

APPRENTICESHIP

Smooth Transition to an Online Learning Model for Electrical Apprenticeship

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When the COVID-19 outbreak hit and Californians were told to stay at home, Western Electrical Contractors Association, Inc. (WECA) found itself well positioned to transition its electrical and low voltage apprenticeship classes online, quickly and appropriately.

Before these unprecedented events, WECA's apprenticeship training board of trustees had the vision to ask us to expand our usage of learning technologies for our apprenticeship program, as well as increase the flexibility of our delivery model. This head start enabled us to rapidly convert our onsite apprenticeship classes to online delivery when everything began escalating so quickly in early-mid March. It also helped enormously that WECA has been delivering online education for its other programs since 2007. Our administrative and instructional teams had nearly 15 years of experience on which to draw.

"The (COVID-19) situation was constantly changing, so as it developed, we had to be ready at a moment's notice to pull the trigger on transitioning our classes to online learning," said Tom

Thompson, WECA curriculum development manager. "Our team had already been working on instituting a Learning Management System (LMS) for our apprenticeship programs, but our target date for completion was September. Still, we were able to shift to online learning on the LMS in a matter of days. The transition was so smooth that I started to



Neil Pesarillo, a WECA instructor, teaching an online class.

become suspicious that we were missing something, but we weren't. My team and colleagues always impress me, but this situation has shone light on their abilities and commitment to our apprentices. This is a difficult time for everyone, but it has also been a blessing to watch everyone come together for a shared purpose."

WECA's apprenticeship instructors, a key part of the success of WECA's quick pivot to online apprenticeship class delivery, also echoed similar sentiments. Low voltage apprenticeship instructor Neil Pesarillo said, "I'm really proud of how adaptable our apprentices were to the sudden shift in how they're receiving this semester of their education. I think it speaks to their versatility as students and employees, and speaks to how seriously everyone in the industry is taking safety and social distancing orders. And I'm also pleased with how the online classes I've taught so far have gone—it's very similar to being in the classroom since we've already been using tools like SmartBoards and computer-based quizzing and grading, which translate well to online delivery."

Terry Seabury, executive director and CEO of WECA, puts into words the positive outlook the WECA team keeps at its forefront. "We believe that the months ahead will bring unprecedented opportunities for adaption and innovation to our industry, and that we will all emerge stronger for it."