

Bates Technical College Blazes the Trail with

Fire Protection Engineering Technology

AT Degree Program

More Than Sitting In A Classroom Reading About Fire Sprinkler Systems

By Chelsea R. Lindquist

The Fire Protection Engineering Technology (FPET) program at Bates Technical College in Tacoma, Washington is the only college in the state producing a steady supply of qualified employees for local fire protection companies. A relatively young program, in the context of the college's 65+ year history, FPET started from ground zero in 2001, and has grown to near over-capacity in the classroom. Integrating high-quality instruction with strong industry ties, Bates provides industry-relevant technical education and a steady stream of well-trained graduates for the fire protection industry. With 20 years of direct industry experience and another 12 of related industry expertise, Ron Greenman, FPET instructor at Bates, knows the business inside and out.

Except for firefighting, Greenman has worked in all aspects of the fire protection industry. He has worked in both California and Washington, and admits that a career as an instructor was not in his game plan. However, he has found that his work with students, coupled with the professional relationships he has built in the industry, make his current position the best of both worlds.

Greenman has aligned curriculum closely with real-world knowledge and experience to give his students the skills they need to get well-paying jobs. Frequent field trips to Bates' Fire Academy training facility in North Bend, Washington, for example, provide students with direct knowledge and awareness of what really happens in actual, large-scale fires.

"When students get close enough to feel the rush of heat hitting their faces, it tends to bring a different perspective to how to deal with real-life situations - more so than sitting in a classroom reading about fire sprinkler systems," Greenman says. "That's a great thing about Bates. We provide students

actual hands-on experience in environments that mirror the workplace. That kind of education sets our graduates apart when it comes time to enter the field."

Greenman is proud of his classrooms. Newly constructed about two years after the program began, they are supplemented with a separate drafting room, a media/study room, and a

"A hands-on lab containing prop lines of equipment for training in automatic sprinkler system layout, special hazards suppression systems, and inspection and testing of water-based systems."

hands-on lab containing prop lines of equipment for training in each of the program's four career paths: fire alarm systems, automatic sprinkler system layout, special hazards suppression systems, and inspection and testing of water-based systems. Unique industry software helps students build a wide range of skills, from fundamental draft-

ing to the design, cost estimating, and application of systems for special projects.

Graduates of this two-year program earn an Associate of Technology degree and prepare for Level II testing and certification in one of the fire protection fields defined by the National Institute for Certification in Engineering Technologies (NICET). Under NICET policies, students can claim up to 18 months of academic training towards on-the-job time required for certification. This means that students who have passed the proper NICET testing elements may already hold NICET Level I certification upon graduation from the program.

First year students receive an introduction to fire science, all NICET fields, general construction methods, building and fire



codes, and fire protection engineering-related standards from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), drafting symbols and techniques, basic fire protection design and inspection methods, related mathematics, and the business of fire protection. As students enter their second year, they are required to declare a specific field of study and will finish their last year

with hands-on, practical work.

"To replicate actual working conditions, students work very independently during their second year, with me acting as a design manager rather than a teacher," says Greenman.

Greenman encourages all of his students to seek internships with local companies and participate in professional organizations to supplement their college studies. He also nurtures close ties with industry professionals and works with members of his advisory committee to offer students opportunities for work-based learning. The program's advisory committee is comprised of a cadre of industry professionals that help keep curriculum current with industry developments. A vital component of all Bates' career education programs, the advisory committee members provide students with the chance to work on actual projects. For example, a contractor on Greenman's advisory committee recently organized a project in which all 15 students worked together to design sprinkler plans for a brand new group home for at-risk youth. "These projects ensure graduates are prepared for employment at or before graduation, which helps alleviate the shortage of qualified workers in the fire protection industry," says Greenman, who says he can name at least 10 students who have been hired prior to program completion within the last six months.

Bates is proud of its long history of providing technical education in a learning environment that mirrors the real world and establishes a firm foundation for future career success. The unique open-entry, competency-based curriculum allows students to enter and exit the course at any time, and students are evaluated on their ability to perform competencies. This method, coupled with the program's self-directed study format, allows students to advance at their own speed and spend more time on subjects in which more assistance is needed. The diverse student body, comprised of recent high school graduates, those exploring mid-career changes, and seniors pursuing continuing education opportunities, is enriched through the interchange of ideas, cultures, and customs among all members of the college community. Students frequently work in groups to facilitate learning, allowing them to develop important teamwork skills, an invaluable skill to have in the workplace.

As a 21st century technical college, Bates offers an education that gives graduates a competitive workplace edge in a wide range of career disciplines. The college is proud to offer comprehensive education for careers in a variety of industries including Associate of Technology degrees, a Certificate of Competency, and certifications.

Bates Technical College is a public, accredited state college, and the largest public technical college in Washington State. The college serves more than 22,000 students annually in career training programs, continuing education, apprenticeship training, business and management programs, home and family life classes, high school completion, Running Start, and adult basic skills training.

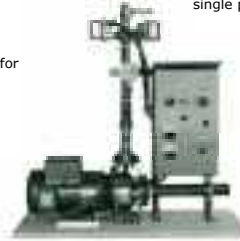
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