

APPA's Credentialing Program—the Path to Distinction

By Kelly Ostergrant



The APPA Credentialing Program has been through many changes over the years, but the one thing that has remained consistent is what it represents—the highest standard of performance and understanding in educational facilities management.

IN THE BEGINNING—THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CIL

When the credentialing program started, it consisted of an exam with the option to purchase a prep course to prepare for it. Once the member made that choice, he or she traveled to a designated location where the testing would take place, and where they would study with other APPA members for 8 hours before taking the exam.

The program worked for the most part, but APPA realized that a larger proportion of its membership

did not have the time and resources needed to travel to a venue to prep and test. It was necessary for APPA to develop an online prep course that would allow people to control the time, place, and choice of prep course options.

From these ambitions, the online course was developed. It included both the exam and the prep course, and made it possible to take the exam at various locations, enabling members to lessen travel or avoid it altogether. Additionally, APPA's six regions agreed to offer financial support to make the program more affordable for members. To this end, the regions offered coupons to their members so they would only pay a portion (if any) of the total cost. APPA now had an affordable professional development course that didn't require travel.

The course was called the Customized Interactive Learning Platform (CIL), and by then, the need for someone to manage all these moving parts became quite obvious—which is where I came in. I was hired to help manage and fine-tune the CIL. I wasn't sure what I was getting into, but I knew I wanted to help people, and with the guidance of Christina Hills, APPA's director of credentialing and benchmarking, we became an awesome team. The new course had many online learning tools that the old program didn't have (i.e., study guides, webinars, flashcards, learning modules, and practice exams), so we started advertising these tools and how they could be used to help prepare for the exam.

THE LIVE WEBINARS

One of the main tools of the 90-day online course are the live webinars. We weren't sure how they were going to work at first, but we knew that they were the key to making the course successful.

The live webinars became the connection that

brought members together to interact as a group.

At that point, there were about 100 members who had not taken the exam. Some had taken the older course, while others had

taken the new one; so we combined everyone and created our first cohort group. Ruthann Manlet, APPA's Vice President for Professional Development, became our first CIL facilitator, leading the first cohort group.

One of the tools used by the cohort groups were quizzes. We took questions from the practice exam, which we separated into four practice quizzes according to each of the four core areas of the APPA Body of Knowledge (BOK)—general administration and management; operations and maintenance; energy, utilities, and environmental stewardship; and planning, design, and construction. The study guides were already divided into those same four areas, so it made sense to focus each live webinar in the same fashion, and break the study time down into three-week increments. The members even created their own study plan to cover the material prior to each call, using the online tools. This approach kept them focused and on track, reminding them that they had material to cover prior to each webinar, and added a bit of competition within the cohort groups.

A TWEAK TO THE COHORT GROUPS

The program was working, but it wasn't being reflected in the numbers. We had people in the cohort groups, but they weren't taking the exam and we couldn't understand why. Members invariably had issues that kept them from being available during the time I had scheduled them to test. That's when I realized what was wrong—they needed to schedule their own exams, based on their own schedules. So, I listed the available cohort groups on the website, and allowed members to decide which group worked best with their schedule. It was a huge improvement to the course and was reflected in the increase of members taking the exam, because they were now in control of their schedule and prepared for their exams.

CREDENTIALING ON CAMPUS—COMING SOON

The next step for APPA's Credentialing Program will be the ability to host customized cohort groups on your own campus! A select group from your insti-



tution will work closely with APPA to develop a customized schedule that works for members. APPA will support the group with registration, coordinating meeting space, ordering lunches, and monitoring the process. This is the type of fellowship and training that allows for growth, self-confidence, and camaraderie among participants.

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LOOKING BACK

The Educational Facilities Professional (EFP) Program began in 2007 and had 15 members earn the certificate that year, while the Certified EFP (CEFP) Program started in 2009, with 14 earning the first credential. In July 2017, we reached a milestone with 1,000 total CEFP and EFP recipients, and now we have 1,115 total recipients. This year we started see-

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ing the pass rate increase for both the CEFP and the EFP, and as of January 2018, the CEFP pass rate has reached 79.5 percent. The program's success would not have happened without the financial support of the six APPA regions. They have made it possible for anyone who wishes to attain the CEFP or EFP to be able to do so without the financial hurdle.

We continue to make changes, find opportunities for growth, and make tweaks as needed. But the one thing that will remain consistent is the value of the APPA CEFP and EFP certification. It will always be worth the time and effort put into this course, because earning the credential demonstrates your willingness to be the best you can be, and to distinguish yourself from others in the field.

I'm here to help you on your credentialing journey . . . what are you waiting for? 💪

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