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PrintED® TO MEET DRIVE FOR ACCOUNTABILITY IN CAREER EDUCATION

The new exit examinations being implemented by the national PrintED accreditation program, will give graphic communications courses of study a means to measure and demonstrate their success, responding to the growing emphasis on accountability in education.

PrintED accredits high school and post-secondary graphic communications programs, and the new exams can assist states, institutions and local education agencies in meeting the heightened demand for measurable outcomes in career and technical education, says the chairman of the Graphic Arts Education and Research Foundation that administers the program.

“Two critical trends are converging today in the field of career education for graphic communications,” notes GAERF Chairman J. Kenneth Garner, President of United Litho in Ashburn, VA. “One is the ever-increasing pressure to hire qualified workers, particularly at the entry level. The other trend is the emphasis on measurable positive outcomes from educational efforts at every level,” he continues. “PrintED responded to this need before it became a national priority, and as a result the program today is the industry’s best method of assuring the quality and effectiveness of career education programs.”

PrintED bases accreditation on defined industry competencies consisting of more than 400 tasks covering the seven areas in which a program can be accredited: Introduction to Graphic Communications, Binding and Finishing, Press Operations, Digital File Preparation, Digital File Output, Advanced Press Operations, and Advanced

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Digital File Preparation. Accreditation in the introductory course, as well as in one other area, is required. Institutions may choose to be accredited in additional areas based on their programs.

The program is now rolling out a series of exit examinations beginning with Introduction to Graphic Communications, Press Operations and Digital File Preparation, designed to quantify the knowledge gained by students who have studied in graphic communications programs nationwide. Tests for the other areas of accreditation will be added at a later date.

The new tests went through pilot testing in fall 2003, with some 600-question items being administered to about 500 student participants. The results of these tests are being reviewed by panels of testing and subject matter experts, and April 2004 should see publication of the revised exams.

The new examinations, Garner notes, are a key to quality assurance. The objective is to assure employers that “if somebody has a certificate in, for example, digital file preparation, that you know they possess at least a certain level of knowledge,” says Dan Lezotte, Ph.D., a principal in Organizational Strategies, Inc., which is working with GAERF to develop the exams. The examinations will be administered online, but taken by students in a proctored classroom environment.

Schools may have very different curricula, faculty capabilities, and orientations, Lezotte notes, and the result can be variability in the knowledge and skills of graduates. But the new exams, which are based on the specific competencies defined by PrintED in seven areas, will help bring consistency to the evaluation of graduates’ capabilities.

“This is also a tool to bring more accountability to graphic communications education,” says Lezotte, noting that schools will receive complete reports on how their students have done on the exams, including comparative data for schools in their area and nationwide.

Accountability is a major part of the Bush Administration’s educational strategy, and is likely to shape the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical

Education Act, which Congress will take up later in 2004.

Currently, there are some 150 accredited programs in 29 different states, along with numerous accreditation candidates.

The PrintED National Accreditation Program is one part of GAERF's mission. In addition to this program, the Foundation administers two other programs designed to support recruitment and training of a skilled workforce: the grant-making program which since its inception in 1983, has awarded over \$4.5 million in funding, and MAKE YOUR MARK[®] in Graphic Communications, a campaign to high schools aimed at promoting a positive image of the printing and graphic communications industry and raising student awareness of the industry's diverse career opportunities.

The Graphic Arts Education and Research Foundation was created by the National Association for Printing Leadership (NAPL), NPES the Association for Suppliers of Printing, Publishing, and Converting Technologies and the Printing Industries of America (PIA) in 1983. These three national associations jointly own the Graphic Arts Show Company (GASC[®]). GAERF was created to channel a portion of the revenues earned by GASC-managed shows into projects supporting a strong future for the industry.

For additional information about the Foundation and its programs, visit the GAERF web site at www.gaerf.org or call toll-free at (866) 381-9839.

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