



MIAMI DADE COLLEGE SUCCESS STORY

"When we learned about ACA certification and all of its benefits, we wanted to bring it to Miami Dade immediately."

Tommy Demos
Assistant Professor of Film,
TV & Digital Production
Miami Dade College

Miami Dade College Unleashes the Power of ACA on Campus

Miami Dade College (MDC) has the largest undergraduate enrollment of any college or university in the country, serving over 165,000 students annually. They offer bachelor's degrees, associate degrees, certifications, and adult continuing education through eight campuses and several outreach centers. The MDC School of Entertainment and Design



Technology serves over 2,700 students enrolled in 9 programs ranging from a bachelor's degree in Film and TV to an associate degree in Graphic Arts.

Tommy Demos is an Assistant Professor of Film, TV and Digital Production and Eric Cornish is an Assistant Professor of Graphic Arts Design at MDC. Demos and Cornish are both **Adobe Education Leaders**, a group made up of 196 professors and instructors across the world who teach in K-12 and Higher Education programs. Belonging to the group enables them to learn from their peers across the world about how they are using Adobe products in the classroom.

Through the Adobe Education Community, Demos and Cornish discovered the **Adobe Certified Associate** (ACA) program, an industry-recognized credential offered through Certiport that verifies fundamental design skills in Adobe software including Adobe After Effects, Adobe Animate, Adobe Dreamweaver, Adobe Flash, Adobe Illustrator, Adobe InDesign, Adobe Photoshop, and Adobe Premiere Pro.

"We heard about ACA in a webinar on integrating third party certification into career pathways while we were on summer vacation," said Demos. "When we learned about ACA certification and all of its benefits, we wanted to bring it to Miami Dade immediately."

Integrating ACA Industry Credentials into MDC Degree Programs

Demos and Cornish spent a few years researching and working on ACA approval at the school-level. They started by consulting with campus administration and exploring how ACA would fit into college priorities.

"Obtaining Dean approval for ACA certification was easy because getting students industry-certified was a huge priority at the college," said Demos. "Our Dean suggested we leverage Perkins funding or the TechHire grant to purchase ACA exams."

MDC became a Certiport Testing Center for convenient, on-campus ACA testing. Demos and Cornish knew exam costs would need to be subsidized in order to make them affordable for students, so the first year of ACA certification was paid for by a federal TechHire grant. They started with a model that allowed students to be reimbursed for the cost of the ACA exam if they passed. The exams were offered as optional extra credit in several summer session courses in the MDC School of Entertainment and Design Technology including video editing, graphic design, and web authoring.



"We quickly realized optional ACA certification did not work well, we would need to integrate mandatory ACA preparation, practice tests,

and official exams into courses in order to get students certified," said Cornish. "By incorporating ACA preparation and exams into student coursework we could reinforce learning outcomes and program learning objectives."

MDC piloted mandatory testing by making the ACA certification test the final exam in several courses for Fall semester. As the pilot semester concluded, they facilitated a workshop for full and part-time faculty to prepare them for ACA Integration the following Spring. They also changed the exam fee reimbursement model to a free first-attempt model.

ACA Success with a Supportive Ecosystem

Once the program was in place, the MDC School of Entertainment and Design Technology took several steps to ensure ACA success. They teamed up with college leadership to create a collaborative space for students called the Digital Design Den with an open floor plan to encourage collaboration. They outfitted the space with some desktops, laptops and tablets and allowed for students to bring their own devices. They encouraged student film festivals, faculty professional development workshops, and other outside activities to keep the creative flame going at MDC.

"At first there was a little bit of hesitation from students asking, why do I need to be certified?" said Cornish. "Once we got going, they understood that ACA certification fills in the gaps in our instruction. We can only teach so much by trying to cover the material, but when we integrated ACA, we were able to cover those gaps with hands-on learning."

Students like David Rabinovitch, a Sophomore at MDC, agree. "Every step of the way the professor, syllabus and curriculum all tied in together to make this process seamless. We took several practice exams and the moment I took the ACA certification I felt comfortable doing it – I was prepared and ready."

In the first year of the ACA program at MDC, 204 ACA certifications were earned. In the second school year that number went up to 253 certifications. Demos and Cornish have seen many benefits from offering ACA certification, including students gaining confidence in their skillset and certification becoming a key asset on their resume.



Zachary Debedout, an MDC Junior, said, "I have definitely had better opportunities with freelance work due to

having the ACA badges listed on my website. I've seen people trust my work more and trust that I would be able to use the tools they wanted me to use."

Both Demos and Cornish say the best thing about ACA is that is a stackable credential that students can earn as they progress from College Credit Certificate, to associate's degree, to bachelor's degree. Once students earn the ACA, they are more confident and also more likely to stay in their chosen degree program.

"The ACA badge is like a pat on their back as they work towards a degree," said Demos. "Let's say you are a freshman who is a little bit unsure of your chosen degree path. You take a video editing or graphic design class and four months in you take and pass an industry-recognized certification that tells employers you are proficient in an industry standard software. That really makes a student feel good, it's an early win in the academic process that keeps them engaged."

Key Takeaways for Implementing ACA Certification:

1. **Faculty:** Build a coalition of willing faculty at your school by finding out who will support the initiative. Train them and work together to launch the ACA certification.
2. **Admin:** Find the administrators who will support the program and help you secure financing.
3. **Funding:** Find a way to pay for the testing contract and get creative. Work with a state industry certification funding list program, partner with on-campus departments, or apply for other grants.
4. **Curriculum:** Integrate ACA as a required part of courses, do not make them optional or extra credit.
5. **Support:** After the vision and direction for the program is in place, offer support and stay consistent. As you keep the program in place and offer continued support for students, it will grow.