

Improve Your Employability with State Job Skills Certification

Training can enhance your resume and make you more marketable in a competitive economy. For young people, especially, a recession is an extremely challenging time because they are competing for jobs with mature workers with more experience.

Enrollment is up at post-secondary institutions because, during a down economy, people intuitively retreat back to school to earn a certification or an extra qualification.

“During a recession many people decide to go back to school, and this can make a big difference in obtaining employment,” says Candace Moody, vice president of Communications for WorkSource, an agency that connects workers with jobs. “Training is a great place to spend the recession.”

Florida Ready to Work is a credential sponsored by the state of Florida. The program is free of cost to employers and jobseekers. It is funded through the Florida Department of Education and administered by workforce regions throughout the state, including WorkSource in Northeast Florida. The credential records scores on three assessments developed by ACT and based on Work Keys.

The Florida Department of Education awards a bronze certificate for those scoring at least a three on all three sections; a silver certificate for those scoring at least a four on all sections; and a gold certificate for those scoring at least a five on all test portions.

The assessment tests job skills and work habits by measuring how long it is likely to take a person to master job skills, and by determining the extent of workplace skills they already possess. Specifically, the assessment includes three one-hour assessments measuring:

- Reading for information
- Locating information
- Applied math

The assessment measures test takers on a scale from 3 to 7 on a series of progressively more challenging tasks, with a score of 3, 4 or 5 needed for most jobs.

For instance, the reading for information section starts with a simple task such as reading a memo and progressing to reading a complex zoning ordinance. The graphical questions progress from interpreting a dry cleaning slip to reading an engineering diagram. The math questions focus an increasingly complex series of questions about addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Questions progress from computing sales tax to determining which of two phone companies offers the better rate plan.

Free remediation courses are available through the Internet.

For employers, it takes the guesswork out of hiring, thereby saving time and money. Several companies are choosing to administer the test to job applicants. They can either use the generic profiles of occupations matched to scores, or elect to profile specific company jobs. WorkSource partners with the University of North Florida to help develop profiles that are tailored to a job's actual tasks.

Shands Jacksonville Medical Center administers pre-employment assessments on campus in partnership with WorkSource, which provides the proctors.

“It helps us identify which job candidates have the minimum workforce literacy requirements to do our jobs,” said Pamela McCaleb, director, Success Academy.

“We have now profiled more than 10 jobs and we have established the minimum skill level requirement for people to be successful in them,” McCaleb said. “We’ve seen a real difference in the success of people coming into our organization. They are easier to train, and we have reduced turnover in our entry level positions.”

Applicants find out right after they take the assessment whether or not they passed, McCaleb said. For those who do not pass, WorkSource employees can arrange online remediation or help connect them with other jobs that better fit their skills.

Go to www.floridareadytowork.org or to www.worksourcefl.com to learn more or call WorkSource at (904) 356-JOBS (5627).

For information on profiling jobs at your business, contact Robert Wood, Dean of Continuing Education, at (904) 620-4200 or Robert.wood@unf.edu.

More Scholarships Available to Workforce

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 is expected to double the number of people who can receive scholarships for education and training through WorkSource, an agency that connects people with jobs and training.

Scholarships can help people complete a degree, earn an advanced degree or pursue post-secondary training.

“Just about anyone who has been affected by this recession can qualify,” says Candace Moody, vice president for Communications for WorkSource.

The Recovery Act includes more than \$165 million for training and reemployment in Florida. WorkSource is receiving about \$9.7 million for Northeast Florida. In 2008, 60,000 people registered for services through WorkSource.

In 2009, WorkSource is expecting to help nearly 100,000 people get back in the work force. About \$2.3 million will be used to provide 1,500 youth between the ages of 14 and 24 with a 6- to 8-week summer work experience. An additional 50 out-of-work teachers will be employed as site supervisors for the worksites. A portion of the funding is being used to pay for training in targeted occupations so individuals can explore career options, assess academic readiness and even enroll in accredited programs. Those who qualify include:

1. People who have been laid off or have received notice of an imminent layoff
2. People, including farmers and fisherman, who are self-employed but not working due to economic conditions or a natural disaster.
3. Displaced homemakers or family caretakers who must work now because of changes in family income
4. People who qualify for workforce training scholarships based on income eligibility

Go to www.learnreturnearn.org to learn more. Or call WorkSource at (904) 356-JOBS (5627).