

## **Best Practices the New Measure of Excellence!**

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Excellence is a standard that, by any measure, is provided in each of California's Accredited Fire Academies around the state. But, what separates one fire academy from another is less obvious. Oftentimes you have to visit each campus to see the fundamental differences between programs and facilities.

In the past two years State Fire Training has been actively accrediting and re-accrediting fire academies across the state. The site team, which consists of members of the Statewide Training and Education Advisory Committee, Fire Technology Directors and State Fire Training Staff, look for these differences or "Best Practices" while conducting accreditation site visits.

Of the 16 accreditation site visits conducted to date, the accreditation site teams have identified a least one or more exceptional programs offered at each of the accredited fire academies. Examples were found in such areas as, recruitment, acculturation, unique training and educational opportunities, outreach to working adults, exceptional facilities, instructor support and training, along with exceptional local fire department support.

### **Recruitment**

While many campuses are actively recruiting women to the fire service, El Camino Community College takes a more proactive approach by opening an office specifically for women in the vocational education building. It is the first office you come to as you walk through the main doors. There, women are introduced to a wide range of vocational programs. In this office it is hard to miss the Fire Technology program spotlighted with color posters and program information.



Many campuses are reaching out to fire fighters of the future through local ROP programs and/or fire explorer programs offered at the local high schools. Many campuses recognize that they need to develop an interest and foundation early in a student's education to get top quality fire academy recruits.

## **Acculturation**

The acculturation of fire cadets to the fire service is accomplished in several programs where, as in the case of Mount San Antonio College, students define their own “core values.” The entire academy staff uses these student defined values to correct behavior and reinforces the “core values” for that specific academy every day.

The acculturation process continues in programs like Crafton Hills College. The college has formed an honor guard to raise and lower the American flag daily and who also host an annual fire academy alumni luncheon to honor those firefighters that came before them.



## **Educational Opportunities**

The introduction of new educational opportunities has also been noted by the site teams. Mt. San Antonio College for example realized that fire science students were not likely to cross the campus to access technical resource tutors in math, reading, and writing, so the campus included a technical resource center within the fire science building. At the Lake Tahoe Community College, job interview training is offered to their cadets and fire science students.

## **Unique Training Programs**

Other unique training opportunities are offered in a wide range of subject areas like; “Cultural Awareness” training offered by the recently accredited San Pasqual Reservation Fire Department. This class introduces cadets to the Native American culture in an effort to develop sensitivity to their traditions and to eliminate stereotypes.

Similarly, the Sexual Harassment class offered by Lake Tahoe Community College provides an education and understanding of gender related issues that plague many fire houses around the country. As one of the few all female run academies, this training is offered by the Dean herself! At the El Camino Academy, students are required to visit the Black Firefighter Museum and write a research paper. All of these practices insure a “diversity” tolerant fire fighting work force.

## Outreach

In recognition of the working adults who are trying to complete their education and fire academy coursework, Sierra College created an extended academy that includes training over the weekend and classes in the evening. Recent research by the Riverside Community College reveals that meeting the need for working adults is a hallmark of many other academies across the state.

## Specialized Training

Many academies, with the input of the local fire departments, provide specialized technical training in their fire academies. In many cases, like the San Pasqual Reservation Fire Department this includes the CAL FIRE approved “67 Hour Wildland Fire Fighter Training,” or specialized rescue training. In some cases, area specific training is included in the Fire Fighter 1 curriculum like Ice and Swift Water Rescue offered by Lake Tahoe Community College.



## Facilities

Training facilities can take a real beating year after year. Yet in spite of the potential abuse, a couple of outstanding sites stood out. The Modesto Junior College training center, though 15 years old looks as if it were built yesterday. Here, students are taught to respect the property as you would expect them to in the fire house. Similarly, the Antelope Valley College classroom facilities and training grounds are in great shape for the abuse that they take. But the site team also looks at other campus resources. Noteworthy is the library, and fire related training resources available at the Santa Ana Community College campus.

## Support by Local Fire Departments

Local fire department input and support, has been noted by several site teams. Local area fire department representatives have become a part of the accreditation site visit in places like Los Medanos, El Camino, Riverside, Sierra, and Lake Tahoe Community Colleges. This level of support insures that local training needs are being addressed and new programs can be identified and instituted.

## **Instructor Support**

A large part of an excellent program is the quality of the instructional staff. El Camino College requires that up-and-coming instructors, intern with the fire academy for two years before they are offered a paying position at the academy. Lake Tahoe Community College offers former academy graduates an opportunity to work as instructional assistants to keep their skill set current while looking for employment. Riverside Community College, however, takes instructor training to the next level by offering instructional methodology seminars to their instructional staff. This practice ensures that instructors are up to date on the latest instructional methodologies.

These are just a few examples of “Best Practices” that have been observed by our accreditation site teams. Collectively, these represent the health and vitality of our accredited academy system. State Fire Training is looking forward to visiting the remaining Accredited Regional Training Programs and Local Academies in the next year— in search of even more examples of exceptional program ideas that can be shared and replicated throughout our training system.