

SUCCESS STORY



CERTIFIED Helps Southern Methodist University Launch a Successful Certification Program

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- LAURENE KLASSEN

Microsoft
Office Specialist

435 Staff and Students Get Certified in First Year of Microsoft Office Specialist Pilot Program

Southern Methodist University is a nationally ranked private university serving 12,000 students in Dallas, Texas. SMU is increasingly recognized for the ways it supports students, faculty and alumni as they become ethical leaders in their professions and communities. The SMU Office of Information Technology (OIT) supports and enhances the academic and administrative activities of Southern Methodist University.

Recently Laurene Klassen, Manager of OIT Training and Communications, was working with a student who asked her how to get Microsoft certified. Klassen had worked as an IT trainer for many years and took several Microsoft certifications so she had a good deal of knowledge about the process from her own personal journey. She had thought about bringing Microsoft certification to SMU but the timing had never been right.

“When that student asked how to get Microsoft certified, a light bulb went off for me,” said Klassen. “I knew the value of earning Microsoft certifications in my career and I wanted to bring those valuable credentials to SMU.”

In her career, Klassen had first earned the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) SharePoint

certification when she was doing a SharePoint software rollout and wanted to have a good grasp of the software. Next, she took additional certifications to become a Microsoft Certified Trainer. Earning certification was a personal goal that took her to the next level in her career so she knew it could help SMU students as well.

SMU already had a Microsoft Imagine Academy membership, so Klassen knew the first step – logistics – would be fairly easy. However, she didn't know the details about launching a successful certification program at a large University. Just as she was trying to decide how to move forward, Klassen received an email promoting the CERTIFIED Educator's Conference, a few days of workshops dedicated to helping educators explore the potential of technology certification in the classroom.

HOW TO ROLLOUT A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

The timing of CERTIFIED was perfect – it would be held in June and Klassen wanted to launch a certification pilot program at SMU in the Fall. The school paid for her attendance and the payoff was huge.

“It was primarily through attending the training at CERTIFIED that I got our certification program up and running just a few months later,” said Klassen.

At CERTIFIED in Orlando, Florida, four sessions in particular were very helpful for Klassen. The first one was “**Building a Certification Pipeline from High School to Employment**,” given by Lakeisha Vance, IT Department Head at Alamance Community College. In that session, she learned that getting faculty involved was the key to a successful certification program. She also learned practical tips about running a program such as how to schedule certifications.

Another helpful session was “**Keeping your Testing Center Healthy**,” offered by Josh Sommer, Certiport Technical Support Manager, where Klassen learned how to keep her certification lab up and running. “I left with a lot of great info from that session, it was great to hear people speak up who are already doing the testing, and mentioning some of the issues they’ve had so I was ready to troubleshoot.”

Klassen got a lot of information about marketing the certifications from a session titled, “**MOS Bootcamp**” with Jennifer Stubblefield of Calloway County High School in Kentucky. Finally, Klassen modeled her program after a presentation titled “**Exploring 3 Proven Steps to Successful Student Certifications**,” by Scott Greer from the California College of San Diego. He talked about setting a specific score requirement in GMetrix practice exams before allowing students to take MOS exams. Klassen planned to implement the same standard at SMU.

The most helpful part of CERTIFIED was **NETWORKING** and hearing questions asked by other, more experienced attendees, which helped Klassen to see what was coming and armed her with the skills to handle the various situations that might arise.

After CERTIFIED Klassen went back to SMU and began the process of signing an agreement and seeking funding. Her manager was supportive and the Office

of Information Technology was able to fund their initiative as a pilot program.

Before they announced the pilot program benefits, her internal staff got certified so they knew their processes. SMU had the Microsoft Imagine Academy and GMetrix practice exams, but they were not using all of the benefits including certification. A general lab was converted to a Certiport Testing Center and the MOS pilot program officially launched in mid-September.

RESULTS

Once the program launched officially, Klassen and her team worked hard to market it to students and faculty. They were encouraged to use online study materials and GMetrix to prepare for the exams on their own, then come to the Certiport Authorized Testing Center to get MOS certified in Access, Excel, Outlook, PowerPoint and Word.

As she had learned at CERTIFIED, Klassen was able to get faculty involved in their first year of the pilot, which made a big difference. More than **25 STAFF MEMBERS** have taken MOS certification exams themselves.

One example is staff member Jie Sun, who works as an Academic Data Analyst in the Dean’s Office at Dedman College. Sun earned his Excel Expert certification and is working on obtaining certifications for all of the other Office programs.

“I use the Microsoft Office tools quite often in my daily work, and these certifications will help me utilize the full functionality of the tools,” Sun said after completing his first set of exams. “Although I used Excel before, I used only a small part of what it can do. These skills can contribute a lot to improve my work efficiency.”

Klassen implemented the same standard for GMetrix practice exams (a score of 800 before taking the MOS certification exam) she learned at CERTIFIED at SMU and she attributes their high pass rate to that session.

Now, at the end of the first year there are seven class sections participating. Some offer extra credit for MOS certification, others make it part of their exams. Participating departments include Sociology where it is part of a life skills course, Business & Finance, and even an English course.

“Our goal is to spark interest among students to take what they are learning

in the classroom and give them the opportunity to validate their Microsoft Office skills with an industry standard certification,” said Rachel Mulry, Director of IT Customer Service.

Allen Gwinn, a professor in the Cox School of Business, had seen many students in the past who struggled with Microsoft Excel. Knowing that the software is crucial in all kinds of business environments, he collaborated with the Office of Information Technology to utilize the new MOS certification program in multiple sections of his Information Systems for Management course.

“The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive,” Gwinn said. “A Microsoft cert lends credit to, and certifies, the claim that the student knows Microsoft Excel. It is also a tangible benefit from the class that the student can add to his/her resume. The certification provides a great benchmark as to how well they’re grasping these concepts.”

In total, **333** of Professor Gwinn’s students became Microsoft certified during the first year of the pilot program.

Student Maddie Nerad has seen the direct benefits of earning certification. “The day after receiving my MOS Excel certification, I had an interview with a company that asked specifically about my familiarity with Excel. They hadn’t heard about certification, but after explaining the process and testing they were clearly impressed. I landed the internship at a large production studio this summer and feel more confident going into it with this skillset. I’m very thankful for the opportunity and push to get certified at SMU.”

During the first eight months of the pilot program, Klassen already awarded over 435 certifications, a great success in the first year of a MOS certification program. She plans to submit a session proposal to CERTIFIED in the coming years to share her tips and help other educators replicate her success.