

Take the Computer Challenge!
A “Best Practice” at the University of Florida



Summary

University of Florida employees can benefit by improving their computer skills when they take advantage of the University of Florida’s “Computer Challenge” initiative. The “Computer Challenge” is a coordinated approach to computer training opportunities available to University of Florida faculty and staff. It provides employees with a roadmap to help them decide what training to take in order to improve their computer skills -- as well as where on campus that training is available. Certificates are offered when certain “tracks” of training are completed. Available courses range from hands-on, instructor-led workshops available at locations across campus to interactive online courses.

About the University of Florida*

*Provided by UF’s Office of Public Relations, www.ufl.edu/facts

UF President -- Charles E. Young

Vice President for Finance and Administration -- John “Ed” Poppell

The University of Florida is a major, public, comprehensive, land-grant, research university. The state's oldest, largest, and most comprehensive university, UF is among the nation's most academically diverse public universities, with a long history of established programs in international education, research, and service. As of the year 2000, it was one of only 17 public, land-grant universities belonging to the Association of American Universities.

In 1853, the state-funded East Florida Seminary took over the Kingsbury Academy in Ocala. The seminary moved to Gainesville in the 1860s and later was consolidated with the state's land-grant Florida Agricultural College, then in Lake City. In 1905, by legislative action, the college became a university and was moved to Gainesville. Classes first met with 102 students on the present site on September 26, 1906. The University of Florida opened its doors to women in 1947 and was integrated in 1958. As of the year 2000, with more than 43,000 students, Florida was the sixth largest university in the nation.

In 1985, Florida became a member of the Association of American Universities, the prestigious higher-education organization composed of the top public and private institutions in North America. Florida offers more programs on a single campus than all but a few U.S. universities. A land-grant university with a distinguished record of developing Florida agriculture through research and extension services, Florida is among the nation's leading research universities as categorized by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. Florida has 23 colleges and schools and more than 100 research, service, and education centers, bureaus, and institutes. More than 100 undergraduate majors are offered. Nearly 1,600 freshmen and sophomores participate in the honors program, which offers 60 to 80 honors courses per semester. Most classes are limited to no more than 25 students. The Graduate School coordinates almost 200 graduate programs. Professional degree programs include dentistry, law, medicine, pharmacy, and veterinary medicine. There are approximately 11,500 faculty and staff members.

The Need

It's well known across the University of Florida campus -- departments have an increasing need for information technology (IT) employees as well as office support staff members who are technically proficient using computer desktop applications.

The labor market consistently has failed to meet the university's total need for these employees. So departments often have been forced to go without, conduct unusually long recruitments -- or hire employees without the requisite skill sets.

Of course, the departments couldn't be clearer: They want and need to be able to send their employees to skills-based training. "We need to be able to 'grow our own' from the best applicants available," they've told us. And they have looked to various administrative offices -- including the Division of Human Resources and the Office of Finance and Administration -- to help with these staffing concerns.

These difficulties come at the same time the University of Florida has been called upon to embark on "The Road to More Efficient State Government." Governor Jeb Bush's call to state government -- and as an extension of that, to the University of Florida -- has been for each agency to create an environment that makes greater use of technology -- and to do so with fewer employees (*Jeb's Electronic Letter*, September 15, 2000).

Given this reality, it has become increasingly important for the University of Florida to invest in its existing and future employees so that they can meet the needs of our academic community.

Our goal must be to invest in our employees through appropriate training activities so that they can use technology more effectively. We must do so to ensure that, despite a targeted decline in employee numbers, our remaining employees are able to meet the needs of a world-class academic institution with a growing number of students.

The Response

As a result of the ongoing need for training, the Division of Human Resources, with the support of the Office of Finance and Administration, reestablished its Training and Development section in May 2000. The charge for this office: To identify the performance needs of departments and then implement creative ways to meet those needs.

In an effort to meet the performance needs of University of Florida departments, therefore, Training and Development began to work cooperatively with other university resources to identify ways to provide IT training for university faculty and staff.

Part of this effort involved the “Computer Challenge” -- a campus-wide initiative designed to provide a coordinated approach to existing IT training opportunities as well as to identify performance gaps that needed to be met with additional training resources. This initiative involves the Northeast Regional Data Center (NERDC), the Center for Instructional Technology and Training (CITT), the Division of Human Resources, the UF Health Science Center, the Division of Continuing Education -- as well as other campus computing resources.

What Is the Purpose/Goal of the Computer Challenge?

The goal of the Computer Challenge is to provide a coordinated approach to information technology, or IT, training opportunities available to University of Florida faculty and staff.

The Computer Challenge series includes core courses and electives that employees complete for certification. Certificates are offered when certain “tracks” of training are completed. The idea behind this format is to provide employees with suggestions for training and, at the same time, give them some flexibility to take courses that reflect their specific needs. Core courses and electives may be taken at any number of identified training resources on campus. An attendance-tracking database helps identify when an employee is “certified” and also provides coordinated information to interested employees. See www.it-train.ufl.edu for more information. Courses taken since January 2001 count toward certification.

Existing resources have been included in the series, with the goal of adding new courses to fill in gaps or expand opportunities based on need. On-line training offered via the University of Florida’s web-based training contract with NetG also has been included.

Our Opportunity

According to the *2000 American Society for Training and Development’s International Comparisons Report* on worldwide patterns in employer-provided training, employers in the United States invested an average of \$724 per employee in 1996 for training.

The largest percentage of training expenditures in most regions (worldwide) went to IT skills training, managerial/supervisory skills training, and technical processes/procedures training. And despite the advent of web-based training and distance education, instructor-led classroom training continued to be the predominant form of training delivery.

Training's Industry Report 2000 -- its 19th annual -- found that almost 40 percent of all employer-sponsored training in the U.S. today was devoted to teaching computer skills. Ninety-nine percent of all U.S. organizations teach employees to use computer applications.

Clearly, no state agency in Florida is prepared to commit \$724 per employee for training (at UF, that would mean more than \$8 million annually); however, for around \$13 an employee, the Office of Finance and Administration made an impact on the ongoing and ever increasing need to provide highly skilled employees in support of the University of Florida's academic mission -- and to retain the ones we already employ. How so? By investing in a computer lab housed in the Division of Human Resources' Training and Development section. This lab is used in conjunction with the Computer Challenge and complements other campus computing training efforts. Recurring budgetary commitment is anticipated to be slightly more than \$5 per employee annually.

Computer Challenge Summary

UF employees can benefit by improving their computer skills when they take advantage of the university's new "Computer Challenge" initiative, and UF benefits when employees do so by having better trained employees who are able to contribute to the academic mission. By

coordinating resources through the “Computer Challenge,” UF also benefits by reducing overlap of resources and increasing awareness of existing training opportunities. The Computer Challenge is an opportunity for providers of IT training across campus to work together to use existing, and future, resources more wisely. We believe the end result of our efforts will be a more effective and comprehensive approach to IT training at the University of Florida. By working together, we build on each other’s strengths, identify areas where additional training is needed, and provide faculty and staff with a clear sense of how to meet their IT learning objectives.

Currently, close to 650 UF employees are participating in the Computer Challenge, and more than 1100 courses have been completed. A few of these participants only need one more course to complete the Challenge. For more information, see www.it-train.ufl.edu or www.hr.ufl.edu/infogator/november01.

Submitted by Jodi Gentry, Assistant Director
Training and Development
On behalf of UF’s Computer Challenge Initiative

Division of Human Resources
University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611
PO Box 115006, (352) 392-4626
jodi-gentry@ufl.edu
January 21, 2002