

Conclusion

Today's commercial pilot is required to possess specific work-related skills, but future employers also prefer he/she possess first-rate workplace skills as well, such as flexibility, independence, and the ability to communicate effectively. Lifelong learning is a reality in today's aviation industry. The more training, education, and flight hours a pilot can achieve, the higher level of employment he/she can seek.

The proposed program is different than other diplomas tied to commercial pilot training, as it is geared for success in the north. It trains students to manage all aspects of business, takes them through their commercial pilot training, and offers an optional float rating before completion. It gives the student a wide variety of choice by offering laddering to a partnered program for multi-engine training and Bachelor degree programs, as well as the add-on options of instructor rating and a commercial helicopter license.

A. Feasibility

Industry Need

Studies conducted in 2001 and 2003 (ATAC 2001, Sypher:Meuller 2003) indicate an impending shortage of commercial pilots. New career options are being realized at all levels for Canadian pilots (ATAC 2009), and northern operators are feeling the pinch. The lure of large airlines becomes tantalizing to pilots who come to the north to seek more flight time, but then elsewhere once they log enough hours to attain more benefits, or return to a lifestyle with which they are more familiar.

Respondents to the Northern Air Operator survey indicate a need for northern-minded pilots who possess the attitude and maturity required to better understand the remote lifestyle of the north. Northern operators report seeing deficiencies in applicants during the last five years in the areas of business knowledge, practical training, and the reality of job demands. These operators state optimism for the future of their industry, and are looking for applicants who have a connection to the region. Aviation will always be central to the movement of people and goods throughout the north and northern operators desire applicants with business sense to further the region's aviation interests. Many northern operators are in favor of a program with a northern focus in hopes that a "grow-your-own" approach will keep qualified pilots in the north for the long term. Northern operators also are in favor of a program that allows them to get to know students as they train on the same airfields on which the operators operate, prior to the hiring process.

What is in Place and What Start-up Efforts Are Needed

The proposed program requires the delivery of aviation and non-aviation courses for a two-year commercial pilot diploma credential. Much of what is needed to start the proposed program is already in place:

- The College of New Caledonia's Vanderhoof Campus lies within a five minute drive from the Vanderhoof Airport and just minutes from the municipal float plane dock on the Nechako River. This allows for a quick, uncomplicated commute between classroom and non-classroom instruction for staff and students.
- The University of the Fraser Valley and its partner, Coastal Pacific Aviation, are willing to partner with the College of New Caledonia and the local flight school to provide

curriculum for the proposed program. This allows for less start-up time, as curriculum is already developed and need only be altered for northern routes and geography.

- The local flight school is well established within the region and currently holds all Transport Canada-required certificates. This allows for the College to contract to the local flight school for aviation courses and training to remain eligible for student loans.
- The College of New Caledonia is well established within the region, is well equipped to offer administrative, marketing, and student support services, and possesses sufficient classroom space for the proposed program. This allows for the start-up of the proposed program even while airport infrastructure planning is explored by the District of Vanderhoof.
- The Vanderhoof Airport possesses a strong history of flight in the region, uncongested air space ideal for flight-training, some tourism-related aircraft activity, and some local pilot traffic. This allows student pilots who fly in the proposed program to have a sense of pride in where they are training, access to uncomplicated flight patterns, and awareness of air traffic that is present, but not overwhelming.
- The District of Vanderhoof has installed a new lighting system at the Vanderhoof Airport and will add a navigation and an automated weather observing system (AWOS) in the near future. This will allow student pilots to have access to 24-hour flight and real-time weather data by the May 2011 proposed program start date.
- The Omineca Medical Clinic, located across the street from the College, which can provide the Category 1 medical exam required by Transport Canada for students enrolled in commercial pilot licensing programs. This allows for applicants interested in the program to make their medical appointment locally.

Start-up for the proposed program which needs to be undertaken include:

- A formal partnership agreement or Memorandum of Understanding between the College of New Caledonia and the University of the Fraser Valley and Coastal Pacific Aviation for curriculum;
- A formal partnership agreement between the local flight school and the College of New Caledonia for delivery of aviation courses and training;
- The seeking of funds for the purchase of a Level 2 or 3 Flight Training Device/Simulator and its placement; and,
- The hiring of a Program Coordinator and non-aviation course instructors to teach on the Vanderhoof campus.

Program Costs

Costs for the proposed program are based on a cost recovery model with no outside funding. Although a straight comparison to an existing program is not possible because program outcomes and objectives differ, costs to the student for the proposed program are still considered to be on par with other two-year diploma programs offering commercial pilot training.

Tuition costs to students for the proposed program can be considered offset by the cost of living savings they will realize from living in Vanderhoof vs. elsewhere because of regional lifestyle differences and the proximity of training facilities.

Employment opportunities created by the operation of the proposed program in the north and the potential of economic diversification with associated activities will further opportunities among funding groups looking to contribute to northern BC. The College and its partners will seek funds from government and non-government sources for eligible projects to further regional economic diversification. In addition, the College will seek funding from government to aid in costs associated with running the proposed program in the north.

B. Community Outcomes

The proposed program will have direct and indirect benefits to the community of Vanderhoof and the surrounding region.

Direct Benefits

Direct full-time employment created by the proposed program at the College of New Caledonia, the local flight school, and the Vanderhoof Airport include:

- Instructional staff,
- Support/administrative staff,
- Aircraft maintenance engineers,
- Aircraft equipment and repair operators, and
- Fuel suppliers.

Local businesses who provide services to participants and delivery agents of the proposed program will also see direct benefits from commerce augmented in the areas of:

- Food (restaurants and grocery stores),
- Transportation (car dealers, taxi services, bus companies),
- Lodging (apartments/housing),
- Apparel (clothing suppliers),
- Banking (supplement loans to student loans, financial planning),
- Insurance (car, renter's, travel, supplement health), and
- Internet and cell phone services.

Additionally, the proposed program will directly benefit the community with spin-off economic opportunities which include, but are not limited to:

- The use of the flight training device/simulator during off-hours to provide recurrent pilot training to regional pilots,
- Employment of the proposed program's fifth semester students as area dispatchers,
- Employment of recent graduates as instructors as the program grows,
- The use of area trades programs to provide support to the proposed program during its inception (carpentry, welding, electrical) as well as throughout its existence (culinary arts, fire training, first aid and safety, etc.),
- The employment of individuals offering tutoring services,
- The employment of individuals offering survival skills training,

- The potential of the proposed program's students job shadowing with regional aviation operators in an effort to log more time and increase their networking potential,
- The potential to attract international students to the program and increase international exposure leading to more tourism, and
- The potential to re-establish the Vanderhoof Air Show.

Indirect benefits

The District of Vanderhoof has a strong history of aviation in the north and international recognition from its former air show. The proposed program will help to reinvigorate the cultural importance of this history, and thus serve as a catalytic force in shaping the competitive position of the local economy, and help determine its future viability. Changes in local revenues and expenditures generated or associated with this cultural importance will be due to:

- The increased awareness of aviation across the north by local residents,
- The increased awareness of Vanderhoof within the Northern Pilot Network and how it is perceived throughout northwest Canada,
- The increased air traffic at the Vanderhoof Airport and generation of interest through the visibility of the program,
- The increased numbers of visitors attracted to the area, and
- The enhanced number of professionals attracted to and remaining in the area.

C. Next Steps

Following the approval of this study by the Steering Advisory Committee, the next steps in bringing the proposed program to fruition will be to:

- Develop a work plan,
- Seek funding for and acquire a flight training device/simulator,
- Form a technical advisory group to assist in the detail planning of the program,
- Work hand-in-hand with the District of Vanderhoof's airport development planning to synchronize efforts and realize the most benefits at the airport for the community and surrounding area, and
- Start marketing the program via local news outlets, the College website, the Local Flight School website, partnering websites, and through student counselors/advisors at the regional school districts and the Northern Pilot Network.

The proposed program will start commercial pilots on a positive path by teaching skills useful in the aviation industry and transferable to other aspects of a pilot's life journey. The results of this study demonstrate a viable educational program opportunity with a proposed two-year commercial pilot diploma program at the College of New Caledonia-Vanderhoof campus. The College and its partners are committed to proceeding with this program in time for a May 2011 start date. The need for the proposed program is clear and supported by the community.