



### The Need: A Blended, Hands-On Learning Environment for IT Certification Training

For the majority of jobs in the information technology (IT) field, landing an entry-level position or furthering a current career requires both hands-on experience and industry certifications—not just one or the other. Gaining industry certifications has become even more important to stay competitive in the job market, especially in this struggling economy. The New Jersey Career Center (NJCC), based in Millville, N.J., strives to provide quality education to give students the training and skills they need to reach their personal, professional, and employment goals.

“NJCC offers a blended learning environment focused on giving students the skills and knowledge they need to obtain the industry certification exams while being both affordable and flexible,” said Carol Chapman, director since 2006. Average enrollment for the school is between 75 to 95 students each term, with about half pursuing IT curriculum and the other half enrolled in the Medical Office Administration and Office Administration programs.

The center offers a variety of IT programs and courses that prepare students for IT certifications from CompTIA, Microsoft, and Cisco. The center is also an authorized testing center for Pearson Vue, Prometric, and Certiport. “Although students work hard to attain our high standards, which require IT students to pass with a 95 percent average to attain the NJCC diploma, we emphasize the importance of earning the internationally recognized industry certifications from CompTIA and Microsoft that employers are seeking,” Chapman said. “Students will receive our diploma, but is an employer going to know who New Jersey Career Center is? Not likely. They will know about Microsoft, CompTIA, and other certifications.”

When the school opened in 2002, NJCC knew that providing the hands-on experience and training students needed to pass industry certification exams would be difficult. To enable students to achieve certification goals, they needed an interactive and integrated software program that would provide students with the information and skills they needed while working at their own pace.



### The Solution: LabSim Online Labs

LabSim from TestOut provides students with realistic, real-world scenarios that build valuable hands-on experience and skills. These labs let students experiment with a wide variety of IT functions at their own pace. “This is important since students come to NJCC with a variety of backgrounds and skill levels,” Chapman said.

NJCC offers an open class schedule with generous hours Monday through Saturday, and instructor oversight and assistance is available to students during all school hours. The majority of students spend an average of 20 hours each week working on their courses. Each course includes weekly breakout sessions where the instructor reinforces the lessons learned through the LabSim online labs.

NJCC students practice critical tasks assigned to them in a safe, simulated environment with operating systems such as Windows XP, Server 2000, Server 2003, Server 2008, DOS, and Linux. When using LabSim, students aren't limited to a prescribed pathway for completing tasks, nor are they faced with a series of screen images. Students are able to freely work within a wide variety of virtual environments to accomplish their tasks and build their skills.

“What is great about LabSim and its simulated environment is that the students are getting a real feel for troubleshooting and practice in critical thinking, skills that are crucial to successfully meet their IT career goals,” Chapman said. “LabSim is a key component to NJCC’s success in providing an interactive blended learning environment for our students, enabling our instructors the flexibility to give students one-on-one attention as needed while overseeing the entire class. Our students thrive in our blended classroom environment, feeling they’re getting the attention—and results—they’re expecting from us.”

Chapman and the school’s IT instructors also greatly appreciate LabSim’s administrative back-end, which lets them monitor the progress of the students in real time. “LabSim really gives us all of the information we need to know about every student to evaluate whether they’re really ‘getting it,’ and how productive they are being during their class time, while monitoring the pace at which students are moving along,” Chapman said. “It would be nearly impossible to track student progress so closely without the administrative tools LabSim provides.”

### **The Results: 85 Percent Pass Rate on IT Certifications Thanks to LabSim**

To pass the courses and be approved to take the certification exams, NJCC requires that students receive a 95 percent or better on their LabSim simulations and practice exams. As a testament to LabSim and the blended learning environment it enables, 99 percent of the NJCC students go on to take the exams, with an 85 percent (and higher) pass rate.

“I’m a strong believer in our program and in LabSim,” Chapman said. “NJCC really offers the best of both worlds to accommodate all of the different learning styles of our students. They interact with the LabSim online labs, gain knowledge from the LabSim videos and reinforce their training with the lectures and mentoring from the NJCC instructors. Students are able to learn at their comfort level while focusing on their individual learning needs. It definitely works. The students really respond to LabSim as well,” Chapman said.

They not only respond but they succeed. Al Arena, now a support specialist for a teleradiology company, started attending NJCC after being let go from the company where he’d worked for 16 years and discovering that he needed certifications to back up his claims, not just experience. “LabSim was a major factor in my decision to attend New Jersey Career Center. To have this kind of quality training with certified instructors on hand for support was the kind of course I needed. The ability to review past lessons and lectures and to save lessons to my thumb drive for home study just about guaranteed success. I learned a lot more than I had expected to, and I passed the A+ and the Network+ certifications on the first try. I’m about to start LabSim’s CCNA course, and will never stop studying again. I’m back to work in my old career with new certifications that got me through the door. Thank you NJCC and LabSim.”