



Transition Tech student Specialist Gopi Patel, age 25, an air defense soldier and network operator and maintainer operator

Transition Tech

Prepping Military Servicemen for Civilian IT Career Success

Taken as a whole, veterans of U.S. military service experience an unemployment rate equal to the rest of the nation. But veterans since 9/11 have an unemployment rate about 50 percent higher than their predecessors, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

One difficulty facing any new veteran is translating military experience and knowledge into terms that today's civilian hiring managers can understand. Another roadblock is when a serviceman or woman has a job description with no direct analog in civilian life. Industry-recognized IT certifications are vehicles which transitioning military can use to communicate marketable skills and knowledge.

In Summer 2015, IT Futures Labs began partnering with Fayetteville Tech Community College (FTCC) in North Carolina to offer fast-track IT certification training to soldiers in their last year of military service. The community college is located near Fort Bragg, the largest U.S. Army base by population. Every month 700 military soldiers at Fort Bragg transition from active military service to the private sector.

The Transition Tech program was aimed at soldiers who have IT experience but want to measure it against an industry-recognized certification and at soldiers who have an interest in technology and want to become more familiar with the work of IT. To recruit soldiers into the program, FTCC staff posted fliers and notices in the local newspaper about Transition Tech.

Sergeant Jennifer McLean who signed up for the program said, "I was looking at what was going on in the outside world, the civilian side, and everyone's looking for IT. So why not try it."

The program was offered free of charge in Summer 2015 for six weeks, and was taught full-time during the work day from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Soldiers scheduled to transition out of the military in the next 12 months could qualify, although they had to obtain permission from their commanding officer for leave in

order to train, a practice that is typically supported by all base commanders for transitioning military.

Although shorter than most courses at the school, Transition Tech was offered as part of the school's academic offerings and awarded credit hours toward a degree for each certification attained. Originally designed for soldiers with extensive IT experience, the curriculum was mapped to three IT industry certifications: CompTIA A+, Cisco CCNA, and CompTIA Security+. Nine students enrolled, with most of them being new to the IT field.



Transition Tech students work together to study for CompTIA certifications, while earning college credits.

Results were mixed. Although three of the students flew through the course segments and managed to obtain two of the three certifications, most of the students didn't have the deep IT experience necessary to absorb so much class material so quickly, and none of the students managed to pass all three certifications.

For the second cohort of the program in October 2015, the CompTIA A+ portion was extended to three weeks, followed by two weeks of CompTIA Network+ training (replacing the more advanced CCNA certification training) and two weeks of CompTIA Security+ training. The course was moved to the school's continuing education department, but the school's credit policy remained the same.

In the second cohort, half of the participants obtained the CompTIA A+ certification and one of the participants obtained all three certifications.

Master Sergeant Jemel Wright, who's now CompTIA A+ certified, commented, "The face to face instruction made a difference."

Specialist Anthony Lopez added, "This class is just the tip of the iceberg for me. I want to keep learning and know more."

For the third cohort of the program starting in April 2016, CompTIA A+ will be extended yet again—this time to four weeks—and CompTIA Network+ training will be extended to three weeks, for a total course time of seven weeks. Training for CompTIA Security+ will be offered separately at a later date. The changes are in response to numerous requests for training by soldiers who are entirely new to the IT field.

Officials at FTCC have worked with base command at Fort Bragg to help advertise the course on base. As of February 2016, 30 soldiers had applied for 15 class seats in the April cohort. Transition Tech Program Director Charlene Callahan says that it's important to be able to choose participants from a larger pool. "We want to make sure that everyone in the class is serious about succeeding, because one person's attitude can impact everyone else in the class," says Callahan.

Specialist Cherry Ungerio, who's now A+ certified, said, "I hope my fellow soldiers that are transitioning get to experience what I experienced."

IT Futures Labs will continue to monitor outcomes of the program in 2016, including civilian employment data for graduating soldiers.



Darlene Wood, Dean of Computer/Information Technologies at FTCC, talks with a student-soldier during the initial pilot class. After the first pilot, the program moved to FTCC's continuing education department.



View the video on what Transition Tech students think about the program at <https://t.co/j35WDRNhh3>

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