



THRIVING IN CHALLENGING TIMES



Connecting Education to Economic Development through Career Pathways



A joint publication of the National Career Pathways Network and the Institute for a Competitive Workforce, an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Graphic Communications

Graphic Communications Academic Challenge Program Southern California

Partners

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo; Los Angeles County Department of Education; Fullerton College; North Orange County Community College District/Center for Applied Competitive Technologies and Multimedia & Entertainment Initiative; Design 2 Print, an Industry-Driven Regional Collaborative Grant funded by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office—Economic and Workforce Development Program; Castle Press; Grafico, Inc.; PrintFest; California Graphic Arts Educators Association; Graphic Arts Club of Los Angeles; Micro Perfect Systems; and PROTRADE, Inc.

Target Population and Eligibility

Students who enter the competition come from 50 participating high schools in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura, and San Diego Counties and are enrolled in classes related to the graphic communications industry.

Challenges

Many changes, both rapid and gradual, have been occurring in the graphic communications industry over the past two decades, creating a need for workers with a broad knowledge of industry production processes and systems—from conventional to cutting-edge.

Strategies

PIASC/RAISE Foundation's Academic Challenge Program and Student Assembly is a two-phase competition that introduces high school students to the full spectrum of graphic communications, a field that encompasses concept, design, production, fulfillment, and mailing services. The program provides a hands-on approach to both the academic and technical aspects of the industry. Its purpose is to publicize and promote career opportunities in the graphic communications field and to promote the graphic communications programs available through local high schools, community colleges, and universities.

The program has three levels—two in the first phase (Academic Challenge Program) and one in the second phase (Student Assembly).

Level 1: Academic Challenge Program—Technical Project (September–February) and Technology Application Test. The first level gives students an opportunity to develop team-building skills and to apply their technical knowledge to the planning, development, and completion of their schools' assigned projects. A panel of industry experts reviews the entries and selects the top eight projects. Each of the eight winning schools selects a three-person team that proceeds to Level 2.

Level 2: Academic Challenge Program—Written Examination (March–April). The second level gives the top



Business Engagement

The program's founder and principal fundraiser is PIASC/RAISE Foundation, a nonprofit organization supported by contributions from its industry members. The program also benefits from the support of southern California's many printing businesses and educational programs. For example, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo supports the program through its exceptional four-year program in graphic communications. The Los Angeles County Department of Education provides program support, as does Fullerton College, which has co-hosted the competition and provided theater and campus facilities.

eight teams an opportunity to demonstrate in writing their knowledge of the graphic communications industry. Students take a written exam that covers both academic and technical aspects of the industry. The exam is based on respected industry resources such as the Graphic Arts Technical Foundation (GATF) and International Paper's *Pocket Pal* (a standard reference tool). The exam covers topics such as history, industry terms, paper elements, typography and design, prepress/press, binding and finishing, and variable data. Each of the top five scoring teams is invited to send a representative to Level 3—the final competition.

Level 3: Student Assembly—Game Show Competition (May). The five selected students (one from each team) apply industry knowledge, timing, and strategic use of earned points in a format similar to that of the TV program *Jeopardy*. The competition takes place before an audience of high school students, teachers, parents, and industry representatives. All five students win scholarships and trophies. The first place winner also receives a complete Macintosh computer system for his or her school. The runners-up receive supply and equipment funds for their schools' educational programs. The winning team is publicly recognized by local government and community leaders.

Results

Like most industries, the graphic communications industry is experiencing technological advances that are increasing the demand for a well-trained and highly skilled workforce. Global and regional competitiveness, the implementation of "green" processes, the aging of the current workforce, and the use of



Funding

While funding comes primarily from PIASC/RAISE Foundation, some businesses contribute directly to the program, for example, North Orange County Community College District/Center for Applied Competitive Technologies (CACT), Multimedia & Entertainment Initiative; and Design 2 Print (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office), both of which provided funding for the 2009 assembly. Others provide funding for competition prizes and special recognition awards, student transportation, event space rental, and meals for student competitors.

new materials require a new workforce that has an up-to-date knowledge of the industry. If it is to "grow" a skilled workforce and keep the pipeline from high school to college to industry open, the American public education system must have high-quality hands-on career and technical programs at the middle and high school levels. By providing valuable career-related experiences for many young people, this program is helping to meet that need.

Lessons Learned

Partnerships are paramount in the development and implementation of successful career exploration programs. In providing career exploration experiences for thousands of Southern California high school students in the last 20 years, this program has proven that lesson many times over.



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