



A Microsoft IT Academy Case Study



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
COLLESCOIL LUIMNIGH

Customer: University of Limerick

Website: www.ul.ie

Number of students: 8,500 full-time and more than 2,000 part-time students.

Country or Region: Ireland

Industry: Education

Customer Profile

University of Limerick was established in 1972. Located in the National Technological Park at Plassey, three miles from Limerick City, the University has 8,500 full-time and more than 2,000 part-time students.

Situation

Every student at the University is involved with computing as a general purpose tool during their studies.

The CPU Development Unit in University of Limerick set out to find an IT training programme covering computing fundamentals that could benefit staff as well as students.

Solution

Because most of the University administrators use Office and the majority of the campus computers are running Windows, Microsoft's IT Academy Programme was the obvious choice. In the wider world, Microsoft's global popularity on the desktop only reinforced this view.

Benefits

- Access to globally recognised Qualifications
- Microsoft Software donation for up to 50 computers
- IT Training For Students of all abilities
- Free eLearning
- Free entry in the Be The World Champ competition (www.betheworldchamp.com)
- Discounts on Exams
- Discounted Textbooks
- Free Teacher Training

For more information on becoming a Microsoft IT Academy please visit www.prodigy.ie or call +353-1-2360424.



Prodigy
I.T. Learning Solution Providers

Professional qualifications enhance University experience.

“The University is a small environment so word of mouth has been important. Successful students have raised awareness among other students and we are attracting more all the time. They know it's something worth having and allows companies to benchmark a students experience through their CV.” Janice O'Connell Executive Director, CPU Development Unit, University Of Limerick

Situation

Every student at the University is involved with computing either directly, learning about computers, indirectly, learning with computers, or they simply use computers as a general purpose tool during their studies. The Information Technology Division is the central support body for all these activities, managing a Local Area Network across the campus.

Working in tandem the CPU Development Unit, under the direction of Director Janice O'Connell is responsible for establishing alliances and partnerships with key industry players in the Science and Engineering disciplines and working with organisations to help design programmes to meet industry needs and multi-dimensional demands placed on today's experts.

In an effort to address multi-domain expertise Janice has played an active role in the development of a new postgraduate framework designed to put the power of learning into the student's hands. The framework allows students to step stone their postgraduate education from Specialist Diploma to Masters to Professional Doctorate, and to build their own awards, based on their needs. In a revolutionary step UL have incorporated professional certifications from leading ICT alliances and partnerships including: Microsoft and the EC-Council. The combination of professional and academic qualifications has become a differentiator for the University.

Microsoft | IT Academy



Why Join the Microsoft IT Academy Programme?

The CPU Development Unit set out to find an IT training programme covering software fundamentals that could benefit staff as well as students. Because most of the University administrators use Office and the majority of the campus computers are running Windows, Microsoft's IT Academy was the obvious choice for a professional course. In the wider world, Microsoft's global popularity on the desktop only reinforced this view.

As part of the Academy, organisations are invited to participate in the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) programme, designed to enhance computer literacy through performance-based certification. It validates computer desktop skills across key Microsoft applications: Word, Excel, Outlook, PowerPoint, Access and Project.

Candidates that complete the course and successfully pass the exam are awarded a valuable certificate that is recognised worldwide as proof that an individual has the desktop computing skills needed to work productively and efficiently. Microsoft Office Specialist offers several levels of certification depending on the iteration of the software used for the course. At the University of Limerick, the IT Academy is based around Office 2003 and runs two course levels in each application category, Expert and Core. Word, Excel and Access have proved to be the most popular.

While Computer Science modules have been an obvious place to recruit candidates, other courses have also incorporated the programme. Dr. Ann Ledwith, a lecturer in the Department of Manufacturing and Operations Engineering, was quick to identify the benefits of MOS and incorporate the material into her course work.

"In the digital world that we live in most job roles utilise computers to communicate via email, documentation, spreadsheets, presentations etc..

Employing best practice Dr Ledwith brought industry recognisable standards into her classroom and included Word, Excel and PowerPoint MOS training as part of a first year module to equip her students with the skills and competencies to help them progress through their academic life," explained Janice O'Connell.

Each year around 250 students from across the University enrol in MOS. They are encouraged to take it over a 15 week term starting in September. The courses are taught in groups of 12 in a laboratory-style environment. In addition, there is a mobile laptop laboratory with wireless connectivity to combat facilitate all teaching environments.

On completion of the course, students are encouraged to take the online exam which the University buys in bulk off Prodigy. "There is a fee involved and we can't force students to take a professional qualification but we highly recommend it and try to make it fit in with their other college work. It takes place in the first week of the semester after Christmas to ensure it doesn't interfere with other exams. There has been a very good response," said O'Connell.

MOS is also made available to the staff at the University through the HR department and the Training and Development office. Deans, administrators, doctors, managers and professors have all taken the courses. "It seems every rung of the academic ladder needs this experience," commented O'Connell.

Benefits

Successful MOS candidates come out with a Microsoft Office Specialist accreditation, a globally recognised standard that demonstrates recognised levels of digital literacy around key software applications.

Since the inception of MOS interest has grown dramatically. "The University is a small environment so word of mouth has been important," said O'Connell.

"Successful students have raised awareness among other students and we are attracting more all the time. They know it's something worth having and allows companies to benchmark a students experience through their CV."

Many of the students are involved in work experience as part of their degree so they are already familiar with expectations of the wider working world and appreciate how an extra qualification reflects well with a prospective employer. And once a student completes one course they are usually keen to do another.

Janice O'Connell has been very pleased with the way MOS has integrated with the University's main academic remit and has no doubt about the benefits. "When people have completed a course and gained all the knowledge they need to use these applications, it increases their productivity levels," she said. "And it gives students a foothold into what a professional course is like and the whole experience of taking a professional examination online. It's a great experience as well as an extra qualification."

She summed up: "The students and staff are benefiting so it's a win-win for all aspects of the university."