



Adult learners embark on path to economic self-sufficiency through IT education

Under the auspices of the State University of New York University Center for Academic and Workforce Development, the Advanced Technology Training and Information Networking (ATTAIN) project builds bridges between education and industry by offering education and training opportunities to New York's most needy students. The project uses technology education as a tool for academic and work force advancement, offering courses aligned with Microsoft® IT curricula in 32 labs statewide. The collaborative program served 10,000+ students in its first year and expects to achieve 1,200 industry certifications by the end of 2009.



Customer: State University of New York (SUNY) ATTAIN project

Web site: www.attain.suny.edu

Number of students: 10,800

Number of faculty and staff: 420

Location: New York, United States

Industry: Education

Customer profile

SUNY is the largest state university system in the United States. Its ATTAIN project promotes digital inclusion by providing education, work force training, and Internet access to underserved residents of New York.

Software and services

Microsoft IT Academy Program

Education needs

SUNY's ATTAIN project promotes social and economic advancement for people who have been academically underprepared and economically deprived. Driven by a passionate group of IT experts and educators, the ATTAIN initiative was conceived in 2001 at SUNY's University Center for Academic and Workforce Development. The goal: provide needy adults throughout New York State with a running start on digital literacy and real-world job skills.

The ATTAIN project uses technology to create relevant educational and employment opportunities for these adult learners, who typically lack degrees and have low incomes. "Our goal is to help people embrace technology as a skill, not only personally but also professionally," says Ronald Bryant, statewide ATTAIN coordinator. "We want to help them on their journey toward self-sufficiency."

Bryant says the education community has not moved as quickly as it could to keep pace with heavy workplace demand for people with IT skills. The ATTAIN project strives to close that gap by empowering disadvantaged students with as many technology resources and skills as possible.

To date, the project has established 32 state-of-the-art technology labs where New York's citizens can gain technology skills and expand their job opportunities. Spanning from Staten Island to Niagara Falls, the ATTAIN labs operate within the structure of Economic Opportunity Centers (EOCs), public housing complexes, and community-based organizations. The EOCs, which serve as the project's backbone, represent the state's commitment to provide educational and vocational training opportunities to disadvantaged adults, urban communities, and employers.

Solution

To promote lifelong learning, digital inclusion, and career development for the ATTAIN project's target population of disadvantaged learners, SUNY launched the ATTAIN/Microsoft Unlimited Potential program in January 2007. The collab-

orative project includes membership in the Microsoft IT Academy Program, which provides support for needed IT education resources. Through its membership in the Microsoft IT Academy Program, SUNY gains access to training, software licenses, discounts on courseware and certification exams, early information about new technologies, and hands-on experience leading to industry certification.

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— Ronald Bryant
Statewide ATTAIN Coordinator, SUNY

Facilitators at the ATTAIN sites help learners at all levels get the skills they need for today’s global economy. The resources of Microsoft IT Academy and Microsoft Unlimited Potential are combined for a course offering that applies to both basic and advanced students.

The resources of the combined programs include:

- Microsoft Digital Literacy curriculum
- Microsoft Office and Microsoft Unlimited Potential Community Learning curriculum
- Microsoft certification courses

“The Microsoft IT Academy Program offers us all the resources we need not only to get students trained but also to get them ready to receive industry-level certification,” says Kofi Amponsah, statewide ATTAIN coordinator. “Microsoft certification adds value to what a person brings to the table and offers an employer.”

In its first year, the ATTAIN/Microsoft Unlimited Potential program enrolled more than 10,800 students in courses offered through the program. Also in the first year, 24 students passed Microsoft certification exams. With the Microsoft official courseware now fully implemented, ATTAIN coordinators predict that 1,200 students will earn certifications by the end of 2009.

Benefits

Exposing students to the world of technology and promoting digital inclusion are among ATTAIN’s biggest successes. “The Microsoft IT Academy Program allows us to promote one primary goal of ATTAIN: move toward digital parity in economically distressed communities,” says Amponsah. “It also helps us include people in the discourse, to where they can acquire the skills and speak the language of our technological society. This is the beginning of bigger and better things to come from this collaboration.”

Making learning flexible and convenient

The Microsoft IT Academy e-learning portfolio has been one of the most successful program components ATTAIN has implemented to date. Because the program targets many people who have to balance their education with the demands of jobs, children or both, the labs are designed around an interactive, self-paced philosophy. “The e-learning element of Microsoft IT Academy has been great because it helps us create a flexible learning environment for students,” Bryant says. “If students can’t attend a scheduled class, they can access it from home or come in on a Saturday.” Students can also support their learning by taking advantage of a rich set of online resources on their own.

Advancing education through certification

ATTAIN coordinators value the discounts that Microsoft IT Academy offers for certification tests. In the past, when ATTAIN ran MOS programs from EOCs, studies found that while most students passed the classes, most couldn’t afford the test. Using grant funds and Microsoft IT Academy discounts, ATTAIN now covers the cost of tests and eliminates that obstacle. Industry certification is also a resource for staff professional development. All staff are encouraged to pursue MOS certification.

Transforming the business of education

As SUNY and Microsoft work together to help empower the most vulnerable residents of New York, those who run the ATTAIN project say the collaboration has had a powerful effect on their thinking and their way of doing business. “This initiative with Microsoft IT Academy and Unlimited Potential has been the catalyst of an institutional and instructional transformation,” Bryant says. “It has not only benefited the University Center for Academic and Workforce Development and our operations across the state but also enabled the University Center for Academic and Workforce Development to enhance the skills and training we provide to the students we serve.”