



The Institute for Facilities Management: APPA's Influential Training

By Vanessa Anne Rodriguez

When you think of how you utilize your APPA membership, what comes to mind? Maybe it is networking with your colleagues throughout APPA, or all of the resources available on the website such as the library, Job Express, and Résumé Bank. Perhaps it is the annual conference or articles from this magazine. However, do you ever think of the Institute for Facilities Management? I know I do because graduating from it was the culmination of the most influential training I had received in facilities management.

The Institute for Facilities Management is made up of four, week-long courses in four core areas of study. These areas include General Administration, Maintenance and Operations, Energy and Utilities, and Planning, Design, and Construction. Each completed course gives you 3.0 continuing education credits. If you speak to your colleagues about the Institute, you likely will hear things such as, "I already know everything I need to know in that area," or "I've been doing this for 30 years, what could they possibly teach me?" or perhaps "It's too expensive and I can't miss a week of work."

INVEST IN YOURSELF AND YOUR FUTURE

As a professional, you know that investing in yourself and your staff pays dividends back to you, your staff, and your institution. An investment in one's professional development not only increases your knowledge and skills, but also increases self-esteem, productivity, and the quality of your work. Additionally, these courses cover all aspects of our field, teach man-



agement techniques, and look great on a résumé. Lastly, continuing your education demonstrates to peers and superiors that you have the wherewithal to increase your knowledge, skills, and abilities making you a more competent and credible professional – a professional worthy of promotion.

As someone who has been working in the housing field since my undergraduate college days over 20 years ago, I learned much by working closely with our housing custodial and maintenance staff. However, when I was preparing to move into a position that required direct supervision of these areas, I knew I needed more than just my work experience. I needed formal training, so I turned to APPA. APPA's Institute for Facilities Management was exactly what I needed. Through the Institute, I was able to gain a well-rounded education. The things I learned from these courses supplemented my experience, broadened

my knowledge, and connected me with others in the field. For instance, the first course I took was Maintenance and Operations. The two things I remember learning and utilizing the most were how to create preventive maintenance plans and the focus on team cleaning (which was increasing in popularity).

The following year I took the Advanced Planning, Design, and Construction course because I was knee-deep in renovation and construction projects. Since our housing department was completely separate from the physical plant, we managed the vast majority of these projects. This course was also particularly helpful later in my career when I had the privilege of building \$25 million residence halls from design through construction to opening. Without this course, I would not have been able to actively contribute as much as I did. By combining my education and experience,

I was able to work with all of the trades appreciating the fact that what we were building had to work for everyone, not just my future residents. Through that process, I was an extra set of eyes pouring over plans that caught errors that were due to the architect cutting and pasting, or missing something from a progress report. Thanks to APPA, I was comfortable not only being a part of the process, but *owning* my part in the process: I was invested.

Last year I put what I learned from the Energy and Utilities coursework to use on an investment grade audit we received. Two of my smaller residence halls had been using radiator heat and window air conditioning units. Residents continually complained about the noise from the radiators and the excessive heat. As you can imagine, it was not uncommon to see students running their window air conditioning units during the winter. Through the audit, we determined that installing geothermal technology would not only pay for itself but

THROUGH THE AUDIT, WE DETERMINED THAT INSTALLING GEOTHERMAL TECHNOLOGY WOULD NOT ONLY PAY FOR ITSELF BUT ALSO OFFER OUR RESIDENTS THE PERSONALIZED COMFORT THEY ARE REQUESTING.

also offer our residents the personalized comfort they are requesting. Our residents love the control that they have along with the silence. I love the energy savings, green technology, and payback.

BUDGET FOR TRAINING

I have no doubt that these courses and graduating from the Institute in 2007 has helped me advance professionally. I am a fan of the Institute and a proud graduate. I am confident about what I do in part because of what I have learned from APPA and their joint ventures with ACUHO-I (Association of College and University Housing Officers – International). When young professionals ask me what they should do to get ahead, I recommend finding an institution that will sponsor their

attendance to the Institute. Both at my last and current institution, I have sent my associate director for facilities to this training. It is a two- to four-year commitment depending upon what your budget allows. To make sure my staff can attend an APPA event at least annually, I budget specifically for the Institute because the investment in my staff's training truly does pay dividends.

The Institute for Facilities Management is one of the wonderful benefits of your APPA membership. I hope you consider it. ☺

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