

# Adobe® Certified Associate

Gives College Students Credibility as  
Aspiring Professionals



CERTIFIED  
ASSOCIATE



## BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

**LOCATION:**  
Muncie, Indiana

**SCHOOL ENROLLMENT:**  
20,000 students per year

### SUCCESS METRICS:

- Professional skills and credibility
- Widely recognized industry credential
- Quantifiable return on investment



## Ball State University's Digital Corps program employs digital communications certification to develop in-house expertise, service the needs of internal and external clients

### CHALLENGE

In 2003, Ball State University was awarded the first in a series of grant awards from the Lilly Endowment to establish a number of multidisciplinary digital media research and content development initiatives. Hiring a student support staff to help execute these campus-wide initiatives has been integral to their success—and, at times, has been a challenge. Gaps in the application skills of student employees sometimes limited the potential scale and speed of production. Jonathan Huer, emerging technologies director at Ball State, noted that students who interviewed for positions often overstated their knowledge of key graphic design programs like Adobe® Photoshop®.

"There [was] a real sense of overconfidence that [wasn't] productive," he said.

Building the expertise and the credibility of the student staff was critical to achieving a return on the endowment. "It really became apparent that equipment isn't knowledge," said Ryan Bitzegaio, senior designer of emerging technologies. "If the critical mass of knowledge was to [build], certification was just a natural jump."

### SOLUTION

Four years after the launch of the first grant initiatives, Huer and others developed an intriguing program to create multi-media expertise and professionalism in-house using a guild model. Through the Digital Corps, students can pass through three levels of expertise—apprentice, specialist and master. To act as a mechanism for advancement between levels, Huer, the inaugural director of the program, turned to industry standard certifications such as Adobe Certified Associate.

He says the certification program has been a useful benchmark for proficiency. "Many students are self-taught by the time they get to us. There are many holes in their education. For students who really struggle with [passing the exam] the first time, it's a wake-up call on the difference between a professional and a student."

Students hired as employees of the Digital Corps vary in knowledge and ability to maneuver in applications like Adobe Dreamweaver®, Flash® and Photoshop. In order to be promoted from apprentice to specialist with a pay increase, they must all pass at least two certifications to prove their mettle.

Bitzegaio says most student employees don't come on board with an excellent range or depth of application skills, but they learn quickly with a heavy dose of exposure and certification preparation. "Things start to snowball when [they] learn a single application," he said.



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*"It's a technical foundation that says, [this] didn't take me ten years to make. I can do it efficiently and effectively, using the right processes."*

– Jonathan Huer  
Emerging Technologies Director,  
Ball State University

Digital Corps master and student Stacey Ernst got her first promotion after achieving certification. "My certifications proved to my superiors that I was committed to my job, which, in turn, expanded the scope of my responsibilities in the Digital Corps," she said. "I was given the opportunity to create effective design, manage projects and interact with clients."

#### **RESULTS:**

With the aid of certification, the Digital Corps has been able to become much more than support in a high-end media lab. The group regularly takes on digital communications projects both inside and outside Ball State, such as the development of an Apple® iPhone® application that acts as an interactive map of the campus.

Bitzegaio believes certification has helped raise the bar on the collective expertise of the group. "It forces them to know their craft a lot more, which allows them to be more productive. We teach the tool, so [they] are not concerned so much with the tool but with the design and storytelling processes."

"It really proves they know what they're doing," he added. "Our clients are generally impressed."

Adobe certification among the nearly 50 students employed in the Digital Corps has since spilled over into the general student populous. Ball State now offers inter-disciplinary, for-credit classes where students can learn Photoshop, Flash or Dreamweaver with the option to achieve certification. In the winter semester alone, ten sections of Adobe-based courses are currently offered to interested students from broad disciplines that range from architecture to English.

Huer thinks student interest in the Adobe application courses reflects the fundamental importance of digital communications skills today. "These are foundational things for working in the real world" he said "Some people believe it's a specialized skill, but if you can't make a video and throw it online somewhere, you're at a loss."

Students in the digital media courses that are close to graduating recognize the credential's value to employers, said Bitzegaio. "With certification they can say, 'not only do I think I know Photoshop, but Adobe thinks I know Photoshop.' It's a really good thing to put on your resumé."

Ernst, who is certified in Visual Communication using Adobe Photoshop CS4 as well as Web Communication using Adobe Dreamweaver CS4, says her certifications will stand out on her resumé as she enters the workforce. "They not only demonstrate my skill level in Photoshop and Dreamweaver but also my dedication to learning how to efficiently use these programs to produce a great product for a client. My certifications ... improve my credibility as a graphic designer and give me a competitive edge."

The combination of an outstanding portfolio and Adobe Certified Associate credentials makes graduating students credible professionals in the workforce, said Huer. "It's a technical foundation that says, [this] didn't take me ten years to make. I can do it efficiently and effectively, using the right processes."



#### **ABOUT CERTIPORT**

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