employee and skills shortages due to retirement, attrition, and rapidly changing technology. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment in the telecommunications industry is expected to increase 7 percent by 2012. As a result, telecommunications companies including the members of NACTEL have stressed the importance of employee skills, computer literacy, and the initiative to learn throughout their companies.

“NACTEL is one of the first partnerships of major telecommunications companies working together with their unions to advance training and education in our industry,” says Morton Bahr, President of Communications Workers of America. “NACTEL offers programs that reflect the latest developments in the dynamic world of telecommunications and we at CWA value our association in this partnership.”

Knowledge of technical advancements is one such area that has improved employee performance. NACTEL members have seen an ever-increasing pool of telecommunications technicians that are trained in the latest technology and better understand the technical aspects of their jobs due to higher education opportunities.

“Telecommunications workers need to keep learning in order to enhance their career prospects and advance with this technology,” says Edwin D. Hill, President of IBEW International. “NACTEL education, developed by the industry, is one of the few avenues where this learning can be obtained.”

“At Verizon, we know that our competitive advantage continues to be a workforce that stays up-to-date in telecommunications technologies,” says James Keane, Director of Workforce Leadership & Development, Verizon Communications. “Our partnerships through NACTEL help us achieve this goal.”

From both the NACTEL companies’ perspective and the employees, the program has given the employees the opportunity to become better-educated and better-trained workers. This translates into more productive job performance; a pool of employees who are more knowledgeable, qualified to advance, and take on leadership roles in their organizations; and employees who are more capable of disseminating accurate information to customers.

For more information on the NACTEL program, visit www.nactel.org.