

From Risk-Takers to the Model of Success:

By Donna Franko, Jay Klingel, and Betty Wooding



July 1982 photograph of the members of the first class in the University of Virginia's four-year Apprenticeship Program. Clarence Wells (on the cover) is in the front row, second from the left. *Photo by Michael Marshall, Inside UVA*

Virginia Commissioner of Labor & Industry Ray Davenport presents UVA Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer Leonard Sandridge Jr. a certificate recognizing the Apprentice Program's 25 years of excellence.



Chief Facilities Officer Don Sundgren speaks at the July 2007 25th anniversary recognition ceremony in the Rotunda Dome Room.

The 2008 Apprentice inductees formally join the program.
Photos taken by Dan Addison/UVA Public Affairs.



25 Years

University of Virginia's Apprenticeship Program Celebrates *25 Years*

*T*he Dome Room of Thomas Jefferson's Rotunda was the location where a special group of trades people were honored as risk takers, pioneers, and success stories by the employees of University of Virginia's (UVA) Facilities Management. This group was acknowledged for being part of the 1982 incoming class of the first formal Apprenticeship Program established in a state agency in Virginia.

At the 25th anniversary recognition ceremony in July 2007, Colette Sheehy, UVA's vice president for management and budget, said, "These first apprentices were risking a lot—most were relocating from in-house jobs that were familiar and comfortable. They had the courage to make a change and to step into uncharted territory."

These charter members included a diverse assembly—a trades assistant, truck driver, several housekeepers, and a baker. Of the 22 apprentices competitively accepted into the electrical, plumbing, and HVAC trades program, 19 graduated. Today, 14 of these graduates are still working for the university. Apprentice graduates are the best ambassadors for the program.

Gordon Jones was a member of the original 1982 incoming class. He is now an HVAC Master Mechanic for zone maintenance in a high-level research area. He told the Apprentice Reunion and Recruitment audience: "This program changed my life. I went from a series of jobs that offered only a limited future to a career with stability and good opportunities for advancement."

The program's origins date to the early 1980s when Bill Middleton—newly appointed director of University of Virginia's Buildings and Grounds—implemented different approaches to training and development. He coupled his thoughts on training with the objectives of developing a workforce filled with credentialed journey-level mechanics. A past president of APPA, Middleton was also a great influence in the development of APPA's educational programs.

A diverse committee of representatives from UVA's departments of Education and Human Resources worked with management and trades people from Buildings and Grounds to present a proposal to the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI), which stated a public institution could develop a strong and viable accredited apprenticeship program. This accreditation of skills and knowledge in the trades would provide employees with a career path to journeyman status and demonstrate a new level of professionalism in the facilities organization at the university.

THE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM PROVIDES APPRENTICES A CURRICULUM OF FORMAL CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION, FOUR YEARS OF ON-THE-JOB TRAINING, AND MONTHLY EVALUATIONS BY JOURNEY-LEVEL MECHANICS AND SUPERVISORS ASSIGNED TO MENTOR THE APPRENTICES.



THE MODEL

The Apprenticeship Program provides apprentices a curriculum of formal classroom instruction, four years of on-the-job training, and monthly evaluations by journey-level mechanics and supervisors assigned to mentor the apprentices. The classroom component is offered at local community colleges and/or vocational technical centers. Educational expense is provided by the university, while classroom attendance and study is on the apprentice's time. The curriculum is reviewed periodically to assure content is consistent with current trade standards and code compliance. The four-year, on-the-job component is formalized by a description of specific trades activities, provided during apprenticeship training.

Shop supervisors and apprentice mentors collaborate to provide monthly evaluation of apprentices' progress. The evaluation includes a 360-degree component for apprentice feedback. The Apprenticeship Program manager reviews the monthly evaluations to ensure individual progress and program consistency.

Cindy Campbell—a third-year HVAC apprentice—came to UVA after a nine-year career in the Marine Corps. “My experience has been rewarding, and an on-going learning process, which constantly challenges me to seek self improvement,” Campbell said. “I have had the opportunity to learn the skills of my chosen trade from the best, most experienced trades people. All of my mentors have had something to offer me. The program will provide security for my future and confidence in my achievement.”

Once the apprentice has successfully completed the four-year program, the final step is completion of the Virginia DOLI licensing examination for applicable trades. To date, about 100 apprentices have completed the program, growing from minimally skilled helpers to fully-trained and licensed journey-level mechanics. The program is based on an annual recruitment of a class of apprentices.

The number of apprentice positions and trades categories are determined by management who consider long-range strategy and goals, and the number of buildings on line and under construction. New apprentice positions are posted through the university's Recruiting and Staff Office from April 15 to May 15 each year. We also send recruitment information and advertisements to minority media and community centers.

Interviews are conducted in June and apprentices are selected and notified by early July. The new apprentices are officially inducted in a ceremony in late July, when they sign an official contract with the university. They begin work in August and start classes in September.

WHY HAVE AN APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM?

UVA began the Apprenticeship Program to ensure a highly-skilled workforce, trained according to established and consistent criteria, and also to create a career path for lower pay band workers. We consider our apprentices “homegrown mechanics,” as many successful applicants were

Facilities Management employees who started in entry-level positions. They were chosen not because they had experience in the field, but because they showed potential, enthusiasm, and promise.

There are great advantages with this plan. Entry-level workers move into a career path and are trained by experienced mentors in the field. This demonstrates Facilities Management's commitment to hiring and promoting from within. In addition, as retention rates show, apprentice graduates are able to transfer knowledge that would otherwise be lost if we relied on the traditional staffing approach of filling all vacant positions with licensed trades workers.

Graduate apprentices are willing to be mentors to incoming apprentices, which adds value to the quality of the workforce. This helps ensure valuable information is not lost when trades people leave or retire from UVA. During their four-year training, apprentices gain a historical record, which helps ease some aging workforce issues. Also, there is a certain prestige enjoyed when quoting a job for a university customer and being able to say the work will be done by licensed journeymen.

Bill Farish, who provided perspective and input for the program's framework, was also in the first class. He is now the maintenance supervisor for the university's service call system. Farish has been a mentor to new apprentices for many years and also serves on the Apprenticeship Program Evaluation Committee. "Facilities Management's success is based on the knowledge and experience of its trade staff," Farish explained. "The Apprenticeship Program is a great source for achieving distinction for the institution and apprentices."

Another positive feature of the program is building a diverse workforce. UVA is committed to recruiting minorities and females, and the Apprenticeship Program is no exception. While the charter class had a number of minorities, the first woman was selected the second year and several have followed. The program continues to seek out venues and opportunities for women in non-traditional roles.

According to the DOLI, Virginia has more than 2,300 registered sponsors in over 300 different occupational areas, with more than 14,000 registered apprentices. Other colleges and universities participating in registered apprenticeship in Virginia are: Virginia Military Institute, Southern Virginia University, James Madison University, Virginia Tech, Christopher Newport University, Eastern Mennonite University, University of Richmond, Liberty University, George Mason University, Norfolk State University, UVA at Wise, and Southside Virginia Community College. UVA's program was the model for VMI and the Augusta County (VA) school system.

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

The program has not always been well received. Some workers may believe apprentices receive preferential treatment because of the special attention or their full-time employment status (with benefits) during their training. However, the overwhelming benefits outweigh this thought as the program



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THE NUMBER OF APPRENTICE POSITIONS AND TRADES CATEGORIES ARE DETERMINED BY MANAGEMENT WHO CONSIDER LONG-RANGE STRATEGY AND GOALS, AND THE NUMBER OF BUILDINGS ON LINE AND UNDER CONSTRUCTION.

adds diversity to our workforce, provides job opportunities, opens new career tracks for entry-level employees, and significantly impacts our community in a positive way. Also, some coworkers and supervisors sometimes consider the time and effort involved in mentoring and training apprentices too time-consuming or costly. We encourage these employees to recognize the long-term benefits of quality, customized training, and institutional loyalty.

The administrative requirements involved in a successful apprenticeship program can present unique challenges to organizations who already struggle with workload and staffing issues. Establishing detailed record keeping and administrative procedures early in the process and providing the ability to track program statistics and receive quantitative measures are essential tools to use to demonstrate a program's success. Statistics can also help identify patterns or trends that require an adjustment to training schedules and curriculum, compensation issues, and supervisory or mentoring problems.

PATH FOR CONTINUED SUCCESS

Finding the right apprentices isn't easy. A great deal of attention is focused on the annual recruiting phase, when the Human Resources (HR) staff attends a number of community job fairs each year. The school's Admissions staff sends care packages to schools, guidance counselors, career and technical education counselors, community groups, and churches. The HR staff conducts open informational meetings for lower pay band workers, explaining how the program works, and providing application assistance. Staff members also visit high schools and trade schools to talk to groups of students who may be seeking careers outside the college track. One successful

approach was to involve a current apprentice in these events—students and job seekers are often able to relate directly to a peer in the program far more easily than to a recruiter.

Following a structured time frame—as outlined by program standards—ensures the program runs smoothly. UVA begins its new apprentices recruiting period in April for August enrollment. This way, the program runs concurrently with the academic year. Once applications are received, representatives from the designated trade area, Human Resources, Equal Opportunity Programs, and graduated apprentices comprise the interview committee to select each year's apprentices.

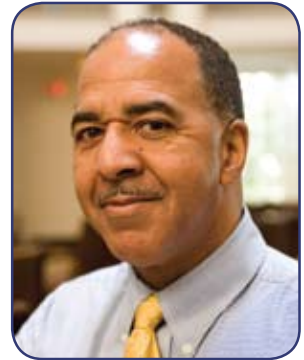
CASTING A MOLD FOR OTHER PROGRAMS

The UVA Apprenticeship Program has become strong and successful. The Apprentice Council at the Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Labor recognized it as a model program for other institutions. Todd Cook, regional apprenticeship program representative, regularly participates in Apprenticeship Program events and refers other institutions developing similar programs to UVA for advice.

“UVA's registered apprenticeship programs—as well as all others in Virginia—conform to the Standards of Apprenticeship and the regulations



Steven Bunch



Clarence E. Wells Jr.

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Gordon Jones

governing the administration of Registered Apprenticeship programs in the Commonwealth of Virginia,” Cook noted.



Bill Farish

The success of UVA's program can be attributed to Facilities Management's support for all phases of the program. The annual apprentice reunion and recruitment luncheon in April and the annual Apprentice Graduation and Induction Ceremony in July are first-class events, which demonstrate the importance of and commitment to apprenticeship, Cook added.

“This also tells the all apprentices and employees that they are a

most valuable resource and that UVA will continue to invest in their training and knowledge,” he said.

At the July 2007 apprentice graduation and induction ceremony, Virginia Commissioner of Labor and Industry C. Ray Davenport—a former apprentice crane operator and keynote speaker for the event—presented Leonard W. Sandridge, UVA executive vice president and chief operating officer, a certificate recognizing the UVA Apprentice Program's 25 years of excellence. Mr. Sandridge, a long-time supporter of the program and frequent speaker at the event, notes that based on the ratio of applicants to available openings, competition to get into UVA's Apprenticeship Program is even more rigorous than getting admitted to the university.

There is a lot of pride in the Apprentice Program. Of the nearly 100 graduates, approximately 75 percent still work at UVA and about a third have advanced into higher level positions. UVA administrators can safely say the Apprenticeship Program was a risk worth taking. The pioneers and their vision, determination, and courage have changed the face—and the future—of the facilities organization at the University of Virginia. ☛

Donna Franko is director of human resources at East Tennessee State University Physicians and Associates in Johnson City. She managed the UVA Apprentice Program from 2001-2007 and served on the DOLI Virginia Apprentice Alumni Association Board of Directors. This is her first article for *Facilities Manager*. E-mail her at dfranko@etsu.edu.

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To view the UVA Apprenticeship Program Standards, visit <http://www.fm.virginia.edu/fmhome/departments/human/ApprenticeshipProgram.htm>.

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