

**COLLABORATE in the classroom.  
COMPETE in the marketplace.**

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**A CASE STUDY:**

**National Coalition of Certification Centers**

September 2015



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**Written by Nneka M. Jenkins**

Skills for America's Future would like to thank and recognize the following partners for their contributions: The National Coalition of Certification Centers, Washburn Institute of Technology, Tennessee College of Applied Technology – Dickson, L. S. Starrett Company, and Burness Communications.

**America's ability to compete in a global economy depends on a workforce that possesses the skills in demand by employers. Skills for America's Future, an Economic Opportunities program of the Aspen Institute, is working to strengthen and increase partnerships between employers and community colleges to provide workers with the training they need for today's labor market.**

*When employers and community colleges work together, something magical happens. Student completion rates, a long-standing challenge for community colleges, rise. Employment and wage outcomes for these students are dramatically positive. And employers find educational institutions that are able to innovate on curriculum and instructional strategies to deliver workers with the skills their companies need to compete.*

—John Colborn, Director Skills for America's Future

## **CASE STUDY:**

# **National Coalition of Certification Centers (NC3)**

### **Kenosha, Wisconsin**

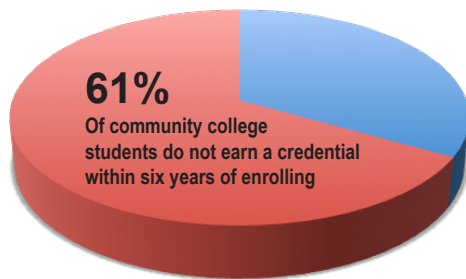
The National Coalition of Certification Centers—NC3—bridges the gap between education and industry workforce needs. NC3, a non-profit network of education providers and corporations, develops and implements portable, stackable, industry-recognized certifications built on national standards for existing technicians, new students and displaced workers in the transportation, aviation, manufacturing and energy industry sectors.

What started in 2007 in Kenosha, Wisconsin as local collaboration between Snap-on, Inc. and Gateway Technical College has burgeoned to nearly 100 educational leadership centers and 350 industry-sponsored certification centers nationwide that have served hundreds of thousands students nationwide. Organized as a not-for-profit corporation in 2009 with a national office at Gateway Technical College, NC3 is funded through community college membership and industry contributions.

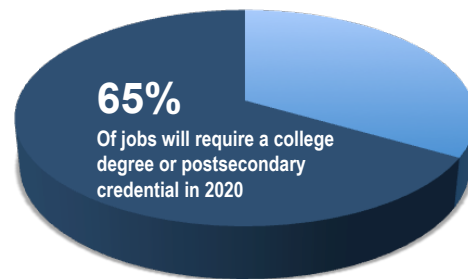
### **The Challenge**

Employers consistently report that job candidates lack the necessary skills to fill available positions. Meanwhile, many community college students seek a certification or a credential for professional purposes. Indeed, certificates are the fastest growing post-secondary credential. Community colleges are well-suited to train and credential workers yet are often challenged to provide advanced training with outdated facilities, outdated instruction, and underperforming or limited industry partnerships. Too often what results is frustrating for all parties: training programs that lack industry relevance; the inability for companies to grow and compete globally; and job seekers locked out of meaningful careers.

### Completion rates for first-time college students at community colleges



### By 2020, 65% of jobs will require a college degree or postsecondary credential



Sluggish attainment statistics were the impetus for the Lumina Foundation to initiate in 2009 Goal 2025, a national effort to increase the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates and other credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025.<sup>1</sup>

## A Solution

NC3, The National Coalition of Certification Centers, has created a new model for technical training in the United States, providing more skilled and job-ready workers when businesses need them most, today.

NC3 has consistently doubled the number of certifications awarded to students since 2009 and 15,500 certifications were provided to 12,000 workers in 2014 alone. How exactly does one organization buck the long held trends of low-levels for credentialing?

NC3 mobilizes public-private partnerships between industry and educational institutions to provide comprehensive curriculum development and access to skill-standard certifications.

**“NC3 staff leverages its national network of business partners, such as Snap-on, Trane, Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, and L.S. Starrett, to build local industry support.**

- The credentials, developed at the national level, validate skill sets required to meet performance standards.
- Training is then designed and implemented locally with industry experts and educators collaborating in tandem.
- NC3 supports the work done on both platforms.

NC3 equips its partner community colleges, technical schools, and highschools with a strategic plan, professional development support, turn-key implementation and sustainable funding models while always engaging industry at the very first steps in the process. NC3 staff leverages its national network of business partners, such as Snap-on, Trane, Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, and L.S. Starrett, to build local industry support. Upon interest from a community college or technical

school, national representatives from industry identify and activate local representatives to begin to engage with a college. The result is a set of productive relationships that can rapidly develop a workforce with high quality, relevant, and industry-recognized technical skills.

<sup>1</sup> The Lumina Foundation cited a 40.1% higher education attainment rate of young adults (ages 25-34) in 2011 and a 38.7% attainment rate for working-age adults (ages 25-64), which is up slightly from 37.9% in 2008.

## SUCCESS AT WASHBURN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

With forecasts indicating continued growth in the climate control industry, Washburn Tech was challenged to provide the advanced training needed to prepare its students for the growing and changing demands of the industry. Washburn Tech formed a strong partnership with NC3 and Trane to bridge the gap between education and industry workforce needs. The team mapped a new direction for the HVAC program, upgraded Washburn Tech's HVAC training labs, and worked hand-in-hand to update the curriculum to meet the needs of its students and the industry. This included adding instruction in building automation controls and Trane replaced the aging equipment with state of the art commercial HVAC systems, which were not previously part of the college's offering. The team achieved their goal of enhancing career and technical training in the region by creating the Midwest Training Center, complete with advanced classrooms and working labs with the latest equipment and a rigorous curriculum that ensures that graduates are equipped with the skills, training and certification required by the industry.

*"We're working in partnership with Trane and NC3 to prepare a well-trained, job-ready 20th century workforce."* -Clark Coco, Dean, Washburn Tech

### The Details: How NC3 Works

#### *Transforming a training site with a vision*

The transformation begins with a site visit assessment at the community college or technical school. Together with program administrators, members of the NC3 team, including industry representatives, walk the classroom and lab floors evaluating the current state of training, identifying the program's goals, and assessing local labor market demands.

The NC3 team provides industry insights to develop a strategic plan and help administrators understand what changes are needed to design an ideal educational workspace that delivers job-ready workers. This may include purging outdated equipment and materials that will not serve a purpose in the redesign. Educational teams are also invited to participate in facilitated benchmarking and to tour of one of NC3's model training centers.

#### *Providing lab solutions and facilities planning*

For each NC3 certification, there is guidance from community businesses about outfitting the classrooms for experiential learning. Together, education, industry, and NC3 determine what design will produce a good career for students who will work locally. The goal is modern and effective training centers that will attract the highest caliber of student and will be an overall effective and professional classroom.

Schools then purchase the equipment and materials, installing only what makes sense. The results are self-contained and mobile workstations containing all lab tools needed for effective hands-on learning; premier learning spaces that promote consistency and professionalism in the classroom.

#### *Focusing on national certification instead of curriculum overhaul*

NC3 credentials are an overarching system developed for specific tool use and centered on industry skills. The school's existing course curriculum is the basis of the training while the NC3 certification is a stackable component that complements the course. The NC3 certification pads the school's program

## INDUSTRY DRIVEN CERTIFICATIONS

### TRANSPORTATION:

Automotive Scanner Diagnostics  
Heavy Duty Diesel Scanner Diagnostics  
Multimeter  
Torque  
Precision Measurement  
Tools at Height  
Vehicle Service Information  
Heavy Duty Vehicle Service Information  
Wheel Service and Alignment Safety  
Collision\*  
Hybrid\*

### ENERGY:

Building Automation Controls I and II\*  
Building Performance Instruments  
Commercial HVAC Systems\*  
Residential HVAC Systems\*  
Precision Measurement  
Tools at Height  
Multimeter  
Torque  
Safety

### AVIATION:

Multimeter  
Torque  
Safety  
Precision Measurement  
Tools at Height

*\*under development*

with theory and hands-on practice with specific company-sponsored equipment and tools. Students graduate with transferable knowledge and competency valued by the sponsoring company and any employer.

This curriculum design approach avoids any need for rewriting and lends to a school's quick and low-cost implementation. Students have fast, easy access to their certificates anytime online upon successful completion of their exams.

Employers view the NC3 certifications as an extra step in occupational readiness. Applicants with NC3 certifications listed on their resume are viewed as highly skilled and committed job candidates. It is a training system with built-in results for everyone involved.

### ***Prioritizing instructor readiness***

NC3's "Train-the-Trainer" effort provides standardized, world-class training and guidance to new and experienced instructors. Instructors spend a week engaged in hands-on learning with other top instructors from around the country. NC3 also fosters idea sharing across the network of schools. Faculty members have the opportunity to build a lasting professional support network and to experience cutting-edge training facilities and organizations.

This investment makes the NC3 approach popular with instructors and creates champions among faculty in developing and advancing instruction on campus.

### ***Boosting awareness in the value of technical professions***

Beyond its work in the classroom, NC3 works to position technical occupations as a premier career choice. First, the modern classrooms in of

themselves are a marketing tool that stimulates support from businesses. A more student-centered promotional effort is National Signing Day. Signing Day is coordinated each year at member schools to celebrate the incoming class of new "industrial athletes" to elevate career and technical education students to the ranks of star scholars and athletes in a community. Participants sign a letter of intent while their families, guidance counselors, college faculty and staff, and employers celebrate their commitment to a technical career with respected positions that develop into well-paying jobs.





## JUMPSTARTING AN EFFECTIVE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

While tool and instrument manufacturer, L.S. Starrett, engaged their marketing and sales and engineering teams to ensure that the content for their certification program would be comprehensive, they realized their efforts would only be successful if they included education partners. They engaged key NC3 Leadership schools to shape the lessons into classroom instruction and hands-on practicum. Involving insights and experience from Starrett's industry clients lent an additional layer of expertise and validity to the certification program.

Moving Starrett's six-certification program from concept to final product took only four months. NC3 leadership clarified the roles of the six education, industry, and education partners involved and upheld the objectives throughout the process which kept the project team moving forward.

The result is a substantive and effective curriculum for credentialing individuals who are equipped to work in an array of industries including manufacturing, electronics, aerospace, and energy. Moreover, the credentials are stackable.

*"We know tools and instruments and how to market them. Schools know how best to deliver effective training for working with our products. Together we are a great team."*

-Ira Friedman, Western Region Tool & Metrology Sales Manager, L. S. Starrett Company

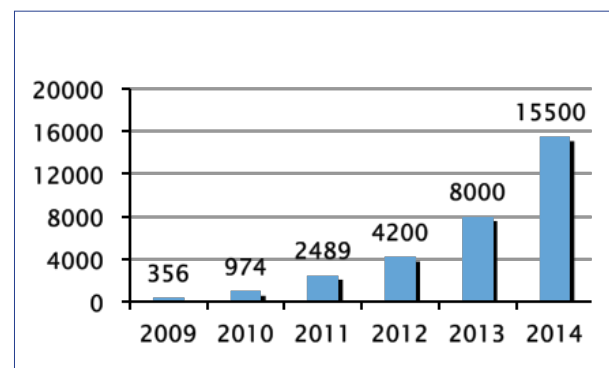
### Extending workforce development networks

The NC3 strategy provides the platform for member community colleges and technical schools to extend their work with other educators, industry partners, and organizations to a national level. The strategy to grow the network and spread this concept to other colleges includes regionally located NC3 leadership schools. Leadership schools work with new schools to serve as models and mentors, conduct Train-the-Trainer activities, and assist with national certification development.

### Results

NC3 has attained rapid year-over-year growth since its inception.

- The number of certifications awarded to students has doubled every year since 2009
- 350 Certification Centers equipped with certification programs
- A consortium of 43 leadership schools and world-class industry sponsors with 40 leadership schools providing instructional material development, Train-the-Trainer activities, and mentoring to NC3 Certification Centers
- 10 global industry partners and professional organizations working closely with educational administrators and instructors to ensure each center is equipped with leading-edge technology and relevant and effective learning environments



The number of NC3 certifications awarded to students has doubled every year since 2009.

## REPURPOSING SKILLS FOR A NEW CAREER

The Automotive Technology program of Tennessee College of Applied Technology – Dickson (TCAT) has begun implementing NC3 into their course offerings and the benefits are already being recognized by the students. For student, Colin Little, training is where he is able to demonstrate his professional abilities. As a retired military veteran, Little has sought to repurpose his skills into a productive career in the automotive industry.



NC3 and Snap-on's stackable certificates have made him recognize the value of becoming a life-long learner, continually adding to his knowledge base and enhancing his marketability. Now Little is fully prepared to take on new roles and responsibilities in the transportation industry.

*"The greatest asset of the NC3 certification program is the hands-on aspect that closely resembles real world experiences."* -Colin Little, TCAT student

*To learn more about bringing NC3 to your campus or working with NC3 as an industry partner, visit: <http://www.nc3.net/>*