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Boeing Partners with College in Cable Harness Bootcamp

By Guest Author - Wiring Harness News : 6-8 minutes

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By Shalin Jyotishi

The pandemic has prompted more consumers to seek out shorter, non-degree credentials such as certificates, industry certifications, occupational licenses, and other upskilling opportunities that require less time or financial investments in comparison to a traditional degree program.

Following the trend, skills-building “bootcamps” have also emerged as an increasingly popular mechanism for career preparation. Rightly or wrongly, bootcamps can sometimes get a bad rep as “fly by night” operations orchestrated by greedy companies or individual “gurus” looking to make a quick buck off those who urgently need new jobs-oriented skills.

Many bootcamp providers have closed in recent years reportedly due to a lack of alignment with employer needs, and according to Career Karma, an organization offering a bootcamp directory and coaching, 72 percent of bootcamps charge more than \$10,000 which can rival the tuition for many quality degree programs at public community colleges.

Additionally, there is no nationally standardized way for consumers to evaluate the effectiveness or labor market outcomes associated with bootcamps, which can make it difficult to tell which programs are worth their salt.

But we shouldn't throw the baby out with the bathwater. When executed strategically by a credible education provider and with the learner and employer needs in mind, bootcamps can maximize affordable training outcomes for busy learners.

The bootcamp inspiration recently struck at The Boeing Company and its partner Mesa Community College located in the Greater Phoenix area.

In 2019, the aerospace giant, one of the top fifty largest employers in Arizona, approached Mesa to help train four hundred and fifty electrical technicians skilled in electrical wiring and harness within two and a half years.

Mesa, a recognized leader among community colleges in the manufacturing workforce ecosystem, has long offered customized training and non-degree programs to meet labor market demands.

But fulfilling this tall order didn't necessitate a new certificate or degree program. Instead, Mesa and Boeing partnered to create a unique, stackable, customized, and for-credit training program structured as a Cable Harness Wiring Bootcamp.

In 36 hours of in-classroom instruction, bootcamp completers earn the IPC A-620 Industry certification, three credit hours, and an interview with Boeing on-site at Mesa – for \$270 with full tuition reimbursement upon successful completion.

Students attend the bootcamp for just four hours a day over nine days. The first week focuses on theory while the second week is focused on hands-on learning. Nine adjunct faculty on loan from Boeing and on Mesa payroll teach each of the nine courses.

Students pay the all-in bootcamp cost amounts of \$270 which is fully reimbursed by Mesa upon successful completion, thanks to Mesa's grant funds from state, federal, and private sources.

So far, Mesa and Boeing claim a near 100% completion rate. Upon completion, students who pass Boeing's background checks are invited to interview on-site at Mesa. The 3-credit hours can count as a technical elective for a certificate of completion or associate's degrees Mesa offers.

So far, 355 students have completed the bootcamp, 234 students have been interviewed, and 211 have been offered jobs (Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Boeing paused hiring until this summer). Mesa's surveying of program graduates revealed that students who weren't hired by Boeing have leveraged their new skills for other opportunities or continuing education.

While Boeing is Mesa's primary partner, other national and regional employers have also said that they value the skills obtained through the Bootcamp including Phoenix Logistics, ASSA ABLOY Group, General Dynamics, and Honeywell.

The starting salary for Boeing technicians who complete the bootcamp is \$18 an hour and some technicians are paid \$23 an hour depending on experience. Both wage rates are respectable when compared to the \$11 minimum wage and the \$12.29 local living wage threshold in the Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale region — especially considering the fact that the program only takes nine days and is free for completers.

The bootcamp serves a diversity of learners from many walks of life:

- Fifty-six percent of graduates are adults over the age of 25, and two percent of graduates are even in high school, aged 15-17.
- A quarter of graduates are female (notable given that U.S. manufacturing jobs tend to be male-dominated), almost eight percent of graduates are veterans, and fifty-five percent are first-time credential earners.
- Forty percent of graduates are minorities, mirroring the diversity of the state.

Compared with those hired from Boeing's typical staffing agency, Bootcamp graduates made significantly fewer errors once hired.

Graduates are happy with their career outcomes and a new set of transferable skills. "The harness and cable assembly bootcamp was exactly what I needed. It helped me get to my goal as a permanent employee," said Jocelyn Johnson who completed the bootcamp and now works at Boeing. "The job at Boeing means a lot to me and my family."

Mesa was similarly pleased with their outcomes. "Mesa offers a variety of jobs-oriented degree and non-degree programs, but Bootcamps offer one of the fastest returns for our students and employer partners. If co-designed in a reciprocal way, colleges can be much more agile in responding to the needs of their students and the local economy," said Leah Palmer, Executive Director of Mesa's Arizona Advanced Manufacturing Institute.

Earning a degree in an in-demand field from affordable, quality public institutions can still yield the greatest return on investment for students, but a degree isn't necessary to secure a quality life. As more colleges and universities explore bootcamps as a new model for career preparation, employers, institutions, students, and local economies may stand to benefit.

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