



THE GOLDEN SLATE

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Apprenticeship: A Growing Path for Many of Your Students

By Todd Conrado, Modesto Junior College

For many years now, those in secondary and post-secondary education have been trained, supported, and encouraged to direct their students to a four-year post-secondary degree. While this path has proven successful for many, there are others who recognize that traditional college is not an option. These students have often been strongly encouraged to go to college just to fail or become discouraged and subsequently drop out. Often these students are forgotten or passed over. Thankfully one of the tools that ag education is implementing to aid all students, including these forgotten students, is industry certification. But what does a student do when they have such a certification? How can they use it to aid them in finding a job or starting their career? There is a tried and true path to gainful employment that has stood the test of time and is making a strong resurgence—apprenticeship.

Most, if not all of us, have heard of apprenticeships but what are they really? Frequently, training programs are mistakenly labeled as apprenticeships. A true and legal apprenticeship is one that is registered with either the California Division of Apprenticeship Standards or with the United States Department of Labor. To be registered in either system, the apprenticeship program must meet three basic requirements. Each apprenticeship is required to provide cost-free job-related instruction, structured on-the-job training, and portable industry recognized certification. During their apprenticeship, each apprentice is required to meet progression requirements and is evaluated for classroom grades, progress with on-the-job training, and workplace practices. If the apprentice meets or exceeds these step requirements, he or she is entitled to receive a step raise. In addition, by the completion of the apprenticeship program, the apprentice is required to be paid journeyman wages. Each of these requirements is protected by both state and federal laws and regulations through the registered apprentice programs. Apprentices are also protected legally with established processes for addressing grievances and complaints through the state and federal agencies.

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Other than legal protections, the apprentice benefits from a structured classroom education, paid on-the-job training tailored to their chosen career, statistically higher wages compared to non-apprenticeship completers, transferable credentials, greater job security, cost-free education, and finally a structured mentorship with a highly skilled journey worker in the trade.

How do interested students enter into apprenticeships? There are two basic types of apprenticeships: union-based and company-based programs. If a student would like to enter a union-based apprenticeship, such as those for pipefitters, carpenters, electricians, and other trades, the student must first join the appropriate union. From there he or she will follow the guidelines of the union apprenticeship. The other type of apprenticeship is company-based. Apprentices enter into this type of apprenticeship in a few different ways. Frequently, individuals secure employment within an organization, and to progress within that specific workplace, they may need to participate in an in-house apprenticeship. Other times, a person could be hired specifically to enter into the apprenticeship program. Lastly, and less commonly, a student can start training in a registered apprentice program, not as an apprentice, but transition into an apprentice role during his or her training.

How can you or your students get information on apprenticeships? All registered apprenticeships are listed on the subsequent websites of the [California Division of Apprenticeship Standards](#) or the [U.S. Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship](#) websites. There are hundreds of apprenticeships available (both union-based and company-based) in a multitude of industries. The Modesto Junior College School of Agriculture was just awarded an apprenticeship in Agriculture and Specialty Equipment Repair Technician (A-SERT for short). A-SERT is for individuals interested in the heavy equipment repair industry. A-SERT works with many manufacturers and dealers and there is certainly a place at MJC for any student interested in this field.

National apprenticeship week is November 13 through 19. Look for special announcements and information during this period.

For more information about the A-SERT apprenticeship at MJC, please contact [Todd Conrado](#).

