

Certification + Core Curriculum = Quality Training

The goal of the Iron Worker apprenticeship program is to develop journeymen able to walk onto a job site and perform their skills competently, safely and professionally. In order to support local union apprenticeship programs, the Iron Worker's Apprenticeship and Training Department produces training materials focusing on our primary technical skill areas (e.g., structural, welding, ornamental, pre-engineered metal buildings, etc.). To continue our tradition of quality training, the Apprenticeship and Training Department is undertaking several major initiatives to develop a new Core Curriculum and then assist local union apprenticeship programs to implement this curriculum as part of a certification process. Dr. Rick Sullivan, Senior Training Advisor for the Ironworker Management Progressive Action Cooperative Trust (IMPACT) has been assigned to work with the Apprenticeship and Training Department to develop the Core Curriculum and Certification programs.

The Apprenticeship and Training Department is implementing these initiatives to establish a certification program for local union apprenticeship programs and implement a new Core Curriculum beginning in 2005. The primary objectives of this certification program will be to improve the quality of apprenticeship training and to standardize the skills developed by journeymen Iron Workers completing these programs.

This certification program includes a Core Curriculum that will help to standardize the knowledge and skills of graduates and will include the courses that every Iron Worker should complete in order to be eligible for a Journeyman Iron Worker (JIW) card. As the focus of this first phase of the certification program will be to strengthen the knowledge and skills of the JIW, this program will initially apply to mixed local unions.

In order to begin work on the certification program and Core Curriculum, a meeting was held 7-9 December 2004 in St. Louis, Missouri. The objective of this meeting was to begin development of the Ironworker Apprenticeship Certification Program (IACP) including development of the proposed core curriculum outline. There were 28 participants representing contractors, vendors, NARSC, NAMOA, NEA, business agents, coordinators and instructors.

The first priority at the St. Louis meeting was to develop an outline for the proposed core curriculum. This outline lists the core courses and identifies the minimum number of hours allotted within the curriculum to teach each course. In addition, the total course hours were then divided to indicate the recommended number of classroom and shop hours at the local union training center. This outline will help coordinators and instructors to plan and implement their courses.

With the core curriculum outline completed, technical working groups then started to work on the training materials to support the core curriculum. These groups focused on:

- Ornamental
- Pre-engineered metal buildings
- Reinforcing
- Post tensioning and multi-strand
- Structural

- Rigging
- Cranes
- Welding

The first priority of each group was to reach agreement on the core skills required of an Iron Worker who completes training in each technical area. Current training materials were reviewed along with materials available from other sources (e.g., vendors, contractors).

In the coming months these technical groups will work on revising and updating the training materials in their respective areas. All of the new materials will have the same “look and feel” – so that we will have a standard layout and quality for all new core curriculum materials. Key features of the new core curriculum materials include:

- Apprentice manuals with content presented in a unit format including unit and specific objectives, suggested activities, information sheets with photographs, graphics, and highlighted safety tips, assignment sheets and job sheets.
- Instructor guides with the tests and the answers to the tests and assignment sheets.
- CD-ROMs with all of the course materials including PowerPoint presentations with imbedded video and Internet links.

Key to implementing this new core curriculum is the certification program. Certification will ensure that an Iron Worker apprenticeship program meets or exceeds all established standards and requirements of academic excellence in areas such as implementing the core curriculum, instructor credentials, training facilities, equipment, safety, on-the-job training and apprentice services. We feel that there are many benefits of the IACP. The certification program:

- Certifies that an apprenticeship program has met established standards.
- Enhances the credibility of the apprenticeship program with contractors.
- Creates goals for self-improvement and stimulates weaker apprenticeship programs to seek higher standards.
- Involves the coordinator and instructors in strengthening their program.
- Strengthens apprenticeship programs at the local, district and international levels.
- Facilitates linkages with colleges and universities.
- Facilitates the process for apprentices to receive college credit and pursue a degree through the National Labor College at the George Meany Center.
- Provides the public with a positive image and validates that an apprenticeship program meets or exceed high standards.
- Helps prospective apprentices in making a decision to become an Iron Worker.
- Keeps apprenticeship coordinators and instructors knowledgeable and in step with current practices.

The IACP will involve three phases. These include an internal evaluation, external evaluation and final recommendations.

During the internal evaluation the local union will do a comprehensive examination of all aspects of their apprenticeship program as outlined by the IACP

standards. This process involves the coordinator, instructors and apprentices, all of whom contribute to the creation of a report detailing their findings.

After the internal evaluation, a site visit will be conducted to assess strengths and weaknesses of the program. This consists of a team from the Apprenticeship and Training Department and will also include coordinators from certified programs. This external evaluation team examines data and conducts interviews to determine if the program is in compliance with established standards. When the internal and external evaluations are complete, final recommendations are made.

Iron Worker coordinators, instructors and apprentices have long been interested in receiving college credit for the completion of apprenticeship training courses. As part of the IACP and Core Curriculum initiatives, the Apprenticeship and Training Department is working closely with the American Council on Education (ACE) to have our apprenticeship courses evaluated for college credit.

The Iron Worker local unions in New Jersey are in the process of having their apprenticeship courses evaluated by ACE. After meeting with the New Jersey locals and the ACE representative, the Apprenticeship and Training Department has determined that we are able to participate in this evaluation so that our Core Curriculum courses will also be evaluated. This will mean that all IACP certified local unions in the United States and Canada implementing the approved Core Curriculum will be able to make college credit available to apprentices who complete their programs.

The Apprenticeship and Training Department is very excited about IACP, Core Curriculum and college credit programs. IMPACT's assistance by providing the services of Dr. Sullivan to work with the staff of the Apprenticeship and Training Department is key to moving these programs forward. We see the implementation of these programs improving the quality of our apprenticeship programs, thereby providing our contractors and employers with a highly skilled Iron Worker. Look for much more information on these important programs in the near future.

Photo caption:

Participants working on the outline of the new Core Curriculum