What If There Is a Better Way to Train and Hire Air Traffic Controllers?

By Daniel R. Cunningham, CEO, Advanced ATC, Inc.

Over the past four years within the air traffic system, there have been many Government Accountability Office (GAO) and Department of Transportation (DOT) Inspector General (IG) reports and testimony before Congress on the need for and challenges facing the FAA to hire, screen, place and maintain air traffic controllers. Just what is the magical answer for meeting the high demand for *qualified* controllers for the next generation?

One report, issued by the MITRE Corporation, Center for Advanced Aviation System Development (CAASD), suggests that advanced training techniques, such as scenario based instruction, voice recognition and synthesis (VRS) and Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS) will reduce the time and costs required to attain Certified Professional Controller (CPC) status. Additionally, the Inspector General pointed out to the FAA that the skill sets of ATC candidates were not being identified before assigning them to a facility for training.

ADVANCED ATC TRAINING TECHNIQUES PRODUCE SOLID RESULTS IN ONE YEAR

Nowhere are these suggested training techniques more successfully demonstrated than at Advanced ATC, Inc. (AATC). AATC is a privately held company, owned and operated by retired FAA ATC Managers. The company was formed in 2008 to assist in meeting the tremendous demand for better trained and qualified Controllers.

In December of 2008, AATC partnered with Wiregrass Georgia Technical College, formally known as Valdosta Technical College, Valdosta, Ga., to offer a one-year intensive ATC training program. The program was designed to meet the requirements and hiring guidelines of FAA's Policy Bulletin #48. In April of 2009, monthly enrollment to the new Control Tower Operator (CTO) Certification program began.

ALL AATC GRADUATES TO DATE HAVE OBTAINED AN FAA CTO CERTIFICATE AND FACILITY RATING

Now, eighteen months later, AATC has seen 100 percent of their graduates, to date, obtain an FAA CTO certificate and Facility rating and make application to the FAA under the CTO Hiring announcement. AATC's training success is based on the implementation and execution of such techniques as advanced simulation technology as well as practical training at a specific facility.

RECRUITING QUALIFIED APPLICANTS IS CRITICAL

But, the first step is to recruit and qualify applicants correctly. Nothing is

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more costly to an employer than hiring a wrong or having a less than qualified employee. Recruiting prospective students for AATC is done much like any other training or education institution. However, *qualifying* a prospective student is done much differently.

An individual interested in AATC's training program is treated as if they are going to be an FAA employee. Therefore, thorough screening is done prior to acceptance into the program. All applicants are required to pass the FAA Class II ATCS medical and security background screening, have a personal interview with at least one member of the Executive Team and demonstrate their entry level skill set in AATC's Max-Sim Tower Simulator.

Once through the enrollment process and beginning class, students are required to conduct themselves as if they are working for the FAA.

THREE PHASES OF TRAINING ARE UTILIZED

AATC's 52-week program is an intensive curriculum, requiring a huge commitment by the student. The program is broken into three phases of training. First, 13 weeks of classroom instruction, followed by 13 weeks of training and qualification in the Valdosta Regional Airport Tower.

After full qualification in the tower, the six month on-the-job training clock continues, along with advanced simulation training. Students are trained on multiple airport configurations and increasingly more complex scenarios.

Each student is allowed to train to their maximum skill set demonstration. All current graduates have demonstrated the ability to work ATC-12 volume and complexity. In fact, new scenarios are built daily, because students are frequently exceeding

expectations in their skills and abilities. At the end of the 52 weeks, students will have accumulated 1,300 hours of instruction, 400 of which is in advanced Tower Simulation scenarios.

AATC DELIVERS REDUCED TRAINING TIME, COST SAVINGS AND INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY

So, is this a better way to train and hire air traffic controllers? Good question. Based on the recommendations by the DOT-IG and MITRE report, AATC has incorporated these advanced training techniques and is producing a highly qualified Certified Professional Controller.

The positive outcome for the FAA is reduced training time, significant cost savings and productivity increases. For more information on Advanced ATC's Air Traffic Control program go to *www.advancedatc.com* or call toll free 866-938-0398. ✈